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I, Elif Bengu,

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Student Signature: Elif Bengu

This work and its defense approved by:

Committee Chair: Co-Chair: Dr. Mary Benedetti

Co-Chair: Dr. Ken Martin

Dr. Wayne Hall

Dr. Mitch Leventhal

Approval of the electronic document:

I have reviewed the Thesis/Dissertation in its final electronic format and certify that it is an accurate copy of the document reviewed and approved by the committee.

Committee Chair signature: Dr. Ken Martin

Adapting to a New Role as an International Teaching Assistant: Influence of Communicative Competence in This Adaptation Process

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Elif Bengu

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B.A., Hacettepe University, 2000

Co-Chair: Dr. Mary Benedetti

Co-Chair: Dr. Ken Martin

Abstract

Title: Adapting to a New Role as an International Teaching Assistant: Influence of Communicative Competence in This Adaptation Process

Author: Elif Bengu

For a variety of reasons, U.S. higher education has employed an increasing number of international teaching assistants (ITAs) to teach undergraduate courses in science, engineering, and humanities departments. Often, ITAs arrive on campus and are placed in undergraduate classrooms without having previous training or teaching experience; they are handed their assignments and given copies of a syllabus and textbook without any knowledge about what their new role entails. Although institutions have recently been putting more effort into training programs, they are usually limited and focused primarily on basic issues, resulting in an inability to address unique needs.

The purpose of this study is to explore the teaching experiences of international graduate students at an American university. Qualitative research methods are used to analyze data and assess how ITAs use their communicative competence of English in this new role and what they might need to learn in order to function more effectively as a teaching assistant (TA) and thus better acculturate into their new social context, U.S. academia.

The eleven participants in this study are international graduate students from a variety of countries and fields of study who had lived in the U.S. from three to seven years. One of the students participated in a single case study that addressed her experience as a first-time instructor. Ten students participated in a focus group interview session that addressed their challenges, their expectations, and their overall teaching experience.

Participants identified several challenges that hindered their success. They also indicated that they were impacted by the process of acculturation. Factors they found helpful in their teaching experience included guidance from previous ITAs, familiarity with the American academic system, and acquaintance with American culture. Factors that affected them negatively included: lack of certain types of assistance, differences in attitudes and behaviors, and differences in communication styles. Participants also reported an increased level of self-confidence as a result of being an instructor in the U.S.

Results of this study suggest that although international graduate teaching assistants appreciate the opportunity to teach, their experiences could be made less stressful and more meaningful if the higher-education institution, the department, and their advisor would take into account their unique needs. These needs include receiving more in-depth training in the areas of U.S. classroom culture, pedagogical techniques, and classroom management.

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Dedication

For my mother, Sahide Nasuhioglu, who gave me life and who made tremendous sacrifices for me to live this life decently. Her presence gives me strength and her sacrifices have given me the motivation to finish this journey and prepare me for future endeavors.

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Chapter Overview

Chapter one offers a general introduction to the issues surrounding ITAs in the American higher education system and provides rationale for why this study should be conducted. I further review the history of the ITA system and the increasing presence of the ITAs in the states. In this chapter, I also introduce the questions that guided my research. The chapter concludes with definitions of the terms used in this study.

In chapter two, I set the foundation for this study by reviewing the existing literature on ITAs, as well as examining the responses to the ITA debates from administrators and undergraduate students. Since this research study focuses on issues related to communicative competence, I also provide a theoretical overview of what the concept of communicative competence entails.

Chapter three describes the methodology and research design for this study. In chapter four, I report the findings, which are analyzed using qualitative methods. Finally, in chapter five, I discuss the outcomes of the study's findings and their potential applications toward the ITA training programs. Additionally, I explore the contribution and limitations of this study and offer recommendations for future research.

Chapter 1

Introduction

> Being a new teacher is like trying to fly an airplane... while building it.
>
> –Smith, 2004

Onur's Story

After graduating with a bachelor's degree from a university in Turkey, Onur started his graduate studies in mathematics at the University of Cincinnati (UC), a major Midwestern University. He was awarded a scholarship and a teaching assistant (TA) position. To be a TA, he was required to take the Oral English Proficiency Test (OEPT), which he passed successfully. His first assignment as a TA was to teach a three-hour recitation.

On the first day of class, he was to review with the students a section of assigned readings and help them solve the problems that the instructor had given as homework. After the first introduction, one of the students in the class asked him to solve question number 18 from the test book. Onur turned to the blackboard and began solving the problem. Soon, one of the students informed him that he was solving number 19 instead of 18. The students corrected him a few times. Onur was frustrated that he was having such difficulty, because he was familiar with the content. While he was grappling with that problem, a few students left his session.

When recalling that incident, Onur commented:

> I have knowledge of the content area; I even worked on those problems before I came to class, but I stepped into that classroom with having no clue about what to do in the class. I have no public speaking experience and don't know how to teach the content. I was

speechless and making mistakes one after another. I was so close to leaving the class and going directly to the instructor's office to tell him 'I can not handle this duty, and I want to quit.' On the other hand, I couldn't, because that job was my financial security. Since I couldn't get enough support from the professor of the class, after the first section of the class, I sat down and started to think about what I should do and how to handle the situation that I was faced with.

This story represents the origin of my interest in exploring the various ways to help international teaching assistants (ITAs) in their "acculturation" process into the U.S. academic and social context. Like Onur, there are other ITAs, as well as native teaching assistants (NTAs), who have the same or similar frustrations.

For a variety of reasons, higher education in the U.S employs an increasing number of international teaching assistants (ITAs) to teach undergraduate courses in science, engineering, and humanities departments (Ford, Gappa, Wendorff, & Wright, 1991; Smith, Byrd, Nelson, Barrett, & Constantinides, 1992). Given the various challenges ITAs face when they start their first teaching experience, a need exists for training programs that focus on the particular strengths and weaknesses of individual students. Interestingly, several accounts describing the same experience also exist for native teaching assistants (NTAs). Many NTAs who arrive on campus are placed in undergraduate classrooms with no previous training or teaching experience, handed assignments, and given copies of a syllabus and textbook without having any knowledge about their new role (deBerly, 1995; Twale, Shannon & Moore, 1997; Al-Sharediah & Goe, 1998; Shannon, Twale, Moore, 1998).

Both ITAs and NTAs are "simply left to their own 'sink or swim' devices, hardly, a reasonable or humane convention, yet common place" (deBerly, 1995, p.9). However,

institutions have recently put more effort into training programs, usually limited to and focused on basic issues, such as syllabus design, use of technological tools such as Blackboard, and effective grading practices (Shannon, Twale, & Moore, 1998). In that sense, ITA training programs parallel NTA training regarding their failure to address the culture of higher educational institutions, pedagogical techniques, and classroom management (Smith, Byrd, Nelson, Barrett, & Constantinides, 1992; Twale et al. 1997; Gorsuch, 2003), and, most importantly for ITA training, undergraduate student culture.

Nevertheless, ITAs do have issues distinct from those of native-born TAs, as they are generally less proficient in the language of instruction and less familiar with American culture, in general, and American academic culture, in particular. Therefore, they are often not acquainted with the types of behaviors they may encounter in the classes they teach. Thus, ITA training efforts should be expanded, and, in order to help them to understand this new academic role, ITAs need evaluation and instruction in three basic areas: language skills, teaching skills, and academic and student culture (Civikly & Muchisky, 1991; Constantinides, 1987; Ford, Gappa, Wendorff, & Wright, 1991; Hoekje & Williams, 1994; Myers, 1994; Sequeira & Costantino, 1989; Schneider & Stevens, 1987; Smith, 1994).

This study will focus on examining in depth ITA classroom management issues and on identifying the cross-cultural communication and teaching skills they are lacking (Bailey, 1984; Smith et al. 1992; Twale et al. 1997; Gorsuch, 2003). Thus, this dissertation will investigate the most significant problems that ITAs encounter in their new role as a teacher and the strategies they use to acculturate into the new social context. The result of this study will be beneficial not only for ITAs, but also for both the undergraduate students and the institution.

This study took place at the University of Cincinnati (UC), where approximately 450 international graduate students enrolled for the fall quarter of the 2008 academic year (University of Cincinnati (UC), 2008). While pursuing their education, most of these international students who receive a graduate assistantship devote their effort to a combined program of formal study and their assigned duties of teaching, research, or administrative service (UC, 2005, p.30, ¶ 4). Those with teaching duties are Teaching Assistants (TAs) (UC, 2005, p.30, ¶ 4). In this study, ITA is used to refer to international teaching assistants who were born in a foreign country and came to the United States to pursue graduate study. NTA will apply to the native teaching assistants born in the U.S.

International students who are awarded teaching assistantships are required to take the OEPT — developed by the Center for English as a Second Language (CESL) — to assess their English language skills. OEPT is designed to measure the language proficiency of its ITAs in the setting of classroom instruction (Lobo, 2002). The OEPT, administered by the Center for English as a Second Language (CESL), is a fifteen to twenty-minute video-recorded interview divided into three sections. Section one consists of three questions that vary in topic, from local to general interest. In section two, test takers present a syllabus, and in section three, they present a sample lesson; both the syllabus and the sample lesson should be related to their fields of study (OEPT Guidelines, 1998).

The required score to certify for oral English proficiency is 3.0. Students who pass may assume the full range of duties associated with their teaching assistantship, according to this universities' Graduate Student Handbook (2005).

In the event that a student fails the OEPT, their department requires them to take courses in the English as a Second Language (ESL) program. The ESL Program at UC provides English

language instruction to non-native graduate students. Some of the courses that the ESL program provides on a quarterly basis include improving pronunciation, oral presentation skills, editing skills, and introduction to academic writing. Starting in the fall of 2007, "teaching skills for international teaching assistants" and "American culture and communication" courses were added to the list.

In addition, throughout the year, the Center for Enhancement of Teaching & Learning (CET&L) organizes workshops for teaching assistants. Since the end of 2006, CET&L is more regularly offering workshops on teaching and course development. According to CET&L website, the center also offers services such as a peer consultancy program, feedback through videotaping, and web resources that may be useful for new and current teaching assistants. Additionally, several individual departments offer orientation programs for their TAs before the academic year starts.

In fall quarter 2006, the researcher conducted a pilot study (PS) to better understand the position of ITAs and their needs. The PS employed a qualitative research paradigm and included the common element of qualitative studies, such as semi-structured and open-ended interviews. The 15 ITAs interviewed in the PS were slightly aware of some of those services mentioned above. The majority of the students interviewed have not been to those training sessions due to time conflicts with their course load, as well as other academic and personal responsibilities and obligations.

Past research has indicated that training programs designed for TAs improve the quality of undergraduate education and prepare the TAs for their present responsibilities (Neves et al. 1991; Smith et al. 1992; Fox et al. 1994; deBerly, 1995; Twale et al. 1997; Shannon et al. 1998). For an effective training program, other stakeholders, e.g., student bodies and departments

should also be a part of the training process (Fox & Gay, 1994). As an institution "whose goal is to raise the standards of undergraduate instruction" (Turitz, 1984, p.49), such support is essential for planning and developing training programs that target their students' needs.

During the interview session, most ITAs pointed out the difficulties that they faced while communicating with undergraduate students. These ITAs "display a thorough knowledge of content material and even of the rules of language yet are unable to communicate effectively because they have little ability to convey their knowledge"(Hoekje and Williams, 1994b, p.12). If one of the institution's goals is to prepare the international student to effectively take on the role of teaching assistants, the ITA curriculum should develop from the perceived needs of ITAs in language, pedagogy, and culture, while situating them within this new social context (Hoekje and Williams, 199b).

Purpose of the Study

This study focuses on international teaching assistants who have arrived to the United States for the purpose of advanced education. Although a main focus of the study is to consider the need for a better training program designed for ITAs, this point can not be fully understood without reference to their cultural background and the communicative competence they must be equip with in order to be more effective communicators.

The purpose of the study is to address these major concerns: How do international teaching assistants (ITAs) use their communicative competence of English in this new role? What must they learn in order to function more effectively as a TA, and thus acculturate into the new social context, U.S. academia (Wiemann & Backlund, 1980)?

In other words, the study examines the process of acculturation of international students in their new setting.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the dissertation:

1. How do ITAs prepare themselves for this new role?
2. In what areas do ITAs feel alienated from their teaching responsibilities?
3. What knowledge and skills do ITAs believe would be helpful in order to prepare them for teaching American undergraduate students?
4. How do ITAs' cultural values and current belief systems influence the way they approach this role?

Definitions of Terms

Various terms are used throughout the study; therefore, it is essential that a common understanding be established between the researchers and the reader. Thus, the following terms and definitions are provided:

Acculturation: One's learning of, or adapting to, another culture.

Intercultural communication: Communication that includes the actual interaction of people from various countries.

Communicative competence (CC): One's ability to use the language effectively and appropriately for communication. CC is knowing what to say and do, when and to whom, and how to accomplish what purpose.

TA: Teaching assistant is a general term for a classroom instructor, lab assistant, co-teaching instructor. This term is even sometimes used to refer to graders for a regular faculty member.

ITA: An international teaching assistant, as defined by the U.S. Department of Education, is a non-resident alien, part-time instructional assistant at a higher-education institution, who was born in a foreign country and came to the United States (U.S) to pursue a graduate study.

NTA: A native teaching assistant is born in the U.S.

Abbreviations

"CC"	Communicative Competence
"CSP"	Case Study Participant
"FGP"	Focus Group Participant
"ITA"	International Teaching Assistant
"NTA"	Native Teaching Assistant
"PoI"	Post-Interview
"PrI"	Pre-Interview
"PS"	Pilot Study
"TA"	Teaching Assistant
"UGS"	Undergraduate Students

Chapter 2

Literature Review

In this literature review, I will first examine the need for the International Teaching Assistants (ITAs) in American institutions. Then, I will examine some problematic areas for ITAs, beside the language barrier. This section will also include an examination of a training module that can be suitable for the selected international teaching assistants. Lastly, I will discuss the theoretical framework I will use in this study.

The Need for ITAs in U.S. Institutions

Since 1986, considerable research has been done regarding ITAs and the different problems they experience in American post-secondary schools (Constantinides, 1986; Bernhardt, 1987). These studies focused on the problems encountered by the ITAs as they dealt with the faculty, undergraduate students, and policies and regulations of their institutions.

A number of those studies (deBerly, 1995 & 1997; Shannon, Twale and Moore, 1998; and Gorsuch, 2003) have found that the institutions are not providing enough support for ITA training and suggest that more intense training programs are needed. Some of them insisted that there is a need for faculty mentoring, while a smaller percent recommended that the institutions should focus more on the internationalization of undergrad students.

Past research has shown that TAs play a major role in undergraduate instruction (Smith & Simpson, 1993; Fox & Gay, 1994; Shannon, Twale & Moore, 1998; Olaniran, 1999; Luo, Bellows & Grady, 2000). The need to hire Native Teaching Assistants (NTAs) and ITAs continues for a variety of reasons (Gorsuch, 2003). In their study, Shannon et al. (1998) indicated that one of the reasons to hire ITAs is that some full-time faculty members have been drawn away from undergraduate instruction in order to teach graduate courses and fulfill increasing

research demands. Another reason to hire ITAs is "the continuing shortage of qualified American graduate assistants" (Smith, 1992, p.2; Twale et al. 1997). In their study, Twale, Shannon, and More (1997) pointed out that over the past 20 years the number of American students receiving doctorates in the sciences has decreased by 50 percent. On the other hand, the number of international students in the sciences has increased a phenomenon that has led to the substantial rise of the number of ITAs in the United States.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, however, we need to ask what theoretical frameworks should be used. The theoretical framework adopted in this study is communicative competence (CC), an approach rooted in the field of applied linguistics.

Studies indicated that "the perceived communicative competence of ITAs" (Trebing, 2007, p.25) has led to misunderstandings and prompted complaints from undergraduate students, their parents, administrators, and legislators. According to Breshnan and Kim (1993b), "differences in phonology, semantics, syntax, and pragmatics, combined with unfamiliar course content, make ITAs' varieties of English difficult to understand and often lead to these complaints" (p.25).

Dell Hymes pioneered CC in 1966. According to Hymes, the term refers to the "knowledge an individual has about the use of language in communication" (Wiemann et al., 1980, p.186) and the knowledge that "demonstrate[s] the ability to carry out appropriate conduct in particular contexts" (Collier, 1989, p.291). Hymes stated that in order to speak a language correctly, one needs to learn more than vocabulary and grammar. The individual should also know how that language is used by members of that speech community to accomplish their purposes (Hymes, 1971). Wiemann et al. (1980) claimed, "in order for a person to function effectively in society, that person needs to achieve a certain level of competence in the use of language and non-

language behavior for the purpose of communication" (p.186). In applied linguistics, Canale and Swain's (1980) definition of CC has become canonical. Building upon the work of Hymes (1972), Canale et al. (1980) defined CC in terms of four components: 1.) grammatical competence as the knowledge of the language code (grammatical rules, vocabulary, pronunciation, spelling, etc.); 2.) socio-linguistic competence as the mastery of the socio-cultural code of language use (appropriate application of vocabulary, register, politeness, and style in a given situation); 3.) discourse competence as the ability to combine language structures into different types of cohesive and coherent texts (e.g. letters, political speeches, poetry, academic essays, cooking recipes); 4.) strategic competence as the knowledge of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies which can enable one to overcome difficulties when communication breakdowns occur and enhance the efficiency of communication.

The term *communicative competence* has been defined by several other scholars. Gumperz defined (1982) CC as "the knowledge of linguistic and related communicative conventions that speakers must have to create and sustain conversational cooperation" (p.209). McCroskey (1982) wrote that it is "the ability of an individual to demonstrate knowledge of the appropriate communication behavior in a given situation" (p.5). In his 1985 study, Nishida applied the definition of CC to intercultural situations and defined CC as "the ability to speak a foreign language in an appropriate manner and to demonstrate a knowledge of appropriate communicative behavior in a given situation in order to interact effectively with people from other cultures" (p.249). Celce-Murcia (1991) defined an individual with communicative competence as one who know[s] not only how to be grammatically accurate but also possesses knowledge of socio-cultural norms of appropriateness, discourse rules and strategies that ensure that communication is achieved.

Even though researchers and scholars labored to put together a definition of communicative competence, it was not until the early 1990s with the work of Bachman (1990) that language teachers were provided with a detailed description of CC that could be used for instruction and assessment. Ten years after the study by Canale et al. (1980), Bachman (1990) divided CC into the broad headings of "organizational competence," which includes both grammatical and discourse (or textual) competence; "pragmatic competence," which includes both socio-linguistic, such as dialects, varieties, register, cultural references etc.; and "illocutionary competence," such as knowledge of rhetorical functions, e.g. stating, questioning, commanding, promising.

In this study, I will use the definition of communicative competence employed by Hoekje and Williams (1994), who indicate in their study that CC is used as a basis for examining the growing field of ITA education. Although some ITAs may have held teaching positions in their own countries, they may still have communication difficulties while adjusting to the new teaching context in the U.S. academic culture, as the classroom culture of their home country is different from that of the U.S. (Di Vito, 1992; Hoekje et al., 1994). As result, these ITAs and the students that they encounter in the classroom interact according to different socio-cultural norms (Di Vito, 1992). Hoekje et al. (1994) pointed out that CC "includes the ability to use as well as know language" (p. 12). In the case of ITAs, "language skills can not be separated from the context in which they are practiced" (p.11); they should have the knowledge of how to present the subject content in a comprehensible form, knowledge of undergraduate classroom dynamics, and the knowledge of appropriate use of language when interacting with students (Hoekje et al., 1994).

Hoekje et al., (1994) proposed that the goal of ITA education should aim to prepare the international students to effectively take on the role of teaching assistants. In order for international teaching assistants (ITAs) "to function effectively" (Wiemann et al., 1980, p.186) in the new setting, the student needs to have more than grammatical competence (Orwig, 1999). ITAs should also establish the knowledge of sociolinguistic competence. Trebing (2007) indicated that "international instructors need to learn cultural and social rules as they pertain to American classrooms" (p.46). ITAs should have a clear understanding of norms related to interactive teaching styles, appropriate student-teacher relationships, and knowledge of departmental and college rules and standards that are crucial for successful teaching (Trebing, 2007).

ITAs need to acquire specific skills that will help them to demonstrate the knowledge of communicative competence. To demonstrate a high level of CC, the ITAs must not only know *about* these skills, but know how to *use* these skills to communicate/interact effectively with students and faculty while performing the role of teaching assistants (Hoekje et al., 1994 & Wiemann et al., 1980).

Common Areas of Difficulty for ITAs

ITAs who have reached an advanced level in a specific discipline may be able to explain the intricacies of their subject with ease, but as Neves and Sanyal (1991) pointed out in their study, the ITAs "may have difficulty in speaking comprehensibly, explaining clearly, and understanding students easily while leading an undergraduate discussion section" (p.1). A large number of studies have reported on the language problems of international teaching assistants in American universities (Bailey, 1984; Cohen & Robin, 1985; Gillette, 1982; Mellor, 1988, Neves and Sanyal, 1991; Hoekje & Williams, 1994 deBerly, 1995). In a paper by Williams (1987),

pronunciation, stress timing of English, and intonation patterns were identified as the main problems of those ITAs for whom English was not the first language (Neves and Sanyal, 1991). According to Olaniran “an essential component of communication competence is the correct use of language” (1999, p.67). ITAs can become vulnerable and frustrated when teaching American undergraduates in a foreign tongue while simultaneously pursuing a degree (de Berly, 1993). The knowledge of the host culture's language is the first step toward developing competence in the host culture's communication pattern and successfully performing in the classroom (Olaniran, 1996).

In his research Han (2008) analyzed the “factors of language, pedagogy, and culture that ITAs and their undergraduate students perceived and experienced in American college classrooms” (p.10) He conducted the study with four international teaching associates and seventeen undergraduate students, collecting data through one-on-one interviews, class observations, and the participants’ narratives. He found that undergraduate students observed their international teaching assistants as lacking in their command of English, especially accent and aural comprehension

Shiga (2008) noted the struggles ITAs face: “teaching freshman courses, departments expect ITAs not only to teach academic courses, but also to help students go through the transition to the new academic environment." This seems ironic since they them-selves are struggling with the transition.” Neves and Sanyal (1991) found that ITAs’ difficulty in teaching and their communication techniques hurt the quality of the student’s experiences. For that reason, it is crucial for ITAs to be effective instructors who motivate students to learn. Since a great deal of responsibility for undergraduate instruction has been handed over to ITAs (Smith et al. 1993; Fox et al. 1994; Shannon et al. 1998, Olaniran, 1999, Luo et al. 2000, Shiga, 2008), “to

ensure students' successful academic achievement" (Shiga, 2008, p.8) and to increase the quality of the educational opportunities and outcomes that undergraduates received (Fox et al, 1994), ITAs must communicate effectively, adjust promptly to the new education system, and understand the cultural characteristics of their students. This is possible with the essential and effective support provided by institutions and departments.

Problematic Areas Besides Language

Past research (deBerly, 1995; Twale et al. 1997; Oppenheim, 1997 & 1998; Smith, Downey & Cox, 1999) showed that oral proficiency in the English language is not sufficient for predicting whether an ITA will be able to teach undergraduates effectively. In addition, Twale et al. (1997) observe that "language may not be the main source of student complaints" (p.62). Other studies indicated that undergraduate students complained about other variables such as ethnicity and cultural differences (Boyd, 1989; Rubin & Smith, 1990; Brown, 1992; Rubin, 1992; Han, 2008), instructor approachability (Twale et al, 1997), instructors using ineffective teaching techniques (Han, 2008), and graduate student attitudes toward the topic (Orth, 1982).

Smith et al. (1999) developed a communication survey in response to criticism of ITAs' teaching issues. A 13-item survey completed by 114 native and non-native English speaking TAs indicated that nine TAs (8 percent) were identified as having communication problems, two of which were native English speakers. Analyses found that their problems relate to many more factors than English skills: departmental TA training, prior teaching experience, social skills of the TA, difficulty of the discipline, and cultural differences in interacting within a classroom. The fundamental discovery they uncovered in this study is that the "prediction of communication problems related to many more factors than English skills" (p.3).

Since most graduate teaching assistants do not have prior teaching experience and lack pedagogical training (Luo et al, 2000), they may have difficulty when managing the responsibilities associated with teaching, such as the tasks of planning, organizing, motivating, and controlling college classroom environments (Luo et al. 2000). Luo, Belows, and Grady (2000) conducted a survey study concerning teaching assistants' classroom management at a large, land-grant research university. The results of the study indicate that ITAs and NTAs experienced many common problems, but each of the two types of TAs also had unique problems. One problem ITAs experienced was the lack of knowledge of their teaching duties and responsibilities before beginning a teaching assignment, as most have not had an undergraduate experience at an American college or university. A second problem ITAs reported was difficulty dealing with overly dependent students and with students who made offensive comments.

Additional problems facing ITAs were students who challenged their comments or lecture; students who questioned or contradicted ITAs during lecture; students who monopolized class discussions; and students who promoted their own political/social agenda each time the ITA spoke. The results of their study indicated that helping TAs become effective classroom managers is an urgent necessity.

The results of the PS (pilot study) conducted in 2006 indicated that similar issues confronted the international teaching assistants (Bengu, 2007). One ITA recalled that he did not know enough about the culture of undergraduate students in the U.S. at first, which caused difficulty for him to adjust to the classroom culture. He stated, "I thought that students will be ready for the class by reading the required material and doing the homework" (Bengu, 2007, p.5). After a couple days of interaction with students, he felt that he needed to be stricter than he thought; otherwise, his students would continue to ignore him and not prepare themselves for the

course. One of the challenges he faced was discipline in the classroom. His students tended not to attend class, were frequently tardy, and talked to each other during the class. On the contrary, his students were expecting him to be more flexible when it came to quizzes and mid-term exams: "One of the students who missed the quiz came to me and asked for a make-up exam, so I gave one. Later, another student came to me and asked for a make up-exam. I ended up giving a make-up exam to half of the class" (p.6). After that incident, he realized that he needed to clarify the rules and regulations for the course. He eventually distributed a supplemental syllabus that included the basic course policies that addressed the rules for the attendance, exams, make-up exams, and homework. He was asked, what are the main causes of your frustration? In response, he stated not having the basic idea of undergraduate student culture and not having the knowledge of classroom regulations. He expressed the concern that he was not familiar with some of the institutional policies (for example, disability services), since he didn't have those regulations in his home country.

One of the ITAs in the PS described her first day of her classroom experience as "horrible." When she recalled that day she said, "I was too serious, too rigid, and concentrated on the material too much rather than communicate the material to students" (Bengu, 2007, p.7). She mentioned a particularly difficult situation that challenged her:

> At the beginning, I had difficulty understanding my students, the same way [others ITAs] had. I had problems with the cultural aspect of the language. Some of my students made jokes in the class, and I did not understand those jokes. It frustrated me, and I had difficulty managing the class. (p.7)

An ITA studying engineering described a similar difficulty when interacting with undergraduate students:

> I had no teaching experience before I arrived here. It would be nicer if I learn before coming [to the states] about the structure of the classes; how the classes are held [in the states]. Also it helps if you know the character and behavior of the [undergraduate] students before hand. Sometimes when I ask questions [to undergraduate students], I don't get the answer, and if I force them little bit they behave negatively and may leave the class, and that affect the psychology of the class. The responsibility is on the TA and there is not much time before the classes to organize your self and you're anxious… it will be nice to have meetings with the professors and [we should] decide on the structure of the class [with the professor]. (p.8)

In time, he organized himself better, and got acquainted with his students' different accents and behaviors. He believes that it will be easier for him to acculturate if he knows the structure of the classes, the undergraduate student culture, and classroom procedures and regulations prior to becoming a teaching assistant.

Another respondent summed up the experience of many participants:

> As a teaching assistant, we don't really know how to approach the students. I have no clue how to deal with students in terms of conduct, like how to deal with a student if he is aggressive in the class. They have all kinds of troubles, being late, being tired, lazy…. Dealing with those situations is hard if you do not know the dynamic of the student. (Bengu, 2007, p. 10)

Ross & Krider (1992) emphasized in their study that when international students leave their own culture and come to a new culture "to join an American institution" (p.279), "they not only have to adjust to the American way of life but also to the more specific and localized values and norms of the organization that they enter" (p.279). In addition, Twale et al. (1997) pointed

out that the difficulty international students experience is compounded by the fact that "the philosophy of education" (p.3) they *internalize* is different from the American academic system (Ross et al.1992; Twale et al. 1997; Luo, et al. 2000; Gorsuch, 2003).

Other issues such as ethnicity, cultural differences, instructor approachability, instructor's behavior, institutional culture, and student attitudes toward the course (deBerly, 1995; Oppenheim, 1996; Twale et al. 1997 &1998) can be a barrier and must be addressed as well.

To understand this new system and to adapt to the acceptable teaching skills, ITAs need assistance gaining cultural understanding (Twale et al. 1997; Luo et al. 2000; Fitch & Morgan, 2003; Gorsuch, 2003; Littleford, 2004).

Responding Through Cross-Cultural Training

Coimbra (2002) reported that when international graduate students are appointed ITAs, they need specific kinds of mentoring and support that differ from their counterparts, native teaching assistants (NTAs). For that purpose, she evaluated the impact of an ITA development program on twenty-three ITAs. The results of this study indicated that "the ITAs received positive benefits from the development program and significantly improved their language, cultural, and teaching competence" (Coimbra, 2002, p.14). In addition, she found that upon completion of the training program, "ITAs felt more confident and better prepared to fulfill their multiple roles due to customized support they received, which provided them with reassurance and encouragement throughout the mentoring process" (Coimbra, 2002, p.14).

Wilson (1987) and Littleford (2004) stated that a person with cross-cultural competence is one step closer to being an effective teacher. This is not an overnight achievement as Littleford (2004) and Gonzalez (2004) pointed out in their study. This is a process that requires developmental time in order to create a balance between the host and the home culture.

It is therefore vital to provide comprehensive training that focuses on improving the ITAs' communication and teaching skills and prepare them for this important role (Neves et al. 1991; Luo et al. 2000; Fitch et al. 2003; Gorsuch, 2003; Bates Holland, 2008). Fox et al. (1994) found that "ITAs who successfully adjust to the U.S. university system, communicate effectively in the classroom, and understand the cultural characteristics of their students, will increase the quality of the educational opportunities, experience and the outcomes that undergraduates receive" (p.21).

Traditionally, however, departments have focused on helping ITAs write syllabi and providing resources available through the libraries. Although steps have been made to improve teaching assistants' performances, little has been done to give ITAs diverse experiences that would help them acculturate into the American classroom. Recently, some universities have instituted some type of preparatory education for teaching assistants in the form of an applied linguistics/methods course. This course is often a workshop starting from one day to a week prior to the beginning of the academic year, followed by periodic visits to the assistants' classrooms by either a supervising professor or a departmental methodologist. However, even when these programs are offered, sometimes no real coordination and comprehensive training for international teaching assistants is offered, and they often don't focus on the common areas of difficulty.

It is now abundantly clear that ITAs need assistance with their acculturation process. deBerly (1995 &1997), Olaniran (1999) and Chalupa and Lair (2000) found that training created for ITAs is limited and the focus is on language proficiency. Apart from the general training for TAs, past research (deBerly, 1995; Twale et al. 1997; Olaniran, 1999; Chalupa et al. 2000; Luo

et al. 2000; Gorsuch, 2003) suggested that the acculturation process should be facilitated through more extensive training.

In 1998, Shannon, Twale and Moore (1998) examined the effects of the TA training in three areas: departmental, university, and undergraduate degree education. Teaching graduate students (N=129) enrolled in the study. They found that TAs who had comprehensive training in pedagogical methods at their undergraduate institution were rated as more effective teachers than TAs without such training. The results found that one-day workshops focused primarily on policy, students, and instructions did not have any impact on TAs' teaching effectiveness. TAs needed more time for training in the area of pedagogical techniques. Shannon et al. (1997) had the same results. They pointed out that ITA programs should focus on incorporating the components of American culture and pedagogical technique into the training.

Twale et al. (1997) compared the undergraduate ratings and corresponding graduate teaching self-ratings of nine teaching assistants in regards to teaching effectiveness factors. They included math and science NTAs and ITAs. Fifty-nine participants were used, 29 of which were NTAs and 30 of which were ITAs. Their students rated ITAs lower in four areas of interactive teaching behavior: ability to facilitate the discussion, encouragement of students and their ideas, ability to use humor, and ability hold the interest of their students. On the contrary, ITAs rated themselves slightly higher in these same four areas of interactive teaching. Twale et al. (1997) found that this rating may differ primarily because of the way ITAs perceived themselves. As Gonzalez (2004) pointed out in her book, individuals evaluate themselves and interpret their acts according to the cultural norms in which they were socialized.

Black & Mendenhall (1990) argued that successful adjustment to living in a foreign culture requires an understanding of the host culture. Hall and Hall (1990) emphasized the

importance of learning about the culture of the foreign group with whom one is planning to sign a teaching contract. In addition, McAllister and Irvine (2000) asserted that to be an effective instructor, the individual must learn about the students' culture. Black et al. (1990) explained cross-cultural training as a way to familiarize the individual with the appropriate and inappropriate behaviors in that new culture. Familiarization with culture and cross-cultural perceptions enables one to smoothly adjust to the new culture, to be more effective in his/her new role, to increase the individual's self-efficacy (Black et al. 1990; Bhawuk & Brislin, 1999), to prevent or at least diminished the cross-cultural misunderstandings that occur in the American classrooms (Cimbra, 2002), (Torbiorn, 1982), and, finally, to emphasize that cross-cultural training and/or cultural awareness sessions allows individuals to more rapidly adjust to the new culture.

From the point of view of ITAs, however, cross-cultural training can be very time-consuming. Past studies (Smith et al. 1993; Olaniran, 1999) showed that ITAs prefer to spend less time on their teaching roles, and the responsibilities that come with it, in order to spend more time on professional goals, family responsibilities, and "obligation[s] to a professor" (Smith et al. 1993, p.486).

It is therefore crucial that these conflicting priorities be taken into consideration when designing ITA training programs. One possible solution would be a pre-arrival cross-cultural training, offered in an online format. Such training would allow individuals to adjust to the new culture prior to their arrival, with the expectation that this would create an opportunity for them to be more effective in their new roles.

Position of Other Stakeholders

In their study Smith et al. (1999) emphasized that the cooperation and coordination of administration, faculty, and students requires clear plans and procedures to facilitate success. deBerly (1995, 1997) found that "the perspective of the stakeholders affected by the ITA requirement (department heads, graduate and undergraduate students and ITA academic coordinator) must be taken into account" (p.8).

Previous studies (Rubin, 1992; Breshnan & Kim, 1993b) and a recent study by Trebing (2008) pointed out the importance of American undergraduate students' perceptions towards ITAs. Trebing (2007) indicated that undergraduate students see themselves "as victim in classes taught by ITAs" (p.28). She recommended including undergraduate students in the intercultural communication training so as to help undergrads view ITAs in a "positive light" (p.30).

The Intercultural Sensitizer, which is also often referred to as the cultural assimilator, is a cross-cultural training strategy. Yook and Albert (1999) analyzed whether the use of the Intercultural Sensitizer and role playing have an effect on the perceptions of U.S. undergraduate students towards ITAs. A total number of 422 undergraduate students were separated into groups of 25 to 30 students. Each group completed one of the four training conditions consisting of Intercultural Sensitizer, role playing, role playing and Intercultural Sensitizer, and no training. After the completion of 20 minutes in one of the above-mentioned conditions, the participants watched a lecture given by an ITA. At this time, groups that were shown the "disclosure condition" knew that the lecturer was a non-native speaker, whereas participants in the "non-disclosure condition" were not aware of this fact. After statistically analyzing the data, Yook and Albert suggest that the training conditions using role play and the Intercultural Sensitizer have a positive effect on the perception of undergraduate students toward ITAs. As a result, they

suggested that "training undergraduate students in intercultural communication can have a positive effect on the currently negative perception of ITAs on U.S. American college and university campuses" (Yook & Albert, p.15).

When stakeholders work together they created "an environment for effective learning" (Neves & Sanyal, 1991, p.4; Olaniran, 1999). Successful ITA training programs function with the support they receive from administration and faculty (Smith, 1992; deBerly, 1995; Smith et al. 1999). deBerly (1995) mentioned that involvement of administration and faculty will help expand the trainer's perspective in the training and evaluation process.

Conclusion

Black and Mendenhall (1989) pointed out that if the military trains its soldiers, and religious groups train its missionaries before they are sent overseas, then why do many universities not pay much attention to ITA issues and instead "assume that the 'best and brightest' will be able to figure out on their own how to best do their job" (Mendenhall, 1996, p.240). However, previous research illustrated that this is not the case, and there are numerous complaints, regardless of how valid, from undergraduate students, their parents, and international teaching assistants (Clayton, 2000; Fitch & Morgan, 2003; Rao, 1993; Trebing, 2007).

A thorough understanding of the structure, culture, and institutional valuation would give the ITAs a better understanding of what is required (deBerly, 1995; Smith et al. 1999; Wulff et al.1993, Bates Holland, 2008) from teaching assistants. Smith (1992) and Smith et al. (1999) emphasized in their study that "no single design is the best for all institutions; the most effective programs take into account a thorough understanding of the structure, culture and needs of the institution" (p.3) and their international teaching assistant population (Coimbra, 2002; Trebing, 2007; Shiga, 2008).

Bates Holland (2008) indicated that since "teaching is an activity that occurs in relative privacy, what occurs in the classroom is shrouded in mystery" (p.15). It is this mystery that must be unpacked in order to improve the quality of college teaching, thereby improving the quality of learning in the undergraduate classroom. For that reason, we should focus on the ITAs' points of view (Mascoop, 1993; Meesuwan, 1992; Ross & Krider, 1992; Tavana, 2005; Trebin, 2007) and let ITAs voice their needs and explain the challenges that they face in the classroom setting in order to provide necessary information for prospective ITAs, faculty members, departments, and institutions.

Chapter 3

Research Design

This chapter aims to describe the methodological framework employed in this study. The sections discuss the data collection techniques and procedures, the research site, the sampling methods, and the research participants. The chapter concludes with a description of the data analysis process, ethical considerations, and the researcher's role.

Issue

Past research (Smith and Simpson, 1993; Olaniran, 1999) has shown that family responsibilities and professional goals force ITAs to spend less time on teaching and the responsibilities that accompany it. However, in order to be effective ITAs, they need to be involved in orientation and training sessions that allow them to adjust to the new academic and social culture of the institution. Academic culture is not the same for all institutions (Smith, 1992). Smith et al. (1999) and Smith (1992) suggested that a training program designed for one institution may not be efficient for others. An effective training program for ITAs should be designed based on a thorough understanding of the structure, culture, and needs of a specific institution. Most importantly, as Gburek and Dunett (1997) pointed out in their study, the different teaching environments (e.g., laboratory class, seminar, introductory level classes, etc.) have different instructional requirements. An effective training program should accommodate these factors when creating a program for international students who are working as teaching assistants in American universities (Gonzalez, 2004).

Research Setting

This study was conducted at the University of Cincinnati (UC), a large Midwestern University with an enrollment of approximately 1,900 international students. In 2006, the Center

for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning (CET&L) coordinated a workshop presented to TAs on the subject of "The First Day of Class." In addition, representatives from the university library presented information about research programs and resources available from them.

At the graduate level, each department establishes its own criteria for assistantships within the framework of the institution's criteria. Some graduate programs have rigorous training programs. Others have offered very little. According to Eleanor Buczala, Senior Assistant for University Dean of the Graduate School (personnel communication, August 20, 2006), the institution as a whole is not always aware of what is really happening in individual departments.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to address these major concerns: How do international teaching assistants (ITAs) use their communicative competence of English in this new role? What must they learn in order to function more effectively as a TA, and thus acculturate into the new social context, U.S. academia (Wiemann & Backlund, 1980)? In other words, the study examines the process of acculturation of international students in their new setting.

Research Questions

- How do ITAs prepare themselves for this new role?
- In what areas do ITAs feel alienated from their teaching responsibilities?
- What knowledge and skill sets do ITAs believe would be helpful in preparing them to teach American undergraduate students?
- How do ITAs' cultural values and current belief systems influence the way they approach this role?

Related to the major concerns above are other focuses and probes such as the following:

- ITA's first day of teaching

- The impact of previous knowledge on teaching throughout the adaptation process.
- The impact of training (if they had any) on the adaptation process.

Research Design

The qualitative research method for this dissertation was a single case study combined with focus group interviews. The researcher used ethnographic methods, including interviews and observations. This study can also be characterized as a naturalistic research study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), because data collection took place in a natural setting. Also, there were no variables manipulated to confirm or disconfirm a priori hypothesis.

Case studies, generally speaking, examine one particular event or a specific setting, or a single subject in its natural environment with no control and manipulations (Nunan, 1999). Case studies draw attention to what specifically can be learned about a particular case by paying close attention to the activities of the participants and how they processed information within the case (Stake, 2005). In other words, a case study focuses on understanding a particular case rather than generalizing it. Nunan (1999) argued that case studies are particularly suited to the types of *action-oriented research* when the purpose is to help researcher's understand and solve the problems *related to the case*.

This researcher used an *inductive approach* for the study in which the individual experience of the participant is the focus of attention. According to Patton (2002), the inductive approach begins with the individual experiences of actors "without pigeon holing or delimiting what those experiences will be in advance of fieldwork" (p.45). Thus, to recognize the nature of the phenomena (communicative competence and acculturation process), it is essential to encourage the participant to express her feelings, thoughts and experiences during the interviews. In this way, "coding procedures help to protect the researcher from accepting any of those voices

on their own terms, and to some extent forces the researcher's own voice to be questioning, questioned, and provisional" (Strauss & Corben, 1994, p.280). According to this insight, the inductive analysis of the data were employed in the following manner: (a) the researcher focused on investigating and understanding the acculturation process and intercultural communication experiences of the ITA in her natural context, (b) the researcher illustrated the ITAs' interpretations about her new role as teaching assistant, and (c) after these concepts were merged and assessed, their conceptual relationship was posited.

Before contacting potential participants, this researcher submitted an application for the research to the UC Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval of the use of human subjects in research. The application outlined the study's purpose, design, procedures, and potential risks to participants. Once the IRB approved the study, this researcher began contacting potential participants.

In this study, the case study participant, who is currently pursuing her Ph.D. degree in the College of Business (COB), is examined. At the time research was conducted for the case study, she had lived in Cincinnati for 3 years.

Focus group interviews were conducted with 10 ITAs from a variety of countries and fields of study in order to better understand the process of change and acculturation, as well as to increase the validity of the results. According to Patton (2002), maximum variation sampling is a goal of qualitative research, and Eland (2001) stated that "if commonalities are found across diverse cases, it strengthens the results" (p.174). For this reason, a diverse group of participants was selected.

In conclusion, a single case study and focus group were conducted with a diverse group of ITAs. Communicative competence theory helped the researcher to generate detailed descriptions and an explanation of ITAs' needs regarding their adaptation to this new role.

Qualitative method

Qualitative data collection involves open-ended questions and less control over participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, pp.249). Qualitative research from the phenomenological point of view describes "social processes from the point of view of particular actors rather than testing general causal claims" (Bogdan et al., 1992, p.253).

The nature of this study required an open-ended interview protocol primarily for two reasons. First, Ross & Krider (1992) suggested that "the fundamental structure, essence or meaning of the ITAs' experiences of entering the American university system can be best obtained through the use of interviews" (p.281). Second, "interviewing gives participants a voice in the interpretation and use of findings, serving as advocates of their own interests" (Bresnahan & Cai, 2000, p.66). By using face-to-face interviews, ITAs were provided with the opportunity to be active participants in the research process and to voice "what they think and want" (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003, p. 25).

Case Study Method

Eisenhardt (1989) defined a case study as "a research strategy which focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings" (p.534). Stake (1978) mentioned in his study that "case studies are useful in the study of human affairs because they are down-to-earth and attention-holding" (p.5). In his paper, he claimed that "case studies will often be the preferred method of research because they may be epistemologically in harmony with the reader's experience and thus to that person a natural basis for generalization" (p.5).

The reason the researcher employed a case study approach was to help students further understand their ITA experience (Stake, 1978, p.5). Since the aim of this study was to allow her participant to explain her communicative competence processes from her own perspective and help the institution to understand ITAs' social problems, this researcher has to "perceive and communicate" (Stake, 1978, p.7) in a way that would benefit current understandings (Stake, 1978, p.5). A case study draws attention to "how" and "why" questions about the event over which a researcher has little or no control (Kitchenham and Pickard, 1995 and Yin, 1984). It allows the researcher to focus on understanding the particular case rather than generalizing it. Therefore the researcher's purpose in selecting a case study is to reveal knowledge about individual phenomena "that are essential for understanding the range of variety of human experience, which is essential for understanding and appreciating the human condition" (Abramson, 1992, p.190).

The related data are collected from:

- Archival records (ITAs' Oral English Proficiency Examination evaluations, undergraduates' evaluation reports, and a journal)
- Verbal reports (interview sessions conducted with the ITA)
- Observations (in a classroom setting)

Sampling and Participant

Eisenhardt (1989) mentioned in her study that "the concept of a population is crucial" (p.537). Due to the nature of the study, to "define the set of entities from which the research sample is to be drawn" (Eisenhardt, 1989, p.537), the participant should be an individual possessing a different cultural background and with experiences in an educational system dissimilar from that of American students. The participant for the single case study was selected

according to that which would allow the researcher "to learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research" (Patton, 1990, p.169).

The researcher used *purposeful sampling* for the study. The researcher had a particular goal in selecting samples whose subjects are believed to facilitate the expansion of the developing theory (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998).

To "control the extraneous variations and help to define the limits for generalizing the findings" (Eisenhardt, 1989, p.537), when selecting the participant for the present study, the following additional criteria were used: (a) s/he is an international student, (b) s/he is currently and will continue to be a teaching assistant, and (c) s/he doesn't have any previous teaching experience in her/his home country or in the U.S.

Sampling for the case study was conducted in the following manner: A total of one participant was employed for the study. This selected student is pursuing her Ph.D. degree in the College of Business. The researcher had informal conversations with the selected participant during the Winter Quarter in February, 2007, to ascertain her biographical background and willingness to participate in the study. During the initial conversations, the researcher explained the study and the research process, and informed her about her own role as a researcher in the study. On May 16th 2008, the participant read and signed the informed consent which described the research process in detail (see Appendix 1). From the outset, the teaching assistant was informed that the study concerns ITAs' experiences of the acculturation process and the difficulties they contend with in this new role.

Background of the Participant

The case study participant is a female student from France working on her Ph.D. in the College of Business. The demographic data for the participant in the study are summarized and

displayed in Table 1. In order to maintain confidentiality, the nickname of the participant was used with her permission. In addition, any identifying characteristics of the participant were either changed or eliminated from the study.

Country	*Field of study*	*Degree*	*Years lived in the U.S.*	*Previous experience teaching*	*Course(s) teaching*	*Year(s) as an ITA (in the year study concluded)*
France	College of Business	Ph.D.	2 years (the year the data collected)	No	International Business	0

Table 1

Focus Group Method

Stewart, Shamdasani and Rook (2007, p.1) introduced us to the focus groups as a distinctive member of the qualitative research family. They explained that the basic purpose of the focused interview was to gather qualitative data from individuals "who experienced some particular concrete situation," (p.9) which serves as the focus of the interview.

The researcher used a focus group method to confirm the results that were collected from the single case study and, additionally, to diagnose the potential problems with programs and services provided by the institutions and departments (Stewart et al., 2007).

Additionally: (a) Focus groups provide data from a group of people much more quickly, and often at lower cost; (b) Focus groups allow the researcher to interact directly with respondents. This provides opportunities for the clarification of responses. The open response format of a focus group enables the researcher to obtain a large and rich amount of data in the respondents' own words; (c) Focus groups allow respondents to react to and build upon the responses of other group members. This synergistic effect of the group setting may result in the production of data or ideas that might have not been uncovered in individual interviews, and; (d)

The results of a focus group are extremely user friendly and easy to understand (Stewart et al., 2007, p.43).

Sampling and Participants

A sampling frame ensures that the ITAs are representative of the larger population of the interest (Stewart et al., 2007). The researcher was especially interested in students who had been teaching for at least one quarter because it is assumed they would have had a variety of experiences. They would have had the opportunity to more fully experience the process of acculturation, and they would have had time to gain more insights and perspective on their experiences. The initial contact with the prospective participants occurred by e-mail. To work in service of the goals and objectives of the research, the researcher selected a heterogeneous group. The sample included 4 men and 6 women. This may affect the group's conformity in a negative way, as Stewart et al. (2007) mentioned, but diversity also provides greater perspective and innovation (Stewart et al., 2007, p.20). Heterogeneously built group members brought a variety of perspectives and knowledge-bases to the table (Stewart et al., 2007, p.28). After the individual's acceptance, the researcher provided the general description of the nature of research, along with the time and place the group would meet. The researcher arranged two focus groups, with a total of 10 students. This arrangement created manageable sessions. Hill, Thomson and Williams (1997) suggested that "8-15 participants are necessary 'to have a large enough sample so that researchers can determine whether findings apply to several people or are just representative of one or two people'" (p.532). Kuzel (1992), citing other researchers, suggested that 12-20 interviews are needed to "achieve maximum variation of data" (p.41). Eland (2001), also citing other researchers, agreed that, "rather than setting an arbitrary number, the number of cases needed should be determined based on the information being obtained" (p.70). Eland

(2001), noting other studies, indicated that "there are enough cases when saturation or redundancy is reached, i.e., when nothing new appears to be added to the data by including new cases" (p.70). In this study, the researcher concluded that saturation had been reached because the same major themes as with the single case study were emerging, and no substantive themes would be added with additional interviews.

Background of the Participants

The demographic data for the participants in the study are summarized and displayed in Table 2. In order to maintain confidentiality, the researcher used pseudonyms. They were enrolled in a variety of academic fields. Four participants were enrolled in technical science fields (e.g., engineering and sciences), and six were enrolled in non-technical science fields (e.g., education and liberal arts). In addition, any identifying characteristics of the participant were either changed or eliminated from the study. Table 2 indicates the number of female and male participants in technical and non-technical fields.

Collected Data (May 2008)

	Country		*Technical major field of study*	*Non-technical major*	*1-3 years lived in the U.S.*	*>3 years lived in the U.S.*	*1 quarter -2 years as an ITA*	*>2 years as an ITA*	*Previous teaching experience in their country*
1	China	Female	0	1	1	0	1	0	1
2	Cyprus	Male	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
3	France1	Male	0	1	0	1	1	0	0
4	France2	Female	0	1	0	1	0	1	1
5	Germany	Female	1	0	1	0	1	0	0
6	India	Male	1	0	1	0	1	0	0
7	Japan	Female	0	1	0	1	1	0	0
8	Nigeria	Male	1	0	1	0	1	0	1
9	Turkey1	Female	1	0	0	1	1	0	0
10	Turkey2	Female	0	1	0	1	1	0	0
		Total:	4	6	4	6	8	2	3

Table 2

The researcher's familiarity with the participants prior to the interviews varied. She had previously had several casual conversations with nine participants. She had not previously met one of the participants before the interviews.

Data Sources

The nature of this study led to the choice of a case study and focus group interviews within the context of qualitative methodology. The data was collected from CSP archival records: Oral English Proficiency Examination results, undergraduates' evaluation reports, and her journal; and verbal reports: interview sessions conducted with CSP and FGP, and observations of CSP in her classroom setting. Interviews were recorded, analyzed, and summarized using the constant comparison method that is further explained in Data Analysis. Data from a reflective journal kept by the participant was also sorted, coded, prioritized, and pieced together according to emerging patterns of interpretation.

Data Collection Procedures

Triangulation has been a common method in providing trustworthiness in qualitative research (Patton, 1980). Denzin (1978) originally advocated the use of multiple methods and multiple sources of data to provide triangulation in a qualitative research study.

To make triangulation possible, the researcher followed the approaches of triangulation to increase the trustworthiness of this study and to "offer stronger substantiation of constructs" (Eisenhardt, 1989, p.538). The data were collected by using multiple data collection methods: semi-structured interviews, observations, demographic questionnaires, and documents analysis (Table 3).

In this data collection process, in order to create "useful field notes in interviews and observations" (Eisenhardt, 1989, p.539), the researcher recorded in written form "whatever

impressions occur[ed]" (Eisenhardt, 1989, p.539). As Eisenhardt (1989) pointed out in her study, "it is often difficult to know what will and will not be useful in the future" (p.539). In this study, the researcher also challenged her thought processes by asking herself questions such as "What am I learning? And how does this case differ from the last?" (Eisenhardt, 1989, p.539).

Data Collection Methodology

Methodology	*Sources*	*Procedures*
Demographics Questionnaire	*CSP & **FGP	Completed by interviewees before the sessions started
Post & Pre interview	CSP	Recorded unstructured interviews on a digital voice recorder, transcribed, coded and clustered data into categories
Observation	CSP	Took notes on scratch paper. Analyzed & presented in synthesis with/in comparison to interview data
Documents: journal, undergraduate students' evaluations	CSP	Read all materials and documented any descriptive information related to interviewee
Interview Session	FGP	Recorded semi-structured interviews on a digital voice recorder, transcribed, coded and clustered data into categories
E-mail follow up	FGP	Received further ideas and clarification

*CSP: Case Study Participant
**FGP: Focus Group Participant
Constant comparison method of grounded theory

Table 3

Interviews

The primary source of data was semi-structured interviews. The researcher utilized interviews in order to find out what is "in and on someone else's mind" (Patton, 1990, p.278). As Patton (2002) explains:

> We interview people to find out from them those things we can not directly observe…. We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions …. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspectives. (p.196)

In this sense, the study aims to use interview sessions to find out how the participant interprets her new role as a teaching assistant and to define her expectations of these duties. The researcher conducted several audio-taped interviews with the participating ITA, and these sessions were transcribed by the researcher.

Interview sessions in the single case study were structured as three consecutive sessions. In the first session of the interview, questions were open-ended and related to the research questions in order to capture the view of the participant before she took on her role as a teaching assistant. The second session of the interview took place after her teaching practice so as to clarify and gather more information regarding the situations that occurred in the classroom setting, and also to examine her reflections regarding her classroom experiences. The third session of the interview--follow-up interviews—were tailored to focus on her previous responses in order to learn "what behaviors have changed, how [she] view[ed] things, and what [her] expectations are for the future" (Patton, 2002, p. 250).

The focus groups' interview questionnaire was derived from Eland's (2001) interview questionnaire, developed for her dissertation. In the present study, utilizing information retained from the pilot study and the single case study, the researcher changed and added additional questions for the focus group. These interviews were conducted in March 2008. The sessions were video and audio taped, after first gaining participants' permission. Focus group interviews were conducted in a meeting room located in a university building. After welcoming participants

and telling them about my interest in the research topic, the researcher asked them to read and sign the consent form. By reassuring them that what they said was confidential, the researcher attempted to make the participants feel as comfortable as possible. Before the interview began, the researcher told each participant the she or he could decline to answer any questions during the interview; however, none of the participants declined to answer any of the questions.

The sessions lasted 1.5-2 hours. All participants talked openly. These interviews produced a very rich body of data expressed in the respondents' own words and context (Stewart et al., 2007 p.39). In their study, Stewart et al. measured the validity and usefulness of the focus group data "by the extent to which participants feel comfortable about openly communicating their ideas, views or opinions" (2007, p.19). In that sense, both of the focus groups were compatible. Groups' conformity level to the questions was high, and both groups were effective in encouraging participation (Stewart et al., 2007). Participants reacted to each others' responses comfortably, and they performed their tasks effectively.

At the end of the interviews, the researcher thanked participants for agreeing to be interviewed. Hill et al. (1997), stated that the researcher's notes can be useful later for understanding the data. After participants left, the researcher wrote notes on main points and any themes that emerged from the interviews.

Transcriptions of Interviews

The audio tapes of all the interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. After she checked each transcript one to two times for its accuracy, the researcher e-mailed these transcripts to the participants to get their approval. The researchers then invited participants to make changes or corrections. All participants agreed to give feedback. Several participants clarified 3-4 sentences or concepts, but overall, the participants found the answers accurate.

In a similar study, Eland (2001) used the same method to clarify that the researcher understood what participants intended to convey. Eland (2001) indicated that "this process lends to testimonial validity to the results" (p.75). According to Maxwell (1996, as cited in Eland, 2001), soliciting feedback from participants "is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpretation of the meaning of what they say and the perspective they have of what is going on" (p.75). Eland (2001) suggested that "this may be especially important when interviewing international students, due to language and cultural differences between participants and interviewer" (p.75).

Observation

"Interviews are primary sources of data in qualitative case studies; so too are observations," wrote Merriam (1998, p.94). By using observation techniques, the researcher, an outsider, observed the case-study participant in the designated course during the first term of the summer quarter. For four weeks, the researcher witnessed firsthand what was happening in the classroom setting and compared that with the participant's perceptions about the classroom setting and her new role as a teaching assistant. Direct observation made it possible to notice things that have become "routine to the participant themselves" (Merriam, 1992, p.96) or that escape her awareness (Patton, 2002). In addition, it gave the researcher the opportunity to capture elements of the classroom experience that the participant might not want to talk about (Patton, 2002).

The observations started in June 2008, the first part of the summer quarter. The researcher attempted to remain an outsider to "objectively record the details of what has occurred in the field" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p.112).

These observations allowed the researcher to better understand and capture the context within which ITAs, in general, and the participant as an ITA, in particular, interact within the classroom setting. The data that was collected enabled the researcher to triangulate data and understand the meaning and context of the interviews and documents more completely. Additionally, the researcher was able to compare and contrast her perspective of the teaching experience with that of the participant.

Documents

Merriam (1992) described documents as "available" materials or data that exist (p.112). Two types of documents were used in this study: "documents that are produced independently of the research" (p.133), for example, participants' OEPT scores, undergraduates' evaluation reports, and documents that were prepared at the researchers' request, such as the journal that was kept for this study. The OEPT Office keeps videotapes of all test-takers' presentations, as well as rating sheets that contain evaluators' written comments and numerical evaluations of these presentations. On one hand, all of this documentation is kept in case any student believes she needs to contest her test scores. On the other hand, these documents are also kept for research purposes, including improving the reliability of the test.

Analyses of the documents in this study were used as supplements to the interviews because "this type of document contains information or insight relevant to the research question and whether it can be acquired in a reasonably practical yet systematic manner" (Merriam, 1992, 124).

At the end of the course session, these documents were examined in order to compare them with the participants' perceptions of and experience with teaching.

Data Analysis

The researcher used a constant comparison method of grounded theory for data analysis. Grounded theory is a systematic set of methods to collect, code, and analyze data (Glaser, 1992). Specifically the grounded theory is "a general methodology of analysis linked with data collection that uses a systematically applied set of methods to generate an inductive theory about a substantive area (Glaser, 1992, p. 16)." In constant comparison method, the researcher asks the following question while she continually codes, compares, and analyzes the data: "What category or property of a category does this incident indicate?" (Glaser, 1992, p. 19). The categories inductively emerge out of the data rather than being decided prior to the data analysis (Patton, 1987).

The systematic analysis of the data began by reading the main written documents from the single case study (i.e., journal, observation records, evaluation reports, OEPT scores, and recorded pre and post interviews) and the transcriptions of recorded focus groups interviews, so as to reinforce potentially significant and recurrent themes and patterns developed during the data collection phase, as well as to generate new themes previously unrealized. The researcher carefully read the open-ended interviews and the journal writings, then recorded her comments and took notes in the margins. This was an ongoing process throughout the data collection procedure. The researcher repeated the reading process several times before starting to code and categorizes the themes and patterns. In this process, key issues, recurrent events, or activities were identified, and the researcher made sure that the most thorough analysis of the categories was accomplished after all the data were coded. During the initial stages of the data analysis, as themes and patterns became apparent, they were organized into units or codes according to their content, and then clustered into categories and subcategories. After careful examination of the

content, the actual process of coding began. The researcher implemented the following guidelines when conducting the data coding: (a) examined the data a specific and consistent set of questions, with the goal of keeping the original objective of the research study in mind; (b) analyzed the data minutely, because "the more codes the researcher had, the more ensuring it will be ground the theories and hypothesis to the data" (Duffield, 2002, p.61); and (c) did not presuppose the analytic relevance of any traditional variable (such as gender, age, and so forth), in order to avoid imposing any assumptions on the data.

When the researcher was finished coding, abstracting, and outlining the data, she wrote lists of major themes for the case study and for the focus group that had been categorized. Her first attempt was to figure out how data collected from a single case study and focus group fit together (Eland, 2001). The researcher first worked with the "themes" or "recurring patterns" that emerged within and among the single case study and the focus group (Eland, 2001). For example, a theme that emerged throughout a case study was the case study participant's frustration with the grading system. As the researcher continued to analyze the focus group interviews, participants' frustrations with the grading system also emerged as a potential challenge for ITAs. After that, the researcher referred back to her original research questions to see if themes were corresponding with these. The researcher revised the themes again to better fit the framework of the research questions. The researcher finally settled on using her research questions as category names when she discovered that these questions fit the emerging categories perfectly.

At the end of the process, the data were organized into seven categories.

All these processes were performed in close consultation with the researcher's academic advisors in order to ensure trustworthiness of data.

Ethical Issues

In the process of conducting this study, ethical issues were carefully taken into consideration. The participants were informed about the purpose of this study and how they could participate. They were informed that their names would be treated with confidentiality in order to protect them, as well the sites where they studied. The participants would not be identified by name at any time; for the purpose of this study, they would be assigned a pseudonym. They were informed that while the data from the study may be published, they will not be identified by name. The researcher also informed the participants that no one would have direct access to the data collected, namely the interviews and their opinions. The participants signed written informed-consent forms whereby they gave permission to participate in the study. Issues of reciprocity were also pondered. The participants were notified that final results of this study would be shared with them.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity and reliability in triangulating the data, multiple data-collection methods such as interviews, focus group interviews, observations, and document analyses were adopted. First, the participant's Oral English Proficiency Test video-taped presentation was observed to identify her proficiency level. Second, the participant was interviewed throughout the data-collection process regarding her new role as a teaching assistant. Third, the field notes from the classroom observations and the various documents (e.g. journal, OEPT scores and evaluation reports) were read and analyzed in synthesis with and/or in comparison to the data from the interview sessions. This three-step approach was used to ensure reliable results.

Triangulation of the descriptions and interpretations was performed through member checking in order to: "[take] data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and [ask] those if the results are plausible" (Merriam, 1992, p.204).

These multiple methodologies helped the researcher derive, then analyze a single set of data from different perspectives about the components of communicative competence. It was the researcher's intention to make use of a positivist and deductive approach, meaning that the researcher used a variety of theoretical perspectives, rather than just one, with finding and explaining patterns apparent in the data. In addition, the researcher worked closely with her advisors and fellow colleagues to ensure the quality and consistency of the work (Miles & Humerman, 1994), and the researcher reflected critically on her role as a researcher throughout the process of conducting this research, in order to ensure validity and reliability.

Chapter 4

Results and Discussion

In early September, the campus is still relatively empty, but it is not hard to see a couple of "foreign-looking" people wondering around the campus. They are coming from overseas with the hopes of receiving a top-notch education. They may be little bit frightened when pondering how welcoming this campus will be. At this early moment, these international students are not really concerned about how many hours they will have to spend in the lab or how they will become a valuable instructor or even how many classes they should take. They are wondering, instead, where they will be sleeping and eating for the rest of the year. By mid September, the number of these international students will increase to more than 300. They will all settle in a house near campus, get familiar with their surroundings, and make new friends. Some of them may have already been to the orientation sessions that were designed by the international student office and/or by their departments. They may be overwhelmed with information, or the fear that they do not have the information they need. These students will register for their classes and feel somewhat ready for the next responsibility that comes with their scholarship award. Some must work in a lab, some must work in an office, and some must stand in front of 30-50 undergraduate students, teaching.

In this section, the researcher provides the individualized introductory profiles of the 11 individuals who shared their feelings and stories about their experience as ITAs. After that, the findings from the qualitative interviews with the single case study and focus group interviews with ten ITAs are provided.

Participants' Profiles

Conversations with each of the participants were transcribed without making any corrections or modification to their language.

Seven female (one of the female participants was involved in the case study) and four male participants were involved in the focus group study. The participants' ages ranged from twenty-five to thirty. Teaching assistant appointments in quarters, including summer teaching, ranged from one to 21 quarters, with an average teaching appointment of nine quarters. Participants' countries of origin, in alphabetical order, were China, Cyprus, France, Germany, India, Japan, Nigeria, and Turkey. Participants were from rural villages and major urban areas. Participants taught in the Colleges of Arts and Sciences, College of Business, College of Education and College Conservatory of Music. Six of the participants indicated that they intended to become faculty members in the future, either while remaining in the Unites States or upon returning to their home countries. Two participants expressed a preference for working as researchers. Three participants were undecided. Pseudonyms are used in place of the participants' names. In the results and discussion section, the researcher used participants' country names as pseudonyms to allow for ease in following. Table 2 on page 36 provides a brief summary of demographic information.

Case Study Participant (CSP)

The case study participant, LN, is from France and was, at the time of the study, pursuing her Ph.D. degree in the College of Business (COB). At the time the case study was conducted, she had been in Cincinnati for two years, and it was her first time teaching.

LN indicated that, other than the guidance she received from her advisor and a teaching assistant who taught this class previously, she took the inspiration from the classes she had

previously taken at UC: *"I took [the class entitled] Managing Across Cultures at UC last year, so I also got some ideas from there… I have the feeling that I already know what an American class is." She noticed that her biggest concern was being "able to conduct the class."*

LN noted that one of the challenges she faced was being fair with students' projects. She spent much time thinking *"…how I could make sure I was going to be fair. I decided not put anymore time pressure than there was already. I wanted to take my time to read several times the projects. I forced myself to write comments after each time reading."*

Another challenge she experienced was regarding unclear guidelines by her department on "how and who to fail*."* She explained,

> *[One] issue happened in a team that was obviously not functioning well …I realized that members of the team were in fact guilty of plagiarism (pure copy/paste from the internet). If the lack of organization and of work is already an issue by itself, plagiarism is violation of the student code. I also asked professors around me how they handle such a situation. Hearing different stories helped me to make sure I was not only acting in a way that was fair but also fitted the larger norms of the department, the college, and the university. When I went to the undergraduate office … I mentioned that … so far the student deserved to fail. The reaction of all the persons in the opened-space was to ask me if I was sure that I wanted to fail her, 'you know she will need to pay without passing the class. Usually the fact they pay is already a big penalty.' In my mind, the problem was not a money issue. Dropping the class was a way to find an exit in case she had 'good reasons' not to show up in class and to let her team down. I was pretty confident with my decision to fail the three students (the above one and the two suspected of plagiarism that did not come to the final exam).*

In the end, she couldn't fail these students, and she expressed her frustration:

I tried to contact [these students] before it was too late, but they did not even show up to their respective appointments. This attitude was for me such a lack of respect. I don't think students realize that you feel personally involved: failing a student is not easy, it means that you failed. I don't know what they were expecting.

Focus Group Participants

An ITA from China

Zheng had couple years of classroom experience in her country, China. She had been teaching with Teaching English as a Second Language for one quarter. Zheng indicated that her motivation for teaching is her research: *"My research and teaching go hand and hand, mutually affecting each other. Nice for me."* She emphasized that this role will enrich her future career as a teacher.

An ITA from Cyprus

Antonis arrived in the United States five years ago. He stated that he had previous teaching experience giving several hours of private tutoring and also teaching undergraduate-level courses while pursuing his master's degree at a different institution in the U.S.

Antonis indicated that this role will affect his career: *"when people come to recruit us, they will look at your evaluations and your skills. Teaching is part of my portfolio."* He noted that this experience will also help him decide on his future role: *"Do I want money or respect of my peers… am I happy when I am teaching?"*

An ITA from France

Frederic had been in the United States for four and a half years. He didn't have any teaching experience when he arrived in the U.S.; neither did he receive necessary training from his department.

Frederic mentioned that his biggest challenge was *"not having the basic idea on undergraduate student culture and not having the knowledge of classroom regulations."*

An ITA from France

Like Zheng, Marion also had the experience of teaching for two years in her country, France.

Marion felt little bit more confident about teaching since she had previously taught. However, she expressed her panic:

> *[A]t that time I wasn't focused on learning how to teach, since I just arrived to U.S., I was busy with looking for an apartment, getting the health insurance and social security number. I had more important things to deal with, and I felt so overwhelmed.*

Marion and the other TAs in the department asked for a longer training session; however, no change occurred in the process.

An ITA from Japan

Sachiko felt like she knew how the system worked since she studied for her bachelor's degree in the states. On the contrary, she found the teaching in the states still difficult: *"Being on time with syllabus and dealing with the students is challenging."* Sachiko indicated that the biggest challenge was dealing with students who needed personal attention and motivating students in the classroom.

Sachiko expressed that she is not familiar with some of the regulations (for example, regarding disability services) that are offered in the classrooms, since he doesn't have such regulations in his home country, Japan. Sachiko would like to teach more classes if given the opportunity.

An ITA from Germany

Silvana came to the United States three years ago. She was assigned her first teaching assignment in the second year of her Ph.D. degree program in Biology.

Like many international students, she came from a country with a different educational system than the U.S. At the beginning of the interview session, she emphasized that she didn't have any previous teaching experience. In that sense, she pointed out the need for training for beginner ITAs teaching in the U.S.

Silvana explained that she didn't see herself as a teacher at the beginning, *"but after the third and fourth time I realized that I do like teaching."* One of the challenges Silvana mentioned was the terminology, specifically lab terminology. She notes: *"I know what are the equipments called but most of the time I know the German definitions."*

An ITA from India

Niranjan was given his first teaching assignment in 2002, the year he arrived to U.S. He expressed that at the time he started teaching, he knew little about the undergraduate student culture of the U.S., which caused difficulty for him when adjusting to the classroom culture. He said, *"I thought that students will be ready for the class by reading the required material and doing the homework."* After a couple days of interaction with students, he felt that he needed to be stricter than he was, otherwise his students would continue to ignore him and come to class unprepared.

Niranjan indicated that his department encouraged graduate students to teach; however, he did not receiving necessary support from his advisor since his advisor did not see it as related to research.

Niranjan realized that he doesn't want to choose teaching as his career:

[T]he thing is, I am so soft-hearted with students, and this is not working with [student]. I cannot strict with students, it is not my nature and to be a good teacher, you have to be strict with them sometime.

An ITA from Nigeria

Fela has been teaching for ten months in the states. Fela expressed that he wants to be a professor: *"I am seeing teaching as part of [my career]."* However, he noted that he was not receiving necessary feedback from his department. He felt like he was left by himself like other TAs and *"still learning day to day basis."*

Fela expressed that other TAs in his department *"discuss with me some problems but I do not feel comfortable discussing issues with the others."*

Fela was amazed by his students' actions and found it amusing*: "They called me names like FUFU--it is a food we name in Africa. They used the name like this three weeks till I heard it from someone."*

An ITA from Turkey

Asli started teaching in her third year in the U.S. as a doctoral student. She indicated that one of the challenges for her was being able to balance teaching and research: *"I am kind of person who can focus mainly on one thing at a time, it is my character, the other things has to be somewhat in the shadow."* She wishes that she had the option to *"teach double one quarter and not teach at all in the next."*

Asli indicated that she is undecided about *"being in a position that requires teaching."* Since she has the experience of teaching, she believes that *"it will be an informed decision."*

An ITA from Turkey

Esra, native of Turkey, had been in the United States longer than any of the other focal subjects. For Esra, this new role wasn't a big social transition since she studied for her bachelor's degree in the states. Esra expressed that she gained lots of experience in this role: *"I learned about public speaking and communicating the class material the best I can."*

Esra indicated that for an academic career *"we have to have the experience of teaching while working on our research."* However, like Fela, she also felt left alone in this process: *"I have not received any feedback and monitoring from the senior faculty."*

Esra noticed that teaching takes too much of her time. She indicated, *"I would like to use my productive energy in different ways."*

Categories and Discussion

In the interview sessions, these 11 ITAs were sincere regarding to their experiences as international teaching assistants. Most of the ITAs shared the same problems or were familiar with the difficulties their colleagues faced. They found themselves somehow "familiar with the campus and culture and yet so alien" (Matthews, Simon & Schuster, 2007, p.114).

The findings of this research indicated many common trends within ITAs' experiences, which were grouped and analyzed within four main categories:

- Category 1: How do ITAs prepare themselves for this new role?
- Category 2: How do ITAs' cultural values and current belief systems influence the way they approach this role?

- Category 3: What knowledge and skill sets do ITAs believe would be helpful in preparing them to teach American undergraduate students?
- Category 4: In what areas do ITAs feel alienated from their teaching responsibilities?

Three subsequent categories were formed from additional potential problems and findings revealed by the case study and focus group:

- Category 5: What kinds of support do ITAs receive and what is the impact of this on their adaptation process?
- Category 6: What should advisors, departments, and the institutions do to help ITAs adjust to this new role?
- Category 7: Recommendations from current ITAs for prospective ITAs

Direct quotes from the participants are used to demonstrate their pleasant and surprised moments, insecurities, confidences, challenges, and needs and "to make the [data] come alive" (Hill et al., 1997, p.555).

The voices, experiences, and ideas presented here only represent the students who were observed and interviewed. Many participants indicated that they were speaking about their own individual experiences and did not wish to speak for all students from their departments and their countries.

Category 1: How do ITAs prepare themselves for this new role?

Readying Themselves for the Teaching Assistant Position:

The majority of the participants (n=8) received their teaching assistant (TA) positions after they arrived to the campus. Three out of 11 had the experience of teaching in their native

countries, but they recalled that experience was different than the one in the states since *"it was in a different cultural setting."* They believed that *"being a graduate student and attending the classes in the states gave [them] a brief insight regard to the American classroom culture and education system."* The case study participant noted that the classes she took previously provided her with a couple ideas: *"I took inspiration from classes I had taken. I took "Managing Across Cultures" at UC last year, so I also got some ideas from there…I have the feeling that I already know what an American class is."*

Two ITAs indicated that they received the materials such as the textbook and the syllabus from the previous instructors. The case study participant (CSP) noted that two of the professors she was working with reviewed with her the materials she was to teach: *"[One of the professors that I am working with] assigned me books to read regard to the class that I may teach. I also met with the professor who taught this class previously."*

An ITA from France recalled not receiving any formal training; on the contrary, the professor who previously taught the same class personally guided him through the process:

> *"I met with the teacher who previously taught this class. She kind of walked me through it for the whole quarter; this is the book, these are the syllabuses for week one, week two and so forth. She gave me all of her power point presentation slides so that was a great help."*

Two ITAs indicated that they observed other instructors' classes *"to see what is going on in her [his] session."* An ITA from Japan said, *"my supervisor let me observe her sessions. That was really helpful for me."*

Light (2001) mentioned in his book that

> [U]ndergraduate students see the time spent in classes where a professor simply goes over and repeats what they have just read, or could easily read in a textbook, as not the best use of time. These undergraduate students would like to learn things that they cannot really learn on their own otherwise "what is the point of being in be here? Especially at these prices. (p.119)

From the start, ITAs who participated in this study also aimed to be unique in the classroom and *"*the instructor*"* who would be valued by his or her students. The CSP noted that she put a great effort to add new-outside material in order to "*spice up the class"* and to make it her own:

> *[The professors who taught this class previously] advise me to use the same [book] that they used last year. I want to look for another book that is close to the current one, to see if I can add something different…. I put down all the chapters of the book [that] I am teaching from and tried to see what else I could add (other book, cases and examples for each class and each topic). I also took the materials Mihai (another grad stud who taught the class last year and last quarter) used to teach.*

Participants commented that in the preparation stage, support from their advisors and department is crucial. Most of the ITAs (n=7) reported that the existing training provided by their departments wasn't enough to prepare them for the new role. They also complained about not receiving necessary information regarding the course content that they were supposed to teach. As a result, they became self-learners. In addition to the ITA from France, ITAs from China, Nigeria, and Turkey also indicated that they didn't receive any training by their departments or any support from faculty members. An ITA from China noticed that she enjoyed figuring out things by herself; yet, she "*Prefers to have longer time of preparation and training."*

An ITA from France explained that he received the materials from the previous instructor; however, some aspects of teaching are more abstract: *"Teaching methodology, grading, what to expect from student or how to interact… all of these I figure out myself by the time by interacting with students."*

Participants commented that with time they integrated technology into their teaching; they grew accustomed to the way undergraduate students communicate; they figured out what exactly their students expect from them; and they acquainted themselves with the grading system. ITAs pointed out that *"adjustment was challenging and difficult … it takes time to learn and accomplish the necessary skills and knowledge."*

An ITA from China recalled that she received the notice for her teaching four days before the quarter started. She said, *"Fortunately I got the materials from the previous TAs but still you need to figure out lot of things by yourself."*

These voices above pointed out that their departments should let their students know about teaching assignments at least a couple of weeks before the sessions started. Furthermore, departments should train and guide their teaching assistants prior to putting them in the classroom.

Category 2: How do ITAs' cultural values and current belief systems influence the way they approach this role?

In My Culture:

Bates Holland (2008) mentioned in her study that the "undergraduate classroom is a setting for teaching and learning while discovering the skill and abilities that ITAs need to become effective teachers" (p.14).

In the case of ITAs and undergraduate students, cultural misunderstandings and conflicts occur when

> the values, norms, and characteristics of the mainstream are frequently mediated by, as well as interpreted and expressed differently within, various cultures. Consequently, one of the challenges facing higher education scholars is to understand how ITAs 'make meaning' of the values, norms, and characteristic of the culture and then implement that knowledge in the college classroom. (Bates Holland, 2008, p.9)

Kuh and Hall (1993) argued that culture functions as a socializing agent and through its properties "newcomers are taught how to behave and what is valued by their institution" (p.11).

In this study, participants found that the level of formality was different compared to their home countries. In her study, Bates Holland mentioned that "implicit and explicit classroom expectations and classroom culture in the American college and university classroom often differ significantly from the experience of most international students" (p.21).

Three ITAs (PP, Cypriot, and French) indicated that they decide to dress more formally to keep the class more formal. An ITA from France explained that her age was similar to her students' when she first started to teach: *"it was an informal situation and I made it formal by changing my dress code."* Wong & Wong (2004) indicated that "clothing may not make a person, but it can be contributing factor in unmarking a person" (p.55). Shiga (2008) noted that "people's appearance affects how they are perceived and received in definite ways" (p.38). A participant from Cyprus indicated that his department has a dress code that assists him in the process because he experienced that dressing formally helps his students perceive him more professionally and therefore respect him more (Shiga, 2008).

Three of the ITAs (CSP, Japanese, and Turkish) noticed other kinds of informalities that they named the "American Way." An ITA from Turkey was surprised that in the states undergraduate students do not mind eating or drinking in the classroom. CSP shared her thoughts on student behavior in her journal:

> *Among some other things to deal with were people arriving late. For me it was not a problem. Of course, in France you cannot even get into the classroom if you are more than 10 minutes late. But I decided not to bother. Same thing with the fact that they wore caps in the classroom. I addressed those the "American way"…. [Another incident happened was that] one of the students fell asleep in the classroom. When I realized that he was asleep I felt really puzzled. I felt at the same time very offended …*

Nathan (2005) noted in his book that most professors will ignore the standard behavior of American college students, such as stepping out of class, eating and drinking during class and sleeping openly.

Bates Holland (2008) mentioned in her study that the classroom settings in most of the countries have a more formal relationship between students and faculty member than in the U.S.: "the professor is an authority figure, examinations are summative, and class participation evidence through queries and discussion is encouraged" (p.9). Participant ITAs reported that in their home countries students were usually passive in the classroom; however, in the states, undergraduate students are questioning, engaging and interacting. "*I like the informal aspect,"* argued one of the French students:

> *I was surprised that students spend so much time talking with teacher, interacting with the teacher and asking questions. The teacher actually listens to them, talks back and responds. In France it is not like that, you suppose to just listen. I guess this affects my*

teacher role. I try to engage them, interact with them and make them think about the concept that I am teaching. As a student I am not sure if it is the best way. I was brought up in this culture where you should just listen, don't talk the teacher do not waste his time, just receive from the teacher. Part of mind thinking it that it should be like that, but I think it is important for students to think about and the question the information that they receive.

Most of the ITAs came from an educational system where formality was the style of teaching; but in the U.S. college classroom there is an informal tone that some, including professors, would interpret as bordering on disrespect (Nathan, 2005, p.78). An ITA from Turkey shared her thoughts:

In the university, I got my BS from, the students were encouraged to say their ideas and ask questions but it was formal. Here it is all very informal. It wasn't something that I expected at the beginning but I got used to it.

The majority of the participants (n=8) found that in the states undergraduate students expected a lot from their instructors, which is quite different from what these international students were used to in their countries. Opposed to the American system, in their home countries one must listen, observe, and not question. Students are solely responsible from their own learning. For this reason, ITAs are puzzled by overly dependent students and students with high expectations:

The teaching style in America is kind of more relaxed, more informal than where I came from. [In Nigeria], you taught, give the information, you can not really question that much but here it is not like that. Right form the beginning students are questioning you. Students always want to know the easiest way. Instead of giving them the reason they want you to give them the answers directly. They want everything to be specific.

Sometimes it makes it more complicated to explain them the reason why. They want the answer from you directly.

Most of the international students felt that being a student should be your only task as a graduate student; yet, in the states students are surrounded by more responsibilities: work after classes or maybe before classes, an infant that needs to be taken care of, and group activities that need to be run (Nathan, 2005). An ITA from Turkey was surprised that undergraduate students in her classes were letting her know that they had a life outside the classroom*: "Most of the time it is lot more important than their school work and they want you to adjust to their life."*

According to Nathan (2005), undergraduate students in the states who struggle with course management and time management,

> will figure out what must be done and what can be let go, just as they will decide whether and when to invest more time than the teacher expected. These decisions will be made in the context of students' own interests and priorities, to be sure, but teachers' own behavior and course structure can appreciably affect how that prioritization works (p.136-137).

An ITA from Turkey attested that when she first started to teach, *"I knew the material that I was supposed to teach, but I didn't know what the students expected from me. It was unavoidable to overwhelm them with unnecessary information for a while but with time I learned."*

Participants found that in the states teachers tell jokes, use technology, and simply wait for undergraduate students to evaluate them at the end of every course; they are like the entertainers waiting to be rated, as also described by Toom (2002). Furthermore, for some of the ITAs, the idea of having their students rate and critique their knowledge, credibility, and

authority is quite shocking. *"I didn't know that students were given an evaluation,"* an ITA from Turkey exclaimed. She continued,

> *I thought their exam would give me feedback. So if they get better grades in their exams and quizzes that were my evaluation … At the end of each term the students were given questionnaires which included questions about their TAs. I was very surprised when I saw answers like 'she was very unhelpful.'' I would never think myself as 'unhelpful or mean'… I started to think about it. It was really helpful to see students' view for certain situations. What I thought as 'challenging them' was 'unhelpful or mean' in their eyes.*

Like Turkish ITA, the others also were never taught that undergraduate student feedback had such an important formative and/or summative role in assessing their teaching effectiveness.

ITAs in this study found that American students *"want to be told exactly from the very beginning of the course what percentages of the total score come from homework, from tests and from quizzes."* Toom (2002) pointed out in his article that "these percentages make sense for undergraduate students who do not care about the subject and take a course just to get a grade with minimal learning" (p.128).

An ITA from Japan knew that American undergrads are motivated:

> *[That was what I experienced while working on my bachelor's degree]. That was my expectations when I first start to teach. [Undergraduate student in my class] should be all motivated and want to learn; at least that is what I taught before the class.*

She continued to voice her opinion,

> *But instead they were like 'we have to do this? Why?' [Undergraduate students] tend to take the language classes easy but language learning by itself is not easy. They expect to*

have A since it is not a requirement. So I was like 'I can not give you A. You didn't do the requirements.

Numrich (1993) indicated that the ITAs in his study viewed undergraduate students as underprepared for college work. Like the ITA from Japan, ITAs from Nigeria and India expressed the same kind of confusion: *"Students are ignorant. They require good grades from us with minimal learning, which was supported by university officials."*

Another element of teaching that arose as a difference in cross-cultural educational systems was the evaluation system and the grading policy. Interestingly, this issue was pointed out as a challenge specifically by French ITAs. An ITA from France shared his confusion on how to evaluate his students:

How do you evaluate the performance of your student? How to judge whether a student did a good job or not? If it is a good piece of work, is it A or B, 75 or 80. I tend to believe that teachers are too nice in U.S. on that. I have the expression that it is wrong not to tell students or let them know that they need to put a lot of work to pass. [In the states] the only way student fail is, if they do not show up. There are also many sloppy students who do not deserve to pass. I do not know how to feel about that. Should I fail who didn't show up or should I failed the bottom fifty who didn't get it. What to do with this bottom 50? I do not know where to put my expectation.

The same kind of frustration was described in the CSP's journal:

I need to remember how the whole system works [in grading]. [France] do not have the same scale and we do not apply the same way and the notion of being fair is somehow relative to the cultural context … how could I make sure I was going to be fair … In

France it is not unusual to fail a class. It is even embedded in the system that there are make up exams if you fail at the end of school year.

Another challenge that came up with the CSP, but not the other ITAs was in regards to correcting undergraduate students and doing it in an appropriate way. Coimbra (2002) indicated in her study that ITAs should be cautious with their criticism since American undergraduate students are fairly sensitive to criticism and might perceive the ITAs' comments, corrections and/or suggestions more negatively than intended. This may add more tension to the classroom climate. "*We are much direct in Europe definitely much more [than U.S.],"* the CSP stated, adding:

And I know if I [be direct on my views of students] here, I will be labeled rude and definitely that is not what I want. Am I able to lead a discussion among students where I can tapping in and say you are right or wrong? …will I able to do that without being too French?... will I able to do that [without having] students start to cry in front of [the class]… I saw it [happened] that is why I am giving as an example.

Category 3: What knowledge and skill sets do ITAs believe would be helpful in preparing them to teach American undergraduate students?

Pedagogical Knowledge:

The majority of the participants (n=9) did not have the necessary pedagogical knowledge. However, "instructors' decisions about how to teach" (Weinstein & Meyer as cited in Coimbra, 2002, p.28) are "the products of the prior knowledge on instructional strategies" (Coimbra, 2002, p.28). Coimbra (2002) found that to be able to use the instructional strategies in an effective and efficient manner in the sessions, ITAs should have the knowledge of different instructional tasks

and different instructional strategies. A couple of the ITAs in this current study found that they do not know how to use undergraduate students' previous knowledge to reach out to the students from different majors and to make students active participants in the classroom. The CSP noted that she didn't exactly know her students' prior knowledge on a particular subject. She said,

> *I don't know how deep their knowledge is. Plus, I still have in the class non-business majors. In this situation it is difficult to make sure that you are adapted to your audience. How fast can I go without losing the involvement of the ones that are not familiar with the topic? How slow can I go without losing the interest of students that are majoring in International Business?*

The ITAs explained that in their countries, course content was delivered by lecture and it was the undergraduate students' responsibility to fully understand the content without the benefit of outlines, projected overhead notes, and other aids, as in the American classroom. In contrast, participants found that in the states undergraduate students were used to a student-centered academic lecture. They were overly dependent on their instructors. *"The American approach--it's like elementary school,"* an ITA from France indicated. He continued, *"They expect instructors tells them exactly which chapters to study, and then you review just those chapters. I found this annoying and non-academic."*

An ITA from China shared her frustration,

> *In China, I grew up with the traditional way of teaching: Do your homework and get ready for the exam. [The younger generations need more attention.] I tried to spend more time lecturing… sometimes I feel like "Is it too much lecturing? How much I am talking and how much I am letting my students do the talking.*

The CSP was exhausted, she claimed, from exploring ways to relate the topic--at that time she was teaching international business emphasizing on China--to students' real lives. She was hoping to involve these undergraduate students in the problems that were relevant to their area by bringing in case studies from real-life situations. She was constantly asking herself, *"what can I bring to them that are different than what they already seen and at the same time it is going to be useful."*

Another challenge that arose from the participants' lack of pedagogical knowledge was related to the design of the exams. A case study participant noted that for her class:

> *I had decided from the beginning that the exam would be a multiple choice because I had already a 40 page paper to grade for each team. Plus, I thought it was a good way to assess that they were clear with the concepts… how difficult should [the exam] be though?*

Necessary Skills:

In his book, Nathan (2005) mentioned that undergraduate students' reflections on their lack of class participation in a given course varied widely. Undergraduate students claimed such reasons as: peer pressure (read as reluctance to alienate or agitate classmates), the power of the teacher, and the lack of personal interest or purpose. However, Shiga (2008) explained this as one of American undergraduate students' common characteristics. Shiga stated that "college students are considered adults in the U.S., and adults in the U.S. are highly independent. Adults fear being seen as foolish by making mistakes in U.S. classrooms" (p.22). Furthermore, often times undergraduate students have difficulty talking about "what they do not know because of the fear and embarrassment of failing" (Shiga, 2008, p.22). The CSP felt that her students were

not actively engaged compared to her expectations, and they were not eager to participate in the class discussions. She notes,

I had to face on a regular basis is the fact that no-one was answering questions … I think is the form more than the content; I want my class be pretty interactive. Making sure that I leave a space for the discussion….

Three ITAs pointed out the difficulties they had engaging and motivating students. An ITA from Japan noticed,

[W]hen I first start teaching, I was so tense to teach this and that and I didn't wait students' reaction. Suddenly I was like "oh my gosh I am going too fast" and I started to ask [my students] "do you have any questions" and there were like "yes we do."

An ITA from Cyprus expressed the same frustration when she stated, "*when I first started teaching, my rate of delivering information was too fast and I would often forget to ask the students if they had questions or if they wanted me to repeat something."*

Two ITAs reported on the strategies that they found helpful in engaging students. An ITA from Germany acknowledged, "*if student do not interact with her, than it is not really motivating."* She said:

So I need to know how to engage students, ask questions. I learned their names 'Leslie answer the question' to get their attention and to engage them … ask them 'is it okay?' or 'do you have any questions?" and actually have them approach you with questions out of their own accord.

An ITA from Nigeria used a similar strategy that he learned by himself:

Sometimes I made mistakes deliberately … Sometimes I actually asked them to talk. Sometimes I call out their names. Sometimes I asked them to interact with themselves. No

one told me these tricks, I learned them myself while in this process …Initially, I pick best student and the worst student. When that worst student gets it I assumed that half of the student at least gets it [the content].

Another dilemma that ITAs reported was the troubled classroom interaction that occurred from time to time. "*It is difficult to be a teacher,"* revealed an ITA from Nigeria, *"At my first class, I [have to] deal with students who are text messaging to each other."*

An ITA from Japan revealed another interactivity issue that she faced in her classroom:

One of the difficulty I had was, I didn't quiet know how to deal with students who need attention [in the classroom]. First of all, I taught my understanding is not good enough but the same kind of question came again and again [by the same student]. These are not kind of questions that you can NOT ask in the classroom. After first quarter, I realized that he has a learning disability. I didn't know it before. How do you distinguish these people? Some people [students] just pop up some questions [in the classroom] and want to talk.

In addition to these ITAs, the majority (n=7) of the participants indicated that they may have felt more at ease and may have known how to better handle these problems that occurred in the classroom in an appropriate manner if they had the necessary skills.

Nathan (2005) suggested that the relationship between the student and the professor should be understood in an instrumental way; "teachers can get what they want from their students by establishing and using a personal relationship with their students" (p.117). The CSP noted in her journal that establishing eye contact helped her focus on individuals rather than just the group as a whole. She found that "*it is important to make eye contact with students to make them fell concerned."* She also noted that she was frustrated by the students who were not

willing to do their homework in an adequate manner, "[even] *though the explanation in the syllabus and the announcements were clear."* Nathan (2005) and Neves et al. (1991) explained this dilemma in two different ways; Neves et al. (1991) pointed out in their study that it may be related to ITAs' difficulty in speaking comprehensibly and explaining clearly. On the contrary, Nathan (2005) and Shiga (2008) stated that depending on the course and the first impression of their instructor, students decide whether to buy the book, whether to go to class, whether to do the readings in a given week, how much effort to put into assignments and how hard they need to work.

Two ITAs indicated that the time management skills were crucial. An ITA from Japan expressed the difficulty to keep up with the time. He claimed, *"I was so tense to teach this and that and I didn't wait students' reaction. Suddenly I was like 'oh my gosh! I am going too fast.'"* The CSP noted the same kind of anxiety:

> *The next biggest issue was the management of time. How long to go over the syllabus? How long was everything going to take me? Plus I found very difficult to keep track of time. I was totally obsessed by my watch. At some moments I think I was checking the time every single minute …even [after]I had gone through the [power point] slides[that I used for the lecture] several times, it was impossible to remember what is on the following slide.*

Participants reported that confidence is a crucial part of being an instructor. An ITA from Cyprus indicated that authority in the classroom was established through confidence. He found that confidence is *"one of the factors in establishing student-teacher boundaries."* He claimed,

> *Confidence is the key; you walk in the class, you stand there, you are initially somewhat afraid inside [but students' shouldn't see it] … Students can see if you are afraid and*

they will no trust you as easily. … After four years of teaching I learned to focus, speak slower, ask questions, and use the tone of my voice better. I now avoid sitting in the same position for the duration of the class. I move more, and I use the room [more efficiently]!

A CSP noted that she was constantly questioning herself on her confidence and her authority as a foreign instructor. She said,

I was unsecured and I have no idea of how vulnerable I appeared. It raised concerns about the respect of my authority. I have been a student long enough to know that students do not respect people that don't feel safe and at ease in front of an audience.

The same participant reported that being familiar with content knowledge *boosted* her confidence:

This [6th] session was the first one I felt 'more control …' I like talking about the political environment … It was the first moment; I felt I could relax a bit… I felt more at ease. I don't know how to express that but for once I did not have the impression that I was 'floating' in the class room. …I was almost not 100 percent controlling my words or my movements. … [After several weeks] at this stage it wouldn't be embarrassing anymore to say something like 'I don't know, I'll find the answer for next time.'

An ITA from India found that his confident increased with more practice. He noted,

First it was difficult to adjust with the students because of the way they speak and communicate. I am teaching for two and a half years now, contacting and communicating with students gets better and better. I ask the questions back comfortably if I am not clear.

Category 4: In what areas do ITAs feel detached from teaching?

The Way I See It:

ITAs from France and China saw teaching as enrichment practice for their future positions in academia. However, the majority (n=9) of the ITAs experienced teaching as a major time commitment. These same ITAs reported that preparation of the course syllabus, schedule, exams, and grading, plus uploading the results and providing feedback for their students required much attention and time. They felt that this new role affected their daily routine. An ITA from France indicated that this new role is demanding. She notes, *"The amount of time I suppose to do research, teaching and many other stuff that related to teaching itself … It makes me ask, can I handle this?"*

The CSP noted that "*teaching every other day is very demanding and time consuming."* She continued,

> *[Teaching] gradually gives the tempo to all the rest of your activities. Yet, I need to say that I am not sure I would have been able to keep such a rhythm any longer. I am really exhausted. I still need to grade everything and submit the grades … If I can avoid taking any classes, I will.*

An ITA from Turkey expressed her frustration:

> *It was hard to balance teaching and research, in my position at least. I am kind of person who can focus mainly on one thing at a time, it is my character; the other thing(s) has to be somewhat in the shadow. If I focused on research then the teaching became something routinely done and it took the fun out of it. Sometimes I focused on my research for three hours and then I had to teach for three hours. It was a challenge for me. I wish we had the option to teach double one quarter and not teach at all in the next.*

An ITA from India complained that teaching takes time out of his research, away from his classes and his personal responsibilities. He stated, *"That is the thing that frustrates me!!!"*

The ITAs' authority in their classrooms and the biases from undergraduate students also arose as another major area that caused ITAs to feel detached from their teaching assignments. *'I really wondered what was appropriate," the* CSP noted. She continued:

> *[The] first thing that can sound really trivial: the choice of my clothes… My students were only (for the majority) two years younger than me and therefore Clothing was also a way to "look older" and maybe not gaining respect but at least putting one more barrier. So I needed something showing that I was the instructor.*

Bates Holland (2008) pointed out that the existence of multiple intersecting roles as graduate student and instructor influenced ITAs teaching in an undergraduate classroom. Previously mentioned in this study was that the role of both student and instructor was challenged in many environmental areas of the classroom. One of the challenges that ITAs have to deal with is their authority in the classroom. Sociolinguists have defined classroom authority as "a hierarchical relationship of command and consent based on teachers' legitimacy teachers' and students' attachment to a morel order consisting of educational purposes, values and norms"(Eunhee, 2008, p.71). In this current study, ITAs have often experienced difficulty projecting confidence and establishing authority in the classroom.

The CSP explained that her choice of clothing was an attempt to adapt to her new identity as an instructor. An ITA from Cyprus commented that the written dress code in his department, along with the standing policy required by the department, where "*undergraduate students are required to call us by our last name. Graduate students may call us by our first name,"* provides an effective transition from the role of graduate student to the role of faculty member. An ITA

from Germany commented that her values and norms were interpreted differently by her students. She didn't understand students' complaints about her choice of clothing. She states. *"I had [students] complaining about my choice of clothing. They said that it is too casual and inappropriate such as that my belly button was showing."*

In the process of adapting to this new identity, the majority of the ITAs (n=8) indicated that their classroom authority was challenged because of their students' doubts about their ability to teach. An ITA from Germany recalled that her students felt "*totally overwhelmed with foreign accents and it takes a while for them to understand and get use to it.*" Her students were really critical toward her accent. She noted, *"In about half of my TA evaluations, there were complaints about my foreign accent, and my accent is not that bad."*

An ITA from Turkey was frazzled by her students' comments about her accent, and she believes that undergraduates use this as an easy way out. She claims, *"[undergraduate students] told me that my accent is understandable and [yet] they blocked themselves automatically the minute they hear my accent."*

Three participants recognized that their students tended to be quiet and aloof. Bates Holland (2008) and Eunhee (2008) indicated in their research that undergraduate students tended to be reserved and distant toward foreign teaching assistants and instructors. *"From time to time, I feel a certain degree of uneasiness in the classroom,"* stated the ITA from Cyprus, continuing:

> *[T]o find out what is going on and why is it happening … I go over through the checklist in my mind; they have given the instruction, I gave them the big picture. When this fails, then there are two possible explanations. They do not want to do it because they don't want to be in the classroom in the first place, or they do not want to cooperate because I*

tell them to do so. If the teacher was from Cincinnati, instead of a Greek-Cypriot, they may do it with less fuss.

An ITA from India commented that his students are reserved*: "If I am working with an American TA, they [students] talked to him more than me."*

One of the ITAs from Turkey was horrified to learn that undergrads do not take the notion of having foreign TAs seriously. The ITA notes,

When I was a head TA, one of my job responsibilities was to distribute students to their classes. There were request from students to change their TAs just because their appointed TA was an international and they thought they might have a hard time understanding him/her. ... the supervisor told me that no one [was] allowed to change their classroom… some students went as far as changing their sections to change their TAs.

Category 5: What kinds of support do ITAs receive and what is the impact of this on their adaptation process?

Existing Support and the Impact of the Feedback:

Participants from Cyprus, France, India, and Turkey reported that teaching is part of the departmental requirement; however, not all the departments are clear about their expectations. The same departments are not aware of their ITAs' prior knowledge and skills. As one of the French ITA pointed out, "*They make us teach not that it has to be taught, it is part of the [requirement]! They do not lecture or teach us to teach, they assumed that we know it."*

"I didn't get any training and they expect you to be teacher" exclaimed one of the ITAs from Turkey. She noted, "*In my department TAs start to teach even in their master level. Those*

kids [are] coming from different kinds of backgrounds so they all do not know the subject that they supposed to teach."

The designs of the TA trainings vary from department to department; some of the departments had weekly or bi-weekly meetings, and some of them were provided the information with seminars, lectures, and question and answer sessions. The CSP reported that in her department:

> *[In] your first year [of doctorate program] we have a seminar named 'What is academic life' and 1 percent is in regard to teaching. They [people who had the experience of teaching] are talking about their experience and telling us how we should act in the class… distributing readings and letting us ask questions based on our reading, fears and teaching.*

An ITA from France indicated that departmental training and support exist only for the first year TAs and ITAs, noting, *"I arrived in August and it was three or four weeks of training. We get familiar with the textbook, classroom, with the syllabus and the program. We had a very good training support and help for the first year"*

ITAs from India and Turkey reported that their departmental training was built on technical knowledge:

> *When we first started, there was a general orientation in the department. In terms of teaching we met every week an hour and basically talked about that weeks' class. It did not contain anything about teaching skills or techniques. It was very technical about which chemical we should use for which experiment. Maybe it was not very important for that class, because of the way it was taught.*

An ITA from Germany found that her departments' training is in need of more pedagogical knowledge:

> *We have weekly TA meetings … The instructors would give you the course text book and would ask you to read about the topic for you to know the general concepts. Before each lab section, they [the lab instructors] would tell you what you will be talking about (which chapter in the book). We discuss the issues and the problems regarding the labs. Then, for the actual teaching, I had to develop my own lab flow (presentation and such).*

The same ITA mentioned that these weekly meetings kept ITAs and TAs on the same page, noting: *"[With weekly meetings] we are having clearer ideas in regard to departmental expectations."*

Participants reported that they built self confidence in time through practice. An ITA from Turkey indicated that *"each experience build self confidence. So, international students should be placed in TA positions and should be monitored on purposes of providing them continuous feedback."* In addition, she noted, "*departments should support their ITAs for polishing their English and communication skills with ESL classes and workshops."*

ITAs indicated that their role can be overwhelming. Formal recognition that did come from faculty, advisors, and coordinators was an important factor that contributed to their success. The majority of the participants (n=6) reported that they received assistance from senior TAs and departmental staff. An ITA from China explained that in terms of teaching materials, she received tremendous help from a leading TA. The ITA stated, *"I got all the materials from her and we have online community where we share all the recourses. She [leading TA] set up all these resources that helped me a lot."*

An ITA from Turkey added that there is a specially appointed person in her department. She noted, *"Specially appointed person helps out the laboratory TAs. That person's help is really important for incoming new TAs to learn the new technology and adjust."*

A French ITA from a non-technical department expressed the importance of networking between TAs and the support that came from administrative staff. She said, *"We [me and other TAs in the department] have good tides and it helps and administrator staff always been helpful answering administrative question"*

Half of the participant ITAs indicated that they are appreciative of the continual support and feedback of their supervisors, professors, and advisors. "*My supervisor supports me a lot,"* an ITA from Japan stated, *"My supervisor supports me a lot by giving instructions, by coming to my classes and by providing materials. She came to my classes and observed my teaching and gave me feedback…point out things."*

An ITA from Cyprus pointed out that in his department,

> *[E]ven before we were given certain roles as teaching assistants, my supervisor and other senior teaching assistants were helpful in providing us with an information platform … I had a team supporting me way before we started teaching classes and especially during the first 2 weeks, midterms, and final's week.*

He stated that in his department, all the prospective TAs and ITAs have to present in front of a "mock class." He explained,

> *My supervisor communicates and comment on our performance after they have watched the video (our classes are equipped with video cameras and microphones) … [mock class sessions] provides the necessary practice and [additionally] train us to use the electronic equipment in the classroom both effectively and efficiently ….*

He indicated that viewing these "mock class sessions" with his supervisors' comments gave him valuable feedback.

An ITA from France also indicated the importance of watching oneself teach:

We have coordinators [supervisors] who sat in the class every quarter and we also filmed. I learned a lot about my communication skills and how I interact with students by watching these tapes. Actually seeing me for the first time was dramatic … I am very energetic person and when I am teaching I am very very energetic, jumping around a lot … I use all these feedbacks.

Participant ITAs believed that support and feedback was crucial, especially for the ITAs who were struggling with the work load.

The CET&L, the Center for Enhancement of Teaching and Learning at the university, offer services such as workshops on teaching and on course development. As previously mentioned, CET&L has become more active in offering programs for current and prospective instructors. Another office that relates to teaching and learning is the Preparing Future Faculty Program (PFF). The main goal of PFF is to train graduate and postdoctoral students who are considering an academic career in higher education. The majority of the participants (n=9) indicated that they had heard of the Center for Enhancement of Teaching and Learning (CET&L) and Preparing Future Faculty (PFF) programs, but their "*commitment to other responsibilities creates time conflict and time clash."* The case study participant (CSP) noted that these programs conflict with her course schedules:

I haven't been to any workshops that CET&L organized. I need to say that it doesn't fit into my schedule. There were times that I was really willing to go "OK!!This looks

interesting I would like to go," but each time they conflict with my course schedule. It is kind of difficult to track them when you are taking classes.

Two of the ITAs have been to those workshops and found them helpful and useful; in contrast, other ITAs (Indian, Nigerian) would sometimes delete these e-mails without checking their content. Since the departments did not require students to attend these workshops, ITAs perceived these workshops as an extra work load. Furthermore, these workshops always conflicted with other commitments. An ITA from Germany explained: "*I think you suppose to take [the PFF sequence] as a whole year and I do not have time for that now. It is something I may take later for my future career but do not have time for right now."*

Participants reported that they felt comfortable with the setup in the classroom, and they were not required to use technology in their classrooms; in contrast, half of the ITAs who were required to use the Blackboard system for class discussions and uploading grades were in need of assistance. An ITA from Cypriot explained,

At [the department] we are fully integrated into the blackboard system, and we uploaded the documents and it takes time to input grades for quizzes, exams and etc. Sometimes it can be overwhelming especially after you gave an exam to large class. Testing, grading, and posting can take a week.

In the states, most of the colleges and universities require their students to fill out a course evaluation form after each quarter or semester. Information gathered from these forms provides useful data for the department, faculty, and ITAs about how well particular topics are received, how well various classes are organized, which textbooks are most helpful, and what problem-sets lead to the best learning. "*I didn't know that students were given an evaluation"* puzzled an ITA from Turkey. The ITA continued,

I thought their exam would give me feedback. So if they get better grades in their exams and quizzes that was my evaluation … I was very surprised when I saw answers [from an evaluation] like "she was very unhelpful". I would never think myself as 'unhelpful or mean". I started to think about it. It was really helpful to see students' view for certain situations. What I thought as 'challenging them' was unhelpful or mean in their eyes.

ITAs indicated that the feedback that came from students during a course, when immediate changes and midcourse corrections were possible, was valuable. These ITAs would like to be *the instructor* that will be remembered and taken into account by their students; therefore these feedbacks are important indicators for their success. "*I tried to ask them,"* explained an ITA from France. She explained:

[T]hey don't always respond and they will not tell me directly that I am crap so I asked them regularly "how that went" when we did particular examples. I asked them, if this example was any helpful for the content. I ask their continuous feedback. Evaluations done by students helped me a lot. I didn't receive feedback from an advisor. I wish I could see my videotape that would help.

Another ITA from France indicated that aside from the course evaluations she *"use[s] students' feedback, constantly checking with them."*

The "*aha moments*" that were described by ITAs from Nigeria and Cyprus are also worthwhile to mention since they provided motivation for ITAs more than anything else. One ITA stated, *"Sometimes I get this 'ohooo' signs or like 'oh yeah I can do it now.'"* Nigerian ITAs indicated: *"When I reduced the problem to their level, I got the 'I see.' You feel that positive energy. I don't think any training taught you that. It is created by interacting students."*

An ITA from Cyprus explained that he learns every day in front of his classes and he hopes to become a better teacher, communicator, and facilitator. The ITA explained,

> *"We thrive and hope for the moment that our students will make the connection, understand the material and apply it. We call that the 'ahhaa' moment!! At that point, we are assured that we have done something right."*

Category 6: What should advisors, departments, and institutions do to help ITAs adjust to this new role?

Crying for Help:

Most of the ITAs (n=9) pointed out that they had no prior knowledge of U.S. classroom culture. Their departments had informal sessions prior to their teaching, but most of these sessions were technical and excluded classroom culture, departmental expectations, and undergraduates' needs. In these sessions, a couple of the ITAs were introduced to the textbook or the experiments they were to conduct for that week; however, they were not gaining knowledge nor skills on conveying the information, conducting interactive lectures, engaging the students, or dealing with students who require extra personal attention. When international students join a new institution, not only do they have to adjust to the new life in a new cultural context, but they also must adjust to the specific and localized values and norms of the organization (Ross et al., 1992). For instance, what is department A's perspective on who deserved the pass and who did a good job? Or, what is department B's criteria on the same issue? Furthermore, each department has its own existing rules in regards to grading students and evaluating the success of undergraduate students. For this reason, departments should inform their ITAs about the new and various responsibilities that come with the teaching assignment (Luo et al., 2000).

An ITA from an India mentioned that eventually they will adjust to the grading system and the role of teaching, but he emphasized, *"it helps if we trained for it from the start."* He felt like his students were using different kinds of communication strategies. He explained, *"Initially it was difficult to adjust with the students because of the way they speak and communicate."*

International students who qualified for teaching still felt they needed cultural interaction sessions for an easier transition. These sessions should address the problems mentioned above and additionally address "*small things but various topics,"* the Japanese student mentioned. This ITA noted,

> *[Sessions] doesn't need to be whole quarter thing but just little things given with the explanation instead of written instructions, maybe just two hours. Best way you will learn is by going through it. Your initial exposure could be reduced by having prior exposure by your departmental support. Introduce teachers the "American Way" by using supportive/reference books.*

An ITA from Turkey emphasized the importance of including others, such as administrators and the staff, in the process and building a general guideline that can be used both for current and incoming ITAs. The ITA notes, *"Since each ITA going through the same thing, a general guideline can be established, there may be a go-to person or the new comers can be 'buddy up' with the old students."*

As previously mentioned, adapting to the role of instructor can be overwhelming for ITAs. An ITA from Cyprus requested flexibility on their academic work: *"For full time TAs – doctoral or master-students, our own professors should have more flexible due dates or extension of deadlines when it comes to submitting homework, papers, or proposals."*

The majority of the participants (n=8) indicated that continuous feedback from their advisors was crucial for their confidence and their success as an ITA. An ITA from France recalled that he didn't receive any feedback from the faculty. He noted, "*The only feedback I received so far from my students, who were nice enough to put comments at the end of the class.*"

Two participants explained that teaching is a departmental requirement; for that reason departments provide support for teaching assistants. One ITA from Germany stated, *"[the department] expect you to teach…but we are always short of TAs so they expect a lot from us*." An ITA from India shared the same dilemma, noting,

> *First quarter of the year usually we have 50 students in the lab and only 2 TAs in charge of them which makes it difficult. You have to read all the lab reports (140 students) and that takes time from your research and classes. We need department support for those kinds of issues. [We are in] need of extra TAs.*

One of the ITAs from Turkey would like to see an active involvement between junior and senior faculty and graduate students. This ITA noted, "*There should be a mentorship between the junior and the senior faculty and the graduate student because they [graduate students] are the future faculty.*"

The participants believed that the best way to learn something was by practicing it themselves. These ITAs were aware of the expectations of faculty members and expectations in the American classrooms; however, they expressed that they still needed guidance on how to incorporate technology into their courses. They need more practice and advice on how to do so. Additionally, a couple of the ITAs expressed that they are not sure about how to verbally warn their students, since warnings may "pose a threat to the classroom climate and arouse emotions

among their students" (Trebing, 2007, p.40). Gorsuch's (2003) findings recommended that ITAs need opportunities to practice effective teaching skills, and their initial exposure should be reduced by providing prior exposure, perhaps by making mock sessions part of the training.

They all agreed that a faculty member or a supervisor should visit ITAs' sessions, and they should provide continuous feedback. That way ITAs can get valuable insight from the senior faculty with years of experience.

As previously mentioned, participants heard about the CET&L and PFF, but other kinds of commitments make it hard for them to attend to the workshops designed by these programs.

ITAs addressed this issue. *"Encourage students [ITAs] to participate at the workshops,"* the ITA from France pointed out. This ITA continued,

> *Lot of times you are receiving emails about them but you are ignoring them. If departments showing any kind of support for you to participate to those kind of workshop that takes extra time, effort and energy that might encourage students to attend more of that.*

Last, but not least, a request came from an ITA from Germany, who stated,

> *I am teaching biology labs. At the beginning, I didn't know the names of most of the equipment or materials, so at that time I could only point at or describe what I meant. I didn't receive any training in regards to that (but I believe that it simply doesn't occur to the lab instructors that international students are not likely to possess this kind of vocabulary).*

Category 7: Recommendations from current ITAs for prospective ITAs

An ITA from Cyprus found that undergraduate students "*require more interaction and motivation.*" Research (Light, 2001) showed that undergraduate students enjoyed sessions where a professor created a participatory atmosphere in a class. Light (2001) mentioned in his study that when undergraduate students are choosing their courses, "students usually look for professors who, even when teaching large classes, still get students actively engaged in what goes on in the classroom" (p.113-114).

A Turkish ITA felt that as an instructor *"you should listen [undergraduate students] as much as talking."* Light (2001) pointed out in his study that students prefer sessions where instructors listen and let them bring different perspectives, experiences, and interpretations to the classroom discussion. This attitude affects how students determine their instructors' fairness (Shiga, 2008).

The majority of the participants (n=6) in this current study indicated that most of the ITAs not only had no teaching experience, but they were also coming from places where the educational system, and thus teaching pedagogy, is different than the U.S. They suggested that ITAs should prepare themselves, *"[in] regard to the expectations of the new role, rules and policies as quick as possible."* They thought that undergraduate students in their classrooms had very specific expectations on how teachers should act in the classroom. Coimbra found that undergraduate students "expect their ITAs be certain on both their behavior and in their knowledge and students articulate these expectations if the teacher in any way deviates from this traditional image" (Coimbra, 2002, p. 37).

An ITA from China indicated that the Chinese culture and educational system is different than the American culture and system; likewise expectations are also different. She noted, "[S]*o*

the expectations are different. [Chinese ITAs] haven't established that mind set [to think and feel like an instructor] yet, not prepare them selves for the new role [teaching assistant], yet." Participants suggested that as an instructor one should be formal, but one must *"balance it for able to communicate without barriers."* ITAs found that how they introduced themselves in the first class determined how much respect and success they will have the rest of the quarter.

ITAs from Cyprus, France, and Turkey (1&2) acknowledged that as instructors they should be confident. To build confidence, they believed that ITAs should be aware of their "*strengths and weaknesses."*

An ITA from Cyprus indicated the importance of using the English language. The ITA stated, *"You cannot teach an English speaking class if you cannot speak English yourself."* Olaniran (1999) and deBerly (1993) pointed out that ITAs can become vulnerable and frustrated when teaching in a foreign tongue. The same ITA also mentioned that as an ITA they *"should know their content knowledge."* He indicated:

> *[Y]ou have to know as much as you can about the topic you will teach. That will give you confidence and confidence is everything! ... You will eventually learn how to respond to your class. This process takes some time to learn, and a lifetime to master.*

ITAs from France and Turkey reported that foreign instructors should be aware of the cultural differences that they carry into the classroom. Foreign instructors shouldn't suppress this difference; instead, they should embrace it and include this different perspective into the classroom sessions. One ITA noted,

> *It scares me now, knowing that you have a huge responsibility as TA" an ITA from France indicated "[as an ITA] try to fit into the big picture. I tried to make fun about my pronunciation, my accent and my French origins. Make jokes regard to [your origins].*

ITAs understood they needed to overcome language problems as the first step toward developing competence in the host culture's communication pattern, and they were aware that this is needed for successful performance in the classroom. They also observed these obstacles as ones that can be overcome effortlessly. An ITA from Turkey recalled the language problem she had with her students,

> *[T]here will be a language problem for both TAs and students, this is normal. Communication is one part talking one part listening. At first, there will be problems in both parts. You shouldn't have high expectations. In time, it will get better. Try to see the fun in it. I will never forget, my first students' faces every time I said "sheet,", be it "white sheet,", 'pink sheet" etc. The meaning is quite different if you pronounce the 'e' shorter. They could not get this kind of fun from another TA.*

Like the Turkish ITA, ITAs from Japan, India, and Germany suggested that the new foreign instructors should not have high expectations from their students. "*Prospective TAs shouldn't get frustrated when s/he hears stupid questions,"* an ITA from Germany reported. This ITA continued,

> [Y]*ou shouldn't expect a lot from your students. Once, I took off points [from students' exams] for spelling mistakes and my lab instructor made me re-grade the exam. [His explanation was that] "they just got out of high school, in which spelling usually is not emphasized, so spelling mistakes are okay." He said that [if the word students write down] sounds close to the way I pronounce it ... then I have to give full credit for the answer. I believe that if you study science, you should know the scientific (biological) names, and be able to spell them correctly. That's why I was surprised how little we*

expect from our students. They are having spelling problems but I am not allowed to reduce their scores.

Most of the participants (n=7) indicated that as an instructor one should be aware of students' strengths and weaknesses in that specific topic. Additionally, they suggested that a teacher should be *"aware of [your students] previous knowledge and do your best to bring the problems to [undergraduate students] understanding level."*

An ITA from Nigeria noticed that as an instructor, *"you will not feel intimidated if you see them as students who want to learn."* He indicated that you should learn their strengths and weaknesses in that topic. An ITA from Cypriot acknowledged that the instructor is *"someone that can make connection [with students' prior knowledge] and help [students to] understand [the] topic."* He suggested that as an instructor, "*You should carry that role ... we should keep in mind that we will learn more from our students than they will learn from us."*

An ITA from Japan noticed that the foreign instructors from Japan tended to be unnecessarily polite to the students as a result of cultural expectations. She suggested that as an instructor, *"you cannot say 'please do this, please, do those.' Sometimes you need to use the direct order. That is a cultural difference."*

Participants suggested that in the learning process teaching assistants should be patient with their students. An ITA from India noticed that undergraduate students tended to be lazy when it came to research. She suggested,

Try to get the answer out of them… Don't give them the answer immediately. Give them time to think…. If not then tell them that [the answer of this problem] is in this book 'read it and if you do not get it then ask me.'

ITAs from Germany, India and Nigeria noticed that undergraduate students expected instructors to know their names and pronounce it correctly. They found that knowing students names, as one ITA noted, *"make[s] them friendlier with you and makes the job easier."* Webb (2005) and Shiga (2008) indicated that learning students' names is really important, because it shows how much instructors care about each student.

Participants suggested that as an ITA one should *"be confident, be prepared, be patient and be open minded ... observe your students, adjust the information to their knowledge level when necessary…most importantly bring humor to the classroom and stimulate students by involving them."*

Chapter 5

Final Discussion and Conclusion

At the time I decided on my topic for my dissertation, I wasn't teaching. Therefore, at the beginning of this study I was challenged while analyzing the teaching experience of the participants. However, being an international student myself helped me to build an empathy with their cultural experience and adjustment.

In the process of writing my last two chapters, I had my first practice as an instructor. I was really anxious because this was not only my first experience teaching in the states, but my first experience in teaching ever. I must admit that the experience that the participants of this study shared with me guided me through the process of my own acculturation in the classroom. However, I felt sorry for the ITAs who didn't have the opportunity to receive any guidance beforehand to prepare them for this new and challenging role. My own experience as an adjunct instructor has shaped my understanding of the data that I obtained from the ITAs.

Apart from observing and listening to their experiences, I attended the workshops that were conducted by CET&L. Through the workshops, I had a chance to observe the training programs that were sponsored by the institution.

Results of this qualitative data and my own observation indicated that university-sponsored training programs need to contain pedagogy-based knowledge and must offer the ITAs monitoring by assigned mentors. Prieto & Altmaier (1994) criticized the fact that ITAs are inadequately prepared to fulfill their teaching obligations and lack communication and pedagogical skills. The results of this current study suggested that ITAs need specific kinds of mentoring built into their training programs, and that they should receive support that differs

from native teaching assistants (NTAs), since the problems ITAs are faced with involve more than just developing appropriate and effective teaching behaviors.

We have to keep in mind that most of the ITAs do not speak English as a first language, and they did not grow up in the states. ITAs' own perceptions, actions, and world views are shaped by their unique linguistic and cultural backgrounds, as mentioned in Trebing (2007). Since many ITAs come from cultures with different communication approaches than in the states, they will often lack the understanding of appropriate classroom behavior, effective student-teacher relationships, and effective communication strategies, which can lead to insecurity and frustration.

This study showed that many support and developmental programs at the University of Cincinnati are indeed lacking, as they are in many institutions across the country, as Coimbra (2002) also noted. Therefore, refinement and direction of ITA development are often left to the individual and his or her advisors. However, ITAs' success in the classroom can be enhanced by training programs that place emphasis on cultural differences, pedagogy issues, and closer mentoring by faculty members. This approach will help the instructors of tomorrow be better prepared to teach and fulfill their college-level professional obligations.

Depending on the stage they are in, ITAs expressed their basic concerns, starting with what should be the appropriate attire for teaching in the U.S. classroom, whether or not their students will like them, and whether or not they will manage to fit in the role of teacher.

After listening to ITAs from India, Turkey, France, and Germany, I observed that these ITAs, and the others, have insufficient time to get accustomed to the new educational setting before they begin teaching. The ITAs, especially the ones mentioned above, experienced many

difficulties dealing with their students over the course of the first quarter; these experiences are different from ITAs who started to teach in their 2nd quarter or year.

Mascoop (1993) argued that ITAs should not be allowed to teach in the U.S. during their first quarter or year of study so that they can gradually adjust to a different language and their new lives in a different culture. This argument may also be valid for the ITAs who had the experience of studying in another U.S. institution. However, Gorsuch (2003) and Trebing (2007) indicated that "ITAs with previous study experience in the U.S. are more attuned to their students' needs and expectations and are able to use a variety of communication techniques in the classroom compared to ITAs who are studying and teaching in the U.S. for the first time" (p.40). In contrast, the results of this current study suggested that the ITAs with previous study experience in the U.S. still need help with their acculturation process since they are teaching in a new institutional setting. ITAs from Cyprus, Japan, and Turkey noted that they had already earned a degree in the U.S. before coming to UC. Thus, they were surprised, shocked, and confused by certain types of undergraduates' behaviors such as late arrivals, early departures, listening to music in the classroom, eating and drinking during the class, challenging the instructor, wasting class time by asking unnecessary questions, and showing general disrespect and poor manners toward the instructor and other students. These particular types of behaviors were also mention by Bresnahan & Cai (2000) and Trebing (2007).

ITAs expressed their desire for more information on pedagogical resources and more contact with the professor they are working with. These findings demonstrate correspondence with the report on the "Teaching Assistant Survey" conducted by the Stanford University Center for Teaching and Learning (SUCTL) (Coimbra, 2002). Among the concerns ITAs indicated are the following: What methods should they use in their lectures; how ready they are for this role;

how effective a grader, a discussion leader, or lecturers can they be (Coimbra, 2002); how should they interact with their students. Among the teaching-related topics ITAs indicated having difficulty with are the following: syllabus design, assessment, proficiency in English, undergraduate students' attitudes and their lack of respect towards them. ITAs in the study were mostly interested in learning about the following: how to motivate students; how to structure a lecture and a class session; how to lead a discussion; how to work with students in need of special attention; how to design exams; how to grade; and, furthermore, how to more easily gain familiarity with institutional and student culture; how to become aware of their departments' expectations; and how to implement effective teaching strategies (Trebing, 2007).

When asked about their future plans, more than half of the participants in the study expressed their desire to hold future careers in academia. In relation to the kinds of preparation they had received prior to teaching, ITAs cited their individual preparation and supervisor support as their main source of preparation.

In this study, ITAs understood through experience that their students had different educational backgrounds and cultural values from them. Therefore, they did not expect their undergraduate students to behave properly in both their verbal and non-verbal behavior, since the context of appropriateness changes from country to country and culture to culture, as also indicated by Trebing (2007). Thus, ITAs labeled these behaviors the "American Way" in order to make the adjustment easier for themselves.

To my surprise, these participant ITAs were well aware of the responsibilities but overwhelmed by complexity of them, as also noted by Shiga (2008), and obstacles that were presented with this new role. On the contrary, some of the problems, difficulties, and unpleasant experiences could be reduced or eased by providing ITAs with help in advance. As an institution

and department we should not expect ITAs to know and remember everything; instead, institutions should provide support and guidelines, seeing this as a part of continuous learning programs. Outlined below, I suggest several elements that are crucial for ITAs' success in this role:

Solving the First Day Dilemmas

Participant ITAs expressed that their first day of the course was critical for themselves as instructors, and for their students, since first-day behaviors and attitudes will determine their success or failure for the rest of the quarter. ITAs noted that they were paying careful attention to doing their best, trying not to make any errors or show any weaknesses in the classroom. Recommendations for practices that may assist ITAs (adapted from interview results) are the following: Prepare a completed syllabus for the course, and explain it clearly in the first class; learn how to use classroom technology, if available; dress more formally than usual; and introduced yourself formally to your students.

In addition, as previously noted, most of the ITAs categorized some of the undergraduate students' behaviors as the "American Way". This notion of undergraduate students can be related to their rights "as adult citizens," (Shiga 2008, p.19). However, with clear guidelines included in the course syllabus, such as including policies regarding punctuality and use of cell phones in the classroom, ITAs can prevent disturbing behaviors.

Understanding the General Aspects of U.S. Educational Systems

When ITAs arrive in the states, they bring different or new perspectives, values, and knowledge of subject matter to U.S. classrooms (Coimbra, 2002; Tavana, 2005; Trebing, 2007 and Shiga, 2008). To understand this new system and to adapt the acceptable teaching skills, ITAs need to learn more about their students and the environment they work in (Twale et al.,

1997; Luo et al., 2000; Fitch et al., 2003; Gorsuch, 2003; Littleford, 2004). One part of this includes informing ITAs about the general characteristics of the U.S. classroom culture (Elland, Greenblatt, & Smithee, 2004), such as a student-centered approach and instruction that implements a variety of teaching methods.

The results of this current study indicated that one of the crucial points ITAs should acknowledge is the general structure of the U.S. educational system, since educational systems vary in different countries. Smithee, Greenbalt and Eland (2004) characterized the U.S. educational system as having "multiple models and a complexity of interacting education systems and subsystems" (p.20), as opposed to some countries, such as Japan and Turkey, where it is characterized by hierarchy or centralization.

In addition, in this current study, ITAs found that their students expected a certain method of description instead of focusing on a circular discourse. For this reason, ITAs need to be taught how to explain and illustrate knowledge and create assignments based in U.S. American logical expectations, an idea also supported by Trebing (2007). Furthermore, ITAs in this current study expressed that they were having difficulty building relationships with their students, since most of the ITAs were accustomed to a formal lecture style, which is not always appropriate for U.S. interactive teaching approaches, an idea also supported by Tavana (2005), Bauer (1996), and Shiga (2008), who claims that open communication between students and the instructor is crucial. ITAs should themselves be instructed on American patterns of instructor/student relationships, where the use of body language is crucial, and they must continuously interact with students both inside and outside of the classroom.

Most of the ITAs arrived in the U.S. without any pedagogical knowledge or practical skills involving teaching. They indicated a lack of understanding regarding the teaching methods

and attitudes employed in the classroom. Therefore, ITAs need assistance in integrating interactive teaching designs, using effective instructional methods in the classroom, and generating discussion sessions that involve providing appropriate feedback.

One of the tools for an effective instruction—technology—was brought up by ITAs as a major challenge. They indicated that by implementing *"technology in the classroom, they can keep the students stimulated and interactive, and awake!"* (quoting the ITA from Cyprus). However, these same ITAs expressed their frustration for implementing technology since they do not have the experience of using it effectively.

Furthermore, ITAs should be acquainted with the U.S. educational setting in order to learn common perspectives and values in the states and better understand and meet the needs of their students. Such familiarization will help ITAs provide comprehensible lectures to connect the gaps between what and how ITAs teach and what students know (Ronkowski, McMurtrey, Zhuang & Myers, 1999; Shiga, 2008).

Understanding Undergraduate Populations

Most of the ITAs who participated in this study were from educational institutions where undergraduate students were responsible for their own learning. By contrast, here they found themselves frustrated by demanding students. Most of the ITAs who participated in this study have low expectations toward their students' capabilities. They believed that departments were easy on their students, which limits their students' potential. However, previous research (Shiga 2008) indicated that students' achievements were significantly affected by their instructors' expectations. For that reason, ITAs should be aware of their students' capabilities and should motivate their students for learning "one step higher" than their current level of understanding, thus encouraging higher goals. At the same time, the ITAs should prepare themselves for the

protest and criticism that may come from undergraduate students, since they bargain on learning "as little as possible for a certain grade" as described by Toom (2002, p.60).

Additionally, ITAs should familiarize themselves with undergraduate student expectations, such as students expecting their perspectives to be valued even when they are irrational and illogical. Directness in both speaking and writing is necessary for academic survival, unlike in some countries, such as Japan where it is considered rude. The relationships between faculty and students are more relaxed in the U.S., and students expect instructors to call them by their first names, as opposed to in other countries where the faculty-student relationship is much more formal.

Becoming Familiar with Important Policies

Results of this current study indicated that while designing the training programs one should consider the institution's unique personality—its programs, policies, procedures, and personnel—since these variables influence the kinds of teaching, learning, and living that occurs within its context, as indicated also by Gaff & Wilson (1971). ITAs must acknowledge and be able to implement important policies and procedures regarding academic issues; this will assure that they are aligned with institutional and departmental expectations. Furthermore, such policies can aid in the ITAs' understanding of undergraduate student culture in the states, since appropriate behaviors and values vary from culture to culture. What is appropriate in the ITAs' cultures may not be appropriate in the states, as Shiga (2008) highlighted. In this sense, the current study indicated that ITAs' knowledge of policies helps them to recognize the types of student behavior that are acceptable and types of student behavior that are not acceptable for a particular institution. The following examples, provided by the UC Ombuds Office website, indicate policies that should be acknowledged by all ITAs: adding and dropping classes, grade

replacement, grading scales and definitions, grade grievances, and academic misconduct. It is likely that the same ITAs are not familiar with policies regarding behavioral actions; therefore, they must be informed on policies regarding conduct, such as policies regarding discriminatory harassment and sexual harassment, the student code of conduct, and equal opportunity policies.

Grading Policy

One of the policies that posed a big challenge for ITAs is the grading policy. Most of the ITAs expressed frustration with finding ways to grade their students fairly. They found this part of the job fairly difficult since "grades are the center of the undergraduate students' attention" (qt. the ITA from France). In this study, ITAs felt like they were forced by their departments to lower their expectations of undergraduate students and change their personal grading system.

Past research (Numrich, 1993 & Trebing, 2007, Shiga, 2008) urged for the need to train ITAs to use assessment strategies that provide undergraduate students various opportunities to show their abilities. Results of this study indicated that ITAs should ask clear and concise questions on tests and quizzes, questions that cover only the content taught in the class. And, most importantly, ITAs should adapt a rubric that was designed by their supervisors or by their departments for a coherent assessment.

Recognizing Institutional and Departmental Responsibilities

Previous research (Rao, 1993, Trebing, 2007) emphasized that the burden of improving the international teaching assistant problem should not only be placed on ITAs. This current study indicated that undergraduate student populations and faculty members should be part of the training program.

In addition, mentoring from faculty members should serve as a crucial element in the ITAs' development to fulfill their teaching obligations. This kind of program helps ITAs to

explore key issues, such as the role of ITAs, knowledge of American educational settings, interactive teaching approaches, undergraduate student behaviors, communication strategies, and importance of undergraduate student feedback. The results of this current study also indicated that ITAs required constant support from their academic departments and feedback from their advisors with regard to improving their teaching skills.

One of the ITAs from Turkey pointed out that ITAs should emulate the teachings of senior faculty in order to ensure the continuation of the quality of teaching in a particular department. However, the instructional diversity present on every campus in the states makes it difficult to model the ideal teacher, and, furthermore, not all the faculty members are able to, or even required to, mentor.

ITAs in this study repeatedly emphasized the lack and/or non-existence of *feedback* from faculty members, advisors, and supervisors. Therefore, institutions should design informative sessions for faculty members, advisors, and supervisors in order to improve their mentoring skills, as indicated by deBerly, 1995 & 1997; Shannon et al., 1998; & Gorsuch, 2003. With mentoring programs, both parties can fully understand the expectations and criteria required of ideal instructors in that specific college or department. Monitoring ITAs' performance, reinforcing good ones, and helping them to develop better methods for a quality education is a must, not only for the American undergraduate students but also for the increasing number of international undergraduate students expecting a top-quality education.

Nilson (1998) stated in *Teaching at Its Best* that "every college and university is a large, multilayered organization with its own unique subculture, norms and values, official power structure, informal power networks, and infrastructure of services and support units" (p.3). Participant ITAs in this study described various scenarios in which a person other than a faculty

mentor or department member made a difference in their acculturation process. These ITAs believe that any individual, other ITAs included, can make a difference by setting an example for others.

Providing Cultural Awareness Sessions for Undergraduate Students

The results of this study indicated that ITAs arrived with a certain perspective about teaching. Light (2001) indicated the same held true for undergraduate students. ITAs in this study indicated that campus culture builders, such as deans, faculty members, and other parties involved with the institution, should clearly articulate to undergraduate students that their college years are a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for them. Institutions should reinforce not necessarily a liberal or conservative perspective, but one of open-mindedness; they should encourage undergraduate students to see these few precious years in their educational careers as a special chance to meet, work with, and get to know others who are unlike themselves, as also noted by Light (2001).

Lindemann (2005) and Shiga (2008) stated that undergraduate students' experiences with their ITAs affect how they develop cultural sensitivity toward foreign instructors in general. For this reason, ITA training should not be one sided. The outcomes of this current study indicated that undergraduate students should also be involved in the training programs and should be aware of the cultural and linguistic difference of their ITAs.

Additionally, Shiga (2008) found that undergraduate evaluations were often not reliable due to undergraduate students' personal feelings towards the instructors. Shinga notes, "For example, if students receive lower grades than they expected, they tend to evaluate the instructor negatively regardless of the true effectiveness of the instructor" (p.33).

In that case, ITAs should be taught to pay attention to the items or comments that appear consistently from multiple students or over multiple quarters, since these comments may be the keys to becoming better and more effective instructors. At the same time, enhancing undergraduate students' intercultural communications skills towards an international instructor will help improve their overall listening skills and intercultural sensitivity, as supported by Rao (1993) and Trebing (2007). This approach may change the negative perceptions of U.S. American undergraduate students toward their international teaching assistants.

Recognizing the Broad Range of Benefits that will Result from Providing Effective TA Training

At the beginning of this dissertation, I pointed out that ITA training programs parallel native teaching assistant training programs. Poimbeauf (2008) used the term "uninformed instructors" as an indication that new teachers rarely understand how all- encompassing the life of educators is. He found that new teachers whose major was education, and who were trained to teach in U.S. classrooms, were lacking the proper knowledge of how to handle situations in the classrooms, and, therefore, they tended to be overwhelmed. If this assessment is accurate in regards to native speakers who are trained to teach in the U.S. classrooms, the situation is even more challenging and frightening for the ITAs. The current study stated that the difficulty these international students have is compounded by the fact that the educational system in their country is different than the U.S., and most of them did not major in education. They are not prepared to teach either in their country or in the states, and their internalized thoughts and communication styles are significantly different from those in the U.S. educational system.

In this current study, ITAs repeatedly brought up their confusion when communicating with their students and their unfamiliarity with the types of behaviors that they encounter in the

classes they teach. Therefore, institutions should have clear distinctions between ITA and NTA training, and intercultural communication training should specifically focus on topics such as attitudes towards undergraduate students, communication patterns, and other findings that are discussed in this research study that might influence interaction in the classroom.

In addition to the issues mentioned above, participant ITAs indicated that they were having difficulty maintaining a healthy balance between this demanding role and their own academic and personal obligations. This may easily be resolved by providing strategies or techniques that will help them to gain better time management skills.

Conclusion

Studying the ITAs' experiences and teaching myself in this new culture and educational setting made it clear that ITAs should receive training in communicative competence to effectively take on the role of teaching assistants. This current study emphasized that in order to function successfully in this new setting, ITAs need more than grammatical competence. ITAs should also establish sociolinguistic competence. For this reason, ITAs' training should be designed with a clear understanding of rules related to interactive teaching styles, a knowledge of how to present the content in a comprehensible form, an understanding of undergraduate students' dynamics, and an awareness of how to use the necessary skills to communicate/interact with undergraduate students and employees of their institution. This should help ITAs perform their role with appropriate student-teacher relationships and also gain awareness of the departmental and college policies that are crucial for successful teachers

This study found that ITAs' knowledge of requirements and expectations—institutional, departmental, and otherwise—will help them to adapt specific strategies for designing and maintaining positive classroom environments. Effective communication is required for effective

classroom management skills and will make ITAs more confident in their new role as instructor. This is not possible without the cooperation of the institution, department, faculty, undergraduate students, and ITAs themselves. This study showed that institutions should implement mentoring sessions for faculty members and cultural awareness sessions for undergraduate students.

The new responsibilities that I propose for the departments and faculty members should not be seen as a burden. Full-time faculty who have been drawn away from undergraduate instruction in order to teach graduate courses and to fulfill their increasing research demands, along with the continued shortage of qualified American graduate assistants, position ITAs as crucial for the growth and diversity of the institution.

International students who are eligible to teach are often also very eager to teach, and most of them are really good at what they do; yet, they are still in need of further instruction regarding the ways American undergraduate students interact in the classroom. This kind of training should not only be crucial for ITAs but also for those NTAs who do not have experience teaching in a higher education setting. The university's main aim should be to increase the quality of education, and this is not possible without acknowledging the existence of the international student population and their specific needs.

The results from this study provide guidance for designing more effective ITA training programs. In that sense, this study should contribute to making the classes taught by ITAs much more rewarding and satisfying for ITAs, their undergraduate students, faculty members, administrators, and the institution itself.

Pedagogical Implications

When ITA programs are put into action, they need to consider legislative requirements in a respective state, the university's needs, time restrictions, and funding (Trebing, 2007). Institutions may consider quick resolutions on a couple of issues (adapted from SIUC, Southern Illinois University of Carbondale, Trebing, 2007).

1. As previously mentioned, prospective international teaching assistants at UC must take the Oral English Proficiency Test (OEPT). A pass means that s/he is certified to teach; if the student fails, then s/he needs to take the test again. These ITAs who failed the test may register for the classes that are offered; however, this is not a requirement. For this reason, I offer a couple of suggestions that may help these international graduate students tremendously:
    a. Fail: If the student fails the test, then s/he should be required to attend the ITA course before re-taking the OEPT. Currently, the Teaching English as a Second Language department in CECH is offering an elective course named *Teaching Skills for ITAs.* In addition to this course; these graduate students should also be required to attend workshops that are offered by CET&L. These two individual but related programs may be put together for an effective result, and attendance in these programs must be encouraged by the student's departments and advisors.
    b. A conditional pass: In this condition, the graduate student may still be able to teach; however, before they are allowed sole responsibility for a full lecture, s/he should be required to attend to a workshop and/or observe classes, as assigned at the discretion of the exam committee.

2. For this specific institution, instead of providing a one-time training session at the beginning of the academic year, there should be training programs that take place quarterly and are required for all prospective and current first-year ITAs.
3. In addition to face-to-face training sessions, departments should inform their students about the responsibilities and expectations of this position in a written format. Since most of the graduate students are informed about their position prior to coming to the states, departments can easily include a booklet that will explain the basic requirements of teaching that graduate students should know. Even a simple handout that includes the CET&L website, or any other relevant websites, would provide tremendous support and guidance for prospective ITAs.
4. Funding always comes up as an objection against this kind of training. Who funds the ITA program? The graduate office, provost's office, or a different academic department? Not necessarily any of these offices provide funding. Undergraduates often have the best ideas about how to deal with what is really going on in the classroom culture. For this reason, institutions should involve undergraduate students in the process of training teaching assistants. Undergraduate students may participate in a kind of service-oriented structure that will give them credit in exchange for their volunteer hours. This service-oriented structure may also be part of their scholarship requirement, if they are receiving any. This kind of structure will not necessarily cost the institution any money.
5. There are also a couple of issues that institutions, along with departments, should consider in order to solve the concerns and dilemmas that occur in the classroom, such as the following (adapted from Coimbra, 2002, p.262):

a. Attitude: What is the institution's and department's attitude towards teaching? What are the ITAs' attitudes towards teaching, and does it really matter to the ITAs and to their Departments? Is their teaching rewarded?
b. Location: Where is the training program housed: in the English as a Second Language Program (ESL), in the Center for Enhancement of Teaching & Learning (CET&L), or in an academic department (English, Communication or other)?
c. Logistics: How do institutions get students to seriously attend a free, voluntary, non-credit, all-semester-long ITA program when they are competing with numerous demands that the ITAs face, for example: studying, teaching, researching, doing lab work, and completing homework, taking care of family, eating, sleeping, and socializing?

Limitations and Suggestions

Despite the conclusion reported here, this study can be subjected to certain limitations and criticisms. First of all, the ITAs who participated in this study had differences in their experience (i.e., one quarter to 8 years). The longer periods of time teaching are assumed to affect teachers' perceptions and, ultimately, their sense of acculturation. Therefore, future studies that focus on first-year teachers may have different results. Similarly, the process of cultural adjustment may differ tremendously with these teachers, according to the ITAs' country of origin; therefore, it may be useful to find out to what extent nationality and culture influence the adaptation process.

In relation to generalizability of the research conclusion, increasing the number of ITAs who attended the focus group interviews and observing more case study participant than was done in this study might increase the reliability of the results.

Another limitation is the gender of the participants. The pros and cons of the gender differences among the participants may require in-depth analysis in the future research. And finally, for further research on ITAs, studies may employ different and additional theoretical perspectives.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Consent to Participate in a Research Study for Case Study Participant

Title of Study:

The Role of Communicative Competence in Becoming an International Teaching Assistant (ITA)

Introduction:

Before agreeing to participate in this study, it is important that the following explanation of the proposed procedures be read and understood. It describes the purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits of the study. It also describes the right to withdraw from the study at any time. It is important to understand that no guarantee or assurance can be made as to the results of the study.

Purpose:

The purpose of this research study is to create a training module to be used by incoming international teaching assistants (ITAs). This training module will help ITAs understand the US educational system and culture, increase teaching competence, and decrease potential feelings of frustration. Since most ITAs teach undergraduate courses, this project will benefit not only ITAs but also undergraduate students. You will be the only participant taking part in this study.

Duration:

You will approximately participate in ten audio taped interviews, and each one will last approximately 30 minutes. The data collection period will last two quarters, including the summer quarter.

Procedures:

During the course of the study:

I will ask you about the experiences you have had being an international teaching assistant. I will tape record these interviews.

I will observe your teaching and ask you to reflect on what happens in your classroom.

I will ask you to keep a reflective journal about your experience in this process.

I need your permission to release your Oral English Proficiency scores from the English as a Second Language department.

I will ask you to share the evaluation reports done by your students at the end of the course.

Risks/Discomforts:

No risk or discomforts are anticipated.

Benefits:

You will receive no direct benefit from your participation in this study, but your participation may help future ITAs to increase teaching competence and decrease feelings of frustration

Confidentiality:

Your responses will not be shared with your advisor or other faculty. You will not be identified by name at any time. You will be assigned a number or pseudonym. The data from the study may be published; however, you will not be identified by name. Only the investigators will have access to your data. After the hard copies of the interview have been analyzed and revised the digital data will be erased. Your research data will be locked in a cabinet and will be stored for one year after the end of this study and then will be shredded.

Right to refuse or withdraw:

Participation is voluntary. You do not have to participate. You may stop participating AT ANY TIME. There is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you withdraw.

Offer to answer questions:

If you have any other questions about this study, you may call Elif Bengu at 513.556.4596 or Dr. Mary Benedetti, at 513.556. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the Chair of the Institutional Review Board – Social and Behavioral Sciences, at 513-558-5784.

LEGAL RIGHTS:

Nothing in this consent form waives any legal right you may have nor does it release the investigator, the institution, or its agents from liability for negligence.

I HAVE READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ABOVE. I VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. I WILL RECEIVE A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM FOR MY INFORMATION.

_____ _____

Participant Signature Date

_____ _____

Signature of person obtaining consent Date

Appendix B: Recruiting Email for Focus Group

Subject line: Calling you for a volunteer participation for a research study

Title: Adapting to a New Role as an International Teaching Assistant-

Dear Former and Current International Teaching Assistants:

I am writing to ask you to participate in a research study which examines the academic experience of international teaching assistants. I am specifically interested in how being a teaching assistants affects your academic experience here. I hope to gain insights that will help University of Cincinnati improve its support services to teaching assistants specifically for internationals.

You are being asked to participate because you have been a teaching assistant or you are currently one. The study requires that you participate in a focus group study with me and other 4 international students that will take approximately 1-2 hours. Sometime after the focus group meeting, you will be asked to review a summary of your answers and give feedback as to its accuracy. Your responses will be kept confidential and will in no way be identified with your name.

If you are willing to participate, please contact me by phone or email to schedule a time that is convenient to you:

Phone number: 513-602-4947

Email address: bengue@email.uc.edu

Thank you very much for your time. Your participation in this project will make an important contribution to the field of international education and to University of Cincinnati graduate programs.

The full details of the study and your rights as a participant are explained further below.

Sincerely

Elif Bengu, bengue@email.uc.edu

University of Cincinnati

CECH - Division of Teacher Education

Mary Benedetti. Ed. D. benedems@email.uc.edu

HERE'RE THE BASICS:

1. REPLY: to this email and you'll receive a confirmation email within a few days.
2. COME: to Edwards Center in the designated room at the time and you will be interviewed in a focus group about your experiences as an international teaching assistant. The 120 minute focus group is videotaped, but ALL information will remain confidential.-

Focus Group 1 (Social Science): Day, Month, Date, Time 3130 Edwards Center
Focus Group 2 (Applied Science): Day, Month, Date, Time 3130 Edwards Center

HERE'S THE FULL DETAILS IN THE CONSENT DOCUMENT YOU MUST SIGN BEFORE THE INTERVIEW:

Appendix C: Consent to Participate in a Research Study for Focus Group Participants

Title of Study:

Adapting to a New Role as an International Teaching Assistant-

Introduction:

I am inviting you to participate in a research study that is part of my dissertation research. I am asking you to join a focus group with 5 other students. I will be recruiting 2 such focus groups for a total of 10 students. In the focus group, I will ask you to answer questions about the experiences you have had being an international teaching assistant. Please read the following explanation carefully and ask questions about anything you do not understand.

Purpose:

The purpose of this research study is to understand how international teaching assistants adapt to this new role and what kind of experience they had. The collected information will be used to make the existing training approaches better for incoming international teaching assistants (ITAs). This training module will help ITAs understand the US educational system and culture, increase teaching competence, and decrease potential feelings of frustration. Since most ITAs teach undergraduate courses, this project will benefit not only ITAs but also undergraduate students.

Duration:

The focus group interview will last no longer than 120 minutes.

Procedures:

You were contacted by email to participate in this focus group with a few other graduate students to answer questions about how you adapt to the new role of teaching assistant. The focus group will be videotaped and then transcribed. The written transcription will not include your name. Participating or not participating will not affect your grades or standing at this university in anyway. Any information about you and responses you provide to the interview questions will remain confidential.

Risks/Discomforts:

I do not expect you to be exposed to any risk or discomfort from participating in this research study. None of the interview questions ask for sensitive personal information and you may choose not to answer any questions.

Benefits:

Participating in this research study will give you a chance to hear from other international teaching assistants about how they adapt to this new role, which would give you insight into academic success. Also, your participation may help future ITAs to increase teaching competence and decrease feelings of frustration

Confidentiality:

Your email information will only be used for this study and will not be given out to anyone. It will be deleted from my records once the study is over.

Your responses will not be shared with your advisor or other faculty.

The video and transcript files from the interview will be kept on my computer which is password protected. Only I will have access to your data. Neither the transcript nor the information published in my dissertation will contain your name or other individually identifying information. Research data will be stored in a password protected electronic format until the end of this study and then will be destroyed by deleting.

Right to refuse or withdraw:

Participation is voluntary. You do not have to participate. You may stop participating AT ANY TIME. There is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you withdraw.

Offer to answer questions:

If you have any other questions about this research study, you may call the researcher, Elif Bengu at 513.556.4596 or Dr. Mary Benedetti, at 513.556 2817.

The University of Cincinnati Institutional Review Board – Social and Behavioral Sciences reviews all non-medical research projects that involve human participants to be sure the rights and welfare of participants are protected. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the University of Cincinnati Institutional Review Board – Social and Behavioral Sciences at (513) 558-5784. If you have a concern about the study you may also call the UC Research Compliance Hotline at (800) 889-1547

LEGAL RIGHTS:

Nothing in this consent form waives any legal right you may have nor does it release the investigator, the institution, or its agents from liability for negligence.

I HAVE READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ABOVE. I VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. I WILL RECEIVE A SIGNED AND DATED COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM FOR MY INFORMATION.

_____ _____

Participant Signature Date

_____ _____

Signature of person obtaining consent Date

Appendix D: Focus Group Protocol

Before beginning the focus group discussion questions, I will say the following to the participant(s):

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. The purpose of the study is to explore the teaching experiences of international graduate students at the University of Cincinnati. Specifically, I am interested in finding out how do you adjust to this new role. Before to the start the discussion, I would like to tell you more about the study and then give you an opportunity to say whether or not you are wiling to participate. I will also ask you to read and sign a consent form. Please feel free to ask me questions any time. As we discussed earlier, the discussion will be video taped, is that fine with you? (If they do not agree to video tape, they will be told that taping is a condition of participating so they cannot participate. I will thank them for taking the trouble to come in.)

Once we begin the discussion, I will direct several questions. Feel free to not answer any question that you are uncomfortable with. The questions will include demographic information about you, your experiences with cultural adjustment, your teaching experiences here, and types of assistance you have found useful.

Please read the consent form now and let me know if you have any questions.
[After they read it…] Again, I want to reinforce the idea that you are in control of what information you give me. You can always decline to answer any questions. Your name will not be included in the transcription of the tape or in the write-up of the findings.
Do you have any questions about the purpose or procedures of the study? Could you tell me what you understand the purpose of the study to be? Could you tell me what you understand the risks and benefits of the study to you are?
[if they sign the consent form, I will give them a copy of the form for their records and proceed with the interview. If they do not sign, I will tell them that we cannot proceed and I will thank them for taking the time to come in]
OK, let's proceed with the interview…

Appendix E: Focus Group Questions

1. How would you describe your teaching experience here at the University? What was it like when you first start? What is it like now?
2. What makes you feel academically a good teacher? How do you know when you are successful?
3. What factors hindered your teaching position?
4. Have you experienced any form of bias as an ITA?
5. How would you describe the atmosphere in your department regard to teaching?
6. How would you describe your adjustment to US academic culture in general?
    a. What were your first impressions of the students and academic?
    b. Tell me some cultural differences you encountered here in the classroom as a student and as a teaching assistant
7. I would like to know about your self-confidence. Is it change by time? If yes, can you tell me how and give me an example?
8. Is this new role affects your future goal? If yes, in what ways?
9. What types of assistance have you found helpful in your academic adjustment?
10. Have you found any University of Cincinnati programs and services particularly useful?
11. What else could the University of Cincinnati do the support you academically?
12. What would you recommend to a new student from your country that was just starting his/her teaching assistant duties at the University of Cincinnati?