International Teaching Assistants’ Development of Cultural Competence: A Critical Literature Synthesis

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Introduction
• 382,953 international graduate students enrolled in 2018 in United States (IIE, 2019).
• “The foreign TA problem” (Baily, 1983): International teaching assistants (ITAs) are facing challenges in language, culture and pedagogy (Zhou, 2009) and many American students have negative perceptions of ITAs (Fitch & Morgan, 2003).
• Cultural competence in education: the ongoing process in which the educators continuously strive to achieve the ability and availability to teach students with different cultural backgrounds effectively (Campinha-Bacote, 2010).

Theoretical Framework (Campinha-Bacote, 2010)
Cultural awareness: Self-examination and in-depth exploration of one’s biases, stereotypes, prejudices, and assumptions that one holds about students who are different from them.
Cultural knowledge: The process of seeking and obtaining a sound educational base about diverse cultural groups.
Cultural skill: The process of seeking and obtaining a sound educational base about diverse cultural groups.
Cultural desire: The ability to collect and interpret cultural data regarding beliefs, values, and behaviors for more effective instruction.
Cultural encounter: The motivation of “wanting to”, not “having to”, engage in the process of becoming more culturally competent.
Cultural encounter: The continuous process of interacting with students from different cultural background to validate, refine, or modify existing values, beliefs, and practices about a cultural group and to develop the other four components of cultural competence.

Future research directions
1. Explore ways to use cultural encounter as a core strategy to impact other components of ITAs’ cultural competence.
2. Explore how ITAs’ cultural competence can impact American students’ perceptions of ITAs.
3. Explore the interconnections among ITAs’ three major challenges, especially how pedagogical competence can impact ITAs’ development of cultural linguistic competence.

No literature has addressed the pivotal role of cultural encounter in ITAs’ development of cultural competence.

Previous research tackle ITAs’ challenges in language, culture, and pedagogy separately, instead of as a whole.

ITAs’ cultural competence can have a compensating effect on their language barrier.

References