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Master's Thesis of Halima Chaudhry

**The clash of cultures: International student
adaptation Issues in South Korea**

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Abstract

People from different cultural backgrounds have often reported conflict and misunderstandings. Studies indicate that such conflict has a tremendous impact on the well-being of international students and may lead to adaptation issues in a new cultural setting. Therefore, this research aims to find out the root causes of interpersonal and intercultural conflict among international students residing in South Korea. With methods like interviews and surveys, it is found that cultural distance has little impact on conflict, rather it is interpersonal conflict itself that leads to decreased satisfaction and problems in adaptation among foreign students in South Korea.

Keyword: Cultural difference, International students, Adaptation, Interpersonal conflict.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Study Background

South Korea in recent years has attracted considerable attention in the outside world. People from all over the world spend thousands of dollars to visit Korea and visit places that they have seen in dramas or in K-pop music videos. Korea's exotic cuisine has surfaced international headlines for its nutrition and benefits to the body, and Soju has become a trend for foreigners who are exposed to it through Korean pop culture. Besides Korea's pop culture and exotic cuisine, many students also wish to attend Korea's top universities which include Seoul National University, Korea University and Yonsei University. More foreigners are applying for exchange programs and most people are aware of the prestige each university holds. However, studying abroad may be a difficult journey, but most foreign students claim it to be fascinating and a 'dream come true'. I myself as an International student¹, was prepared to counter any hardship or obstacles just to pursue my dream to study and live in Korea. As fascinating it may seem on TV and media, often, the reality is quite the opposite. Adjusting in a different society can be a great challenge and it requires a huge amount of courage and patience to learn and adapt to the differences. Adjusting in a culturally different environment usually includes stages of discomfort and shocks, which may hinder the process of adjustment considerably. In previous research conducted in the United Kingdom, it is shown that overseas students experience pronounced 'symptomatology'² (Danquah, 1971) and failure rates (Kapur, 1970) as compared to host students. International students were also subject to language difficulties and felt isolated from their own culture (Anumonye, 1970). Similarly, in another research conducted in the United States, Huang (1977) indicated four areas where international students had difficulties, namely 1) language barriers, as a result of unfamiliarity of the host language, 2) shifting cultural gears, as the students are constantly trying to adapt to the new cultural values while also maintaining their own cultural identity, 3) replacement of a support network of family, friends and neighbors with an environment which they view as an 'exotic cultural' object or an 'unwanted intruder,' and 4) multiple accountabilities to family, government or sponsor, advisor, immigration official and as well to oneself (Huang, 1977).

Students who come to Korea for educational purposes have diverse opinions about their temporary stay in South Korea. A majority who have stayed in Korea for six months to one year have different opinions than those who have invested more than two years in South Korea. Of course, experiences are different and so are individuals who have experienced it. Therefore, we cannot generalize an opinion of one individual over the rest, nor can this represent the entire international student body in South Korea. However, students who have spent more than a year in South Korea have reported having felt lonely, depressed and homesick. It seems that the enthusiasm that these students have in the beginning starts fading away with the passage of time. What could cause this sudden change in moods or opinions? Why do these energetic international students lose their energy by the end of their degrees? Interviews revealed that even some of the international students gave up on their degrees in the middle of their

¹ In this study, the term 'international student' refers to any student who is not a South Korean citizen or permanent resident.

² the set of symptoms characteristic of a medical condition or exhibited by a patient.

programs and flew back home. Another important observation is that most students go back to their countries as soon as they finish their degrees. Is it because Korea does not provide any incentives to make them stay, or are there not enough support programs that could help foreign students to make their stay in Korea feasible?

A notable observation is that foreign students have complained about how they were treated by the host nationals. International students have reported being victims of discrimination and stereotyping because of their non-Asian facial appearance, skin colour, ethnicity and the country of origin.³ These factors have created some sort of tensions, and it is important to address them.

1.2 Purpose of Research

The current study aims to examine the causes of interpersonal conflict by International students in South Korea based on the stressor⁴ model created by Shupe (2007) (Figure 1). The model assumes that cultural distance will cause interpersonal/cultural conflicts which will have a tremendous impact on adaptation. In this study, adaptation will be seen in terms of 1) Job satisfaction, 2) Psychological well-being, 3) Health conditions and 4) Socio-cultural distress.

1.3 Problem Question

While there is a plethora of research indicating that people of different cultural backgrounds often fall prey to conflict, this study tries to answer, ‘To what extent does cultural distance lead to interpersonal conflict and how does it affect adaptation among international students in South Korea’? In an effort to answer this question, a qualitative analysis has been conducted through surveys and interviews.

³ International students expressed this through formal and informal discussions about life in Korea.

⁴ A stressor is any event, experience, or environmental stimulus that causes stress to an organism.

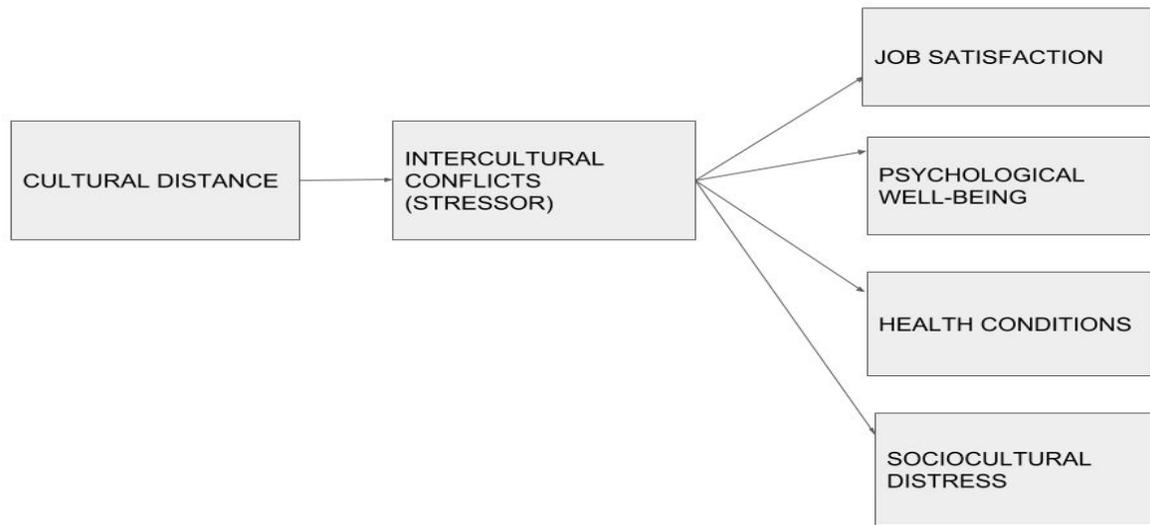


Figure 1. The Intercultural conflict Model

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1 Intercultural Student Adjustment

Researchers studying international student adjustment take diverse approaches to understand the outcomes of living in a new culture. Some researchers see adjustment as an independent variable and often look at the changes experienced by sojourners, drawing from the stress and coping literature (Lazarus, 1993) to provide an extensive outlook on the negative consequences faced by sojourners in a different setting. Searle and Ward (1990) have divided adjustment or adaptation into two broad categories namely - sociocultural and psychological. Such type of adjustment plays a crucial part in the sojourner's life. The former calls attention to the capability to 'fit in' the interactive aspects of the host culture such as effective communication and other social skills, whereas the latter refers to feelings of well-being and satisfaction (Ward & Searle, 1991). Research indicates that psychological and sociocultural adjustments are interrelated but are conceptually and empirically distinct. For example, the psychological adjustment is largely determined by personality, social support and life change constructs whereas sociocultural adaptation is dynamically affected by cultural distance and the amount of contact with locals and knowledge of culture. Research also suggests that the two components of adjustment follow somewhat different sequences over time (Ward et, al, 1998).

Other groups of researchers treat adaptation as a dependent variable, investigating the determinants that predict effective adaptation. Factors including 'communication and language-related skills' (Zimmerman, 1995), 'social support' (Tsang, 2001), 'relation and interaction with host members' (Tsang, 2001; Ward & Kennedy, 1993) and 'personality' (Tsang, 2001) remarkably anticipate intercultural adjustment.

Lastly, another group of researchers view adjustment through a 'learning-based framework' (Shupe, 2007), which explains the importance of skills and knowledge required to adjust in a new culture effectively. In his popular study of Norwegian fulbright scholar in the United States, Lysgaard (1955), notes that the greatest adjustment difficulties were encountered by those sojourners who had resided abroad six to twelve months compared to either those who had been overseas less than six months (Lysgaard, 1955). Lysgaard states:

“Adjustment as a process over time seems to follow a U-shaped curve: adjustment is felt to be easy and successful to begin with; then follows a “crisis” in which one feels less well adjusted, somewhat lonely and unhappy; finally one begins to feel better adjusted again, becoming more integrated into the foreign community”(p.50).

Correspondingly, Oberg (1960) also provided a similar explanation of cross-cultural adaptation in his anthropological description of “culture shock.” Most international students who came to Korea have undergone cultural shock. Oberg (1960) describes culture shock as an “occupational” disease (p.177) of people who have been suddenly exposed to an environment not familiar to theirs. For example, in South Korea it is very common to share food among friends or family, however, in most foreign countries, people have their own individual foods that they eat separately.

In The Netherlands for example, it is common to greet people that you are not familiar with (for example in the elevator, hospitals etc). It is just a friendly gesture. However, in Korea, smiling or greeting people in a similar setting is not very common, rather it may be uncomfortable since people in Korea are taught not to smile or talk to strangers. Greeting manners, table manner, or even taking off shoes before entering someone's house could be really stressful for foreigners who are not accustomed to it prior to coming to Korea. Cultural shock is often related to psychological symptoms like fear, anxiety and helplessness etc. Oberg (1960) asserts that sojourners move through these stages of culture shock and eventually achieve satisfactory adjustment. Indeed, most foreigners have adapted to these cultural habits quite successfully. Sometimes Koreans are surprised and display tremendous appreciation for foreigners who are able to mimic their way. Commonly heard phrases are, '외국인 맞아요? 거의 한국인 됐어요!' which opens the door for foreigners to enter into the Korean circle. Apparently, foreign students who are highly accustomed to the Korean culture are more likely to gain access to the Korean network. But does this access mean there would be less conflict?

Most international students have reported undergoing a series of stages, which is most similar to Lysgaard (1955) U-curve model of intercultural adjustment. Cross-cultural experience usually starts off with a "honeymoon" stage of enthusiasm and fascination with a new cultural setting. This is then followed by a period of crisis, distress, hostility and withdrawal, and then by a transition stage and finally by a period of adjustment, integration and enjoyment. Even though the U-curve seems intuitive, a considerable amount of research indicates that adjustment is largely dependent on the individuals undergoing it. Not all foreigners go through the same stages, there are always exceptions and their roles keep on changing. Kim & Ruben's (1988) intercultural transformation theory describes that international students' role keeps changing and they take out time to be self-reflective, which requires frequent adjustments to failed expectations.

To sum up, the substantial literature on international student adaptation has provided a detailed description of adjustment experience and calls this process as lengthy, dynamic and stressful. During this process, students must make efforts and should acquire knowledge to adapt well to a new culture. Since intercultural adjustments often coexist with misunderstandings, frustrations, anxiety and failed expectations; undoubtedly, this process is demanding and tough. Such difficulties can commonly result in lower psychological well-being, school-related problems and not being able to fit effectively in society.

2.2 Cultural Distance and Interpersonal conflict

Cultural distance is defined as the degree of similarity or difference between two cultures (Gavrila & Brandt, 2013). Hofstede (1980) and other scholars define cultural distance as the measure of the extent to which norms and values in one country differ from the ones in another country. In this study, the model assumes that cultural distance causes interpersonal and intercultural conflict, which further leads to problems in adjustment. This hypothesis is inspired by Triandis (1994) framework in which he asserts that cultural distance and cultural backgrounds of a group predicts the rewards of interpersonal interactions. This seems very intuitive. If there are more cultural similarities, one may think that there would be more smooth interactions between individuals. However, that is often not the case. If North and South Korea's example is taken into consideration, they share a very important aspect of culture; language. With similar language and roots, we still see some tensions among them. Therefore, based on

one's cultural context, interactions between individuals can yield different results. Similarities and dissimilarity between individuals can also predict if one group wants to have more or less contact with the other group. However, this sort of attitude leads to conflict and indifference.

Cultural distance between social groups is seen as a crucial indicator for negative intergroup attitudes (Allport, 1954). Particularly conflict starts when in-group bias manifests. According to Tajfel (1979) social identity theory, groups like social class, family, school or baseball team etc. to which people belong is an important source of pride, dignity and self-esteem. In short, groups give us a social identity which distinguishes us from others. People also make an effort to increase the self-image of the group. For example, 'Netherlands is the best country in the world!' or 'America is the land of opportunities.' Such statements not only enhance the image of the particular group, but it also fuels discrimination and prejudice against the out-groups. For example, 'All Arabs are terrorists' or 'All Americans are fat.' Here we see a shift in rhetoric when one group regards themselves better than the other and this is how people have created 'us' and 'them' through the process of social categorization. Sojourners with differing cultural values are often seen as a threat to the culture and identity of the majority group, which contributes to 'prejudicial attitudes' and 'discrimination' (González, Verkuyten, Weesie, & Poppe, 2008).

One of the interviewees sparked headline news last year for not being able to enter a particular bar in Itaewon because of his nationality. His Indian heritage was the reason for not being able to enjoy a night out with his friends. Why is it that particular nationalities are allowed and some are not? It is mainly because of stereotypes that are attached to such nationalities. On the contrary, his friends from Canada, France, Russia, Afghanistan and Colombia were all allowed to enter. In situations like this, conflict and resentment are inevitable. Many foreigners have expressed that once in their stay in Korea they have been denied entry to a bar or club. Bouncers give reasons like security and protection of Korean people, which implies that foreigners are dangerous for Koreans. Undoubtedly, there must have been a reason to initiate rules like that, but this is a clear evidence of stereotyping and discrimination. If one person commits a crime, we cannot put all the people in the same box. This is unfair to others who are innocent.

On another account, a recent news released by the Korean Times stated that the amount of Syphilis patients has surged drastically in the past few years. The initiation of this disease and the mode of transmission was not mentioned in the article, but many Koreans claimed that it was due to foreigners coming to Korea. On a Facebook comment, one woman argues that "Korea was free from such diseases and it started happening only after foreigners started entering the country." This is an obvious example of in-group-out-group distinctions. Scholars note that intercultural conflict usually arises when there is a perceived threat to group security and identity (Worchel, 2005). Ingroup and outgroup distinctions are likely to occur when members of different cultures are interacting with one another (Shupe, 2007).

Even though there is not enough empirical evidence that supports this hypothesis, but theoretical basis for such a relationship is preponderant. In fact, there are some empirical evidences that declare interpersonal and intergroup conflicts as a result of cultural difference. For example, if we consider different verbal communication styles across cultures, phrases or expressions used by people may mean something different for another group of people. For example, 'yes' can mean 'maybe I will consider it' or it could mean 'definitely yes'. This can affect a person's perception of other people's consent to a course of action. If we look at different non-verbal communication styles like gestures, facial expressions, personal distance or seating arrangements, it can also indicate cultural difference. Let us take an example of the most important facial expression, eye contact. The perception of eye contact is different among distinct cultures. Maintaining eye contact is an integral principle during social interaction for Western

Europeans as compared to East Asians (Argyle et al., 1986). While maintaining eye contact is seen positively by Western Europeans, it is not the case with people of East Asian cultural backgrounds (Argyle & Cook, 1976). For example, in the Japanese culture, people are taught to refrain from maintaining too much eye contact with others, since it shows disrespect (Uono & Hietanen, 2015). This is also true in the Korean context. Similarly, Jackson (1992) and Adler (2000) assert that distinct ethnic groups are more prone to lower levels of attachment, and differences in attitudes and perceptions often cause more conflicts. Moreover, evidence also suggests that stress experienced by international students are often a consequence of the perceived cultural distance (Babiker, Cox & Miller, 1980).

2.3 Ambiguity in measuring cultural distance

Many scholars have noted the ambiguity that lies with the term culture or cultural distance and many have expressed difficulty in measuring this term. In previous research conducted by Babiker, Cox and Miller (1980), they point out a similar issue and managed to measure cultural distance with the help of the Cultural Distance Index, a questionnaire created to quantify cultural distance among international students in Edinburgh University. Similarly, Shupe (2007) in her research conceptualizes cultural distance in terms of the individualistic and collectivistic cultural dimensions. This study adopts Shupe's (2007) framework for understanding cultural distance, however, the aforementioned framework is not appreciated by a number of scholars for reasons such as theoretical problems (Fiske, 2002). Critics argue that scholars using individualism and collectivism as a means to gauge cultural distance often approach cultural distance in an 'overly simplistic' and occasionally in an 'unsophisticated' way (Shupe, 2007). Miller (2002) and other scholars like Oyserman, Coon & Kimmelmeier, (2002) argue that many have strictly categorized countries and individuals, alike, as either individualistic and collectivistic without recognizing different forms or expressions associated with the aforesaid constructs. Similarly, they also argue that researchers studying individualism and collectivism take a broad global approach which resultantly overlooks other imperative factors such as individual or indigenous differences.

Whereas some scholars criticize the individualism-collectivism construct, many argue for its continuous use, however with some modifications. Critics propose to look at this construct in a different way, for example, 'general cultural meta schemas' (Oyserman, Kimmelmeier, et al., 2002) or 'polythetic' cultural syndromes (Triandis, 1996). They also demand changes in the theoretical and methodological approach to study this construct (Shupe, 2007). Researchers also recommend to study other dimensions of culture and to adjust the individualism and collectivism constructs. They further ask to explore other possible derivations of individualism-collectivism.

In this study, individualism and collectivism measures are used to operationalize the distance between individuals from a culturally distinct group of international students and the local culture. Considering South Korea's strong influence of Confucian values (Cho, 2011), it is considered a collectivist society. South Korea's collectivism is heavily influenced by Confucian values which are uncommon for other collectivist societies.

Individualism-Collectivism construct is further studied through the lens of values and attitudes that are undoubtedly distinct among different cultures. Gelfand, Kuhn, & Radhakrishnan (1996), assert that individuals from different cultural backgrounds display clear differences in attitudes and values, which further gives birth to a multiplicity of social behaviour.

However, it is equally important to understand that an individualistic society may also comprise of individuals who possess collectivist values, for example, religious people may appear to be selfless as required by the local religious construct/scheme. Similarly, in a collectivist society, individuals may not conform to systems of hierarchy. For the purpose and scope of this research, Korea's Confucian collectivist society is considered different from other countries (either collectivist and individualist) and this will be evident with the difference in values and attitudes of Korean people as compared to the international students residing here. South Korea is still very homogenous constituting 96% ethnic Koreans, making it one of the least diverse countries in the world (Volodzko, 2017).

Chapter 3. Analyzing Argument

3.1 Methodology

3.1.1 Data Collection

In this study, face-to-face interviews, written interviews and online surveys were carried out to obtain relevant data required for this research. These methods were used in order to understand the interpersonal conflicts experienced by international students living in South Korea. Written interviews were conducted because most participants' schedule did not match with the interviewer and many preferred to answer queries on paper rather than meeting in person and to talk about it. To obtain an overview of the required data, the author of this research approached a cross-section of recent graduates, along with graduate and postgraduate students representing over 20 nationalities. The main motivation to choose this specific population of graduate and postgraduate students is because studies indicate that there is a difference in the level of maturity and emotional management as compared to undergraduate students. Demographic variables like age and educational levels are reported as important factors determining the quality of intercultural adjustment (Okamura & Collier, 1978). On the contrary, scholars also suggest that younger students may seem to adjust more easily than the older ones. Nonetheless, graduate and postgraduate students have better control over their emotions. To obtain more objective results, this research strictly pertains to the aforementioned specific population sample. Moreover, previous studies have pointed out that studying in a foreign country often brings a considerable level of stress, anxiety and depression for international students, which hinders proper adjustment. This study does not consider exchange students or students enrolled in language schools as they may not be suitable candidates for this research given that they spend an approximate of six months to one year in the host country, time which is insufficient to fully understand society or its culture.

3.1.2 Procedure

Participants were contacted through phone calls and via social media platforms such as Facebook. The participants were only asked to provide information if they were willing to take part in this study. Seventy-seven international students took part in the survey, and 10 people were asked for an interview. One participant was removed from our study because of his discomfort and unwillingness to answer the interview questions.

Interview questions included three classifications whereby participants could describe their experiences in South Korea. The three classifications were: 1) General impressions of South Korea, South Korean culture and their respective university and department, 2) daily hassles in a new culture and 3) interpersonal conflict related to their work at the university. These questions are borrowed from previous research conducted by Shupe (2007). For the written interviews, the questions were structured and were to the point, for example, "What are your general impressions of South Korea, South Korean culture, your university and your department? Please explain your answer." Some participants answered more than they were required to and this was useful in understanding the purpose of this study. One respondent answered in a structured way pointing out a lot of useful information. He mentions the ageing of the

Korean population, unhealthy competitions in schools and colleges, racism and xenophobia, economy and politics.

3.1.3 Resulting Measures

For face to face interviews, an empirical-rational strategy was employed to establish two measures. Sociocultural hassles and work-related problems were identified as two different themes based on participants experiences, and then were used in the survey. This way, the measure of interpersonal conflict and socio-cultural distress was created.⁵

However, for the former measure, the author borrowed Shupe (2007) intercultural conflict survey since it shared many similarities with the themes identified while creating the measure for intercultural conflict experiences. Few students were asked to review the measure and the wordings were adjusted accordingly. Few questions from the original survey were removed, and new questions were added that were applicable in the Korean context.

For the survey, Facebook pages such as ‘Expat women in Korea’, ‘International students in Seoul’ and ‘International Coop-GSIS’ were used to reach out to international students in South Korea. On these online platforms, the purpose and criteria were stated clearly, and only participants who fulfilled the criteria and who were willing to take part in it were asked to comment on the post, and the survey link was then provided to them in a private message.

3.1.4 Materials for the survey

The survey consists of six sections, and each section contains measures of the following constructs: 1) Intercultural work-related conflict, 2) psychological, 3) sociocultural, 4) work-related, 5) health-related aspects of adaptation and 6) individualism-collectivism based cultural distance. As addressed by Shupe (2007) in her research, measures of adaptation came prior to the measure of intercultural experiences to avoid respondent expectancy. All questions in the survey were marked mandatory to avoid incomplete responses. (Please refer to the appendix for a complete listing of items).

3.1.4(a) Intercultural adaptation - Psychological aspects of adaptation

In this part of the survey, international students’ satisfaction with life was measured using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener, et. al, 1985). This 5- item scale was designed to measure global cognitive judgments of one’s life satisfaction. This scale has excellent ‘reliability’ and ‘validity’ in samples from diverse cultures (Shupe, 2007). Participants indicate how much they agree or disagree with each of the 5 items using a 7-point scale that ranges from 7 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). Statements included like, ‘*So far I have gotten the most important things I want in life*’ and ‘*In most ways, my life is close to ideal.*’

⁵ The measure of interpersonal and intercultural conflict experiences was created based on the work-related experiences and the measure of socio-cultural distress was created based on daily sociocultural hassles.

Student's psychological well-being was assessed using a shortened version of the General Health Questionnaire (Goldberg, 1978). Participants were given multiple choices and they were asked to choose the answer that best matched their situation, for example, '*Have you recently been able to concentrate on whatever you are doing?*' and '*Have you recently been finding it easy to get on with other people?*' The GHQ is considered a 'valid indicator' for psychological well-being in non-clinical samples from culturally diverse backgrounds (Shupe, 2007). (Please refer to the appendix for a complete listing of items).

3.1.4(b) Intercultural adaptation - Work related aspects of adaptation

The participant's satisfaction with their work in graduate schools was assessed separately by measuring Work satisfaction, Co-worker satisfaction and supervisor satisfaction. The students were asked to answer Yes (if it describes), No (if it does not describe) and ? (if they cannot decide) with the list of adjectives that may describe their work, co-worker and supervisor. List of adjectives for each part is different. Each part consists of 8 items, in which positive and negative phrases are divided equally. (Please refer to appendix).

3.1.4(c) Intercultural adaptation - Health-related aspects of adaptation

To understand students overall health conditions, Cornell Medical Checklist (Brodman, Erdman, Lorge, & Wolff, 1949) was employed. The original questionnaire consists of 195 questions, but for the purpose and scope of this research, it was shortened to ten questions only. The original questionnaire is predominantly addressed to men in specific, whereas only six questions concerned the opposite gender. The author feels that the subset of ten questions out of the original 195 are equally applicable to both sexes and is relevant for incoming international students who have previously lived mostly in their countries of origin or came from distinct cultural settings and academic surroundings. Participants were asked to answer 'YES' or 'NO' if they had experienced any of the conditions in the past six months of their stay in South Korea. Conditions included exhaustion; headaches, stomach troubles etc. (Please refer to appendix).

3.1.4(d) Intercultural adaptation - Sociocultural related aspects of adaptation

This part of the survey was created by the information collected by in-person interviews. To fully understand the socio-cultural aspects of adaptation, the author partially employed a Thurstone scale⁶ to measure distress caused by twenty activities/situations which can cause distress to people living in a new environment and culture. Such as 'people staring at you', 'drinking culture,' or the 'weather conditions.' They were asked to rate from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). (Please refer to appendix)

⁶ Usually, the Thurstone scale has been employed to measure attitudes, however, for this part of the survey, it has been modified to test situational or activity based stress.

3.1.4(e) Intercultural Conflict Scale

Intercultural Conflict Scale (Shupe, 2007) was used to measure the rate at which students experienced intercultural, interpersonal conflict in the University of Illinois, however, for the purpose of this research, wording has been changed and some questions were added or removed. This was done for two main reasons. First, this research is not specific to any singular university in South Korea and second, questions that did not seem to fit within the Korean context were modified. Respondents were asked to choose the most suitable answer whether they had experienced any incident in relation to their work in their respective universities. There was a total of twenty items which included incidents such as, “*You were not given the opportunity (e.g. teaching or research positions) because of your Korean speaking abilities*” and “*Despite your efforts, you couldn’t get to know someone you worked with on more than a superficial level?*” (Please refer to appendix).

3.1.5 Individualism-Collectivism based Cultural Distance

As proposed by Shupe (2007) in her research, a similar approach to the researcher has been used in defining cultural distance. In her research, she conducts a quantitative analysis to operationalize ‘cultural distance’, however, in this research a different approach to understanding cultural distance was used.

Cultural distance will be seen in terms of values and attitudes (Shupe, 2007). Shupe (2007) admits that the value-attitude composite has not been used in previous research to measure cultural distance, but she optimistically opts for this method and supports it by indicating research that shows cultural differences in both values and attitudes (for reference see Gelfand, Kuhn, & Radhakrishnan, 1996). She further claims that such differences also account for different kinds of social behavior, including interpersonal conflict (Gelfand et., al, 1996).

Values were assessed by using a shortened version of Schwartz Value Scale (Schwartz, 1992), in which participants were asked to rate to which extent to each value for example ‘freedom’ or ‘national security’ serves as a ‘guiding principle’ in their lives. The items included three values from each of the following eight basic value types: self-direction, stimulation or hedonism, achievement, power, security, conformity or tradition, benevolence and universalism (Schwartz, 1992), ensuing 12 values considered individualistic and 12 values considered collectivistic.

Attitudes were measured using the shortened version individualism and collectivism scale revised by Shulruf, et., al, (2003). Twenty-four items were included and participants were asked to rate to what extent respondents endorse attitudes associated with individualistic and collectivistic cultures ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) and 9 (strongly agree). Items included such as ‘I prefer to be self-reliant rather than depend on others’ and ‘I consult with my parents before making an important decision.’

3.2 Findings

Overview of the survey findings

This study was conducted with an objective to understand the reasons for interpersonal and intercultural conflict, which further leads to adaptation problems among international students in South Korea. After three years of observation, it is clear that most foreigners tend to go back to their countries as soon as they finish their degrees.⁷ Some of the respondents have expressed their desire to extend their stay in South Korea after graduation, as they found concerns of adaptation to part of the natural process re-locating into a different cultural setting, whereas, other respondents have greater difficulty in adjusting to a new cultural and academic environment and seem worn out and exhausted which can account for a number of reasons.⁸

The facets of the surveys yielded some interesting results about the participants (Table 1). The survey was filled out by 77.9% women and 22.1% men.

TABLE 1
Demographics of Respondents

Sample population

| | n | % |
|---------------------------------|----|------|
| Gender | | |
| Males | 17 | 22.1 |
| Female | 60 | 77.9 |
| Total | 77 | 100 |
| Academic Programs | | |
| MA | 59 | 77.6 |
| PhD | 18 | 22.4 |
| Total | 77 | 100 |
| Geographical region | | |
| Africa | 9 | 12 |
| Asia (Far East) | 11 | 14 |
| Asia (Near east or Middle east) | 3 | 4 |
| Asia (Central) | 3 | 4 |
| Asia (South and West) | 10 | 13 |
| Europe | 22 | 29 |
| North and central America | 8 | 10 |

⁷ This specific finding is based on semi-formal or informal conversations with international students residing in South Korea from 2016-2018.

⁸ Please refer to the questions dealing with socio-cultural aspect of adaptation in the appendix.

| | | | | | |
|-----------------------|--|----|--|-----|--|
| Oceania and Australia | | 2 | | 3 | |
| South America | | 5 | | 6 | |
| Eurasia | | 4 | | 5 | |
| Total | | 77 | | 100 | |

3.2.1. Health and Psychological aspects of adaptations

The survey tested psychological well-being and general health conditions of students for the past six months. When they were asked to fill out the satisfaction with life scale, most respondents slightly agreed to the questions. For example, when asked if their ‘life was close to ideal,’ 31.2% slightly agreed to it, whereas 19.5% neither agree nor disagree. 35.1% slightly agreed to ‘the conditions of my life are excellent’ and 16.9% slightly disagreed. This is, however, a combined overview of an international student’s life satisfaction. However, after doing an individual analysis, it is found that majority of the respondents are slightly dissatisfied with their lives (See appendix to see how SWL is calculated).

In the next part of psychological aspect of adaptation (General Health Questionnaire), 39% lost sleep ‘rather more than usual’ over worry and 16.9% lost sleep ‘much more than usual’, which is alarming, even if it is for small population size. However, in the domain of feeling warmth and affection of those near, the majority felt about same as usual and 32.5% thought it was better than usual, which is positive. However, 35.1% felt unhappy and depressed ‘rather more than usual.’ Most research indicates that studying in a foreign country brings about a considerable level of stress, depression and anxiety. Spielberger (1966), in his book, *Anxiety and behaviour*, explains that anxiety correlates highly with the level of stress individuals experience.

The level of emotional problems faced by international students varies according to their ‘length of stay’, their ‘personality traits’ and their ‘demographic status’ (e.g., age and sex) (Oei & Notowidjojo, 1990). For example, it has been reported that between 10% to 20% of freshmen complained regularly of emotional symptoms (Bradley et al. 1985).

Later in the survey, Cornell medical index has been used to understand health-related problems that are associated with adaptation. South Korea is known for its exotic and spicy cuisine, and many respondents from Europe find it difficult to eat spicy food. American respondents, on the other hand, expressed that they liked eating spicy food. However, when asked if respondents faced constant stomach issues as a result of different food, majority (57.1%) responded that they did not have any stomach issues. But the other half agreed that they were constantly bothered by stomach troubles. When respondents were asked in the sociocultural aspect of adaptation survey, participants pointed out that they felt least distressed eating Korean food on an everyday basis. In fact, most foreign students do enjoy Korean food, however, there are also exceptions.⁹

⁹ Exceptions include people from different religious backgrounds for example, Students who observe Islamic tradition do not eat food other than Halal or Jewish following the Kosher Law.

Majority of the respondents (50.6%) also claimed that they usually get up tired and exhausted in the morning. Experts claim that such situations are often caused by unhealthy living habits. For example, students tend to stay up late to write their term papers, or preparing for an examination etc. All require the use of electronics which Dr Martinez explains that ‘electronic devices keep us awake and keeps our minds active, a reason why we may wake up tired and exhausted’ (Wolff, 2016). Another reason, very relevant to this study is stress. Therapist Dawn Wiggins explains that something emotional or psychological unresolved issues in our life can cause exhaustion and fatigue in the morning like for example not liking your job or not being in a happy relationship, etc. (Wolff, 2016). Respondents that attend labs and do experiments revealed stress and emotional drain as a consequence of working late at night and not being able to hang out with friends regularly. Unhealthy life patterns can have a toll on students’ mental and physical health which is detrimental for adaptation.

3.2.2. Work, Socio-cultural and interpersonal aspects of Adaptation

Most respondents claimed that work-related opportunities were hard to come especially after the latest amendments in the immigration rules¹⁰ and procedures, which have proven to be cumbersome and demotivating. The aforementioned respondents claimed that they were on the verge of giving up on their dream to live in Korea and would rather go back home given these complexities.

With the majority having a good command over the Korean language (refer to Figure 2), most of them expressed that they were sometimes not able to communicate in Korean with someone they were working with. And this is quite stressful for most international students. They claimed that their group members all spoke in Korean, and most were not able to participate in their discussions. This is particularly true for those students who are enrolled in programs that are taught in Korean only. Students who are enrolled in Korean taught programs faced more problems than students who are studying in English taught departments. It is important to understand that everyday Korean, and the Korean used in academia is very different. Therefore, language problems are inevitable, which causes stress and anxiety. In some cases, it also leads to lowered academic performance. Another interesting point noted by a respondent is that before they came to Korea, they were told that their classes will take place in English, but upon arrival, they found out that there were not enough international students for them to be teaching in English, so such students had great difficulties to follow up with advanced levels of Korean in their class. Language is a very crucial aspect for proper integration and better adaptation. The categorization of ‘in groups versus out groups’ can be generated when people recognize certain cues, such as language that delineates cultural differences (Brickson, 2000). Few respondents also expressed discomfort because they couldn't understand a joke or the underlying meaning of what was said in class, despite having intermediate and advanced levels of the Korean language.

¹⁰ Since October 2018, foreign students who are willing to work part time for more than 15 hours per week need to have TOPIK level above 3. Students who do not have TOPIK cannot work more than 15 hours per week.

Korean proficiency level

77 responses

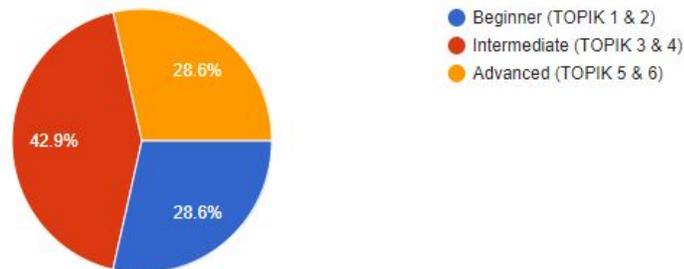


Figure 2: Korean Proficiency levels of Participants

While students experienced problems in terms of language in their universities, surprisingly, most of them also expressed satisfaction with their university-related work, co-workers (fellow students) and supervisors. When asked how they felt about their work in their universities, the majority (42.9%) answered ‘great’ and most thought it was ‘worthwhile’ (57.1%) and it makes them ‘content’ (44.2%). Results were surprisingly positive since it was hypothesized in the model that cultural distance will cause interpersonal conflict which will, in turn, affect international students’ work satisfaction. The results show a different picture. There is ample research on cultural distance and conflict in organizations. For example, in a study by Dubinskas (1992), he explained that cultural differences of time management/perspectives were often the main cause of conflict.

In many cases, students also reported to accepting their mistakes for something they haven’t done. Since in Korea, it is not polite to talk back or argue your position, most students had to agree to what the professors had to say without expressing their honest opinion, which is very stressful for students who came from countries where they are encouraged to express their opinions and point of views. This adds up to the amount of stress students experience during their graduate and post-graduate programs. However, as previously mentioned, students still showed satisfaction with their work in their universities. Many respondents agree to the hectic student life in South Korea and it is especially true for students who attend labs and are enrolled in the Science and Technology related departments. However, it doesn’t mean that other students enrolled in Arts, humanities or social sciences have no stress at all. All students are stressed because of the workload and their professor’s expectation, but this doesn’t really affect their school performance or the way they look at their program. A reasonable conclusion can be made that being enrolled in a Master or PhD program will be hectic and stressful. Most students are already prepared for this and already have a slight idea of the challenges they will face while pursuing

their higher education in a different country. In addition, students also have the freedom to choose what they want to study each semester (there are also exceptions to this) and the work content and load is mostly decided by the students themselves. They do not associate stress of the demanding workload to their work, professors or other graduate students, instead they acknowledge it and handle it maturely. Most students have already experienced most of the hardships during their studies in their respective countries. Thus, they are already accustomed to the fast-paced and competitive environments in their universities. Students may use such experiences to learn to handle stress associated with work and studies so that it does not affect their performance. Such experiences are also imperative, because this way, students learn to manage their emotions to avoid negative consequences. Matsumoto et al., (2001) argues that this ability to control and manage one's emotion is good for intercultural adaptation.

However, there are always exceptions. Out of 77 respondents, only 7 said they thought it was worse than most which could be for a number of reasons. First, it can be because the education system is not similar to theirs, and their majors are not what they were expecting it to be. One respondent said that the major she was doing is nothing like what she was expecting before she came to Korea. She claims that her major is an utter disappointment.

Respondents were very positive about their fellow students and supervisors. The majority claimed that their co-workers were 'supportive' (70.1%) and 'intelligent' (77.9%). However, some expressed that their co-workers were 'frustrating' (32.5%), which may be because of the language barriers and different approaches towards work and time management. Punctuality and time management vary among cultures. Social psychologists often think of punctuality as a cultural trait (Basu & Weibull, 2002). Respondents also claimed that their supervisors were very supportive (67.5%) and they were always around when needed. However, 23.4% of the sample population did not agree to it and they had a hard time getting in touch with their professors, because of tight and hectic schedules. 29.9% claimed that their supervisors had favourites whereas the majority did not agree to it. Interestingly, majority of the respondents claimed that their supervisors 'did not tell them where they stand'. However, a sudden change in results could mean a few things. Respondents may not have understood the underlying meaning of 'tells me where I stand'. They have either taken it literally or indeed their supervisors did not tell them how they were doing and where they stood in their academics. One respondent contacted the researcher and thought that this statement had a negative meaning.

In the final part of the survey (socio-cultural aspects of adaptation), majority respondents rated (4) to 'the pace of life' (1=lowest distress and 5=highest distress), which shows that they are very much affected by it. Korea's city life can be overwhelming for those who came from places that are quite or not as fast-paced as Seoul or Busan. At the beginning of one's sojourn period, going out and exploring cities can be quite entertaining and exciting, however, at a certain point, it becomes monotonous and may also cause distress as constant entertainment is not what one is accustomed to.

As previously mentioned, the majority of the participants acknowledged that they were highly distressed because of the language barrier. The language barrier can be really stressful for those who have little or no knowledge of the language. But in my sample, the majority of the respondents are intermediate and advanced level speakers, and it is interesting even how they find language barrier a problem. International students also expressed high levels of distress (5= highest) especially when host nationals have a prejudice about a certain group based on where they are from. Too much emphasis on outer appearance is also a concern for the majority of international students. Importance on outer appearance is almost everywhere around the world, an important societal aspect, however, in South Korea, the beauty

standards are somewhat different. This trend is especially true for ladies. If one is considered small or medium in their own country, they may end up buying L or XL in South Korea. Not being able to find larger clothes readily, may contribute to stress. Another interesting factor that upsets majority of the foreigners or international students here in Korea is when people do not apologize when they push you. Majority rated 5 (highest level of distress) and expressed irritation. This phenomenon is very common not just among foreigners, but Koreans themselves have also expressed frustration when it happens. When asked from a Korean person, she asserted that ‘Korean people are very shy. When they accidentally push you, they are embarrassed for the mistake they have done, so they just leave without saying a word’. However, this trend is more common among the elderly, these days youngsters do apologize when they accidentally push you.

Respondents were also concerned about themselves being seen as a monolithic group rather than being looked at as an individual. For example, if a person from a certain ethnicity has done something wrong, then it means that all people from that ethnicity are the same. For example, in a few places around Hongdae, entrance fee for foreigners are higher than Korean people. Their justification is that foreigners cause problems and damage for which compensation is difficult. Because of a few bad examples, other foreigners are paying the price.

For other activities like ‘expected to conform to the Korean way of life,’ most showed a neutral stance, however, the second highest answers showed relatively distress. Drinking culture, food, or ‘worshipping in your normal way’ were least distressing for international students in South Korea. However, for Muslim students, it can be a factor of distress.

3.3 Interviews

For the interviews¹¹, questions were asked in three different classifications which have already been highlighted in the method section. Interestingly, all interviewees praised and appreciated South Korea for its high technology, development, infrastructure, transportation, history and culture. Many regard Korea as a safe country and expressed no discomfort during their stay in Korea (there are also exceptions to this). Most also acknowledged Korea’s fast delivery system and punctuality of busses and other forms of transportation as compared to their countries.

I contacted Pete, who studies at Seoul National University for a knowledgeable discussion. He has been in Korea for over a year now and is doing his PhD. I asked Pete to express his general impressions of South Korea, Korean culture, the university and his department. Pete answered, “My general impression about South Korea is a peaceful country to live and the people are very helpful, respectful, and kind. However, the official documentation and some legal procedures are complicated sometimes. I really love the South Korean culture: people do not interfere with others matters, they are very keen only on their matters and are hard workers.”(Pete, October 1, 2018).

Similarly, John, who recently graduated Kyung Hee University, expressed that, “Korea has a unique culture that is a mixture of Buddhism, Confucianism and more recently individualism. However, I

¹¹ For interviewees protection of privacy, pseudo names shall be used in this section.

would like to see a weaker influence of Confucianism when it comes to social hierarchy and work culture, and more of Buddhism when it comes to life values and consumerism.” (John, October 1, 2018)

He further notes that “University life in Korea was a period of self-reflection because graduate programs allow you to concentrate on yourself and the subjects in the class. In general, Master degree studies were not so difficult, however adapting to the above mentioned social hierarchy in the university was a challenge: never questioning professors, lack of questions during lectures and lack of feedback from professors. These were some areas I think the Korean education system could do better.”

A recent graduate of Sogang University, Kumar, gave me a very detailed explanation of his impressions of South Korea. His answers highlighted a number of grave issues that are still present in Korean society. He notes that “Youth spend millions of KRW to learn English in their lifetime, but still the government of Korea has been so conservative about it. There is still widespread confusion regarding whether or not English should be taught at the elementary schools. There is widespread racism and xenophobia. The façade of pure blood is still alive in society. From bars and clubs to educational institutions racist practices can be found as normally accepted cultural thing in Korea. Children of mixed races are not accepted in the society while Koreans who have a foreigner partner are called out by different names. All black are Africans here in Korea and all whites are regarded as superiors. Asia just constitutes the people of China, Korea and Japan. Countries like India and Pakistan are close to Arabs and not considered Asians. Stereotypes are deeply seated and there is no education regarding races and diversities in the world.”

As previously mentioned, most foreigners are subject to prejudice and discrimination. It is important to understand that South Korea is still a very homogenous society and most people don't get a chance to interact with people from diverse backgrounds. However, respondents claimed that they were to some extent comfortable with Korean students who had an experience of study abroad, otherwise, they said they felt uncomfortable when they were asked strange questions like, for example, “if you are a Muslim, why don't you wear a headscarf?”

The other part of the interview was mainly about the hassles international students faced during their time in Korea. Most respondents went through similar issues that involve jobs, immigration, language, pollution and dealing with people. John explains that the, “most difficult challenge is to find a suitable job, because of the lack of working experience and Korean skills. However, working as a part-timer I experienced the working culture in Korea. I would like a better gap between work and personal life and the working hours in Korea are too long. I also would like Koreans to be more accommodating when it comes to foreigners, especially in legal terms. Visa should be easier to get for foreign graduate students.”

John has problems related to finding jobs and securing personal distance; Maria, a PhD student at Kangwon National University states that “I'm good in Korean, therefore I usually don't face a noticeable hassle in routine but during some lectures, I really feel uncomfortable. All the professors are good at English but during lectures, they don't speak in English at all and they just see me struggle with the lecture. Obviously, the scientific terms and daily life Korean are totally different, but they insist to take lectures in Korean. On a number of occasions, I was refused to participate in projects of Korean companies, fearing that I might not be able to handle the documentation in Korean.”

This is also evident from the survey findings in which the majority of the respondents thought that they could not reach their potential because they are foreigners, which is a huge obstacle for integration and adaptation. Natalie from Hankuk University of Foreign studies, “The language barrier is

intense. Although I know Korean on an intermediate level, I sometimes have problems communicating especially on a call. I have also faced discrimination a lot of times and being stared at a lot is one of the everyday things which makes me uncomfortable.’’

On a similar note, Pete also expressed a corresponding issue saying that, ‘‘I sometimes face language barriers with Korean people in the offices and shops as well but that never caused me any trouble. Couple of times, yes, I was wrongly guided or directed due to the language gap. The one and only negative point in Korea is air pollution. I seriously face problems in breathing during that time. It took some time to adapt to the Korean culture. However, it was not a challenge to me at all.’’

The third interview question involved intercultural conflict experienced at university or work and Kathy¹², a master student says; ‘‘I have had a very smooth ride for the most part because my professor and lab mates are really nice but recently a new Korean lab mate joined us who is not very welcoming to foreigners and dislikes me for an unknown reason and has been creating problems for me which resulted in a lot of conflicts.’’ (Kathy, October 17, 2018)

Kumar revealed that, ‘‘Since I graduated from GSIS I did not have much problem, since there were many foreigners and our professors were open to take questions. However, sometimes I had clashes with the office staffs. Being new, I had some questions about how to issue some academic certificates and the staff looked irritated. Similarly, in group presentations with a few Korean classmates (who did not have studied abroad), they used to be a bit dominant and wanted to implement what they wanted.’’

John also expresses that, ‘‘At work, Koreans expect me to understand what they mean without giving me too much context. Since Korea belongs to the ‘‘high context’’ culture countries (where most of the meaning is implicit), it can be very difficult for an outsider to grasp the true meaning of everything Koreans say. It sometimes leads to conflicts; however a better communication would have sufficed to calm down the conflict.’’

Pete notes that, ‘‘Since our class is very diverse, many conflicts because of misunderstanding take place. Everyone tried to show their true colours in the group projects especially in the group presentations. That led to conflict. Some people kept silent for some days. Sometimes language gaps made many problems too, that was because of our cultural differences. Other than that, I never faced any problem at the University with other students, either Korean or international.’’

3.3 Analysis

In this research, it was hypothesized that cultural distance leads to problems arising in interpersonal relations that further causes issues in adaptation. However, this study's findings point to another direction. After analyzing the Schwartz Value scale and INDCOL attitude scale, it seems that regardless of belonging from the individualistic society or the collectivistic society, students showed similar patterns of responses in regards to family and their ethnic grouping. Which further means that values or attitudes towards family should not be regarded as a measure to study individualism or collectivism. For example, the majority of the respondents said that they would definitely help ‘if a close family member were in financial difficulty’ and ‘for me pleasure is spending time with others’. However, statements related to one’s individuality and personal space, the majority of the respondents thought it

¹² Kathy requested not to mention her university for personal reasons.

was important to respect one's individuality. Most respondents are inclined to values that are both individualistic and collectivistic in nature and therefore it is difficult to assume that this quality will be a reason for interpersonal/intercultural conflict pertaining to adaptation. Even though Korea is considered a collectivistic society heavily influenced by Confucianism, other than language and communication, there is no evident gap of values and attitudes which could possibly cause distress in adapting to the South Korean society.

Since the 1960s, South Korea was heavily exposed to the United States, economically and culturally, hence most youngsters are inclined to individualism rather than collectivism. Also, with a high number of Korean students going abroad for internships or exchange programs, it seems that they want to internalize more of Western values that protect their individuality and personal space. Considering Korea as a collectivistic society with collectivistic values and attitude, the sample shows both collectivistic and individualistic trends, which does not account for the reasons that may lead to adaptation problems. However, there were slight variations in people's attitudes. For example, the majority expressed that they 'openly express their feelings and emotions', which may not be appropriate in a Korean working environment. Most Koreans tend to suppress their feelings and emotions, not to cause chaos or problems in their offices or working environment. This mainly accounts for respect for authority and hierarchy, which is deep-rooted in the Korean culture. Most of the respondents also consider themselves as separate from others instead of associating themselves with a group, ethnicity or country. However in Korea, one commonly comes across words like '우리' which is very commonly used on an everyday basis like, '우리 나라, 우리 집 etc. Foreigners, on the other hand, use words like 'I', 'mine'. However, these little differences in semantics have little or no effect on interpersonal or intercultural conflicts.

Interviewees did not mention anything like values or beliefs as a cause of conflict. Most of the problems international students faced while living in South Korea were not because of cultural distance, but because of interpersonal conflict that took place during their interactions with host nationals and in their universities. No one said that these problems were caused because of cultural distance with an exception of one interviewee. Apart from language and communication, which is an important aspect of culture, nothing else seemed to be a problem for international students. If international students complained of Korean people being not open to foreigners or having a prejudice against them, it cannot be considered an aspect of their culture because no culture reinforces discrimination or prejudice. Perceptions and historic incidents are root causes of this type of behaviour.

Values and attitudes are shaped by one's experience, culture and education. However, it seems that values itself are never constant and people keep on changing and altering their values in accordance with their specific circumstances. Values, therefore, are vague and need more understanding and research since it could be different in the subjectivity of every individual forming part of the same society.

Majority of the respondents shared similar values, for example, social order, harmony, freedom, wisdom or equality. Values that one internalizes are personal preferences and the way one has been brought up within one's familial institutions. For example, person X may consider himself as an individual completely independent from others, but on the other hand, person Y would consider himself as a person belonging from a particular tribe, country or family. Attitudes, on the other hand, could be somewhat different, and that is shown in the data collected. International students expressed more straightforwardness and the ability to stand up to anyone who questions them. For Korean people, or East Asians in general, respect for authority, or anyone superior in rank or class, deserves full respect without any questioning. As John explained, he felt uncomfortable not being able to question or add a remark to

his professor's lecture. This seems to be a big problem for many international students who during previous academic experiences were encouraged to criticize their professors during lectures, within the boundary of respect.

Some respondents claimed that they were often mistaken for another ethnicity and were treated accordingly. A middle-aged African man explained that most people considered him African American at first, but later when he cleared that he is from Africa, people would hesitate to talk. According to a 2015 survey by the Seoul Institute, 94.5% of foreigners in Seoul had experienced discrimination, compared with about 30% of foreigners in Japan, according to a 2017 study by its justice ministry (Volodzko, 2017).

Chapter 4. Conclusion

As previously mentioned, the problems with adaptation do not revolve around a particular construct, but there are a number of factors that lead students in Korea with adaptation problems. Language barriers and not having enough opportunities for them are one of the major causes that lead to decreased satisfaction levels in South Korea. Interpersonal conflicts and daily hassles in a new cultural environment have shown considerable inconveniences for students living in South Korea. Especially after the change in immigration regulations, most international students also find it difficult to support themselves financially during and after they complete their degrees.

Also, it is important to acknowledge that adaptation experiences would be different for individuals depending on their age, sex, marital status etc. The greatest sociocultural difficulty is also expected for those who came to Korea with no prior knowledge of the culture and language. Respondents who knew the language before coming to Korea did comparatively better than those who did not at all. Therefore, understanding of a language (basic level) or culture is an important prerequisite before moving to a culturally different country.

As highlighted by one of the interviewees, study abroad experience here in Korea was a period of self-reflection, and it is very true. As previously mentioned, Kim & Ruben's (1988) intercultural transformation theory also describes international students' role as constantly changing and they suggest that during this period, students take out time to be self-reflective, which requires frequent adjustments as a consequence of failed expectations. Such experiences help international students grow, develop and prepare for the future hardships. This allows them to become more skilled and knowledgeable.

In relation to the model used in this study, there seems to be no direct relation between individualism-collectivism based cultural distance and interpersonal conflict. However, interpersonal conflict acts as a stressor while other cultural constructs like language barriers do have an impact on the interpersonal conflict which is evident from the survey and interviews. In fact, the interpersonal conflict itself leads to adaptation problems.

Chapter 5. Limitations and recommendations for future research

5.1 Limitations

The results of this study are interesting and worth noting, however, this study has a few noteworthy limitations. Perhaps the most important shortcoming of this research is its small sample size. Time limitation and reaching out to a greater audience were the most difficult aspects while conducting this research. Most students were highly preoccupied with their busy schedules, and most expressed that the survey was too long for them. Most students could not even make time for a face to face interview because of which written interview was conducted. With a sample size of seventy-seven international students, we cannot generalize the entire international student body in South Korea. We cannot assume that these seventy-seven students represent all adjustment related issues. There may be other problems that could have not mentioned or might have been ignored in this research. This research looked at the cultural distance in terms of individualism and collectivism, however, this may not be the most effective way to look at the cultural distance. Other dimensions of culture¹³ could be taken into account for a better understanding of adjustment issues faced by international students.

Another limitation of this research is that we couldn't get responses from Chinese and Japanese students. According to the data released by the National Institute for International Education in 2017, the largest number of students came from China (55%) and Japan (3%). A major factor contributing to this limitation could be of the language barrier. Most Chinese students residing in South Korea have a decent command over the Korean language, however, their English speaking skills are rather weak, unless they are enrolled in departments that conduct lectures in the English language or are enrolled in Graduate School of International Studies. Therefore, the results of this study are not generalizable to other populations, and this gap should be taken into account for further research. Chinese and Japanese students may not be subject to issues that are faced by other foreign international students because of their similarity in culture, physical appearance or language, therefore it would be interesting to see if these students face similar problems as other international students face. Surveys and interviews were conducted in English only, and when there is a wider population, it is important to understand that not everyone speaks English fluently, therefore for future research, languages like Chinese, Japanese or Russian should be incorporated so that it is easy for a wider population to participate in the study.

5.2 Recommendations

Another important finding which has emerged from the interviews and the detailed survey is that there is a limited impact of cultural distance on interpersonal conflict and adaptation. This may be due to factors such as global interconnectivity and neo-liberal economic world order which may have commonalised the cultural norms and work-related environment for international students. Thus, if the

¹³ Other than individualism and collectivism dimensions of culture, Hofstede (1980) points out power distance, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity-femininity as a way to model cultures.

above factors are taken into account, cultural distance may be measured/interpreted in a manner relevant to the global world order.

During the course of this research, data which gauges the experience of international students in South Korea was hard to find. The focus of this research was to find out the impact of cultural distance on interpersonal conflict and adaptation, and to objectively understand this relation further, universities may include surveys which aid them in understanding the international student experience in South Korea, so that improvements, if deemed appropriate, may be made to enhance the quality of student life and academic experience.

Another very relevant recommendation for future research is that if researchers are willing to study cultural distance between two culturally diverse populations, it is important to study both the populations instead of one. Perhaps creating surveys for both Korean and international students would have shown clearly how similar or distant both of them are in terms of culture.

The clash of cultures: International student adaptation Issues in South Korea

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Abstract

다른 문화적 배경을 가진 사람들은 종종 갈등과 오해를보고합니다. 연구 결과에 따르면 그러한 갈등은 유학생들의 웰빙에 엄청난 영향을 미치고 새로운 문화 환경에서 적응 문제로 이어질 수 있습니다. 따라서 본 연구는 남한에 거주하는 유학생 간의 대인 관계 및 문화 간 갈등의 근본 원인을 규명하는 것을 목적으로 한다. 인터뷰와 설문 조사와 같은 방법을 통해 문화적 거리는 갈등에 거의 영향을 미치지 않으며, 대인 관계 갈등 그 자체가 한국의 유학생들의 만족도 감소와 적응 문제로 이어지는 것으로 나타났습니다.

키워드: 문화적 차이, 유학생, 적응, 대인 관계 갈등.

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Appendix

Psychological aspects of Adaptation

1. Satisfaction with Life Scale

Instructions: Below are five statements that you may agree or disagree with. Using the 1 - 7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item. Please be open and honest in your responding.

- 7 - Strongly agree
- 6 - Agree
- 5 - Slightly agree
- 4 - Neither agree nor disagree
- 3 - Slightly disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 1 - Strongly disagree

- ____ In most ways my life is close to my ideal.
- ____ The conditions of my life are excellent.
- ____ I am satisfied with my life.
- ____ So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.
- ____ If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

Note: Method how to calculate Satisfaction with Life: When participant have ranked all the items, the numbers should be added up.

31-35 Extremely satisfied

26-30 Satisfied

21-25 Slightly satisfied

20 Neutral

15-19 Slightly dissatisfied

10-14 Dissatisfied

5-9 Extremely dissatisfied

2. General Health Questionnaire

Instructions: Please choose the most suitable answer to your current situation.

Have you recently:

GHQ 1. been able to concentrate on whatever you're doing?

- a. Better than usual
- b. Same as usual
- c. Less than usual
- d. Much than usual

GHQ 2. lost much sleep over worry?

- a. Not at all
- b. No more than usual
- c. Rather more than usual
- d. Much more than usual

GHQ 3. been having restless, disturbed nights?

- a. Not at all
- b. No more than usual
- c. Rather more than usual
- d. Much more than usual

GHQ 4. been satisfied with the way you've carried out your task?

- a. More satisfied
- b. About same as usual
- c. Less satisfied than usual
- d. Much less satisfied

GHQ 5. been able to feel warmth and affection for those near to you?

- a. Better than usual
- b. About same as usual
- c. Less well than usual
- d. Much less well

GHQ 6. been finding it easy to get on with other people?

- a. Better than usual
- b. About same as usual
- c. Less well than usual
- d. Much less well

GHQ 7. spent much time chatting with people?

- a. More time as usual
- b. About same as usual
- c. Less time than usual
- d. Much less than usual

GHQ 8. been feeling unhappy and depressed?

- a. Not at all
- b. No more than usual
- c. Rather more than usual
- d. Much more than usual

GHQ9. been losing confidence in yourself?

- a. Not at all
- b. No more than usual
- c. Rather more than usual
- d. Much more than usual

GHQ 10. been feeling hopeful about your own future?

- a. More so than usual
- b. About same as usual
- c. Less so than usual
- d. Much less hopeful

Job Descriptive Index

JDI is commonly used to understand overall job satisfaction. For the purpose of this research, JDI will be used to assess students satisfaction with their University-related work (assignments, group presentations, exams, writing research papers, readings etc), and satisfaction with other graduate students and academic advisor(s). Each section is included to understand overall student satisfaction in their respective departments/faculties.

1. Work Satisfaction

Think of your work in your university in general (everything you do in your university). All in all, what is it like most of the time? In the blank beside each word or phrase below, write:

- Y for “Yes” if it describes your job
- N for “No” if it does not describe it
- ? for “?” if you cannot decide

- Great
- Waste of time
- Makes me content
- Undesirable
- Worthwhile
- Worse than most
- Acceptable
- Inadequate

2. Co-Worker Satisfaction

Think about the majority of the people with whom you work or meet in connection with your major/degree. How well does each of the following words or phrases describe these people? In the blank beside each word or phrase below, write:

- Y for “Yes” if it describes the people with whom you work
- N for “No” if it does not describe them
- ? for “?” if you cannot decide

- Supportive
- Frustrating
- Responsible
- Rude
- Likeable
- Intelligent
- Active
- Narrow interests

3. Supervisor Satisfaction

Instructions: Think of the kind of supervision that you get during your enrollment in your specific departments. How well does each of the following words or phrases describe this? In the blank beside each word or phrase below, write

- Y for “Yes” if it describes the supervision you get in your university/department
- N for “No” if it does not describe it
- ? for “?” if you cannot decide

- Supportive
- Hard to please
- Praises good work
- Impolite
- Around when needed

1. The pace of life
 2. Worshipping in your normal way
 3. Limited access to different food choices (For example, vegan, Halal etc)
 4. Natural environment (pollution, yellow dust, etc.)
 5. Language barrier - not being able to communicate properly
 6. People staring at you
 7. Drinking culture
 8. Commenting on your physical appearance (weight, size of eyes, skin colour, face shape, etc)
 9. Climate conditions (extremely cold winters, humidity, rainfall etc.)
 10. People having prejudice or stereotypes about you depending on where you are from
 11. Home sickness
 12. Too much emphasis on outer appearance
 13. Safety (e.g., can you walk home alone at night, robbery, theft etc.)
 14. Attitude towards foreigners
 15. Difficulty in reaching your potential because you are a foreigner
 16. Eating Korean food everyday
 17. Expected to conform to the Korean way of life (bowing, respecting the hierarchical norm, not talking back to your superiors, etc.)
 18. Not being able to express yourself because you may be judged or ignored
 19. People not apologizing to you when they push or bump into you
 20. Putting you in the same box as other foreigners and not acknowledging you for your individuality
-
-

Intercultural Conflict Scale

The following questions ask about your experiences at your respective universities. Using the scale below, indicate whether you have experienced each type of incident in relation to your work (as a graduate student, research/teaching assistant, etc.)

- 1 - Never
- 2 - Once or twice
- 3 - Sometimes
- 4 - Often
- 5 - Most of the time

In your work at this university, has there been a time when....

1. You were not given the opportunity (e.g teaching or research positions) because of your Korean speaking ability?
2. Someone wanted to discuss a topic that you thought was too sensitive or personal?
3. You felt that you weren't able to communicate in Korean what you wanted to someone you were working with?

4. You felt uncomfortable because you didn't understand a joke or the underlying meaning of what was said in the class?
5. You felt uncomfortable when someone touched you?
6. A student or a professor was impatient because you were talking slowly or because he or she couldn't understand you?
7. Someone tried to avoid you because you are not Korean?
8. You held back a comment to a professor because it is generally not appropriate to criticize a professor in South Korea?
9. Despite your efforts, you couldn't get to know someone you worked with on more than a superficial level?
10. You weren't given an opportunity or were treated unfairly because of your ethnicity or religion?
11. You thought that someone you worked with was too formal when interacting with you?
12. You felt someone didn't want to hear your ideas because of your Korean Speaking ability?
13. Someone took advantage of you because you are an international student and so she/he thought you would work hard?
14. You couldn't discuss something with people you work with because it is not appropriate topic in Korean culture?
15. You thought you were closely monitored because you are a foreign student or because of your ethnicity?
16. Others thought you weren't working hard enough because your attitude toward work was different from the Korean attitude?
17. You thought that someone you worked with was too casual or informal when interacting with you?
18. You were considered bossy or over confident because you speak a lot as compared to local students in class?
19. You felt that professors gave more attention to Korean students than you?
20. You felt uncomfortable because someone made a joke of your culture or ethnicity?

Schwartz Value scale

On the following page is a list of 24 values and each value is accompanied by a short description in parentheses. Your goal is to rank each value and think of how much each value may ACT AS A GUIDING PRINCIPLE IN YOUR LIFE.

When ranking, take your time and think carefully. When you have completed ranking the values, the result should represent an accurate picture of how you really feel about what's important in your life.

| Values | |
|---|--|
| A Comfortable life (<i>Prosperous life</i>) | A world at peace (<i>A world free of war and Conflict</i>) |

| | |
|--|---|
| Ambitious (<i>Hard working and Aspiring</i>) | An exciting life (<i>A stimulating, active life</i>) |
| Self respect (<i>self esteem</i>) | Equality (<i>Brotherhood and equal opportunity for all</i>) |
| Freedom (<i>Independence and free choice</i>) | Family Security (<i>Taking care of loved ones</i>) |
| Health (<i>Physical and mental well-being</i>) | Forgiving (<i>Willing to pardon others</i>) |
| Intellectual (<i>intelligent and reflective</i>) | Helpful (<i>Working for the welfare of others</i>) |
| Social Recognition (<i>Respect and Admiration</i>) | National Security (<i>Protection from attack</i>) |
| Wisdom (<i>A mature understanding of life</i>) | Obedient (<i>Dutiful; Respectful</i>) |

| | |
|--|---|
| Wealth (<i>Financially stable & strong</i>) | Social order (<i>A stable state of a society</i>) |
| Authority (<i>attainment or preservation of a dominant position</i>) | Honoring of parents and elders |
| Success (<i>accomplishment of a desired end</i>) | Politeness (<i>Courteous and well mannered</i>) |
| Independent (<i>Self reliant; Self sufficient</i>) | Loyalty (<i>Faithful to friends or the group</i>) |

Individualism-Collectivism Scale

Below is a list of 24 attitudes. Your goal is to rank each item and think about which attitude you are more inclined to. All items should be answered on a 9-point scale, ranging from 1= strongly disagree and 9 = strongly agree

1. I prefer to be self-reliant rather than depend on others.
2. As a rule, I openly express my feelings and emotions.
3. I consult with my parents before making an important decision.
4. It annoys me when other people perform better than I do.
5. I feel lonely when I am not surrounded with my brothers, sisters, or close relatives.
6. I would rather struggle through a personal problem by myself, than discuss it with my friends.
7. I consult with co-workers on work-related matters.
8. It is my duty to take care of my family, even when I have to sacrifice what I want.
9. To me, pleasure is spending time with others.
10. I respect the majority's wishes in the groups I belong to.
11. To me, pleasure is spending time with others.
12. When faced with a difficult personal problem, it is better to decide for myself, than to follow the advice of others.
13. I prefer to work hard for less money than to depend on my parents' support.

14. If a close family member (e.g., my brother or sister) were in financial difficulty, I would help them within my means.
15. I maintain status differences between my superiors and me.
16. One should live one's life independently of others.
17. I consult my family (close relatives) before making an important decision.
18. I accept awards or recognition based only on age or position rather than merit.
19. I'd rather say "No" directly, than risk being misunderstood.
20. My personal identity independent of others is very important to me.
21. I show respect to superiors, even if I dislike them.
22. I define myself as a competitive person.
23. I would choose to take care of a sick relative rather than go to work.
24. Freedom of action and thought is a prime value for me.

End of the survey.