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Master's Thesis of Arts

**Exploring the Role of International
Scholarships in Higher Education:
A Qualitative Research on the Experiences of
Vietnamese Recipients of the Korean Government
Scholarship**

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ABSTRACT

Exploring the Role of International Scholarships in Higher Education: A Qualitative Research on the Experiences of Vietnamese Recipients of the Korean Government Scholarship

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The purpose of this research is to examine the meaning of the experiences of the Vietnamese recipients of the Korean government scholarship, Global Korea Scholarship (GKS). This research was done to reveal the role of international scholarships that help to improve access to overseas education and help to promote social change. With the advent of the global knowledge economy, the importance of higher education for economic and social development has been highlighted, along with higher education being seen as a public good. Accordingly, the role of international scholarships that enable the opportunity for quality higher education is gaining significance. In particular, this study looks at international scholarships in higher education as a means of educational development. Indeed, in recent research, the role of international scholarships that nurture individuals as change agents, who contribute to wider positive social change, draws attention beyond the role to raise human capital or facilitate access.

This study set university lecturers as the main research participants. Global Korea Scholarship, as an international scholarship, provided Vietnamese recipients with a chance to study in Korea where they could be equipped with knowledge and skills to be university lecturers and the opportunity to feel

responsible and proud as government scholarship recipients. The research participants did suffer from some difficulties such as academic burdens, lack of support for international students, and language issues but did overcome them and achieved advancements both personally and academically.

The advancement of individual scholarship recipients has also led to changes in Vietnamese universities. As internationally educated lecturers, the Vietnamese scholarship recipients are contributing to the development of education and research in their universities at high-level positions. The research participants, in addition, perceived responsibility in themselves for the continued development of Vietnamese society. This responsibility notably appeared as being a good example in Vietnamese society with academic contributions, as well as further promoting good relationships between Korea and Vietnam.

This study's findings showed that positive social change can be eventually realized through the agency of individual scholarship recipients and that environmental conditions are crucial for the mobilization of overseas-acquired knowledge and skills to scholarship recipients' home countries. Moreover, alumni networks and collective actions can catalyze further social change. This study has the academic implication that qualitatively understands the aspects of social change from international scholarships through the role of the individual recipients and suggests the policy implications of the GKS program.

Keyword: Higher education, International scholarships, International education development cooperation, Global Korea Scholarship, Social change, Change Agent, Vietnam

Student Number: 2018-20189

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Higher education has long been considered as luxurious and privileged because of its high cost. While primary education was the main concern in the international development agenda for several decades, the emergence of the notion of the knowledge-based economy has brought the discourse that higher education is essential for national social and economic development and national competitiveness (World Bank, 2000). The United Nations also started to actively promote the importance of ensuring equal access to higher education with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) established in 2015. Higher education in SDGs has significant relationships to other Goals, such as poverty, health and well-being, decent work, and economic growth (UNESCO, n.d.). It is important to note that the higher education sector holds the biggest portion of official development assistant (ODA) throughout the world (OECD, n.d.).

International scholarships, as the main focus of ODA in the higher education sector, are gaining in importance with their role to promote opportunities for students to study in quality higher education institutions abroad. The United Nations' SDGs Target 4b indicates global needs for expanding scholarships in higher education especially for students from the least developed and developing countries to study in donor countries, including developed countries and other developing countries (United Nations, 2015, p. 21). It represents a message that securing access to international higher education that was used to be accessible only to the affluent people can now be considered to be at least one of the educational

opportunities available to adults (Campbell & Mawer, 2019; McCowan, 2012).

Such emphasis on international scholarships involves the expectation that international scholarship recipients will contribute to social change in their home countries through transferring skills and strengthening commitments to civic engagement (Dassin, Marsh, & Mawer, 2018a). Baxter also (2018) presented some key findings of the beneficial outcomes of international learning opportunities, facilitated by scholarships, for both students and societies: It helps students equip with intercultural competence, global citizenship, global civic engagement, cognitive development, and employment advantages (pp. 112-115). Some studies broadly argued human capital benefits of international higher education (Goodwin, 1993; Schmid & Pardo, 2017) that could support a need for international scholarships in higher education.

However, the role and impact of international scholarships have not been deeply articulated and researched hitherto. Dassin, Marsh, and Mawer (2018a, p. 4) argued the need for more research on the impact of international scholarships for three reasons. Firstly, the significance of intentionality in program design, as well as focus on outcomes, has been increased among governments and private donors. Secondly, research and evaluation of scholarship programs results have raised methodological questions in recent years. Thirdly, education is now being called for sustainable solutions for a variety of global problems today. In other words, international scholarships, as a catalyst for development, need more attention in research and for sophisticated policy design.

Furthermore, limitations on quantitative research on international

scholarships that mainly dealt with the completion or employment rate of scholarship recipients and merely focused on the diplomatic impact of scholarships should be overcome with research that qualitatively explores students' experiences and their lives (Baxter, 2018; Kent, 2018). It is crucial to have in-depth understandings of the experiences of scholarship recipients and how they make meanings of their experiences in their lives and as a member of their society, after they graduate and return to their home countries (Baxter, 2018).

Although there are studies on the issue, existing literature broadly on international higher education and students' experiences is Anglo-Saxon and Western European dominant in both bibliographic and content analyses (Bedenlier, Kondakci, & Zawacki-Richter, 2018). Hence, a research gap in understanding the role of international scholarships that was mainly illustrated in the context of the Western higher education institutions as study abroad destinations should be filled with new studies within a non-traditional regional context, focusing on not only scholarship recipients' experiences but also their post-graduation experiences.

Korea, as a middle-income and non-English speaking country located in East Asia, has unique characteristics as a host country with its history of a rapid social and economic growth. Jon, Lee, and Byun (2014) argued that countries that are not typical global hosts, such as Korea, Malaysia, Turkey, and Mexico could be a "niche market" as a regional hub (p. 694). However, it should also be noted that Korea was not always international students' first considered country when they planned to study abroad (Ahn, 2009). Since the early 2000s, Korea is actively implementing higher education internationalization policies.

Among them, the Global Korea Scholarship program, under the management of National Institute for International Education (NIIED), a responsible administrative agency of Ministry of Education (MOE), is a key policy to promote inward mobility of international students to study undergraduate or graduate programs in Korea with fully-funded scholarships. Significantly, the program takes the largest part of Korea's ODA grant aid in the education field at the same time (Export-Import Bank of Korea (KEXIM), n.d.). As Korea became a member of OECD Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) in 2009, turning into one of the major donor countries from a recipient country, the amount of ODA has been rapidly increasing including the higher education sector. In other words, the GKS program is functioning as the main strategy of Korea's policy to internationalize higher education and is also the largest education ODA program to provide access to international education for students, particularly from Korea's ODA recipient countries.

Meanwhile, 160,165 international students were studying in Korea in 2019, which was 2.5% of all tertiary level students, and, although the percentage is not high in comparison with the OECD average of 6% (OECD, 2019, p. 232), it was a considerable increase compared to the number of 12,314 in 2003 (MOE, 2019b). It is also notable that 90% of them are from Asia. The majority of students are from China (44.4%). Significantly, the number of Vietnamese students is rapidly increasing that it ranked as the second-largest country of origin since 2014, occupying 23.4% of all international students in 2019 (MOE, 2019b). In the cumulative number of GKS recipients from 1967 to 2019, Vietnamese students were the second largest group, with 378 students following the Chinese group of 436 students

(NIIED, 2019d). However, since 2015, the number of Vietnamese GKS recipients surpassed that of Chinese students with only one exception of 2017 (NIIED, 2019d). This increasing inward mobility of Vietnamese students is an important phenomenon for both Korea and Vietnam as well as in terms of cooperation between Asian countries.

Nevertheless, little research on GKS recipients or Vietnamese students has been conducted. While Huryk (2017) tried to explore developmental outcomes of international education experiences of GKS students, research participants were limited to students who were currently studying in Korea, which was not enough to find out post-graduation experiences of students. In the study of Kim (2018), the focus was to find out policy intention and the meaning of the GKS program, not to understand the students' experiences. Although Lee (2014) focused on GKS students, the research used a quantitative method to determine a specific relationship between variables, which was not enough to gain an in-depth understanding of students' interpretation on their experiences. Studies like Kim and Lee (2019) sought in-depth understandings of Vietnamese students in Korea, but no research was focusing on GKS recipients.

Taken together, this thesis suggests the need for research on Vietnamese GKS recipients who already graduated and returned to Vietnam (hereafter referred as Vietnamese GKS alumni), focusing on how they make meanings of their experiences in Korea to both themselves and their home societies to disclose the development impacts of international scholarships.

1.2. Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of the thesis is to explore the meanings of the experiences of

Vietnamese GKS alumni in Korea and their post-graduation pathways in terms of individual, institutional, and social level. It should be pointed out that the impacts of international scholarships on students are aligned with that of international education experience itself (Baxter, 2018). Yet, this research is more concentrating on the role of international scholarships as enhancing access and fostering positive social change. In the research of Vietnamese international graduates who returned to Vietnam, Pham (2019) examined the returnees' valuation of their overseas-acquired knowledge and skills and how they mobilize such resources to their home society in the three fields: professional, intellectual, and civic fields, to see the aspects of identity formations as elites of society and the impacts of overseas education in their work and community activities. In this thesis, among the GKS alumni who returned to Vietnam, the focus is on academics in Vietnamese universities. This will be accounted for in details in the methodology chapter.

To achieve the research purpose, the following research questions will be examined:

- (1) What were the motivations of Vietnamese GKS alumni to apply for the scholarship to study in Korea, and how do they describe their experiences in Korean universities?
- (2) To what extent do the experiences of Vietnamese GKS alumni in Korean universities relate to their current situation, particularly in Vietnamese universities?
- (3) How do the Vietnamese GKS alumni interpret their experiences in Korea both in their personal and professional lives as well as in Vietnamese society?

CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will examine the existing literature relevant to the topic of this thesis according to the three sections: international scholarships in higher education as a means of educational development, Global Korea Scholarship, and Vietnam as the regional background of the scholarship alumni. It is essential to firstly look at international scholarships in higher education in the context of international development as an underlying idea of the thesis. This includes global perspectives on higher education and salient subjects related to the topic, such as rationales and the role of international scholarships as well as some issues and challenges. In the second section, policy design and intention of the GKS and existing studies on the program are explored to better understand the experiences of the Vietnamese GKS recipients. The last section describes several characteristics of Vietnam as the regional background of the scholarship alumni in terms of social and educational circumstances.

2.1. International Scholarships in Higher Education as a Means of Educational Development

2.1.1. Global Perspectives on Higher Education

As higher education is regarded as important in the field of international development cooperation for the national economic and social development in today's global knowledge-economy, related literature illustrates the role and benefits of higher education. The discussion was triggered when the

World Bank Task Force on Higher Education and Society published a report about higher education in developing countries. According to the World Bank (2000), higher education brings about development through increased income, skills development, and extended choices. This report offered the rationale for more actions in the higher education sector when primary and secondary education was the main agenda in developing countries (Neu, Gomez, León, & Zepeda, 2002; Tilak, 2000). However, the report was criticized for the lack of a clear vision of strategies and incomplete illustrations on problems and solutions (Tilak, 2000).

UNESCO, as “the only UN agency with a mandate in higher education” (United Nations, n.d.), also presented the importance of higher education in terms of justice that enables individual development and social mobility through capacity-building (UNESCO, 1998). As an ongoing process, UNESCO is actively working on the higher education sector by creating a discourse on equal opportunity to higher education under the agenda of human rights (Mundy & Madden, 2009).

Higher education in developing countries is noticeably argued as a significant accelerator for reducing poverty and fostering economic development, affected by neoliberalism emerged in the 1970s, while international inequalities between countries and higher education institutions still exist (Altbach, 2004; Olssen & Peters, 2005). This argument is based on the human capital theory that degrees in higher education generate economic profit to individuals and produce the labor force, and consequently, educated professionals will contribute to the national economic growth and produce knowledge that can solve societal challenges (Yoo, Chung, & Kang, 2017). Also, national innovation systems through university consortia can play a

significant role in economic growth as well as ecological and social development in the context of transition economies (Hansen & Lehmann, 2006).

However, arguments that overemphasize only the economic interests of higher education often confronts criticism from the perspective that sees higher education as a public good to be the benefits for all members of society, not only for the minority elite. Researchers such as Nixon (2010) Tilak (2008), and Torres and Rhoads (2006) criticized neoliberal phenomena of higher education, arguing that higher education has degenerated into a market commodity and that it must return to the arena of knowledge sharing and knowledge production for a social benefit for all. Marginson (2011) also pointed out characteristics of higher education as a global public good that “can make solidarity practical by tackling common human problems such as climate change and epidemic disease on a collaborative basis,” acknowledging that these problems cannot be solved in the short term (p. 429).

The phenomenon of internationalization of higher education also influenced the international development cooperation agenda. Knight (2004) illustrated social/cultural, political, economic, and academic rationales for internationalization of higher education that can broadly handle human resources development, strategic alliances, commercial trade, nation-building, social and cultural development, especially on a national level (pp. 21-25). Altbach (2016) also explained that internationalization is the way universities and governments respond to globalization by “sending students to study abroad, setting up a branch campus overseas, internationalizing the curriculum, or engaging in international partnerships” (p. 18). Globalization here is “shaped by an increasingly integrated world economy, new

information and communications technology, the emergence of an international knowledge network, the role of the English language, and other forces beyond the control of academic institution” (Altbach, 2016, p.18). However, there still exist inequalities between the Western and non-West countries regarding international education, intentionally or not, derived from the superiority of the Western higher education system working as a global standard that unavoidably influences other institutions around the world (Pham, 2019).

In the context of increasing international student mobility, a study abroad opportunity is proved to play a crucial role in development. Substantial research described the benefits of international study both to individuals (e.g. Grayson, 2008; Loo, Luo, & Ye, 2017; Wiers-Jenssen, 2008) and societies (e.g. McMahon & Otetch, 2010; Solimano, 2008; Stapleton, Mecea, & Beqiri, 2016). These benefits encompass economic and non-market and social effects on development. As a frequently referred benefit, students who had overseas education appear to get an advantage in employment (Loo, Luo, & Ye, 2017; Wiers-Jenssen, 2008). Global citizenship is also one of the learning outcomes of international students from their international education experience (Rhoads & Szelényi, 2011; Tarrant, Rubin, & Stoner, 2014). Global citizenship that students acquire is stressed for its role in equipping individuals to contribute to broader development on both national and global level.

2.1.2. The Rationale and the Role of International Scholarships

International scholarships can be identified differently based on the background where it is mentioned. When looking at the definition in the

context of international development cooperation as Bhandari and Mirza (2016) proposed in terms of SDGs Target 4b, it is:

a grant or payment (regardless of funding amount) made by a developed or developing country's national government to students from developing countries to support their education at a tertiary level. Scholarships will involve some level of coursework or vocational training in a particular area of study that will result in a degree, certification, or recognized award. (p. 4)

The definition is pointing out the “transactional quality of a scholarship” (Campbell & Mawer, 2018, p.3). Although it fails to specify diverse scholarship funding scale (Campbell & Mawer, 2018), international scholarships in terms of development cooperation can be understood to play a significant role in providing students, especially from developing countries, with international education opportunities that might not have been possible without scholarships.

International scholarships mostly support students to study in developed countries, whereas some programs are funding for students from developing countries to study in another developing country. Such international scholarships are sponsored by a wide variety of funders: governments, international organizations, foundations, multilateral institutions, and private companies. This variety of funding bodies also indicates the complexity and varied aims among scholarship programs. It is interesting to note that government-funded scholarships provided by developing or mid-income countries tend to support their citizens to study abroad, while developed nations tend to work as host countries inviting students from all over the world

(Kent, 2018, p. 25). Historically, especially since the Cold War era, international scholarships have been regarded as a tool to promote some political agendas and socio-economic vitalization among government funders (Lehr, 2008). According to Boeren (2018), the followings are three common objectives of scholarship programs across various funders, and almost all scholarships have a mix of these three goals:

- (1) To strengthen human resources needed for the development of the countries of the scholarship recipients
- (2) To foster diplomatic and economic bonds between countries
- (3) To promote and improve the quality and attractiveness of the education (institutions) in the country of bilateral donors. (p. 44)

2.1.2.1. Focal theories to explain the rationale of international scholarships

Prominent theories that underpin the rationale of international scholarships are human capital theory, human rights-based approach, and capability approach. These theories are not different from what establish links between higher education and international development. Researches such as McCowan (2015), Robeyns (2006) bring the three theories to explain the role of education in development. In the research of Campbell and Mawer (2018), they also employed the three theories to analyze international scholarship agenda in SDGs Target 4.b. The following paragraphs will examine three theoretical rationales that sustain international scholarships, including some weak points of each argument.

Human capital theory (HCT) is the explanatory type of theory to explain “why some economies grow more rapidly than others and from which we can

adopt strategies for ensuring growth in the future” (McCowan, 2015, p. 32). HCT views students’ choices regarding college as the result of their decisions to make investments in higher education, which means a form of human capital; human capital can be described as “the productive capacities – knowledge, understandings, talents, and skills – processed by an individual or society” (Paulsen, 2011, p. 56).

HCT underpins the design of many international scholarship programs. According to HCT, “significant financial investment in international higher education will lead to post-education economic activity, which spills over to generate returns within the wider community of the student’s home country” (Campbell & Mawer, 2019, p 171). Perna et al. (2014) reviewed numerous government-funded international scholarship programs and elaborated a framework to understand the central characteristics of these programs. The research suggested four program types that have implications for the nature of human capital with different characteristics, development of (1) basic skills, (2) advanced knowledge in developing nations, (3) advanced knowledge in developed nations, and (4) promotion of short-term study abroad (Perna et al., 2014).

However, HCT does not concern social justice or equity aspect, and individual interest might be marginalized in too much focus on the macro-level of interests (Campbell & Mawer, 2018). Recent research sharply criticizes a problematic methodology of measuring rate of return to prove human capital benefits and argues that HCT does not give a clear comparative explanation about how investments in primary education and higher education have a different rate of returns (Klees, 2016).

Human rights-based approach (HRBA) to education is bound to the UN

Declaration of Human rights that all human beings have rights to pursue education (UN, 1948). The Declaration notes that “technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit” (UN, 1948). HRBA to international scholarship concerns about access to higher education, especially quality education, for those who are living in a country with a low-quality higher education system and who have limited changes to pursue their rights without scholarships’ financial support (Campbell & Mawer, 2018). McCowan (2012) argued that the right to quality higher education is not limited to the elite when concerning the benefits of it.

However, it is still not clear if access to *international* higher education qualifies as a human right, and it is not feasible to implement scholarships for all students due to financial limitation (Campbell & Mawer, 2018). Furthermore, the sole emphasis on access might cause little concern about completion rates or quality of education (Campbell & Mawer, 2018). The HRBA is somewhat overemphasizing the legal aspects of rights; the discourse can make policymakers feel contented enough “when they have strictly followed the rules that a limited interpretation of the rights imposes on them, even when additional efforts are necessary to meet the goal that underlies the right” (Robeyns, 2006, p. 70).

The capability approach was introduced by Amartya Sen (1999) and developed by other figures such as Mahbub Ul Haq (1995) and Martha Nussbaum (2006). The approach, together with HRBA, belongs to the liberal egalitarianism paradigm that considers the possibility of universal morality in accordance with social justice idea (McCowan, 2015, p. 40). However, the capability approach does not see individuals as compliant beings unlike HCT

and HRBA but emphasizes the importance of individual agency who has the freedom to choose according to one's value, which refers to capability, substantial freedom (Sen, 1999). In this approach, education expands one's range of choices which are meaningful for one's life and leads to greater opportunities and abilities to understand and interact with the world (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2006). It should be noted that the enhanced capabilities of an individual are not limited to one's benefit but connected to broader social well-being. According to Campbell and Mawer (2018), expanding a person's capabilities through education is a "prelude ... for a wider population" with a change agent model (p. 12).

In this respect, international scholarships facilitate broadening of capabilities by creating an environment for individuals to think differently and widely through studying abroad experiences (Campbell & Mawer, 2018). Pham (2019) also adopted Sen's capability approach to explain the outcomes and benefits of international education in terms of the ethical development of scholarship recipients as an agency. Many international scholarship programs allude to change agent or opinion leader model. However, it is not guaranteed whether scholarship recipients will choose to apply their capabilities for their home country's development (Campbell & Mawer, 2018).

To sum up the three theoretical perspectives on international scholarships, the relevance and outcome were important issues in HCT, and equity was a primary concern in HRBA. In the capability approach, all these issues were imperative, yet, with a different stance on relevance and outcome from HCT, and equity issue was considered with both access and outcome (Campbell & Mawer, 2018, p 13). It means that HCT and HRBA were not enough to delineate the dynamics of international scholarships that can create a broader

connection between international education opportunities and development. In this respect, despite the difficulties in elucidating the process of social development through scholarships, this paper is more focusing on the role of international scholarships in terms of raising individuals that can contribute to broader benefits of societies, along with the broad stream of the capability approach. It is also because Sen's approach concerns the formation of human capability in the context of a cultural plurality (Marginson, 2014, p. 10).

2.1.2.2. International scholarships for positive social changes through scholarship recipients

In terms of international scholarships that highlight the role of individuals in a positive social change, Baxter (2018) identified three typical rationales: transferring technical skills, developing leadership, and strengthening commitments to civic engagement and public service (p. 107). Technical skills are considered to play a significant role in developing workforces for national (economic) development, and students' leadership development, through exposure to diverse people and perspectives, is expected to solve problems in their home countries (Baxter, 2018, p. 108). These rationales are based on a theory of change, which indicates that empowering such individuals to earn knowledge applicable in academic, industrial, and civic sectors can positively contribute to their communities (Baxter, 2018; Mawer & Day, 2015).

According to Dassin, Marsh, and Mawer (2018b, p. 5), positive social change is something that "unleashes opportunities for individuals and communities to reduce injustice and increase well-being in all forms." The researchers identified five pathways of such scholarships for positive social

change: change agent; social network, widening assess, academic diversity, and international understanding pathways. (Dassin, Marsh, & Mawer, 2018b, p. 5). “The change agent pathway” is for individual scholars to create such change through personal activities and behaviors. The social network pathway is a network established by scholarship recipients to support positive social change through joint actions. “The widening assess pathway” is a way for scholarships to contribute to social mobility and positive change by expanding international education access for people in marginalized groups. “The academic diversity pathway” is where the scholarship program for international students allows the institution to inclusively cover outstanding and non-traditional students, while “the international understanding pathway” allows scholarship programs to promote cross-cultural communication, inclusiveness, and cooperation.

Pham (2019) is searching for the potentiality of international education for ethical development. Although the research does not straightforwardly indicate the role or rationale of international scholarships, the topic aligns with the idea of international education experience that makes positive changes, and such opportunity is encouraged by scholarship. As a case study, Pham (2019) examined Vietnamese international graduates who returned to Vietnam to find out the impacts of international education upon their lives as well as their local communities that “include and beyond economic benefits” (p. 4). Pham (2019) tried to link international education experience to development where returnees can contribute to their home countries’ development by applying their overseas-acquired skills, knowledge, and attributes. This return and settlement process of international graduates are viewed through the lens of Sen’s capability approach and Bourdieu’s concept

of habitus in the research. By doing so, Pham (2019) understood how returnees reason their choices with their agency freedom in a way that can contribute to the personal well-being as well as collective well-being and how returnees respond to contexts around them in terms of perceived opportunities. Pham (2019) suggested that picturing international education for the ethical development is to be “conscious of international students’ personal ambitions and goals of macro development in the offering of international education” (p. 228).

Taken together, this thesis takes the perspective on international scholarships that foster social change through individual scholarship recipients to articulate the role of scholarships beyond economic development or specific intentions of scholarship programs. However, this research does not elucidate what the desired social change would be because it depends upon individual scholarship recipients’ agency as well as their own society. The research focuses on what changes they experience, and if the changes are connected or at least perceived to be related to social level changes.

2.1.3. Issues and Challenges in International Scholarships

2.1.3.1. Brain drain and students’ choice of return

Baxter (2018) pointed out that one of the problems with international scholarships is brain drain. The increased international student mobility gave rise to brain drain concern among developing countries (Capuano & Marfouk, 2013; Dassin, 2009; Docquier, Lohest, & Marfouk, 2007; Odhiambo, 2013). Brain drain, generally defined as the proportion of the tertiary-educated population that has emigrated from a country in the economic literature, is

widely discussed as a direct loss of a country's human capital for national development in the context of developing countries as well as a loss of future tax revenues (Docquier, Lohest, & Marfouk, 2007).

However, Rizvi (2005) suggested to re-conceptualize the notion of brain drain. Students might gain a transnational identity through study abroad experience, and the notion of brain drain can change into brain circulation under the conditions of globalization and de-territorialization (Rizvi, 2005). The concept of brain circulation has appeared in a way where skilled migrants can contribute to their home societies as well as to host countries inside and outside of their home countries (Marsh & Oyelere, 2018). These diverse kinds of contribution can be addressed with the delayed return, transnational knowledge networks, joint ventures, and diaspora communities (Marsh & Oyelere, 2018). Baxter (2018) also revealed that scholarship alumni tended to return to their hometowns after graduation, but many of the students who remained were also contributing to their families or communities in the form of remittances.

Nonetheless, projecting the obligations or expectations for students to return to their home countries might be a dilemma for them, especially when their family encourage them to work abroad or when they are under the particular conditions and expectations of scholarship donors that are against what the students pursue (Baxter, 2018; Campbell, 2018).

Baxter (2014) concerned about migration dilemmas of international scholarship students who are studying in the United States, through an ethnographic study on students' experiences. While students who are sent to the United States by the Rwandan Presidential Scholarship Programme felt privileged as scholarship recipients, they were burdened with the expectations

of their families and their home country, which is referred as a burden of privilege (Baxter, 2014). Baxter (2014) found that there was a gap between high expectations of home communities and students' actual acquired skills from overseas education. Rwandan government scholarship recipients reported some frustration from the discrepancy, but they experienced growth in mind through these difficulties (Baxter, 2014).

Lehr (2008), doubting the continuity of an unequal global socio-economic system based primarily on a small minority of advantaged individuals, concerned about brain drain issues of the least developed countries with the question of whether international scholarships in higher education should be awarded for personal purposes or collective interests. Lehr (2008) adapted John Rawls's idea of justice and extended the concept into global justice that can enlarge the notion of society in terms of collective rights. Regarding the question of higher education for whether individual or collective purposes, Lehr (2008) argued that the interests of both individuals and communities are compatible, and the right to move to another country freely depends on the specific circumstances, values, principles, and most importantly, socio-economic conditions of the community to which the individual belongs (p. 436).

2.1.3.2. Difficulties in mobilizing overseas-acquired knowledge

The success of scholarship programs, specially designed for skills transfer, usually depend on the returning decision of students after graduation and whether the skills acquired abroad are relevant and able to apply or transfer in home contexts (Baxter, 2018, p. 117; Campbell, 2018). Returnees find it challenging to utilize their learnings due to different social and economic

backgrounds between the home country and host country as well as lack of options available for returnees due to limited networks that were already built while they were abroad (Baxter, 2018; Pham, 2019). This difficulty of skills transfer becomes more severe for students who studied in more technically focused areas due to less advanced infrastructure and resources of their home countries (Baxter, 2018). Baxter (2018) also suggested the problems of maintaining returnees' commitments and practices when they come back to their familiar routines in their home contexts.

In the context where the Western countries are students' most preferred study abroad destination, Pham (2019) argued that although returnees who studied abroad might take an advantageous position in the labor market, the ability to apply their overseas-acquired skills depend on "the country's history with the West in terms of education, economic, and political encounters" (p. 7). From the study on the outcomes of Australian education experiences of international students, Cuthbert, Smith, and Boey (2008) pointed out that it was difficult for returning students who received international scholarships in the form of foreign aid to mobilize the acquired skills and knowledge due to different situations of home countries from Australia. With this difficulty, positive social changes of the students' home countries were not followed. These returnees were becoming complex members of their societies by reconciling the experiences, values, and knowledge they earned through overseas education with the that of home countries (Cuthbert, Smith, & Boey, 2008).

2.1.4. International Scholarship Alumni Tracking Studies

This section will review some alumni tracking studies according to

funding bodies: private companies and national governments, where the focus of programs is to raise social change agent. There are more diverse actors, such as non-profit organizations, international organizations, and individual universities, but the section will focus on the above two bodies where there are many programs with active research. Also, it is essential to look through government-funded scholarship programs' tracking studies as the area is where the thesis aims to concentrate. Overall, it appeared that international scholarship programs that this section introduces were aimed at training individuals that can contribute to their home societies, and most programs supported graduate-level programs rather than undergraduate programs.

2.1.4.1. Private foundation funders

When looking at alumni follow-up studies of private foundations' scholarship programs, studies of International Fellowships Program by Ford Foundation (Martel & Bhandari, 2016; Murga & Martel, 2017; Kallick, Martel, & Bhandari, 2017) and the African Alumni Tracking Study by MasterCard Foundation (Marsh, Baxter, Di Genova, Jamison, & Madden, 2016) are standing out.

Ford Foundation's International Fellowship Program began in 2001 and ended in 2013, but tracking studies have been and will be conducted from 2013 until 2023. Based on the inclusive higher education model, this program aimed to improve access to international higher education for students from a marginalized environment and prioritized the leadership potential, social contribution, and academic potential of applicants in the selection process. The tracking studies are figuring out the impact of students' experiences on their institutions, communities, and societies as well as what kind of social

justice they contributed to. In other words, the studies were interested in the relationship between higher education and social justice that can be facilitated by scholarship program (Martel & Bhandari, 2016; Murga & Martel, 2017; Kallick, Martel, & Bhandari, 2017).

Among them, the second-round tracking study of Kallick, Martel, and Bhandari (2017) is qualitative research targeting alumni from the Asian region. To find out the result of the advanced educational experience, especially of alumni from India, Indonesia, and the Philippines, the researchers conducted interviews about how the changes in their society occurred through alumni as change agents. This study also used the Kirkpatrick evaluation model for data analysis. Many alumni have reported positive impacts on their lives and explained that they are working to make a meaningful social change at the institutional, community, national and even international levels. One Indian alumnus said,

Even while I have been working, I have been thinking, what is it that I am doing for my own community? I come from a farming community, so I had this niggling question all the time: ‘What am I doing for the community that I come from, the community that I left behind? (Kallick, Martel, and Bhandari, 2017, p. 23)

The Scholars Program of the MasterCard Foundation is also noteworthy. The program provided people from Africa with the opportunity to study in and out of the African continent to enhance access to quality secondary and higher education. The tracking study focused on alumni who have studied at American universities, particularly on what kind of job they have and what life trajectory they have been living in (Marsh, Baxter, Di Genova, Jamison,

& Madden, 2016). For this purpose, both survey and interview were used for data collection about how the alumni are reflecting their international higher education experiences, what career path they have pursued after graduation, and how these alumni contribute to the social transformation of the African continent. Found was that returned alumni contributed to a variety of fields; most of them valued their international education experience and the networks they created. It was also noted that career choice was more affected by childhood experiences than studying abroad. In addition, their willingness to apply acquired knowledge after returning, their ability to contribute to their home country, and their family's reasons also influenced their career choice. Interestingly, international students receiving scholarships tend to return to their home countries more than self-funded international students.

2.1.4.2. National government funders

When it comes to government-funded international scholarship programs, Enkhtur (2018) interviewed 20 Mongolian scholarship alumni who studied in Japan with three different Japanese government-funded scholarship programs. The study focused on the perspectives of the alumni towards their learning experiences in Japan, about how they make meanings of their experiences after graduation, within a conceptual framework of transformative learning (Enkhtur, 2018). Enkhtur (2018, p. 7) found that the alumni mostly were working in national research centers, government implementing agencies, ministries, or national universities both prior and after their study in Japan. There has been skills development and a positive impact on the alumni's families. The alumni also tended to observe how people lived and what they valued and compared the differences of what they have seen in Japan to their

works in Mongolia.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) (2014) also conducted a tracer study of Cambodian alumni who studied in Australian universities with the sponsorship of AusAID. The objectives of the scholarship program were to increase the participant's skills and capacity, to support Cambodian people to make a contribution to Cambodia's development, to build ongoing links between Cambodia and Australian people, organizations and institutions, and to foster recognition by the Cambodia Government and other development partners of Australia's active contribution to the development of Cambodia. Through surveys of 220 people and semi-structured interviews with selected alumni, the study found that the objectives were well achieved. When it comes to contribution to Cambodia's development, alumni reported that they had made significant contributions to their organization, community and towards national development, as they were mostly employed by the public sector and civil society/non-government organization. The alumni perceived that their experiences in Australian universities had a significant impact in terms of their career that can also be connected to national development.

2.2. Global Korea Scholarship

Korea's higher education development cooperation is the ninth-largest among the 28 OECD countries (OECD, n.d.). From 2006 to 2017, the entire education sector ODA disbursement was \$1,979.42 million, and the higher education disbursement was \$725.74 million including college/university education and technical and managerial training (KEXIM, n.d.). Among them, the GKS program took the largest portion among the grant-type program

(KEXIM, n.d.). It is also worth noting that Vietnam was the largest recipient country of the higher education ODA sector (KEXIM), n.d.). However, Korea's ODA scholarship programs, including the GKS, were perceived to have no specific features as international development programs, as the scholarship agenda has been expanded in the process of higher education internationalization policy (Ha, Lee, & Lim, 2011). In this situation, the selection body, management support, and education might be conflicting each other, and the operation of scholarship programs are compelled to depend upon the government's financial conditions (Ha, Lee, & Lim, 2011).

2.2.1. Policy Design and Intention

First, the GKS¹ program, launched in 1967, is one of the main strategies to achieve the Study Korea Project. The purpose of the Project is to provide international students with “opportunities to conduct advanced studies in undergraduates and graduate programs at higher education institutions in the Republic of Korea in order to promote international exchanges in education and mutual friendship between countries” (NIIED, 2019a). The Study Korea 2020 Project is also mentioning that through this program, they aim to raise students as pro-Korean leaders (Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, 2012).

The program encompasses eight specific scholarship programs including degree program, non-degree program for foreign exchange students, invitation program for students from partner countries, non-degree program

¹ The name of this scholarship used to be Korea Government Scholarship Program (KGSP), and it changed to GKS since 2010 as the government integrated various scholarship programs under the name of GKS (NIIED, 2019b).

for self-financed international students, ASEAN countries' science and engineering students, invitation program for undergraduates from Africa and Latin America, and invitation program for undergraduates from Central Asia (NIIED, 2019a). Of these eight GSK scholarships, degree programs are the main focus and at the same time make up the largest proportion. The graduate degree program was the main target of this scholarship program since 1967, and the undergraduate program began in 2006.

Both undergraduate and graduate degree programs have two tracks for application. One is Korean embassy track where students apply to each country's Korean embassy with the list of three desired universities, and an embassy is in charge of screening through qualified applicants and send the list to the NIIED; the other is the university track where applicants directly apply to the university where they want to study. As of 2019, the scholarship has invited 830 graduate students (both master's and doctoral program) from 146 countries and 132 undergraduate students from 67 countries (NIIED, 2019b; NIIED, 2019c).

The GKS program is also an international development cooperation scheme operated with the Korean government's ODA budget. In this respect, the main target of the program is students from developing countries. For example, the graduate course recruitment notice entitles students to apply for the program if they hold a teaching position in one of Korea's ODA recipient countries, regardless of their age, even though the program's age limit is 40-year-old. (NIIED, 2019b).

Another notable point is that the GKS scholarship students are required to complete a year of a Korean language course at a language institution designated by NIIED before the commencement of the degree course. During

that time, students must attain a certain level of Test of Proficiency in Korean (TOPIK), but students who already have 5 or 6 level of TOPIK are exempt from this duty. It is distinct from other government-funded international scholarship programs in Korea, such as Korea International Cooperation Agency Scholarship Program (KOICA SP) in which there is no Korean language requirement when they recruit master's students who are currently working as a government official at one of Korea's ODA recipient countries. Moreover, by law, when Korean universities recruit international students, they must require students to speak either Korean or English by law (MOE, 2019a). This policy aims to lower application barriers so that students can come to Korea without necessarily having a certain level of Korean language proficiency.

2.2.1.1. Press Releases

To better understand the intentions and implications of the scholarship program, press releases about the program published periodically by the MOE (n.d.) were analyzed. All posts were investigated that appeared from 2012 to 2019. The press releases were mainly divided into three themes: (1) the admission/orientation, (2) graduation, (3) alumni re-invitation, and (4) others.

In the press releases, overarching themes were related to the government's expectations on the GKS students and the characteristics that the Korean government wants to emphasize itself as a host country. The terms "global human resources," "pro-Korean talents," and "talents contributing to their home countries' development" were frequently used to present such expectations. It also appeared that the government considered what kinds of jobs and positions the scholarship alumni take in presenting "successful"

cases. The role of the recipients as bilateral bridges between Korea and their home countries were also emphasized.

In describing the characteristics of Korea as a host country, they paid attention to the influence of the Korean Wave and the rising value of Korean education brand as a study abroad destination. There was also an emphasis on the fact that Korea was transformed from an ODA recipient country to a donor country with a desire to transform the GKS into a scholarship program like Fulbright scholarship of the United States, one of the biggest government-funded scholarships in the world with a long history.

In presenting the cases of excellent applicants in (1) admission/orientation topic, the government highly appreciated the will of students who wished to learn Korea's specific aspects and apply it back to their home countries, who wanted to promote Korean culture and language to their home countries and the world, and who wanted to study in Korea despite their physical disabilities or economic obligations. It should be noted that all press releases were about graduate students' admission, excluding undergraduate students' cases.

The press releases related to (2) graduation included excellent examples of the scholarship alumni. Examples were about those who returned to home countries and worked in an area that is related to Korea or in some Korean companies and who are in international organizations such as Asian Development Bank, contributing to the international community. Outstanding academic achievements, such as publishing papers in international journals, were also mentioned as representative examples.

The posts about (3) alumni re-invitation showed more explicit intention of the GKS program. The alumni re-invitation training program is the event to invite the GKS alumni who are successfully working in various countries

around the world. This program has been operated every year since 2003 to encourage them to serve as acquaintances of Korea after returning to their own countries. The press releases about this topic revealed that cases of the GKS alumni who were working as professors, entrepreneurs, and public officials, acting as “influential leaders” in a variety of fields including politics, business, and academia.

As for the (4) others, it is worth noting that recently, under the influence of the New Southern Policy in Korea, an event was held for the GKS students as well as alumni from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The NIIED hosted the event in the name of ASEAN GKS Peace Road in November 2019. About 200 participants from the ASEAN region who were regarded as emerging partners for cooperation between the two countries attended the event. In particular, the event is expected to contribute to promoting ASEAN-Korea cooperation. The message of the Minister of Education expressed aspirations to build co-prosperity of both Korea and ASEAN countries and to share Korean educational experience that was believed to have enabled Korea’s national development.

2.2.2. Research on the Global Korea Scholarship

As evaluation research, Oh (2014) surveyed 826 students, 543 enrolled students and 283 graduates and analyzed their motivations, preparation, study life, and post-graduation status. Oh (2014) tried to examine whether the program achieved its goal to raise global leaders and strengthen Korean-friendly networks worldwide. According to the survey, most of the GKS students were utilizing the experiences that they had in Korea in their current lives and keeping a close relationship with Koreans after graduation. About

57% of the graduates returned to their home countries, and 27% of them appeared to be employed in Korea. In a survey of graduates' current occupations, 58% of them were working in the field that is not related to Korea. 28% of graduates said that the reason why they returned to their home countries was to get a better job at home, followed by 14.3% who said it is because it was hard to find a job in Korea when they tried.

Kim and Moon (2014), Park, Baek, and Jung (2019), and Han, Bae, and Jeon (2011) researched on GKS students' adaptation issues in Korea. Kim and Moon (2014) conducted a survey and analyzed the relationship between cultural adaptation stress and demographic variables, including Korean language ability. Park, Baek, and Jung (2019) provided 30 GKS students with Korean cultural experience programs and found the positive effects of such program through a survey as well as focus group interviews with seven Korean students who helped to operate the program. Han, Bae, and Jeon (2011) also surveyed 300 GKS graduate students in Korea to analyze how the personal characteristics of students influence on Korean cultural adaptation. The results showed that the older they were and the less they were introspective, the better they adapted.

Huryk (2017) conducted a case study of GKS students to find out the relationship between education and development. Huryk (2017) suggested that studying abroad could lead to the development of individuals' intercultural competence, disciplinary knowledge, social/personal growth, especially human development, and, these individuals can be regarded as social capital formation. The study found a meaningful result that students tended to gain such developmental outcomes over the experiences in Korea.

There are also studies based on specific backgrounds of GKS students

(Masimli & Jeong, 2017; Lee, 2014). Masimli and Jeong (2017) analyzed the academic experiences of five Azerbaijan GKS scholars through a semi-structured interview. The questions consisted of academic performance experiences and relationships with colleagues and professors. Difficulties in academic Korean language learning and alienation in interpersonal relationships were identified as problems. In the study of Lee (2014), the researcher analyzed the factors that influenced the satisfaction of the students on the GKS programs through a survey of 48 GKS students from Tanzania. As a result, the most significant factors influencing students' satisfaction were the application of professional skills acquired in Korea, understanding of Korean university education, difficulty in the Korean language, and understanding of modern Korean economy (Lee, 2014, p. 125).

Lastly, although it is not about the GKS, the study of Jon (2019), which explored the experiences of KOICA SP participants who are government officials from developing countries, is also important as another ODA scholarship program. Jon (2019) conducted in-depth interviews and participatory observation with 17 KOICA SP students for one year and four months. The interviews were divided into motivations for studying abroad, experiences during studying abroad, and plans after graduation. Due to the nature of research participants as public officials, their study experiences were characterized by the coexistence of the subjectivity with the public domain (mission as public officials) and the private sector (the discrimination they experience as international students as well as their aspirations for personal careers). This study also clarified the significance of such scholarship programs to support an overseas study that can benefit people from developing countries and lead to the development of their home countries.

2.3. Vietnamese Society and Higher Education

It is imperative to provide the background of Vietnam as the research participants' country of origin. This enables a deeper understanding of the impacts of international education in a specific situation of returnees' home countries. Pham (2019), in the research on Vietnamese international graduates returning to Vietnam, also asserted that it is important to “provide contexts for understanding the returnees' motivations and expectations of their acquired international education” as well as “analysis of how their motivations are shaped by traditional Vietnamese values or overseas-acquired beliefs and attitudes, or both” (p. 54).

Vietnam is bordered by China, Laos, and Cambodia, with China being the most prominent influence. Vietnam was a tributary of China for about a thousand years. During this period, Vietnam embraced the new educational system, Chinese characters, and the administrative system of China; Buddhism and Confucianism were also introduced to Vietnam (Yu, 1996). Invasion of France in 1858 changed the enemy from the neighboring Asian countries to the West, which had a profound effect on the modern and contemporary history of Vietnam (Song, 2016). Until independence in 1954, vigorous resistance movement, led by Ho Chi Minh, continued. Vietnam is divided into North and South when the French troops withdraw, but the war went on with the United States. Later in 1976, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam was officially launched. Since reunification, Vietnam has been establishing peaceful relations with all nations, including the United States.

In 1986, Vietnam adopted *Đổi Mới*, the Policy of Renovation, and pushed ahead with the reform and opening of the politics and economy (Lee, 2016).

The Policy enabled foreign investment in Vietnam as well as the establishment of private corporations. Since Đổi Mới has established, there has been a rapid economic growth in Vietnam. The results of Đổi Mới is a transformation of the economic system into a market-based economy within the framework of a socialist government (Jeong & Bae, 2012). According to Pham (2019), Vietnamese people, as economic actors, operate on “a historical trajectory of Confucian culture, colonialist history, fight for independence, Communist One-Party rule and free-market economics of international integration,” and this refers to “economic pragmatism” embedded in Vietnamese people who are always seeking “outside for economic opportunities but inside for identification” (p. 91).

In the meantime, personal relations in Vietnam act as the moral foundation of the Vietnamese people (Pham, 2019). Some differences between the Northern part of Vietnam and the South regarding personal relations reside in Vietnam. According to Pham (2019), in the North, there is competitive nature to preserve unequal social positions based on wealth among the prestige families, and in the South, people are more open to the egalitarianism among families.

It is also meaningful to note that Vietnam’s Human Development Index (HDI) ranked 48 out of 157 countries which is the highest among middle-income countries (World Bank, 2019). However, there are still some disparities within the country, especially between rural and urban areas. In addition, even the Communist Party of Vietnam describes Vietnam as a democratic country; there is a lack of the procedural aspects of democracy in society (Pham, 2019).

A prominent feature of Vietnam’s education system can be explained with

international influences in the historical background. As Vietnam was largely influenced by China, the role of education was stressed from the earlier period by introducing the public examination system. The modern Western education system appeared in Vietnam after the French colonial rule. The influence of the United States is also outstanding, which ties education to “human capital and personal wealth making in South Vietnam that continues its prevalence in modern Vietnam” (Pham, 2019, p 101). In this respect, the values of education in Vietnam became economical that people pursue (international) higher education for the realization of personal economic benefits (Pham, 2019).

After Đổi Mới policy, the market economy and the demand for the high-quality workforce have appeared, giving rise to the increased number of universities and students (Jeong & Bae, 2012). In accordance with Đổi Mới reforms, the Vietnamese government tried to integrate with the world through joining the World Trade Organization as well as receiving funds from the World Bank and Asian Development Bank to improve Vietnamese universities in quality (Pham, 2019). In 1993, the Private University Regulation (số 240-TTg) was promulgated, and private universities began to be established (Jeong & Bae, 2012). It is noticeable that faculty’s salaries, as well as the tuition fee of private universities, are more than three times that of national universities (Pham, 2019).

In 2005, as Vietnam’s Higher Education Reform Agenda (HERA) was announced, a strategy to revitalize the higher education system by 2020 launched (Harman, Hayden & Nghi, 2010). HERA aims to achieve fundamental reforms in higher education by increasing the quantity, quality, and efficiency to meet the demands of global economic integration and the

learning opportunities of society (Nghì & London, 2010). The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) also encouraged higher education institutions to create stronger links to business and industry (Harman, Hayden & Nghì, 2010). In pursuit of university development to an international level, the universities imported the curriculum of American universities and various technical training for the human capital formation (Nghì & London, 2010).

However, due to the influence of Confucianism and socialism, the governance of the MOET is still a centralized and top-down structure. In this circumstance, the reform of university institutions and pedagogy was hardly made, which is inconsistent with HERA's emphasis on educational autonomy and decentralization (Nghì & London, 2010; Tran, 2014).

In 2012, Vietnam's first University Education Act was passed by the National Assembly when the law of higher education was still included within the Education Act. However, the lack of finance in the higher education sector is now deemed to be a factor that undermines the quality of university education. In addition, teaching and learning methods, university autonomy, and accessibility to university education remain challenges (Harman, Hayden & Nghì, 2010).

International outbound mobility of Vietnamese students appeared to be diverse. Based on the year of 2017, the majority of students were heading to Japan (26,768) and the United States (23,204), followed by Australia (15,298), Korea (4,656), and France (4,587) (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, n.d.). It should be noted that the number of Vietnamese students in Korea has been rapidly increasing, and it appeared that there were 13,832 Vietnamese students in Korea even excluding the number of language students (23,594) who tended to transfer to universities (NIIED, 2019d). Tran and Marginson

(2018) also suggested that the flow of student outbound mobility has been changing as students are heading to the newly industrialized economies in Asia, such as Taiwan, Korea, Singapore, and China.

As mentioned above, education is deemed to be a means to achieve a better income in Vietnamese society, and international education experience is even greater qualification (Pham, 2019). Such embedded economic values of international education appeared to be a push and pull factor for studying abroad (Tran & Marginson, 2018). The Vietnamese government also positions outbound student mobility as a vehicle for nurturing human resources and boosting the national economy (Tran & Marginson, 2018). However, there was a perceived belief of the international graduates who returned to Vietnam to improve professional standards and practices in their own fields, not only focusing on their personal or family's economic benefits (Pham, 2019).

CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

To gain a deep understanding of the experiences of the scholarship recipients, qualitative research method was employed. Qualitative research provides “an in-depth description and understanding of the human experience” (Litchman, 2013, p. 17). In qualitative research, researchers do not hypothesize what participants may say since it is important to observe and grasp the experiences of participants from their own perspectives (Merriam, 1998). Bogdan and Biklen (2007, p. 6) also said that the goal of qualitative inquiry is to “get to know the *process* [emphasis added] of people’s way of constructing their experiences, meanings, and perceptions which is characterized with its subjectivity.”

A number of studies on international scholarships have been focusing on quantifiable outcomes of scholarship programs such as rates of completion, return, and employment (Baxter, 2018). However, as Baxter (2018) argued, we need more qualitative studies on the issue to understand better how students derive meanings of their study abroad experiences. It is also important to note that studies on the GKS are also mostly adapting quantitative methods without much focus on a certain regional context of GKS recipients. So, this qualitative study will add to the pool of studies on international scholarships, especially of Korean government-funded scholarship recipients from Vietnam, to reveal the real-life voices delivering people’s actual experiences.

3.1. Participants

3.1.1. Sampling and Recruitment

Interview participants of this study are Vietnamese GKS alumni who returned to Vietnam. Among them, potential participants were identified by purposeful sampling approach that is widely used in qualitative research (Patton, 2002). The followings are the selection criteria.

(1) By current profession: those who were working in the Vietnamese universities as a lecturer or professor. The detailed consideration of this criterion will be explained in the next section.

(2) By entrance year: those who received the GKS after 1986 when Đổi Mới was established. It is because the policy aimed to place Vietnam in the context of global competitiveness and foster international mobility.

(3) By academic major²: those who studied in either Social Sciences and Humanities or Science and Engineering. Music, Art, and Sports fields were excluded in this research as there is a limited number in that area (NIIED, 2019d).

(4) By language ability: those who can express their experiences in either English or Korean. It was reasonable to set this language criterion as English or Korean language proficiency was required when applying for GKS program.

There was no specific criterion on the location of universities they went in Korea.

According to the above criteria, participants were recruited through the recruitment document, which briefly outlined the purpose of the study and the

² There was no official statistic on the specific study area of the Vietnamese GKS students, so the research referred to the statistical information of majors of all GKS students.

process to participate in the interview. The documents both in Korean and English were shared to the GKS alumni group. Participant recruitment involved direct requests for participation by the manager of the alumni group as well as some of the interview participants.

Judging that the data is sufficient is an “interactive reflection of every step of the interview process and different from each study and each researcher” (Seidman, 2006, p. 55). In this respect, the recruitment completed when the researcher reckoned that it is enough and saturated to reflect the experiences and perspectives of the variety of participants with diverse fields of the study area and work period.

3.1.1.1. Academics as targeted participants

The research is focusing on university lecturers among all Vietnamese GKS alumni. It is primarily because the main perspective of the thesis is on the scholarship alumni’s contribution to positive social change in their home communities. In the study on the Vietnamese overseas-educated returnees, there was a shared perception among them that there is a lack of quality higher education system in Vietnam, and this was connected to their motivations and expectations to study abroad (Pham, 2019). Pham (2019) found a high possibility of Vietnamese academics’ contribution to positive changes, especially regarding university systems in Vietnam that can be connected to the development of Vietnam.

When Pham (2019) conducted surveys for 280 people and interviews with 21 people, 31% of survey respondents and 48% of interview participants belonged to the education and training field, mostly as academics. In a survey result about their contribution to Vietnam’s developmental needs, a

considerable number of respondents reported that they were “raising educational levels” in Vietnam (Pham, 2019, p. 220). This result pointed out that there is a perceived need for the development of education in Vietnam and a certain role of academics. When looking more closely to the experiences of returnees in the Vietnamese higher education sector, Pham (2019) found that the returned academics looked at themselves as potential education reformers for the higher education sector to be more independent in the context of Vietnam’s centralized structure.

It should be noted that when setting university lecturers as the main participants, the research is unavoidably inclined to focus only on successful cases that provide a rather positive nuance. This setting functions as both the limitation and the strength of the research. Although the research limitedly shows successful samples who occupy a high position as a university lecturer in Vietnamese society, the research contributes to a focused and highlighted understanding on the role of international scholarships and the returnees’ participation in social change through their academic commitments.

3.1.2. Participants Characteristics

This section succinctly describes the characteristics of each participant, including motivations to study in Korea with the GKS, academic backgrounds, and current situation, at the time when the interviews were conducted. The following table provides a summary of the participants’ information.

| Participant | Gender | Work Period ^a | Major ^b | Degree |
|-------------|--------|--------------------------|--------------------|--------|
| A | Female | 5 years | Anthropology | MA |

| | | | | |
|---|--------|----------|--------------------------------|-----|
| B | Male | 10 years | Management Information Systems | PhD |
| C | Female | 18 years | Korean Language Education | PhD |
| D | Male | 13 years | Earth System Sciences | PhD |
| E | Male | 25 years | Food Science and Biotechnology | PhD |
| F | Female | 25 years | Public Relations | PhD |
| G | Female | 23 years | Business and Administration | PhD |
| H | Male | 18 years | Computer Engineering | PhD |
| I | Female | 3 years | Environmental Engineering | PhD |
| J | Female | 13 years | Korean Language Education | MA |

[Table 1] List of Interview Participants

^aWork period was counted from the time when the participants started their career as a lecturer. Most of the participants were already working at a university before they studied in Korea and came back to their position right after they returned to Vietnam.

^bMajor that the participants studied in their final educational attainment

Participant A was a lecturer in a public university. She received her bachelor's degree in Korean language and went to Korea for her master's right after graduation. Before she decided to study in Korea, she already had some experiences to visit Korea as a winner of the Korean language speaking contest. During her short visits, she visited some Korean universities, which made her want to study in Korea. At first, her motivation to apply for the GKS program was to get a fine job with a high salary with a degree in Korea and Korean language skill. However, after she found the joy of research with the influence of her advisor, she decided to become a lecturer.

Participant B was a professor and a vice-dean of his faculty in a public university. He was already a lecturer at the university he was working at the time of interview before he went to Korea to get a PhD degree. He did his

bachelor's and master's in Vietnam, and noticeably, he had two master's degrees in related fields. He also had long work experience in international companies before he became a lecturer. While working for some companies, he found that he wanted to do something that can contribute to more people in Vietnam and decided to teach at university. He also had visited Korea as a research intern after his undergraduate education and earned a positive impression of Korea's development and advanced technology. Since then, he decided to study in Korea when he would get a chance and realized it.

Participant C was a professor and a dean of her faculty in a public university. She received her bachelor's in the Korean language in Vietnam and master's degree in Korean studies in Korea, at the same university where she did her PhD, but at that time, she was self-funded for her master's degree. She started working as a lecturer right after finishing the undergraduate course and decided to study in Korea to improve her knowledge to teach at university. She also visited Korea before she did her master's as a language exchange student, sponsored by the Korean government.

Participant D was a professor and the head of his department in a public university. He did his bachelor's and master's in Vietnam and became an assistant lecturer during his master's course. He met a visiting researcher from Korea when he was working as a lecturer and found Korea's advanced science and technology. He did not have a strong motivation to study in Korea, but when he found a scholarship opportunity, he applied with the idea that he can learn Korea's technology where there is a similar culture to Vietnam.

Participant E was a professor and a dean of his faculty in a semipublic university. He was the first generation to study abroad in a country other than the Soviet Union at that time. He did his bachelor's and master's in a country

of central Europe, in the same major area. In the early 1990s, not long after Đổi Mới, few international scholarships were available for Vietnamese people to study abroad, and the Vietnamese government directly selected scholarship recipients. When participant E was working in a research institute in Vietnam, he was designated by the government to study in Korea with the Korean government scholarship, which was the only choice at that time. He received the offer because he wanted to continue his study.

Participant F was a professor and a dean in a faculty in a public university. She was one of the pioneers in her academic field in Vietnam. Before she went to Korea for her PhD study, she was already a lecturer since she got her bachelor's degree in Vietnam. After she finished her master's in Vietnam, she planned to study abroad to advance her expertise in her field of study and establish a department of the field as there was no such major in Vietnam at that time. She needed to get a scholarship to study abroad and decided to apply for the Korean government scholarship to stay with her husband, who got a scholarship from a Korean university.

Participant G was a professor and a dean of her faculty in a public university. She started working as a lecturer after getting three bachelor's degree. She studied her master's degree in a northern European country with a government scholarship. She wanted to continue her study as a lecturer and get a PhD degree abroad. She applied for several international scholarships among limited choices, but the Korean government scholarship was the best option for her at that time, and she chose it. One of the reasons why she decided to go to Korea was to learn about Korean people and language that she felt beautiful from a Korean film.

Participant H was a professor and the head of his department in a public

university. He studied in Korea for both his master's with a professor's scholarship, and doctorate with the GKS but in a different university. He started his career as an assistant lecturer from when he got his bachelor's degree. He had wanted to work in the academic area, as professors in Vietnam are respected and can contribute more to the country. To further his research, he chose to study his master's degree in Korea, because the selection process of Korea was the fastest compared to other country's scholarships that he also applied. He decided to continue his PhD in Korea, as he knew the Korean language and liked the way he lived in Korea. He also wanted to study in the United States, but he thought that it did not matter which country he studies as long as he produces good results.

Participant I was a lecturer in a public university. She used to work as an assistant at a laboratory after she finished her master's degree. She decided to get a PhD to advance her academic career. She applied for a few scholarship programs, including some European countries', Korean and Japanese government scholarship and chose to study in Korea as the application result came out first. After she finished her PhD in Korea, she decided to work as a lecturer as she wanted to become like her professor in Korea.

Participant J was a lecturer in a semipublic university. She studied Korean in her undergraduate program and started her career as a lecturer right after graduation, which was offered by her professor. She had wanted to work at university as it is a stable and respected position in Vietnam. She decided to study in Korea to improve her understandings in Korean culture and language. She wanted to work for a short time in Korea after she got a master's degree, but she had to come back to her university due to her university policy.

3.2. Data Collection

3.2.1. Interview

According to Yin (2009), there are six possible sources of data in qualitative research: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observation, and physical artifacts. The interview, as one source, has its strength to generate insightful data that enables researchers to gain a better understanding of subjects' perceptions and attitudes (Yin, 2009). As the main strategies for qualitative research (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001), interviewing also has a certain primacy among other methods to know how an individual experience some phenomenon (Brinkmann, 2013, p. 47). The interview is also a process of "selecting constitutive details of experience, reflecting on them, giving them order, and thereby making sense of them that makes telling stories a meaning-making experience" (Seidman, 2006, p. 7). In this regard, researchers who are doing interviewing research should have an interest in various stories of individuals acknowledging that the stories are of worth and important (Seidman, 2006).

There are broadly three interview methods in qualitative research: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). In this research, semi-structured interviews were conducted to answer the research questions from their own interpretations. Semi-structured interviewing, as a part of formal interviews, is best used when an interviewer has a list of questions or series of topics, an interview guide, but there is "flexibility in how and when the questions are put and how the interviewee can respond" (Edwards & Holland, 2013, p. 29). This type of interview provides some structure for comparison across interviewees under

the same topics (Edwards & Holland, 2013). Another advantage of semi-structured interviews is that it enables researchers to reflect a broader perspective and more in-depth understandings of participants, compared to structured interviews (Fontana & Frey, 1994), while structured interviews might hinder discovery as it limits the amount as well as the type of data (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 205).

3.2.2. Procedure

Before embarking on the interview, the research passed the deliberation of the SNU Institutional Review Board (IRB) (IRB No. 2002/002-012). The interviews were conducted with ten participants through both face-to-face and online³. Face-to-face interviews were made in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, with four people. Most of the times, the face-to-face interviews took place in a coffee shop, and some participants invited the researcher to his or her laboratory.

Online video interviews were conducted with six people via Skype, one of the frequently used services for online interviews (Fielding, Lee, & Blank, 2008; King & Horrocks, 2018) and Zoom. Online interviews proceeded with great concerns on ethical issues and possible challenges. Online interviewing is increasingly valued as a legitimate research method. Although some challenges such as building rapport and limited interactions still remains, it has benefits of flexibility in terms of recruitment, time effectiveness, and a

³ All interviews were planned to take place in person both in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher could not continue the planned research in Vietnam and had to come back to Korea. The situation presents a certain limitation of this qualitative research where the researcher could not build a deep rapport with the participants.

larger possibility for participants to withdraw with just a clicking a button in terms of research ethics (Fielding, Lee, & Blank, 2008). During the online interviews, the researcher tried to make it as alive as possible, as if the interview is happening in person. As a result, it was observed that the participants were being honest and feeling comfortable and confident to share their stories.

The interviews were conducted one or two times with each participant, and three times when it was necessary. Each time, interviews lasted from one hour to three hours and a half, depending on the number of times of the interview. Prior to the interviews, the informed consent form was shared with each participant, and all interviews were recorded based on agreement. The informed consent form, delivered either in English or Korean based on participant's preferred language for the interview, contained information about the details of the research, interview procedures, benefits and risks of participating, voluntary participation, agreement on the recording, and contact information of the researcher and the IRB. The consent forms were signed voluntarily by each participant and the researcher before the interviews. When it comes to online interviews, the forms were shared via email in advance with a signature of the researcher first and received with a countersign of each participant. A copy of the consent form was kept by both the participants and the researcher. The following table shows the interview procedure of each participant.

| Participant | Times | Duration (Each time) | Meeting Place |
|-------------|-------|----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| A | 2 | 1hr30min | Ho Chi Minh City |
| B | 3 | 1hr | Ho Chi Minh City / Skype (online) |

| | | | |
|---|---|----------|------------------|
| C | 2 | 1hr30min | Ho Chi Minh City |
| D | 1 | 2hr30min | Ho Chi Minh City |
| E | 1 | 3hr | Skype (online) |
| F | 1 | 3hr | Skype (online) |
| G | 2 | 1hr30min | Zoom (online) |
| H | 1 | 3hr30min | Zoom (online) |
| I | 1 | 3hr | Zoom (online) |
| J | 1 | 2hr30min | Zoom (online) |

[Table 2] Interview Procedure

A guideline of the semi-structured interview included three main phases according to the time sequence of participants' experiences, prior to, during, and after studying in Korea. The interview guideline referred to some existing research related to the topic of this thesis (Baxter, 2014; Marsh et al., 2016; Jon, 2019) and the three-interview series of Seidman (2006, pp. 17-18), (1) focused life history, (2) the details of experience, and (3) reflection on the meaning. Even though the interviews of this research were conducted less than three times, unlike the suggestion of Seidman (2006), the researcher still considered the flow of such interview sequence. The interview questions were about their overall experiences in Korea and Korean universities, their changed attitudes or ideas, any application of learnings from Korea in Vietnam, and the perceived meanings of such experiences as well as the GKS program to them. Any part that is deemed insufficient in the field interview upon returning to Korea as well as in online interviews was supplemented through further online communications. Sample interview questions are listed in Table 3.

| Prior to studying in Korea... |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What did you do before you came to Korea to study? ▪ Please explain the scholarship you received (GKS). How did you hear about the GKS and what made you decide to apply for it? |
| As you arrived and started to study in Korea... |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How was your one-year Korean language course that you took before you start your degree course? ▪ What would you say have been the most significant or meaningful aspects of your education experience in Korean university? Please share some of your academic experiences |
| After graduation and returning to Vietnam... |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How do you think your experience in Korea has influenced your current career (choice) as a professor/lecturer? ▪ Does the fact that you were a GKS recipient have any special meaning in your current personal/professional life? |

[Table 3] Sample Interview Questions

3.2.3. Modification of Interview Transcript

The transcribed interview data collected have been examined and inspected. Any parts deemed to be clarified were checked and reviewed by the interview participants. Note that some quotes have been modified for clarity for readers, in keeping with the research ethics. This modification includes the correction of grammatical errors and the addition of a word. Square brackets were placed around the change, especially when a word was added. However, such modification was made as little as possible unless the quotes deliver the intentions of participants. Examples are as follow:

[Original quote]

“You know. When you go to markets,... they can learn Korean better than they put in the school.”

[Modified quote]

“You know. When you go to markets,... they can learn Korean better than

[when] they [are] put in the school.”

[Original quote]

“It mean that I contribute my country.”

[Modified quote]

“It means that I contribute [to] my country.”

3.3. Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis is the process of organizing collected data, dividing them into separate units that can be interpreted, and finding patterns in the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Also, data analysis in qualitative research depends on the objectives of the research as well as the nature of the data collected (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2011). According to Matthews and Ross (2010), thematic analysis and grounded theory are presented as possible analytic approaches when addressing qualitative interview data. King and Horrocks (2018) also suggest thematic analysis as the frequently used analysis method that focuses on the experiences of participants. Thematic analysis is a method to identify, organize, and offer insight into patterns of meanings across a data set and allows researchers to see shared meanings and experiences to answer a particular research question (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 57). In this regard, the research adopted a thematic analysis to find common themes in interview data that can address the research topic.

There are two approaches in thematic analysis, inductive and deductive. This research focused on the inductive approach to be driven by “what is *in* [emphasis added] the data” so that codes and themes are made from the

content of the data themselves (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 58). Seidman (2006) also suggests that inductively reducing the interview data is important because researchers cannot address them with a hypothesis or a theory that was developed in another context. However, analysis cannot only take one approach but necessarily combine both inductive and deductive approach (Braun & Clarke, 2012). It is important for researchers to identify his or her interest and examine it to clarify that the interest is not instilled with bias (Seidman, 2006). What is essential to thematic analysis is to clearly understand where the researcher stands and have a rationale for making the choices (Braun & Clarke, 2012). So, the researcher analyzed the interview data inductively in a way that can answer to the research questions and reflect the interest of the researcher.

Thematic analysis has a six-phase approach that is: (1) familiarizing with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing potential themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This research also followed the phases. Voice or video recorded interview data were transcribed shortly after the interview. The data were analyzed simultaneously, but an in-depth analysis of the data was completed after all interviews (Seidman, 2006). The transcription was done as precise as possible to contain what the participants said exactly. When any of the voice recordings were unclear, the researcher referred to the notes taken during the interview or asked the participants to confirm it. The researcher read the transcribed files repeatedly and added notes to get to notice things that might be relevant to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

For systematic analysis of the interview data through coding, both

descriptive and interpretative codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006) were given to the transcribed texts in the process of creating initial codes. In Vivo Coding method was also used in the naming of codes to refer to participants' actual language (Strauss, 1987). Code definitions also "reflect the specific language of the interview guide" (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2011, p. 56), so, during coding, some words or phrases were used from the interview questions. After generating initial codes, some re-coding and new coding were done to make sure there are enough codes to capture both the diversity and the patterns within and across the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 62).

While continuously reviewing the coded data, the researcher started to organize the codes into themes. A theme "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of *patterned* [emphasis added] response or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). A theme is also "an *outcome* [emphasis added] of coding, categorization, and analytic reflection" and "a *phrase* [emphasis added] or *sentence* [emphasis added] that identifies what a unit of data is *about* [emphasis added] and/or what it *means* [emphasis added]" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 139). Each theme was examined to gain an understanding of participants' experiences and perceptions in relation to the research topic. In addition to identifying and discovering them, the relationship between themes was explored, considering how they work together to represent the overall story about the interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). For coding and producing themes, the software program EXCEL was utilized to review the relationship between codes and themes systematically.

CHAPTER IV. FINDINGS

The chapter describes the findings from the data collection through interviews. The findings are outlined in a manner to answer key research questions and generate the research purpose by organizing the codes and themes presented as a result of thematic analysis. The chapter is divided into two sections according to the roles of international scholarships to better articulate the experiences of the Vietnamese GKS alumni in the context of the existing literature. The first section is presenting the findings regarding the role of international scholarships that give an opportunity for overseas education. This section more focuses on the time when the research participants studied in Korea, including the interpreted meanings of the GKS as a facilitator of studying in Korea. The second section is about the role of international scholarships that promote positive social change. This deals with their post-graduation experiences and changes in terms of the personal, institutional, and social level as well as their perceived responsibility.

4.1. The Role of International Scholarships that Give Opportunity for Overseas Education

4.1.1. Gaining Access to Education in Korea and Being a GKS student

4.1.1.1. Getting the Scholarship: “I deserve it.”

As most of the interview participants were working at university, they received the information on the GKS program from school offices among the package of information about various scholarship programs provided every

year. In the past, government officials, including public university lecturers, or students in the field of Korean studies and language were the main target of the Korean government scholarship program. Even some participants, like Participant E, G, and H, were directly designated by the Vietnamese government to apply for the Korean government scholarship as they were working at university or research institute.

However, Participant B pointed out that there was an information gap between northern and southern Vietnam. He said that information tended to arrive late in the South after many students were selected mainly from the Hanoi area. Even though he was already familiar with Korea and was determined to study in Korea, he did not know about the GKS program and was about to go to Korea with the Vietnamese government scholarship before he finally became aware of the GKS.

Participant I found the scholarship information from the internet. She explained that there was a website with information on various government scholarships, among which the government scholarships of Singapore, Korea, and Japan were the most popular scholarship programs.

When the interviewed GKS alumni were asked the reason why they thought they were selected by the Korean government, they said they made a lot of efforts and had a strong motivation. Participant F, for example, even visited Korea to have meetings and receive letters of recommendation from some professors after she failed once. Participant B only wanted to study in Korea, not any other countries, and learn Korea's technology and development experience. He explained that his clear motivation to study in Korea might be the reason why he was selected. Participant C and I said they had reasonable study plan that might attract professors. With a desire to get

the scholarship, some participants mentioned that they applied for seemingly less competitive universities. Especially, Participant G asserted that the Korean government might want to see the potential of applicants to be an elite of Vietnamese society. “The government provides money with the expectation to produce someone to take high status or position,” she said.

The participants also explained that they were qualified enough to win the scholarship. Participant G stressed the fact that she was selected from other governmental scholarships at the same time. The participants also shared their past experiences and performances that helped them become the scholarship awardees, such as their career in the related industry, research outcomes in their current university, and a good GPA. Some talked about their experiences in Korea and the understandings of Korea as their qualification. English or Korean language proficiency was also regarded as important for the participants as a differentiated feature from other Vietnamese candidates.

As some of the participants applied for a PhD course, they said that their position as university lecturers was an advantage for them. Participant H explained that the Vietnamese government might want university lecturers to apply for the scholarship because they might be the ones who could lead and contribute to the development of Vietnam. He had a “contract” with the Vietnamese government to study in Korea because at that time, there was a quota for the Vietnamese government to select a certain number of people, and he was one of them who was recommended and selected by the Vietnamese government. “Usually, [the] Vietnamese government chooses lecturers because they try to improve our country. A person who can teach and train,” he explained. Besides, the reputation of their universities was another factor that the participants thought to be beneficial for them to be

selected.

4.1.1.2. Support of the NIIED and a sense of belonging: Financial aid and language and cultural programs

The most significant meaning of the GKS for the participants was, especially during their stay in Korea, financial support that had made them possible to study in Korea when they were not able to afford to study abroad, they said. They expressed their gratitude to the Korean government for allowing them to study in Korea without concerns on financial issues. To speak in greater depth, the GKS helped them achieve their personal and professional goals. Participant H, as he wanted to contribute to the development of Vietnam, said,

“Because I could go to Korea and spend all the times for work ... I could get knowledge and skills, and I can teach my students. It means that I contribute to my country. Without your support, how? How can I do that without this position?” [Participant H]

Regarding the amount of the scholarship, most alumni said it was enough because they could “live simply.” They stressed that even though the scholarship was not abundant enough to travel around Korea or socialize with friends, they could live with it. Meanwhile, Participant H shared his feeling that Korean universities should support more for Korean students, saying, “The main thing in here is [a] very high tuition fee.... But how can a student, from an underdevelopment country, can get the position, right?”

In addition, the alumni felt that they were supported and managed by the

NIIED. One of the vital features of the GKS is one-year Korean language course. The Korean language course, as a mandated program for the GKS students, helped them get ready to start their degree course by equipping them with basic conversation skills and understandings of Korean culture. While some participants already were able to speak Korean, some were beginners. These participants had difficulties due to the different alphabet system.

Nonetheless, the participants felt that teachers were friendly and made them practice Korean every time, and Participant H was still in contact with them. For Participant E, learning Korean was especially crucial because few Korean people could speak English at that time, in the 1990s, when he studied in Korea. Participant F also said,

“I must say that [the] Korean language course to me ... is [a] very important step for me to prepare to be only with Korean students. So, I have one kind of preparation, not only the language but also my psychology, before I enter the real world of Korean university.” [Participant F]

As international students in Korean universities, it was sometimes not easy to fully adapt to the atmosphere. However, thanks to activities and networks organized by the NIIED, they could feel a sense of belonging as well as learn about Korea more deeply. The participants said things were well prepared and arranged. Participant I explained that she could go through some administrative affairs more quickly compared to other international students as she belonged to the NIIED.

Various cultural activities were one of the strengths of the GKS program, the participants said. Participant G also shared her memory about the experience to travel around Korea and make some traditional props.

Participant C especially liked this as she could not experience it when she did her master's with a self-funded plan.

“석사 때 자비로 가서 그런지, 공동으로 할 수 있는 활동이 없었거든요. 그런데 박사로 오니까 모이고, 어디 같이 가고, 글도 쓰고, 소감문? 그런 거 써서 상도 주고. 저희 집에도 아직 있는데요. 하여튼 그런 게 있어서 좋았어요.” [It was because I studied at my own expense in my master's course, and there was no activity that I could do jointly. But when I come with a doctoral course, we gather, go somewhere, and write something like review paper with awards. It is still in my house. So, it was good to have something like that.] [Participant C]

These cultural programs and the Korean language course let the alumni have a broader network with other GKS students from all around the world, which helped them feel belonged to a community. They said they not only learned about Korea but also got to understand more about the diverse cultures. Participant J shared her memory that she got along with international friends from various countries but wished to meet more Korean friends at the same time.

Through such activities, the participants said that they were also able to understand what the government intended them to see about Korea.

“I can observe how Korea as a country builds its own reputation through foreign students ...Whenever I attend an event, ... I just look a little bit far to see how they make, what they speak in their speech, what games they make for us, and what is the destination of the field trip. And, I realize that it is not just random.” [Participant F]

She also mentioned that she “could have a chance to see Korean education from the inside” from the perspectives of Korean government officials and learn how the government built and managed the alumni network. Similarly, Participant H tried to see which strategies the Korean government had in order to promote Korea and keep the relationship with the world.

4.1.2. Encountering and Experiencing Korean Universities

4.1.2.1. Academic experiences: The joy of learning, pains, and achievement

With the given opportunity to study in Korea as a scholarship recipient, they experienced and learned in Korean universities in various ways. As most of the participants were lecturers or researchers before applying for the scholarship, their goals and expectations to study in Korea were to accumulate knowledge and improve research skills. These expectations made them put effort into every step of their studies, and they could find the joy of learning. Participant F explained that it was “the best moment” for her when she found “something new,” and such moment came to her when she was studying “silently in the library.”

Participant A, even though the reason why she decided to study in Korea was to get a fine job in a company, she found studying and researching very interesting. After she found the joy of research, she changed her career plan and decided to become a lecturer.

“이론 공부 많이 했고, 연구 방법도 많이 공부해봤고. 그래서 점점 시간 지나고 나서 아, 연구 좋아하나봐요. 그래서 아, 계속 그 다음에는 한국

유학 끝나고 베트남으로 강사로 결정했어요.... 사실은 제가 인류학과인데, 주제 논문이 좀 사회학과 같아요.... 연구가 정말 재미있고, 사실 저 생각에서는 좀 사회적으로 보면, 도움이 되는 주제인 것 같아요.” [I studied theories a lot and research methods. So, after a while, I think I like research. So, I decided to be a lecturer after I finish the study in Korea.... Actually, my major was anthropology, but the topic of my thesis is more like that in sociology.... The research was really fun, and in fact, I think it is a helpful topic for society.] [Participant A]

The participants also had opportunities to attend academic conferences. Participant B said it was an excellent chance to visit other provinces in Korea and make a presentation at a conference that enabled him to create good relationships with scholars, saying, “We have a lot of papers at [the] conference. I went there and met many professors.... We dreamt together and talked [about] everything very closely.” Participant D also shared his experience of joining seminars and conferences held every week in his department. He said it was very edifying for him to listen to the lectures of experts in his field. They shared their research result, and he was able to learn so many things.

Some interview participants stated that they did not have any difficulty in research due to their background as academics who were used to conduct research as well as their past international experiences. For example, Participant E’s experience as a researcher in an institute in Vietnam helped him perform well in his laboratory. He also did his bachelor’s and master’s degree in Europe and could adapt to a new environment of Korean universities more easily. Similarly, Participant G stressed that she had a lot of experiences in overseas countries, including her master’s course in Europe,

which made her easier to settle in a Korean university.

While the participants enjoyed learning, all of them underwent difficult times, mostly because of the hard-working atmosphere of Korean universities and language issues. All participants indicated that there was high pressure on the study, which made them feel stressful and sometimes caused health problems. Participant E, although he said it was not difficult to adapt to Korea or learn new ideas, he felt a high pressure that he had not experienced before in Vietnam. It was a great deal of pressure for him to have to report experimental results at the weekly lab meeting. Some participants suffered from health problems due to stress, and they had to see doctors.

In the meantime, the participants were heavily stressed about publishing academic journal articles imposed on doctoral students as a requirement for graduation. Participant I had a hard time when she was rejected from a journal several times. She had to study from 9:00 a.m. until 2:00 a.m. to produce experimental results. Participant H was not satisfied with the requirement as he did not have enough time for what he wanted to do.

“When you study, you have to focus on the paper. So, it means it is very difficult to do something you like....When I go [to my professor] ... and [said], ‘Professor, when I do these things, my idea is like this. I want to work with this. I make this thing. We need something.’ And he [said], ‘Okay. First thing, you have to apply for the paper and focus on the paper. When you finish the paper, you can do it.’ But when I finished the paper, I had to get [a] PhD degree.” [Participant H]

Participant G did not have much problem overall, but she experienced some difficulties in her doctoral dissertation research due to

miscommunication and technical problems. She contacted a number of Korean companies to collect data, but some people were impolite and did not help her at all. This situation sometimes made her cry. When she conducted her research in Vietnam, she had limited access to the internet and had to spend much time and extra effort. She pointed out that this series of experiences was what doctoral students had to endure.

Another challenge for the participants was the Korean language. This issue was so critical that some participants considered quitting and applying for a scholarship in an English-speaking country. The language issue has led to the frustration and helplessness of the participants because they could not understand what professors were talking in classes and had “another job” to read a book both in English and Korean. Participant F explained that it was a burden to study something new that is already difficult, in Korean language.

“Before, I studied Journalism. I just know how to write.... I never had to count and do some math. But at that time, I had to study about research methodologies and statistics, and everything, which was not in my own language. And professors explained not in English but in Korean. And the book is in English. And, I don’t know [the] Korean language. Yes. At the first time, it was super difficult.” [Participant H]

This difficulty in language was the same as the participants who studied Korean Language Education. Participant J said that specific terminologies were entirely new. Participant A also pointed out that academic language was different from the words of every life.

“완전 죽고 싶다. 첫 번째 학기는 진짜 힘들었어요. 제일 힘든 시간이

첫 번째 학기였어요.... TOPIK 4급 받았다고 해도, 학문언어가 완전 달라요. 교수님들 말씀하신 거 제가 이해 안 갔어요. 그래서 수업하기 전에 예습도 많이 했고, 책 먼저 읽었어요. 만약 예습 안 했으면 이야기 하나도 못 했어요. 언어 장벽 때문에. 사실은 [한국어 전공] 학사 끝나고 한국어 능력이 좋지 않습니다.” [I almost wanted to die. The first semester was really hard. It was the hardest time.... Even though you got TOPIK level 4, the academic language is completely different. I did not understand what the professors said. So, before class, I studied a lot and read books in advance. If I had not studied before, I could not say anything, because of language barrier. Actually, my Korean ability is not good even after my bachelor’s degree [in Korean Language].] [Participant A]

In this situation, some participants had an advantage with their universities that offered a variety of English courses. Participant H expressed that he was “lucky” as his department opened enough classes in English, and he appreciated the situation that all of the professors could speak English with several professors from overseas countries.

As the participants got more and more used to living and studying in Korean universities, they overcame the difficulties and experienced changes. Participant F, who was thinking seriously about leaving Korea, took a leave of absence for a while and went to a Korean language institute again. She thought that language was “the only barrier” for her, so, she decided to overcome it so that she would be able to continue her study in Korea. After six months, she felt “more confident to talk” with her friends and professors as well as in her research.

Participant I also suffered from the repetitive rejection of her papers from an academic journal. However, after she spent much time in the experiments

and tried again, she finally got approvals and was able to graduate with five published journal articles.

“A lot of times, I received rejection emails, I was really disappointed.... I continued to work and did a lot of experiments. And then, I wrote more papers. And, [I was] really surprised when I received one accept email from one paper. The day later, I got one more.... So, I continued to write papers more. It’s enough for the graduation, but I didn’t want to stop.... I tried something new with the research. So, when I graduate, I have five publications.” [Participant I]

4.1.2.2. Meeting people: Supports and Misunderstandings

During studying in Korea, the participants had different types of relationships. They explained that the interaction and relationship with their advisors affected most significantly in their lives in Korea. Most of the participants said that their advisors were kind and supportive and had a good relationship with them. They remembered that they were able to adapt to Korea better thanks to the carefulness of the advisors. Participant F shared her memory of visiting her advisor when she was having trouble with the Korean language. Her professor “saw himself when he saw” her because when he was in the United States to study, he was also “among very few Korean students who got a chance” and found it challenging.

Some participants pointed out that Korean professors seemed difficult and strict for Korean students. However, they said they did not have any uneasiness to talk with the professors. Participant I also found that some professors were speaking loudly when they were unhappy about something,

but her professor was always speaking “softly” and “slow” and trying to give her advice all the time. Participant G remembered that her colleagues “complained” about their advisor, but she was “very humble” and managed well because some professors that she met in Europe were tougher. Similarly, Participant H said,

“You know Korean professor, right? It’s difficult. Really. But he [showed] kindness of very specific thing for me because I was [a] foreigner. All the time, he smiled at me. But when I looked at other people in my laboratory, they were all afraid of him. When they went to [a] lab meeting, they were scared. But I was okay.... Anyway, he was very kind. Maybe because I received [the] Korean government scholarship, I wasn’t a heavy burden for him.” [Participant H]

When the participants explained the relationship with their advisors, Participant A expressed her gratitude to her advisor and called the professor as a “은인,” which refers to a “savior.” The relationship with her professor and the fact that she was able to get to know her was the best thing that she got from the experiences of studying in Korea, she explained. Her advisor took care of her lives in Korea that she sometimes offered her an assistant position, and Participant A occasionally cooked for her.

This strong bond also came from the trust in the academic excellence and reputation of their advisors. The participants perceived their professors strict when it comes to academic works, but it was ultimately helpful and made them study harder and able to graduate. Participant D and C stated that they might not have been able to finish their study if not the support from the professors as well as their colleagues. Participant F illustrated that her advisor

was a pioneer in her field of study, so it was an advantage for her research.

“My professor is very famous in my major, in the area. He has [a] very good reputation in Korea. So, whenever he holds any organization and international or domestic conferences or seminar, he offered me a chance. Not only to attend but also to write something, to present something. He gave me a chance; also, he challenged me. And, I was so thankful to him that I gained my self-confidence, and I felt that the area is controllable, study-able, I can achieve it.” [Participant F]

While the participants described their advisors very kind and considerable, some experienced uncomfortable moments caused by cultural differences. Participant B shared his memory about the situation when he did something else from what his advisor asked to him, which made his professor “angry” and spoke “bad words.” Even in this difficult situation, Participant B comprehended cultural difference and sensitivity as he said he had “experiences in Korea before.” However, he pointed out that many international students were “disappointed with the ways of Korean professors because in some cases, Korean professors tried to express their anger.” In addition, Participant A shared some unpleasant memories about the culture in which she had to drink alcohol with professors.

Some participants experienced misunderstandings with their colleagues, even though they overcame it in the end. Participant D talked about an uneasy relationship with his colleague in his laboratory. He did not understand much about the rules of his laboratory at that time, and he made some mistakes. Both he and his colleague were angry and had a hard time. Participant D emphasized the fact that “She was too younger than” him, which made him

more unpleasant about the situation. But after all, they overcame and could understand each other.

Most of the participants spoke about how close their relationships were with Korean colleagues or neighborhoods. However, there were some negative characteristics of Korean people's attitudes towards people from overseas countries, mostly indifference and unfamiliarity. The participants described Korean people as busy and not so much careful about international students. Participant C, for example, did not know what to do in the first semester, even what to read or which classes she had to take. She said she did it “그냥 알아서” [just on her own] as there was no one who taught her these kinds of information.

Participant F also remembered her first semester as puzzling and disturbing because she did not know the Korean language without anyone to help her with the language and life. “I think that I had a kind of honeymoon, about one week.... But next week, it totally changed. Everybody was busy with their own business,” she said. Similarly, Participant J expressed her regret for the fact that she could not make any Korean friends as they were too busy.

“보통 평소에 만나서 이야기하면 친절한테,... 이야기한 후에 끝이에요. 그 후에 바로 수업 끝나서 같이 밖에서 놀러가거나 친한 친구처럼 편하게 시장에 같이 가서, 아니면 밥 같이 먹는 그런 한국인이 물론 없어요. 도우미라도, 그냥 학교에서 어떻게 해야 하는지 알려주고 자기 생활에 돌아가서 각자 하는 게.” [Usually, they were nice when we met and talked,... but that was it. Right after the class, of course, there were no Koreans with whom I could go to a market easily or eat together after class, just like close friends do. Even helpers, they just told me how to do in school

and went back to their lives.] [Participant J]

Furthermore, Participant F and H highlighted the feeling that they were only fully welcomed when they speak in Korean, not in English. “I realized that ... once I want to be accepted in Korean society, I must speak the Korean language, not English,” said Participant F. Participant H also said,

“Sometimes, they are very kind. All people, they are very kind, and they can help. But if you know Korean. When you meet someone and say “안녕하세요” [Hello], they can help you and answer all questions. But old people, they don’t know English. Young people, they know English, but they [are] silent. They don’t want to talk.” [Participant H]

4.1.2.3. Korean Universities: Quality Education System but with Some Desired Improvements

When the participants were asked about their perception of Korean universities, they shared their feelings in diverse ways, including systems, faculty, and facilities. The participants’ overall impression on Korean universities was very positive. Participant F simply put it as “very well-organized,” and Participant A viewed Korean education has high quality, especially in comparison with Vietnam.

When it comes to university systems, the participants evaluated the administration system as effective and supportive. Korean universities were equipped with quality online management systems, the participants said. Participant A and J were especially impressed that all administrative procedures were available and handled over the internet, and it was very

convenient and fast. Participant B, as an expert in the field of information technology, liked effective and helpful learning management systems (LMS). “They can control all the syllabus, ... grades for students. It was better than our university,” he said.

The participants also mentioned that there were open atmosphere and supportive university staffs for international students. Participant D remembered that it was an “open environment” and he was “happy about the staffs” who were very supportive of international students. Participant G also thought that the university system was “very convenient and flexible.”

However, the systems were not always satisfying for the participants. While they felt welcomed, some participants stressed the need to improve the system to support international students better. Participant E asserted that Korean universities could improve their environment to equip with more cultural diversities, especially for those who are from the Middle East. Participant J shared her idea that it might be better if Korean universities could support international students with multilingual services and help people from countries where the internet is not advanced yet to get used to the online administration and learning systems.

Participant B drew important attention about the reality that Korean students are more open to and welcoming international students from the Western countries or who could speak Korean, compared to students from the Asian region. He thought this situation unfair.

“I felt something unfair, discrimination. In our university, we have [students from] Malaysia, Indonesia, China, Vietnam, and other countries. And, when making a team, Korean people normally only choose good students or good countries to make friends. I see several students who are Chinese, and

Indonesian, Mongolian, they can speak very limited Korean. When they want to enter a team, Koreans don't want them. But if that is European or American, they welcome. So, for some students, I felt very sorry, sorry means unfair.” [Participant B]

As most of the participants were already lecturers when they were studying in Korea, they watched closely about the university environment in which the professors work and research. The participants felt that Korean professors had a good environment to independently conduct their research with lesser administrative works than Vietnamese professors. Especially the participants who were in the field of science and engineering were impressed that all professors in Korea had their own laboratory where they could do experiments and even got a fund from organizations outside when it was not like that in Vietnam.

When it comes to research and education, they saw Korean universities adequate and advanced for research where they could improve their research capacity. Participant C found that research trends in Korea were changing rapidly, and university members continuously discovered new things and kept up with new trends. Participant E asserted that the research outcomes were highly qualified in Korea. Notably, some participants stressed that research and education in Korea were focusing on both theories and practices. Participant F said she liked the way in which her department invited people from organizations or corporates to help students learn from the real stories of practitioners. Such times were like “moving classes,” she said. Participant I also mentioned that she could learn not only theoretical knowledge but practical skills and knowledge when she studied in Korea and participated in research projects.

The participants ascribed the quality education of Korean universities to faculty members. They pointed out that most of the Korean professors have graduated from universities in the United States or some European countries, which made the education international.

“I think most professors in Korea have graduated from universities in the [United] States. Most of them. Actually, all of them. No one studied in Korea. So, I think that they, the Korean professors, actually are not only Korean style, but at that point, international standard professors. All of them.”
[Participant F]

While all participants suffered from the hard-working culture of Korea, they said this culture was what made the Korean higher education excellent. Participant J said she admired Korea’s tradition to study hard and the people’s attitudes to make much effort ceaselessly. Participant E also stated, “Education is very good, and I learned a lot in Korea. Especially discipline and very hard working. Very [high] responsibility. And group work.”

In the meantime, regarding the reputation and education in Korea, it seemed to exist some discrepancy between the fields of study. Participant F pointed out that Korea needed to promote the science and engineering field as it was “under-evaluated.” While she learned a lot in her field of study, public relations, she said her colleagues in the science and engineering field sometimes had difficult times due to lack of English classes and high study pressure.

The participants evaluated the facilities of Korean universities as excellent. They were impressed with convenient data search programs and library facilities, as well as classrooms and dormitories. For the participants

in the science and engineering field, they found their laboratories convenient and well-built that were equipped with computers, adequate machines, and even printers. This convenience let them only focus on their research. Participant H indicated that Korean universities changed so fast that it was like “one year and then one building.” He also mentioned that universities were not the only ones that changed fast, but Korea was basically improving and changing rapidly. However, there were also disparities between universities in Korea. It seemed the research and education quality somehow depended on the size and reputation of a university, especially regarding experimental equipment and research fund.

4.1.2.4. Korea as a study abroad destination: “Similar culture” and “good example”

It is important to note that the participants perceived Korea as similar to Vietnamese culture. This similarity sometimes made them decide to study in Korea and help them feel more familiar while they were staying in Korea. There were several reasons why they thought Korea and Vietnam share many things.

The participants said that Korea and Vietnam are both located in Asia and basically share Asian culture. Participant G stressed that the two countries were both affected by Confucianism. The participants also mentioned similar historical experiences such as wars and division of the country between the North and the South. Participant H, for example, said, “I think your country is similar to our country. Similar in the area and kind of Asian country, history, we have [a] kind of revolution and war. I think we have a lot in common.”

Another likeness was about people’s relationships. The participants

pointed out that both Korea and Vietnam have community and family-based relationships. They said collectivist relationships in the two countries caring about not only their families but also the people around them in the neighborhood. Some participants had felt this from some Korean dramas or films before they came to Korea.

However, Participant F addressed the problem of such community-based culture that it took much time for people from outside to become a member of a community both in Korea and Vietnam.

“We all know that Korean culture and Vietnamese culture are similar. We have collectivism. And, when we have foreigners, newcomers, it takes a lot of times ... to accept the new members. It is similar to here, when you stay in Vietnam, you feel lonely in some time because still, they say ‘Hi’ to you and smile all the time, but they are not totally open. So, I think it takes some time. But time to Soju, 한식[Korean foods], [make people] become closer.”

[Participant F]

The participants felt that Korea has advantages for international students from Vietnam due to similar culture as well as geographical closeness. This made them feel more familiar to stay in Korea in comparison with other Western countries. Participant G stressed the fact that she recommended her brother to study in Korea even when he was selected as a scholarship recipient in some other European countries. It was because she felt that “Life in Korea is easier,” reflecting her experience in Europe. She also told her brother, “Korea has close distance and similar culture ... I also think the quality of education is very good.”

Likewise, Participant E said that he would recommend people to study in

Korea, even with a self-funded plan due to similar culture and familiarity. He also remembered his experience in some Western countries where he had faced racism.

“When I went to Europe to study, I felt not good in Europe because young people in Europe did not respect Asian people. Racism. I had [a] very good relationship with our roommates and classmates. But outside, people [did] not respect Asian people... But when I came to Korea, I felt as I lived in Vietnam. We felt as family...And we respected each other. It’s important.”
[Participant E]

Significantly, the participants shared their opinion that Korea was a good example of Vietnam’s development that they could learn and apply easily. They said this was one of the significant meanings of their experiences and learnings from Korea in Vietnamese society.

“I studied and ... worked for several companies, and I recognized that the development of Korea is [a] very good lesson for us to learn and apply in our country.... After I got [the] scholarship and went to Korea to study, I bring back. I think what I learned in Korea, I can apply to my country very easily. Very feasible, very reasonable to our society.... It’s similar, and it’s what we, as a developing country, can learn and can apply better.”
[Participant B]

Likewise, Participant G was interested in and already understood the historical background of Korea’s rapid economic growth from a “very poor country.” She thought that Vietnam could learn from Korea’s experience. Participant C said that Korea’s situation was suitable for Vietnam to learn.

She stressed that it is not necessary to go to Western countries to study because people can facilitate their learning in Korea, even better than some other countries.

4.1.3. GKS as an International Scholarship Program: Strongly Recommended but Some Improvements Needed

All of the research participants said they would recommend other Vietnamese people to apply for the GKS to study in Korea. The alumni explained that it was because studying in Korea is a good opportunity for them to get quality education abroad. The strong points of the GKS program were in line with the benefits they gained from experiences in Korea. It appeared that they even would like to recommend this program among a variety of scholarship opportunities from other countries because their experiences were valuable and irreplaceable.

Regarding the features of the scholarship program, the participants pointed out that the GKS was the program that raised talented people for Vietnamese society and at the same time, promoted Korea to the world. The participants indicated that their experiences in Korea through the scholarship changed their lives, and they wanted other people to experience this valuable change as well. “It is desirable for everyone to try once in her or his life because ... we will learn a lot, and we will be given a lot of strengths and a lot of values, especially values that we can live our whole life,” said Participant F.

While some participants did not think the GKS program needed to be improved, several participants shared their opinions on some desired changes in the program. When it comes to the policy of the NIIED, Participant C cited

the lack of management system of the NIIED for those who studied more than the scholarship funding period. She wanted to report to the NIIED that she finished her degree after a decade, but she was told that there is no need for reporting, which made her feel confused about her identity as a scholarship student. Some participants asserted that there is a need to improve the selection process. They said it should belong to universities, not the government office because they thought that university staffs know better about selecting good students.

Some participants also talked about the one-year Korean language course. While it was necessary for those who did not know the Korean language, there needed some improvements. Participant A said that people who could speak Korean wanted to be exempted from the duty to shorten the period of studying. In addition, Participant H argued that the mandatory language course was not useful because learning Korean in a school setting was not adequate for them to study “real” Korean, although he liked some cultural activities. He stressed that the GKS students in his language class thought that it was “ridiculous” that they were put in school and learned little.

It is important to note that the participants talked about the need to improve alumni networks supporting system of the NIIED. The participants asserted that alumni networks after they returned to Vietnam would help them to keep their identity as Korean government scholarship recipients and build a connection between Korea and Vietnam in a better and effective way. Participant B, emphasizing that good memory and network was more important than the knowledge gained, said,

“I think [the] Korean government have invested money for the KGSP program. And, the people who were selected as the KGSP [students], after

they come back to their countries, they have good memories and good impression of Korea.... Nowadays, there are thousands of KGSP program [participants] globally.... If I go to some countries, I can add friends who [were] used to be KGSP [students]. That will be a very strong network.”
[Participant B]

Similarly, Participant D exemplified the Japanese government scholarship program that effectively supported the scholarship alumni, where they conducted some projects together and kept their connections. He wanted the Korean government to make such solid connections between the GKS scholars not only in Vietnam but also internationally. One of the crucial reasons why the participants thought the alumni network is essential was because they could do “something good” for their society and have more “power” to do that.

In addition to that, there was a need to foster more gatherings between the GKS students while they were studying in Korea, not only after returning to Vietnam. It was because the participants wanted to feel more belonged and have an international network that might be able to support each other with all the difficulties of graduate students’ life.

4.2. The Role of International Scholarships that Promote Positive Social Change

When articulating the role of international scholarships that promote positive social changes, meaningful changes in terms of personal, institutional, and national level were explored, which were related to each other. This section starts by describing the participants’ interpretation of their

experiences in their personal lives and continue to deal with that in their universities and Vietnamese society.

4.2.1. Changes in Personal Lives: Feeling Advanced and Becoming the GKS alumni

4.2.1.1. Professional achievement as a lecturer

As most of the participants were teaching at university before they chose to study abroad, their goals or expectations were to finish their study as soon as possible. They said they wanted to and, at the same time, had to study further in their fields to advance their career. For example, Participant D said, “I just set only one goal, to get a PhD degree as soon as possible.” So, the participants were primarily satisfied with the fact that they received a degree.

More importantly, the participants achieved their professional advancement with new knowledge and skills, which gave them more confidence. Participant C expressed her feeling of relief after she was able to graduate after more than a decade of her doctoral course, saying, “좀 더 자신감이 생겼어요. 어려운 공부를 끝냈으니까. 다른 사람은 모르겠는데 저는 너무 힘들었어요.” [I got more confidence as I finished such a hard course. I do not know about other people, but for me, it was very difficult.] Participant D said he also could build up his experiences in his study field, but he did not feel he achieved his professional goal ultimately. It was because “Scientific intelligence is not limited,” but it is developing continuously. Participant B also said that he could live the life that he dreamt for a long time.

“After I came back to Vietnam, I continued to be a lecturer and vice dean of

our faculty. I received good expectations and respects from students and colleagues. I was promoted and had a chance to apply my knowledge, experience, what I've learned from Korea. I had [a] chance to consult and work for the industry. My career path was good, I was doing what I expected to be before.” [Participant B]

In addition, the establishment of new networks, not only with Korea but also with the world, was a significant achievement as academics for the participants. They found that they had more connections with scholars all over the world, and it helped them conduct their research more effectively. Participant B mentioned many times about the networks that he created, which was still ongoing and gave him more and more chances to work as a professional in his field.

It is also worth noting that for those who were not lecturers before they started their degree in Korea, the change in their career direction to become a lecturer was a meaningful experience for them. For example, Participant A perceived this change as better and right for her.

“예전에는 취업하고 싶었다고 이야기 드렸는데, 목적이 조금 바뀌었지만, 더 좋은 방향으로, 더 의미 있는 방향으로, 그리고 저의 생각에 맞는 방향으로 옮긴 것 같아요. 지금 만약에 다시 생각하면. 제가 만약에 유학 안 갔었으면, 만약에 못 갔었으면 지금 뭐 하고 있을 수 있을까? 지금 아마, 한국 기업? 행정직원? 예를 들면 행정직원으로 일을 하고 있을 것 같은데요. 근데 아마 제 생각에 맞는 일 아닌 것 같아요. 그래서 유학 기간 아주 고맙다고 생각했어요. 조금 이상하게 얘기하면, 한국 정부 고맙다고. 좀 웃겨요. 그래도 유학 갈 기회를 주셨으니까 감사한 마음을 지금 가지고 있어요.” [You know that I told you I wanted to

work for a company. Even though the purpose has changed a little, but it seems to have moved in a better and more meaningful direction, and a direction that suits my idea. Now if I think again, if I had not gone abroad to study, if I could not make it, what could I be doing now? Probably now, a Korean company? Administrative staff, for example? But I think it does not work for me. So, now I thought I was grateful for my study abroad period. If I speak a little strangely, thank the Korean government. It is funny but thank them for giving me a chance to study abroad.] [Participant A]

Furthermore, the participants explained that they gained positional advantages and good reputation. The Vietnamese GKS alumni, especially PhD holders, have occupied high positions in their departments and faculties, along with other Korean university graduates. Participant E said that he has been in a senior position at his university for around fifteen years already. As the founder of the department, she was “appointed to be the head” of the department since the establishment until now, for about a decade. The participants pointed out that they were respected and received good expectations from students and colleagues, thanks to their higher degree and the fact that they studied in Korea. Some participants said that students admired and looked up to them as the students were influenced by the Korean Wave and sought advice to study in Korea from them. Some reported their increased salary and reputation. Participant G, for example, was pleased that she got a high salary with her doctorate, and she not only worked as a lecturer but also was invited to work as a project manager of a governmental organization.

4.2.1.2. Positive changes in personal characteristics

After studying in Korea, the alumni found themselves with some positive changes in their characteristics. They said they became more flexible, proactive, and self-independent after they overcame all the difficulties. Participant I shared her feeling of change, saying, “You learn how to control your life during the difficult time, during the bad moment ... It really meant to me ... I [was] really grown. Different me.” Furthermore, she was able to “apply that experience” to another trip when she visited some other countries, the United States, for example.

Participant J reflected that she was an introspective person, but she became more active and sociable with improved confidence following her experiences in Korea. She also found changes in life values; She obtained a broader view of the world, and it helped her feel more comfortable in her lectures and personal life and address everything more easily. Participant G, while she did not feel much difference, explained that she became more open to the world and more flexible and proactive after overcoming the sufferings as a doctoral student.

Interestingly, the participants reported that they learned from Korean people’s hard-working and diligent traits and changed themselves to be like them. Even though it was challenging to adapt to such culture of Korean universities at first, they thought learning from the culture might be helpful for them to succeed in their personal and professional lives.

“I think that all people have some good and bad points, Vietnamese or Korean as well. So, I tried to learn from good people around me. Regarding the Korean people, I think that I have many good things to learn from them. For example, they are very diligent. They work many hours in a day, very

concentratedly in their work or study. And, how to say, the second thing is the discipline, very high discipline. The third thing, their willingness is very strong.... I felt that I should learn. That's why I think my personal life is very well improved when I had a chance to live in Korea for five years and to find Korean cultures and Korean characters.” [Participant F]

Participant H explained that his behavior and life habit have changed after he overcame the difficulties from the high pressure of studying. Even though he acknowledged that this hard-working culture is sometimes too stressful for people, he brought this life to Vietnam. He said he tried to watch English TV channels even when he took a rest not to stop learning. Participant I also said that she continued to keep her “working attitude or life attitude” that she learned from Korea.

4.2.1.3. Becoming the GKS alumni

As the research participants spent some years and received a degree from Korea as a scholarship recipient, their understandings and familiarity with Korea and a sense of belonging in the alumni network still influenced their lives in Vietnam. Participant G expressed his feeling that Korea is his “second country.” Although she travelled to many other countries, her stay in Korea was the longest. Participant E repeatably said that he had a very “close relationship” with Korean people in Korea as well as in Vietnam. “I understand Korean people as Vietnamese people. I had no problem for living in Korea,” he said.

In addition, the participants shared their feeling of proudness as a graduate of Korean universities who received the government scholarship. Participant

F, for example, said, “I always, when I told my friend, my colleagues that I graduate from ... South Korea, all of them told me that it is [a] very good university and [a] very good country in terms of academics. So, I am proud of this.” However, it should be indicated that the participants’ proudness does not always come from their graduation from Korean universities in particular, but it appeared that their proudness is about the fact that they were the internationally educated.

The participants in the field of Korean studies said that a number of faculty members were the GKS alumni, so they felt belonged without much effort. In addition, Participant H said that even though he was not receiving anything from the NIIED at the moment, it did not “stop.” He explained that when he met people, he liked to say that he was a GKS recipient and was happy to see other GKS alumni. He said the alumni in Vietnam had strengths in technology and science and kept supporting each other. Participant B, as well, said that he always mentioned about the GKS in his resume. Such feeling was more robust when the participants joined the alumni revisit program organized by the NIIED.

The alumni expressed their responsibility as the Korean government scholarship recipients to perform well during, and even after studying in Korea. Participant A and C felt that they should study hard as they received the scholarship from the government, not from any other private funders. Participant J also mentioned that her advisor sometimes told her to do her best as she was a government scholarship student. Even after returning to Vietnam, such responsibility remained among the alumni. They said they wanted to prove their capacity as the ones who had studied in Korea as a scholarship student. Participant B said, “Because we are scholars who were selected and

well trained in Korea, we want to prove that we are good people.”

In addition, the Vietnamese GKS alumni felt that they had a role in keeping a good relationship between Korea and Vietnam. The alumni perceived themselves as “ambassador” between Korea and Vietnam. As they spent a few years in Korea, they were experts about Korea, they illustrated. Participant C said that she wanted to pay back to the Korean government and promote Korean studies as a person who has benefited. Participant A did not feel anything special about the GKS program except for the fact that she was financially supported until she participated in the revisit program. She went to Korea again and participated in the ASEAN Talk Concert. In the event, she felt that she should be the part of a cooperation between the two countries as a lecturer in a public university in Vietnam, although she could not actively work on it now.

This idea also derived from the current situation, where economic and business cooperation between the two countries became greater and greater.

“I think that cooperation between Korea and Vietnam right now became partners. And, I think those people who had education in Korea are also ... contributing to our society because we have a lot of Korean companies in Vietnam. And, many of them I know, they [are] also ... working for [a] Korean company. It’s also good for [the] Korean company to manage local staffs because they have education, they have language, and they know the business culture.” [Participant G]

He emphasized that it is not only Korea that can lead the cooperation, but it is about a mutual relationship.

4.2.2. Making Changes in Vietnamese Universities: The GKS Alumni as

One of Many Other Overseas-Educated Lecturers but Making Unique Contributions

In Vietnam, there is an increasing number of academics who have studied in overseas countries. The GKS alumni in Vietnamese universities are also among them. It appeared that their contributions, position, and reputation were almost the same as other people who graduated from some quality higher education institutions outside of Vietnam, but specific contributions were found in terms of academic outcomes and scholarly relationships between Korea and Vietnam.

4.2.2.1. Contribution to the development of education quality and system

The Vietnamese GKS alumni perceived that they, including other Korea-educated professors, were contributing to the development of their university's qualities and systems. Participant F was the "pioneer" in her study field and established the department in the field of public relations. She described her department as one of the best majors in the whole country because the delimitation score for admission was very high, and most students got a job with a high salary in the second or third grade. She also felt that she was "happy with" that "people who were studying with Korean background" were recognized "very highly."

Furthermore, the alumni utilized research capacity and education method that they learned from Korea. They explained that they learned how to conduct research from Korean universities and taught their students in Vietnam with the new skills and knowledge of research. Participant G, for example, was making an effort to improve research methods in Vietnam with

her colleagues who were also international graduates.

“In Vietnam, in the past, people did some simple research, less statistical. Now we can do some small conferences and explain how to conduct research ... and how to publish in the professional journal.... But not only me but a group of people who studied abroad.” [Participant G]

Participant H also introduced a GKS alumnus who was “very famous” in his academic area not only in Vietnam but worldwide. The professor was “an editor and chair” of many conferences and famous journals. Those GKS alumni in the field of computer engineering were improving research and education.

In the meantime, Participant H particularly pointed out that Korea-educated professors are like “paper machine” in a somehow negative way. He and his colleagues found that some people who had studied in Korea are the “best people who produce paper.” It is worthwhile to note that Participant D also mentioned that graduation criteria were “a little bit difficult” than that of Europe due to the requirement of publications.

In the case of the Korean studies or language field, the participants interpreted their degrees in Korea as necessary for the development of their study field in Vietnam. Participant A thought that if someone wanted to major in Korean studies, the one should receive at least a master’s degree in Korea. She added that if he or she would like to study some other study fields such as medicine or engineering, it did not have to be Korea. Participant C, as a dean of her faculty, explained that there were not many PhD holders in her faculty, so she thought it was her duty to study in Korea and come back to her university to better teach students about Korea and Korean language.

There was a particular positional advantage for overall Korean university graduates in Vietnamese universities. It means that there is a high possibility to make changes more straightforwardly in such position. Participant B said, “My friend,... they also went to Korea, and they came back. And now, most of them are dean, vice dean, and some of them are a director or vice president in university.” Participant G explained that of the seventeen faculties in her university, three of the deans studied in Korea, including herself, and one director of international office and scientific research was also a Korean university graduate. But she interpreted this situation that it was not only because of their degrees from Korea but also of their passion and capacity as well as conditions that made it possible.

Similarly, Participant C said that even though not many people were aware of Korea or Korean education in the past, the quality of Korean higher education was highly regarded now, and Korean university graduates were famous now.

“지금 호찌민 국립대 부총장님이 한국 유학 갔다 오신 분이예요. 인사대가 아니라 국립대 전체의 부총장님이요.... 그리고, 그분이 무슨 장학금으로 갔는지는 모르겠는데 어쨌든 부총장님 있고, 재정기획처장이라든지 그분도 한국에서 유학한 것으로 알고 있고, 몇 개의 중요한 위치에도 이제는 한국 대학 졸업한 박사학위 받은 교수님들 계세요. 그런 위치에 올라가는 게 사실 힘들잖아요. 그런데 이제 조금씩 생기니까.” [The Vice President of Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City studied in Korea. Also, the head of the Ministry of Finance and Planning studied in Korea. Even in several important positions, there are now professors with doctorate who graduated from a Korean universities. It is actually hard to get up to that position. But

now, little by little, there are people in such position.] [Participant C]

However, some participants asserted that the contributions of professors with Korean education background were recognized not very different among all international graduates in Vietnamese universities. The participants said that it was because Vietnamese people basically consider internationally educated people as better than those who were nationally educated. Participant J said that it was common for Vietnamese people to think that studying in the United States or England would be more desirable than studying in Korea. Participant I also mentioned that Vietnamese people “really like people who graduated from the outside” because they are considered to have “more knowledge.”

4.2.2.2. Influence of study abroad destination: “Something Korean” in the educational arenas of the Vietnamese GKS alumni

While academic capacity or positional advantages were, at the same time, shared values of all international graduates in Vietnamese universities, it appeared that they brought “something Korean” in their educational arenas. Most significantly, the alumni reflected that they were influenced by their advisors in a similar way they were impressed by the hard-working Korean people. They were transferring the advisor’s way of teaching and treating people to Vietnam. Participant A said she decided to be like her advisor remembering her as strict but very careful and kind professor to students.

For Participant F, she had a heavy responsibility to keep her department that she established as her advisor did in Korea, even though she felt lonely to stay in the same place and see other people leave pursuing higher salary.

She was inspired by her advisor in many ways, from how to treat students, how to love her study field, to how to build alumni networks.

“He makes me love my area.... He inspires me a lot. I feel that I cannot betray him.... I could move to another [position] because I have a lot of opportunities. But I think... if I exchange [my life] with another material life, when I remember about him, I will be very guilty. This is something Korean. In my blood, already. I cannot explain.... I learned a lot from him and from them. Not only by the lectures in the classroom but also the way he communicates and treats us. The same way I was influenced by my professors,... I became [a] very strict professor.” [Participant F]

When it comes to applying and transferring their overseas-acquired skills and knowledge to Vietnamese universities, the participants said that what they have learned from Korea was suitable to Vietnam due to similar culture between the two countries. Participant B said that what he learned from Korean university, especially “not only [the] technology but the way of doing, the way of teaching” was very applicable to his university. He also asserted that when he compared studying in Korea to other countries, people’s ability to apply learnings from overseas to Vietnam would be limited due to different culture and technology situation. He liked that he could find the equipment that he needed in Vietnam more easily from Korea at a suitable price.

Participant F, who suffered from difficulties in the beginning, shared her experience that she felt “lucky” that she did not cease her study in Korea because “Korean culture is very similar to Vietnamese culture,” which made it easier for her to transfer her knowledge to Vietnam. She said,

“I realized that I was lucky because my life did not bring me to America or Australia or England to study public relations. It is my fate, also my luck to stay in Korea ... because Korean culture is very similar to Vietnamese culture. I feel it, not by reading the books, but by my personal experience because ... I was crying for the differences in cultures ... I passed through and adapted to society and to the university. And, I started to love [the] Korean way of researching and teaching.... Here, we’re living in [the] Eastern [countries], in oriental society. So, I realized that whatever Korean public relations do, I can just learn Korean public relations style and immediately apply in Vietnam successfully. If I studied in the United States, I had to convert my mind again in order to apply. Thank God, I was in Korea, not in another Western country. So, I catch the knowledge, the skill, and the attitude in public relations from Korean or Eastern or oriental style. I can bring this package and immediately apply it to Vietnamese society. And it works actually.” [Participant F]

Likewise, Participant G explained that she, as a professor, thought that she could transfer what she learned from overseas-education to students. She shared Korea’s development as an example that Vietnam could follow and let them find their own ways to contribute to Vietnam’s development.

In addition, it was considerably apparent that the Vietnamese GKS alumni were facilitating academic cooperation between Korea and Vietnam. When there was no connection in Participant B’s university, he started partnerships with Korea after he came back. He sometimes brought Vietnamese students to Korea as well as Korean professors and students to Vietnam for both academic and business purposes. A group of Vietnamese students led by Participant B also performed well at a startup competition held in Korea.

“I came back ... and I bring opportunity ... for [a] relationship with Korea. So, [the] international relation department, when they have any partner from Korea, they call me. And they ask me to welcome them and contact with them, and work with them.” [Participant B]

Some participants stressed that they were not only still in contact with their advisors or colleagues in Korea but also conducting research projects together. Participant E, for example, said that he has been sharing some experimental materials from Vietnam with his advisors and sometimes helped his colleague to conduct research in Vietnam. Participant H also said that he has been inviting professors from Korea to his laboratory as well as sent some doctoral students to a university where his colleague in Korea was working as a professor.

4.2.2.3. Some challenges in the mobilization of acquired skills and knowledge to Vietnamese universities

While the alumni have been effectively working in their universities in Vietnam, there were still some limitations and challenges in applying the knowledge and skills learned from Korea. Some participants pointed out that the “bureaucratic” system of Vietnam sometimes prevented them from changing their department or faculty. One of the participants was trying to establish an office that he or she found necessary for the university from his or her observation of Korean universities, but the process was still ongoing despite trials for a decade because of the leaders not welcoming change. There were also difficulties in changing working environment due to a “systematic problem.” As a head or a dean, they had to deal with too many administrative

works and could not have enough time to focus on research. Another participant also presented an example that it was hard to change things due to absence of the hard-working culture in Vietnam.

Another challenge for the participants when mobilizing their skills and knowledge was a lack of resources.

“But when I come back from Korea, and I faced so many difficulties in terms of salaries, in terms of human resources. I haven’t had, even up to now, many supporters from my university.” [Participant F]

Such issue was similar to overall international graduates. Participant H, for example, said that academics who studied in a “very famous school” in the world do not come back because of low salary. He thought that if they would return to Vietnam, they might take a high position and earn good reputation very easily. Likewise, Participant C explained that people who studied abroad tended to come back, but the impediment that prevented them from returning was a lack of resources and policy to support their research.

4.2.3. Perceived Responsibility of the Vietnamese GKS alumni to Contribute to Vietnamese Society: “You work, and you contribute.”

The meanings that the Vietnamese GKS alumni bring to Vietnamese society appeared to be in line with that to Vietnamese universities. Nonetheless, the section will deal with how the participants perceived their responsibility and role in the level of Vietnamese society as international scholarship graduates.

4.2.3.1. The current state of the Vietnamese GKS alumni in Vietnamese society: Influence of the image of Korea

The participants explained that there is a culture in Vietnam that people respect individuals who studied abroad, and this perception derived from each country's national image and their performances in markets. While Korea-educated people were among many other international graduates and even evaluated lower than those who studied in some Western countries, some participants said that people who graduated from Korean universities are well recognized. Participant F explained the reason was that "Almost all of them find a good job in Vietnam." Participant D also said, "It means you have a higher education class ... Maybe people estimate that you have a good ability." Participant C illustrated that Korea-educated people were contributing to the advancement of science in Vietnam. In a young scientist award in Vietnam recently, a winner was the one who studied in Korea, she said.

Such perception was also due to a good image of Korea and Korean companies, the participants explained. Participant F described this situation with "good image of successful Korea, successful Korean companies in Vietnam" as well as "successful Vietnamese students who studied in Korea." Participant G also said, "If your country's product is good,... in the future, they believe." However, he suggested that when it comes to products, some companies of the Western countries had a "better" image than that of Korean.

Sometimes, Vietnamese people thought that Korean university graduates went to Korea with the only interest in Korean culture, not for academic purposes. Participant A shared the situation in which Vietnamese people asked her if she would like to marry a Korean man or if she was a fan of a Korean singer when she told them she graduated from a Korean university.

Participant A also illustrated that there were not many Korean university graduates in a higher position of the government. Most of them studied in Russia or other communist countries and some other Western countries. She said that people who studied in Korea were not as many as them in number, and their age was still in their 40s, so they may not have reached there yet.

4.2.3.2. The motivation for contribution and return issues

For the Vietnamese GKS alumni, Vietnam was their country of origin and their identity. It was “country’s fate” that made them feel responsible for serving for their society. In other words, it was natural for them to have such feeling as a member of their society. Participant H, for example, stated, “Actually, it’s similar to your country. You are Korean, and you are familiar with your country ... with your people.” For him, a family does not only mean those who were living together with him in a house but “community” around him. So, it was “easy to think about the things around” him and his role in such a community. He felt he should contribute to the people who received “lower salary” and share what he has with them as he had “enough.”

Similarly, Participant B emphasized that the experiences of facing differences between countries as well as their people’s sufferings would influence people to more think about their roles in society.

“What makes people think about their contribution to the development of their own society is experiences to see various world situation to compare and to see some poor people in your own society.... I had experiences going around some countries before I chose to be a lecture.... I see the differences between the countries. When you go out and see some differences, you feel

something that your country needs to be better.... I mean, maybe patriot?"

[Participant B]

Participant F similarly said, "I was raised in a poor family. And I go around and see differences between countries, feeling sorry and pity about our people. We should do something to make our society better."

In the meantime, all the research participants went back to Vietnam nearly right after graduation, and they were serving as lecturers in Vietnam for many years already. However, some participants had some time to concern about whether they would return or stay in Korea when they had just finished their graduate studies. Participant F shared her story about her decision between a good life in Korea and personal responsibility related to her original motivation to study in Korea. What made it challenging to decide was the situation in which her husband, who was also a doctoral student in Korea, was offered a fine job in Korea and her son having a satisfying education in Korea. But for her, she had something to do in Vietnam.

"But what about me? I also could find something to do, but I felt guilty, shameful.... I thought [the] Vietnamese government sent me to Korea, not to stay in Korea but to come back and contribute to the society, even no one imprisoned me. But I have imprisoned myself. I never could forgive myself that I did not fulfil my responsibility.... To me, because I experienced this whole terrible thing and the most critical situations of deciding whether the country responsibility, realistic feeling of myself, or better living condition in another country. My career or my husband's career, my future, or my son's future." [Participant F]

It was a hard choice for her, but after all, she decided to return to Vietnam to realize her responsibility, and she was satisfied with her decision now. “I have ten years after graduation from Korea already, suffering a lot of challenges but also achieving a lot of feelings of proudness and happiness when I see our children growing up nicely in Vietnam, and the two countries cooperate very nicely,” said Participant F.

As mentioned earlier, Participant H had a contract with the Vietnamese government when he received the scholarship as a part of the quota policy. The signed contract contained the duty of a scholarship recipient to return to Vietnam. He indicated that if a recipient does not follow this rule, he or she will lose everything they received. He explained that it was a “good thing” because people should “work and contribute” and they might be able to force themselves to complete their studies. He added that people have a choice not to return when it was not for the contract and can contribute with remittances to their families from the outside. However, it was about the “direction” of the Vietnamese government to require people to come back and directly contribute “in Vietnam.”

Participant C also said that international graduates do not always have to return to Vietnam. It was because if they were successful in overseas countries, it means that they promoted the reputation of Vietnam. So, she thought that people could choose where they would like to live and contribute in various ways.

4.2.3.3. Serving Vietnamese society as academics: Promoting academic development and encouraging Vietnamese people

The alumni perceived that they have certain roles in Vietnamese society

as a member of the university. Most obviously, they said they could contribute to Vietnam by researching and teaching. It means that they contribute by doing their own jobs. Participant D, for example, said that as a researcher, the best way to contribute to his society is to develop science in Vietnam. Participant H also stated,

“Because I could go to Korea and spent all the times,... I could get knowledge and skills. And I can teach my students. It means that I contribute [to] my country... How can I do that without this position? I mean... without studying, without getting [a] degree or knowledge, I can't contribute.”
[Participant H]

Participant I, as well, shared her opinion that everyone who got higher education could contribute to their country's development.

“In general, and in university in particular, as my status, I think during my research, my study topic impacted the university ... and connected with [the] international group, so, I can contribute to the development [of Vietnam] based on my knowledge.” [Participant H]

As a founder of a department, Participant F felt strongly responsible for keeping her position to develop her study field in Vietnam. Even though she was offered many opportunities to get a much higher salary in some private companies, she stayed because if she would leave, the department cannot be kept like the present. She also said that she was already participating in social activities by working as a researcher and professor, especially in a public university.

Participant B was one of the active academics in Vietnam who tried to share knowledge in Vietnamese society in various ways. Most of his activities were related to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) field education. He has been organizing many events such as inviting Korean scholars to some Vietnamese high schools to help teachers equip with proper knowledge.

In the meantime, some participants asserted that which area people work is not necessarily important in terms of contribution to society. Participant C and I, for example, asserted that no matter which countries people work, regardless of the size or the types of companies, they could be part of a contribution to Vietnam without even noticing.

It is also noteworthy that the alumni felt responsible for their behaviors as academics. They thought that they should be careful with their words and actions because they should be a good example of other Vietnamese people to follow. Especially as a lecturer, they wanted to influence their students first.

“We try our best not only in major but also to motivate and guide students to a good life.... We have to be self-motivated and self-educated to improve ourselves.... to be an example to motivate other students. How the professors live and treat other people, how the professors keep their lives, and how they contribute will be an example for students to follow.”

[Participant B]

Likewise, Participant A and C encouraged students to participate in volunteering activities by bringing them to some older people who were living without any family every national holiday.

The alumni also shared their idea that they can influence people’s way of

thinking and change cultures that need improvements. Participant E said, “I think we have to change. We have to make rules.” He thought that he could be an example whom other people around him could follow, by speaking slowly, working effectively, and protecting the environment. However, it was thought to be hard for him to change the culture and environment in a short time.

Participant J similarly asserted that she might be able to influence Vietnamese people to be able to equip with better public orders and open-mindedness to new things and different cultures.

“주변 사람들에게 영향을 많이 줄 수가 있다고 생각해요. 제가 어떻게 하는지, 어떻게 생각하는지, 제가 배운 것을 어떻게 전달하는지. 학생뿐만 아니라 주변 사람한테 좋은 영향을 많이 줄 수 있다고 생각해요. 그것은 눈으로 볼 수 없지만, 장기적으로 그런 좋은 영향은 많이 줄 수 있다고 생각해요.” [I think I can affect people around me a lot with how I think, how I communicate, and how I deliver what I have learned. I think I have a significant influence not only on students but also on the people around me. I cannot observe it with my eyes, but I think it can have a lot of sound effects in the long run.] [Participant J]

While the participants perceived their roles in society and were contributing to the development process by researching and teaching, there still existed some constraints. It was mostly due to lack of time that prevents them from more active participation in research or any other social activities. As mentioned earlier, some participants in high positions suffered from too many administrative works. They also had a family to keep, so they said they could not have much time to do further works.

CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION

The GKS, as an international scholarship program, played the main two roles in enhancing access and promoting positive social changes as the findings showed. The scholarship helped the Vietnamese GKS alumni access to university education in Korea, which they believed had a better quality of education and environment, and they became influential academics in Vietnam. The alumni explained that they were not able to get overseas education if not the scholarship, so, what they experienced in Korea was not something to be taken for granted. The access to international education allowed them to have meaningful experiences to advance themselves, and their identity as the government scholarship recipients made them feel more proud and responsible and think about the relationship between Korea, a study abroad destination, and Vietnam, their home country. The experiences in Korea enabled them to make meaningful changes in Vietnam or at least feeling responsible for creating changes, through their positions and works as academics.

Thus, positive social change in case of the Vietnamese GKS alumni was the development of higher education in Vietnam and the change of cultures through the changes and advancements of individual alumni. Although it has not been revealed yet, such development was recognized as being tentatively linked to social development. The positive social change through scholarships, especially when it was government-funded, also includes the specific features of study abroad destination with cultural similarity and the alumni's responsibility to bridge the countries.

These impacts of international scholarships can be explained in line with

some of the five pathways that Dassin, Marsh, and Mawer (2018b, p. 5) suggested, by which international scholarships foster positive social changes. The first section discusses the scholarship recipients' agency to bring about meaningful changes. The second section includes the environmental conditions in supporting people to be part of changes. The third section discusses the scholarship alumni network that assists and facilitates changes through collaborative movements. The study's contribution and implication and further research suggestions will be followed in the fourth and the fifth section of this chapter.

5.1. Scholarship Recipients as Change Agents

For international scholarships to play roles in social change, it is the role of individual recipients that eventually matters. As briefly described in the literature review chapter, the change agent pathway is where individual recipients' personal action makes a change. In this regard, individual Vietnamese GKS alumni played vital roles in improving quality of education and research capacity in Vietnamese universities, and this development of research and education was perceived to be connected to Vietnam's national development. As Dassin, Marsh, and Mawer (2018b) describes, their employment in a managerial position, as well as higher levels of responsibility and autonomy, helped them to take part in this change agent pathway.

Although the scholarship recipients participate in the same program, each person experiences it differently. They make unique choices and benefit from distinct options when the program ends. Here, individual agency is one of the highlighted factors that affect recipients' experiences and choices along with

individual characteristics and push and pull factors (Campbell, 2018). Individual agency is about how individual recipients exercise their choices and consider their interests against a given range of possibilities, and it is significant to explain how individuals will engage in social change (Campbell, 2018, p .172).

Amartya Sen also elucidates this concept of agency in capability approach, which was one of the focal theories on which international scholarships were based. For Sen, an agent is someone who “acts and brings about change” and “whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives, and, agency is what individuals have as a member of somewhere” (Sen, 1999, p. 19). This is where people are not seen as passive recipients of the benefits of some development programs; instead, there is a certain rationale to recognize the positive role of free and sustainable agency (Sen, 1999). Thus, with enhanced capability, substantive freedom, individuals can have a better ability to help themselves as well as influence the world (Sen, 1999). The underlying idea is also that educated individuals should live a life with obligations to use one’s power to bring about sustainable changes (Walker, 2012).

In the findings, it appeared that individual scholarship recipients as agents were making choices among their available options as lecturers in Vietnam and influencing Vietnamese universities and society in valuable ways. The meaning of their experiences in Korea that the research participants made to their personal lives were necessarily connected to changes in their universities and Vietnamese society. This connection was amplified with the participants’ position as lecturers, and there are two reasons for this.

First, learnings and experiences of individual academics have become that

of universities as well as society and brought meaningful changes. It also appeared in the alumni' motivation to become lecturer to contribute to their society and desire to work in a public university, despite much lower salary compared to that of a private university. Their influence as lecturers was inevitably strong to both students and people around them. They also were aware of this situation and tried to comport in a way that can lead changes in people's thought and behavior.

This aspect can be further articulated by the selection process to raise the social change agent of international scholarship programs. Musa-Oito (2018) argued that the intended selection process seeking candidates with leadership capacity and traditional academic achievements was also an important element that strengthens scholarship programs' social change impacts. The GKS program also included such intention to select leaders that can support their home countries' development, as stated in the literature review chapter, even though diplomatic purpose seemed more critical. The research participants shared their opinions that the Korean government seemed to select applicants who were public officers or university lecturers, and, in fact, the participants' responses showed that they perceived their positional advantages as university lecturers when asked about the reason why they were selected as scholarship awardees.

The second reason can be attributed to the role of higher education itself in society. As described earlier, (international) higher education gained its importance for national economic and social development in the era of the global knowledge economy. However, not only for the human capitalistic rationale, higher education can play a role as a public good for a social benefit for all by producing and sharing knowledge (Marginson, 2011). Especially,

universities in Vietnam are mostly public and state-owned (Pham, 2019). So, academics in Vietnamese universities basically belong to the government, and they are government officials who hold responsibility and identity to contribute to Vietnam, as it appeared from their comments. They wanted to contribute to the development of Vietnam by researching and teaching in a public university where there are power and legitimacy to make changes. A participant even emphasized that the Vietnamese government also believed that giving more opportunities to academics in Vietnam to study abroad and educating them is what can be connected to the development of Vietnam.

5.2. Environmental Conditions for Agents to Generate Social Change

To generate social changes through individual change agents, it needs to be combined with environmental conditions. Sen (1999) also illustrated that social support should be advocated to enhance individual capabilities because they largely depend upon the various socio-cultural circumstances of each individual. It is where individuals make choices taking into account their families, societies, and cultures surrounding them (Yoo & Lee, 2015). It means that environments around individual scholarship recipients inevitably affect them to choose what they value as well as to transfer their overseas-acquired knowledge to their home communities without constraints.

In other words, an environment that guarantees substantive freedom to choose and the ability to transfer knowledge must be provided for scholarship recipients both in study abroad destination and more importantly, in their home countries. Freedom of choice, in the context of international education, may be related to the return issue. Observed more clearly in the findings were

what caused or prevented the return of the alumni to Vietnam. First, since the most research participants were already lecturers, their motivation or goal was to return to Vietnam as soon as possible to fulfil their role in their universities, rather than to find a job abroad. However, it was a little different at the time of graduation. Some participants had a desire to stay in Korea, especially when a participant's husband was studying in Korea as well. Such desire came from the better environment for living and education for her child compared to Vietnam, she said. Nonetheless, because she had a strong motivation for studying abroad to contribute to educational development in Vietnam, she gave up her life opportunity in Korea and returned to Vietnam. Living in Korea might have been a more reasonable judgement, but she made a free choice toward a life she deemed valuable and returned to Vietnam.

In the meantime, a participant had signed a contract with the Vietnamese government for the return right after graduation. He explained that the government regarded the return of lecturers as an essential factor affecting the educational development, that is, the development of Vietnam eventually. He thought that people outside of Vietnam could also make contributions through, for example, remittances. However, he agreed with the government's idea that it is better to contribute directly to their communities in Vietnam. Another participant wanted to try additional experience in Korea before returning to Vietnam. However, due to the policy of her university in Vietnam in which she was a lecturer, she had no choice but to return shortly. In other words, these contracts or policies have a significant influence on the freedom of choice of scholarship recipients, whether to return or not. Campbell (2018) also describes this as push and pull factors about how individuals consider a multitude of various elements when making career and life choices. Campbell

(2018) indicated that this as a tension between scholarship conditionality and choices of individuals.

After the Vietnamese GKS alumni returned to Vietnam, the surrounding environmental factors played an important role in deciding whether to be able to make meaningful social changes. An alumnus who felt responsible for academic and educational development in Vietnam also struggled with a discrepancy between her ideal and the reality of Vietnamese universities. Another alumnus pointed out that although most international graduates tend to return to Vietnam, many choose to or may not be able to return due to lack of research resources and low wages.

Despite these uncertainties, the application of knowledge and skills was also greatly influenced by some aspects of the specific relationship between the study abroad destination and home country. In the existing literature, one of the challenges of the international scholarships was difficulties in applying acquired skills and knowledge to their home society due to the excessive cultural disparity and systematical differences, especially from the Western countries (Baxter, 2018; Cuthbert, Smith, & Boey, 2008; Pham, 2019). In other words, there was a lack of relevance to mobilize their knowledge acquired.

However, the story was different for the Vietnamese GKS alumni. They assessed that the knowledge that learned in Korea fitted well with Vietnamese society, and it was easy for them to transfer it to their educational arenas. It was due to the cultural similarities between the two countries where they share a lot of historical and ethical values, the participants explained. In particular, they explained that Korea's development experience was a good example for designing Vietnam's future development strategy. This seems to

have overcome the limitations of the existing research conducted mainly in the context of the Western countries as traditional host countries.

Consequently, it appeared to be significant to expect individuals to take responsibility as social change agents, while equally respecting their freedom to choose with a guarantee of environmental support. Even if the elements or definition of desired social changes can be illustrated in many ways, it should be remembered that changes can happen without even noticing and that maintaining the changes is another issue. As Dassin, Marsh, and Mawer (2018c, p, 376) puts it, facilitating social change through individual scholarship recipients is “an indirect and often long-term process,” and pressures for immediate changes will hinder the process of any change in challenging environments.

5.3. Scholarship Alumni Network for Agents to Facilitate Social Change

While change agents are at the center of social changes, alumni networks can also create compelling ways for change with greater influence. This is in line with the social network pathway where a network established by scholarship alumni supports positive social change through joint action (Dassin, Marsh, & Mawer, 2018b). Dassin, Marsh, and Mawer (2018b) said that most knowledge-based professions are inherently collaborative, and those who wish to create change might seek to establish new networks among similarly trained individuals. Scholarship alumni networks are considered to function as a critical mass for changes and mutual help (Dassin, Marsh, & Mawer, 2018b; Kent, 2018). Critical mass is “where the expected impact is linked to the changing culture within organizations that come with a ‘critical

mass' of returned scholars” (Kent, 2018, p.33).

In this regard, alumni networks can support individual scholarship recipients and their social movements with the power residing in the networks (Dassin, Marsh, & Mawer, 2018b). Such networks can be related to diaspora communities to facilitate international connections, and alumni can also use their connections to promote benefits for both their home and host countries mutually as “ambassadors” (Dassin, Marsh, & Mawer, 2018c, p. 376). Moreover, it is crucial to understand how such alumni networks may conceive of social change and pursue a common agenda with what organizational structure and autonomy they have (Campbell & Baxter, 2019).

It appeared that the research participants, as academics in Vietnam, perceived alumni network as crucial in keeping the relationship and making collective actions both during and after studying in Korea. They were having annual meetings organized by the Korean Embassy in Vietnam, but they thought it was not enough. They required to have more networks, both domestically and internationally, where they can celebrate their memories in Korea and take advantage of in terms of academic and even business cooperation.

They also perceived themselves as ambassadors between Vietnam and Korea as the Korean government scholarship awardees, and this also backs up what the existing literature illustrated about such networks. While some participants said it might not be available to make a considerable step for change through alumni association in Vietnam as they were all in different study fields, the participants firmly acknowledged that they cannot make a change on their own but will have more power to move and for collaborative actions to address social change. Therefore, even though the GKS alumni

network across Vietnam currently was not active enough to induce pivotal change, it points to the fact that they perceived the significance of collaborative action through the alumni network and urges the Korean government to organize and support such networks.

5.4. Contribution and Implication

This thesis contributes to an understanding of the experiences of a government-funded scholarship's participants, especially those who are from a specific region when there is a lack of qualitative research on the subject. The findings enabled an articulation for the role of international scholarships in enhancing access to quality overseas education and promoting positive social change. Moreover, the study could support the international education development cooperation agenda by understanding international scholarships in the context of SDGs Target 4b.

The study also has policy implications for the GKS program. The GKS was a representative strategy for Korea's higher education internationalization plan and the largest grant aid in the higher education ODA sector at the same time. Therefore, this study, which tried to understand the experiences of the program participants, suggests the future policy strategy. In particular, as an ODA scholarship, it should be considered how the scholarship can facilitate social change in the recipients' home countries. To this end, it is necessary not only to provide an opportunity to experience Korean culture but also to consider and develop the elements to maximize the educational effect regarding social change. This may include providing a place for the students to think about how they can contribute to their home societies and the world as internationally educated individuals. More

importantly, as the literature and findings have shown, the alumni supporting system should be reorganized and improved.

Ensuring the quality of education for international students is another vital issue. OECD and UNESCO (2005, p. 9) argued that such quality assurance is important to encourage “the development of quality cross-border higher education that meets human, social, economic, and cultural needs.” Most of the participants were generally satisfied with the quality of Korean universities but still had difficulties due to a lack of supporting system, even though the universities in which the GKS students studied were deliberately selected ones according to specific criteria of the government.

5.5. Future Research Suggestions

While the research showed the impacts of international scholarships in terms of positive social change, it does not cover the diversity of current occupations of the alumni. Moreover, examining the voices of people around the alumni in their home countries, students or their colleagues, in this case, would provide a more in-depth insight into change aspects. Additionally, a further examination of how changes occur in terms of more various development goals through individual scholarship recipients also can add to the knowledge about international scholarships and their role in social change. These limitations call for further studies that may generate different aspects of social change through a variety of individuals who benefited from international scholarships.

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국문초록

고등교육 국제장학금의 역할 탐색: 베트남 출신 한국정부초청장학생의 경험에 관한 질적 연구

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이 연구의 목적은 한국정부초청장학금(Global Korea Scholarship, GKS)을 통해 한국의 대학원 과정을 수학한 베트남 유학생들의 한국 유학 및 졸업 후 경험과 그 의미를 탐구하는 것이다. 이를 통해 GKS 국제 장학금의 접근성 향상 및 긍정적 사회 변화에 기여하는 두 가지 역할을 고찰하고자 하였다. 글로벌 지식 경제 사회의 도래에 따라 경제 및 사회 발전을 위한 고등교육의 역할이 부각되고 있으며, 질 좋은 고등교육 기회를 위한 국제장학금의 중요성이 강조된다. 특히 이 연구는 교육개발협력의 수단으로서 고등교육 국제장학금을 바라보고 있다. 이와 관련한 최근 선행연구에서는 단순히 접근성을 증진하거나 양질의 노동력을 생산해내는 국제장학금을 넘어, 더욱 다양한 차원의 긍정적 사회 변화에 기여할 수 있는 변화 에이전트(change agent)로서의 개인을 키워내는 장학금의 역할에 주목하고 있다.

이 연구는 베트남 대학 교원 GKS 동문을 주 연구 참여자로 설정하였다. GKS 국제장학금은 베트남 출신 동문들에게 한국 유학 기회를 부여하며 베트남 대학 교원으로서 합당한 지식과 기술을 갖추어 줄 수 있도록 하였으며, GKS 장학생으로서 책임감과 자랑스러운 마음을 느끼게 해주었다. 연구 참여자들은 한국 대학의 치열한 교육

환경으로 인한 학업 부담과 유학생 지원 부족, 언어 문제 등 여러 어려움을 겪었으나 이를 극복하고 개인적, 학문적으로 성장하였다.

이러한 개별 장학생의 성장은 베트남 대학의 변화로도 이어졌다. 그들은 해외 유학한 교원으로서 높은 직위에서 베트남 대학의 교육과 연구의 질적 발전에 기여하고 있었다. 참여자들은 해외 유학한 개인으로서 베트남 사회 발전을 위한 책임감을 느꼈다. 이는 곧 학문적 기여와 더불어 베트남 사회에서 모범이 되는 것이었으며, 나아가 유학국인 한국과 본국 베트남의 관계 증진에 기여하는 것이었다.

이와 같은 연구 결과는 긍정적인 사회 변화를 위한 국제장학금의 역할이 곧 장학생 개개인의 행위 주체성(agency)을 통해서 가능하게 됨을 보여주며, 지식과 기술의 본국 적용을 위해서는 적절한 환경이 뒷받침되어야 함을 보여준다. 나아가 사회 변화는 장학금 동문이라는 소속감을 통한 동문들의 네트워크 및 공동의 행동을 통해 촉진된다. 마지막으로 이 연구는 국제장학금의 사회 변화 측면을 개인의 역할을 통해 질적으로 이해한 학문적 의의가 있으며 GKS 프로그램의 정책적 함의를 시사한다.

주제어: 고등교육, 국제장학금, 국제교육개발협력, 사회 변화, 변화 에이전트, Global Korea Scholarship, 베트남

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