The Cross-Cultural Adaptation of Tertiary International Students in South Korea

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Abstract

South Korea’s demographic problem has spurred Korean universities to expand their outreach and increase their stake in global student mobility. The desire for global expansion and diversity in Korean higher education clashes with the sensibilities of a nation lacking a multicultural tradition. This study documents this conflict of competing interests by narrating the cross-cultural adaptation experiences of 14 international students at a private tertiary institution in South Korea. Within the framework of cross-cultural adaptation theory, the researcher utilized questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and a focus group to better understand how international students are affected by their encounters with Korean society. From the qualitative analysis, the key themes of cultural affinity, language fluency necessity, and implicit discrimination were found to impact an individual’s cross-cultural adaptation. The results demonstrate that students’ perceptions of Korea and their experiences constitute a feedback loop: either a positive cycle of adaptation stemming from a high interest in host language and culture that manifests into a higher student-perceived satisfactory experience in the host country or a negative cycle of dissatisfaction and rejection of the host society and culture.

Keywords: cross-cultural adaptation; Korean higher education; global student mobility; cultural affinity; language fluency; discrimination

1. Introduction

An increase in globalization has resulted in more international student mobility. International students encounter many challenges in transitioning to their host countries which include language barriers, psychological, and sociocultural adaptation issues (Peng & Wu, 2019). In South Korea (Hereafter, Korea), sociocultural adaptation issues stem from difficulty adapting and integrating into Korean society and culture (Jung, 2022). Many social and cultural matters afflicting international students are like those of other non-Korean citizens living in Korea, such as migrant workers and foreign spouses (Jung, 2023). For international students, acculturative stressors including language barriers, frustration, and depression, guarantee that they ultimately face more significant challenges than domestic students (Lee et al., 2020). Specific mitigating factors are conducive to international students’ successful cross-cultural adaptation. Identifying these conditions and connecting them to a larger framework to influence Korea’s multicultural policies is vital, given the present demographic
challenges in a country with relatively new multicultural values and lack of implementation. This paper applies cross-cultural analysis to elucidate the complexities of the cross-cultural adaptation experiences of international students due to global student mobility in Korean higher education and provides a preliminary framework to aid researchers, government officials, and other stakeholders.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Higher education in South Korea

There has been tremendous growth in international students worldwide (Dailey-Strand et al., 2021; L. Jin et al., 2022; Y. Y. Jin et al., 2022; Jon et al., 2014; Jung & Kim, 2017). According to recent statistics, 381 post-secondary institutions operate in Korea, with 3,117,540 domestic students and 166,869 international students enrolled full-time (Korean Educational Statistics Service, 2022). Some of the most significant social issues attributing to the low domestic student enrollment are Korea's rapidly declining national birth rate, a slowing economy, and a weakening job market (Rabbidge & Banerjee, 2022). Luckily, for many institutions worldwide suffering from student retention and attrition issues, there is continuing interest and an increase in students seeking international education abroad (Y. Y. Jin et al., 2022; Jon et al., 2014). Traditionally, in the last four decades in which there has been a rapid increase in tertiary international students (J. Choi, 2021; L. Jin et al., 2022), the most popular choices for studying abroad have been the major English-speaking countries, including the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand (Bae & Song, 2017). However, South Korea has become a popular alternative and a significant education hub for international students in recent years due to its growing global economic and cultural influence (L. Jin et al., 2022). This, coupled with the Korean government's sincere efforts to fulfill its goal of establishing Korea as an academic powerhouse in East Asian higher education through various internationalization policies (Cho & Palmer, 2013), has subsequently led to the number of international students in Korea steadily increasing in recent years (Jung & Kim, 2017; Lee et al., 2020).

The international student profile in Korea represents numerous countries worldwide but is predominantly from China, Japan, Mongolia, Vietnam, and the United States (Choi & Kim, 2014; L. Jin et al., 2022; Park & Noh, 2018). Most recently, international students from so-called "resource-rich" countries in Central Asia, Africa, and the Middle East have increased sharply (Choi & Kim, 2014). Through three government-backed campaigns, Korea’s international student population increased in the early 2000s and continues to do so (Y. Y. Jin et al., 2022; Juraev et al., 2022). The government has assisted Korean institutions in securing international students by providing funds to assist them in expanding English-track programs, simplifying visa requirements, and enhancing employment support (Juraev et al., 2022). To ensure desirable outcomes in Korea’s attempt to become a meaningful contender in the competition for international students, the needs of international students must be addressed at the institutional, governmental, and societal levels.

2.2 Challenges of studying in South Korea

Although research that has focused on international students’ experiences in Korea is not extensive, current studies have made it evident that the students experience various kinds of adaptation challenges. In the interest of raising student satisfaction and managing attrition and retention problems, Alemu & Cordier (2017) identified that factors influencing international students’ overall satisfaction include satisfaction in academic and education quality, effective communication between university and students before arrival in Korea, proficiency in the Korean language, socializing with Koreans and foreigners, discrimination based on nationality and satisfaction with living arrangements and Korean food among others. As noted above, one of the most salient issues of international students in Korea is the language barrier (Achangwa et al., 2022; Bae & Roh, 2021; Lee et al., 2022). Despite boasting that Korea is a globalized society and emphasizing the value of the
English language, English is still rarely utilized in everyday life in Korea, and most Koreans cannot speak it fluently (J. Choi, 2021). Hence, because Korean is the primary method of communication for all transactions, international students will face disadvantages and challenges if they lack the Korean proficiency to understand and communicate at school and in society. The language barrier in the host country is a cause of international students’ feelings of anxiety and isolation (Luo et al., 2019). Furthermore, there are differences based on ethnicity and race at host institutions concerning discriminatory treatment. For example, Lee, Jon, and Byun (2017) found that compared with students from Europe, North America, and other regions, non-Caucasian students such as Asian students from the Global South reported more tremendous hardships and discriminatory treatment.

The psychological adjustment and social integration of international students are challenging due to the lack of opportunities for social interaction with domestic students (Jon, 2012; Suh et al., 2019). Research shows that to help alleviate the difficulties brought on by the linguistic and cultural challenges, tertiary institutions can provide support in the form of student counseling by a professional counselor on-campus who is accessible to all international students regularly. Schools can also provide social support by creating campus opportunities for interaction between Korean and international students. Allowing domestic and international students to engage in curricular and extracurricular activities enables all to benefit from gaining new learning experiences and mutual cultural enrichment opportunities (Suh et al., 2019).

2.3 Theoretical framework

According to Kim (2001), cross-cultural adaptation is when individuals establish themselves in a new, unfamiliar location and cultural environment to eventually become integrated into the host society through relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationships with the host members. This occurs through an “interactive, communication-based conception...[that is] the totality of an individual's personal and social experiences vis-à-vis the host environment in and through a complex system of communicative interfaces” (Kim, 2001, p. 32). The theoretical framework for this study is Kim’s (2001) Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory (CCAT). Regarding its attributional characteristics, CCAT is multidimensional in structure and the key constructs are of two types. The first type is categorized as macro-level factors which include aspects manifested in the physical such as environmental and individual characteristics (Kim, 2001). The other consists of the micro-level factors of personal and social communication (Kim, 2001). The CCAT framework was chosen as the best theoretical framework to undertake for this study since it focuses on individual experiences and allows for a deep conversation about adapting into Korean society. Through this framework, the dialogue between researcher and the participants enables intercultural communication and reflection, highlighting the unique narratives of adaptation. The potency of CCAT is its capacity to be generalizable to all individuals living in a foreign environment. It is all-encompassing and inclusive of external and internal factors that can impact an individual regardless of differences in cultural, societal, and geographic variations.

3. Rationale of the Study

This study builds upon previous research that offered anecdotal evidence of racial discrimination in Korean higher education, hindering cultural adaptation (Lee et al., 2017). Given the demographic challenges in Korea, along with anecdotal evidence of discrimination and racism (Kim, 2020; Lee et al., 2017), this paper uses CCAT to examine the deeper complexities underlying student adaptation and identify the possible path to increase student satisfaction and well-being (Cordier & Alemu, 2017; Kazakova et al., 2021). It is insufficient to interpret the problems of adapting to Korean society as issues reducible to cultural irreconcilability and racial discrimination as there are several complex factors involved. Drawing upon previous findings in the literature, this paper investigates the process and conditions of cross-cultural adaptation of tertiary international students in Korea by answering
the research questions below.

RQ1: How do adaptation factors pertaining to daily experiences, encounters with Korean people, and participation in Korean institutions impact international students’ perceptions and cultural adaptation?

RQ2: How can Kim’s (2001) Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory explain the interconnected factors of experiences and perceptions of international students during their sojourn in Korea?

4. Materials and Methods

4.1 Research site and participants

Data collection occurred at a private midsize university in Korea with a total student population of 12,723, of which 1925 were international students. A total of 126 international students voluntarily completed the survey and 14 participants participated in both the semi-structured interviews and focus group. The characteristics of the interview participants are summarized below in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Year of Study</th>
<th>Years in Korea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ansar</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td>4th year</td>
<td>Four years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamala</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>&lt; three months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muzzafar</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>&lt; three months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valerie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>2nd year</td>
<td>&lt; three months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarika</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>2nd year</td>
<td>&gt; Two years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raj</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>2nd year</td>
<td>One year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illa</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>4th year</td>
<td>Four years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>2nd year</td>
<td>&lt; three months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniela</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
<td>2nd year</td>
<td>One year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wong</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>&gt; Two years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shen</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>&gt; Two years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabrina</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>&lt; three months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>4th year</td>
<td>&gt; Five years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeke</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td>4th year</td>
<td>Four years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 Data collection

Ethics approval was obtained from the institutional review board at the university. Written consent from the participants was acquired before the data collection. During the transcription process, the names of the participants and institutions were removed. To protect participants’ privacy, pseudonyms were used. The process by which the qualitative data was collected followed standard ethical procedures.

A survey was sent to the international student population by email from the international student center at the university. Participants were asked to complete a survey about their experiences interacting with Korean students and society, how they perceive their treatment and experiences as international students in Korea, and their interests regarding Korean culture and learning the Korean language. After the survey was distributed, the researcher reached out to potential participants and conducted semi-structured interviews. During the semi-structured interviews which were approximately 90 minutes each, the researcher requested more background information from the answers given by the students to delve deeper into the heterogeneous conditions affecting student experiences. The interview questions were structured to empower students to narrate their
experiences, providing insight and contextual support to the survey questions.

4.3 Data analysis

Based on the grounded theory approach, the interviews were transcribed and analyzed for emergent categories utilizing Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) coding procedures. In the open coding stage, labels were created from keywords in the transcripts and literature review where more than 50 codes were found. Preliminary codes were culture shock, everyday English use, experience and interest in Korean culture, racial discrimination, and quality of university education. In the axial stage, further reduction in the codes led to themes such as identifying as Korean, Korean proficiency, and reflections on their Korean experiences. In the final stage of selective coding, further analysis and reductions in the themes were made until the saturation of data occurred and no new themes were derived.

5. Results

The following key themes were discovered. These themes substantially impacted the participants’ journeys of cross-cultural adaptation in Korea.

5.1 Cultural affinity

The participants who had learned about Korean culture and language before arriving in Korea had fewer difficulties adjusting and forming relationships with Koreans. Those more motivated to expand their cultural repertoire were also generally more optimistic, suggesting that a positive outlook and openness to experiences affect adaptation. Having just arrived in Korea a few months before, Kamala showed great interest in learning Korean culture for pleasure, not just survival. She stated, “I don’t just want to survive. I want to learn the Korean language and culture.”

In contrast, when asked why she chose to come to Korea, Sarika explained that the similarity between Korean grammatical structure and culture with her own attracted her to go to Korea in the first place. She elaborated, “I was surprisingly drawn to the language. My mother tongue, Bengali and Korean, are similar in grammatical structure. Also, while learning Korean, I read folk tales in Korean, which were surprisingly like my culture. I was drawn to the cultural aspect of Korea.” Valerie felt the same way. She confessed, “I like Korean dramas and songs. I like Korea as it is. I guess for other international students who came here without hearing about Korea previously or didn’t like Korea from the beginning, it might be harder for them.” Likewise, Daniela’s interest in Korean culture stemmed from her love of K-Pop. She explained, “It started with K-pop. And then, as I grew older, I became interested in the culture. When I visited Korea, I liked the people, the attitude, and the culture. The culture here is like Kyrgyzstan’s, the respect they have for older people.” When asked what aspect of Korean culture he likes, Adam confessed:

I heard they appreciate foreigners who like to speak Korean and are friendly. They don’t think badly of all foreigners. They are stylish and have great traditions. They try to protect their privacy, and their security is one of the topmost in the world.

A significant factor in Samuel’s experience concerning his acceptance and cross-cultural adaptation into Korean society originated from his friendships with Koreans. In his own words, he explained the critical scaffolding and supportive role of his best friend in Korea, who happened to be Korean:

One of the most memorable things was that I almost quit Korea. However, then I met my best friend. He taught me everything about Korea. He showed me how to eat food. He showed me how Korean society works: from language, food, and how to treat people. He even taught me what I couldn’t say to Korean people because of Korean culture. You need to do this if you want to do business here; you need to learn
Based on the participants’ experiences, it can be concluded that interest in Korean culture is a precondition for more accessible cross-cultural adaptation into South Korean society.

5.2 Language proficiency

Because a specific minimum English proficiency score was required for acceptance into their international program, emphasis on Korean language proficiency was not required for admission. However, the students found that possessing a minimum level of Korean proficiency was necessary for daily living. Many participants stated that they were surprised by Koreans’ lack of English communicative ability because they assumed that Korea was a globalized country. For example, Muzzafar said, “I expected English names on the products. It’s all in Korean, so it’s difficult. It’s uncomfortable for foreigners.” This linguistic barrier led to cultural misunderstandings in everyday life. Raj was amazed to learn this when he first arrived in Korea:

Before I arrived here, I watched many videos on YouTube about Korea. None of the videos ever mentioned how vital Hangul is for survival. I never thought that I would have to learn Korean. I felt that knowing English would be enough, but I was wrong.

Regarding the linguistic barriers, Adam stated that the first struggle he encountered when arriving in Korea was communicating with Koreans. He confessed:

This was the first challenge I faced. It was a challenge when I went shopping and to other places. I met the problem of being unable to express what I wanted and couldn't understand what they were saying.

Sabrina also pointed out that her attempt to speak Korean still made it challenging to communicate with Koreans. She stated, “They don’t speak English. When you try to say some words in Korean to express your ideas, they don’t understand even though you’re trying to use their words.” Korean proficiency is also essential in the student’s finding a part-time job. Illa illustrates:

We can only get jobs if we know Korean. So, during the interview, they ask so many questions. If we don’t learn Korean, they choose other people and will not allow learning. So that’s why we must know the language to survive in Korea.

Thus, obtaining a part-time job took much work for those who needed help communicating in Korean. It also served as an obstacle to fully participate in school functions and deal with administrative issues. Raj confessed that one of the main problems for him and other international students was that most facilities operated only in Korean, not English. He revealed, “Actually, the main problem of our college is that the website is all in Korean. When we apply for any courses, it’s tough for us. When we translate with our phones, the translation is not always good.” Thus, one of the essential factors in successful daily living is communicating in the Korean language. It was apparent that the linguistic struggle in everyday life was a solid factor to overcome in cross-cultural adaptation.

5.3 Implicit discrimination

Many participants felt Koreans generally did not accept their ethnicity and cultural background. However, it was interesting to note that they did not feel unsafe or in danger because of their different race and cultural background. There was also implicit discrimination based on skin tone, where those who were lighter-skinned and European-looking or similar in appearance to Koreans were treated better than those who were darker-skinned. For example, Adam explains:
You can find discrimination in buses. I’m sitting, and I’m not white. I’m brown and South Asian. I’m sitting on a seat on the bus, and the seat next to me is empty. Some of them will stand the whole time and not have a seat. I found it weird that they left the center empty. They could have a seat and enjoy their journey. I wonder why they did this.

Likewise, Sabrina explained that she felt a sense of prejudice in Korea due to her skin color and hair. She stated:

_The fact that I’m French helps a lot. But my skin color and hair are not helping me much because it’s only when you tell them you’re French that they become in awe of you. The discrimination was not that strong because it wasn’t in a violent way, and it’s more like they were trying to avoid what was different._

Further corroborating Sabrina’s experience of racism, Zek explained he usually felt welcome in Korea, which his friends attributed to his lighter skin tone. He stated, “Yes. I felt welcomed. Face to face, I never had a racism problem. My friends say it’s because I have lighter skin than them.” Illa believes that part of the cause of her discrimination and differential treatment in the classroom is her lack of proficiency in Korean:

_If I talk with them in Korean, they just come and speak to me. But if I don’t know any Korean, they don’t want to say anything. So, in the beginning, it was painful because the professor wanted us to be in a group, and they didn’t want to be in a group with us. It was a problem._

In summary, implicit discrimination harmed the participants’ cross-cultural adaptation and integration into the host society. Racism and discrimination impact a student’s life, but these encounters are part of a more extensive adaptation process. Given that racism was not a significant theme or the primary complaint of the study participants, it seems that difficulties in adaptation must be examined within the greater context of interconnecting factors. Figure 1 below shows the interrelationship of the four main factors influencing international student experiences.

![Figure 1: The perceived factors affecting international student experiences in South Korea.](image-url)
6. Discussion

The orientation of the participants’ experiences in Korea stemming from cultural affinity further supports the empirical evidence suggesting that the influence of prior expectation and personal motivation are vital components of satisfaction (Juraev et al., 2022). The greater the incentive to adapt, the more likely the individual will try to learn about and participate in the host environment (Kim, 2001). Those who maintained their motivation to adapt were more invested in getting a job and living in Korea after graduation. Many participants’ positive outlooks and optimistic personalities allowed for better integration into Korean society (Kim, 2001). To provide international students with living conditions conducive to cross-cultural adaptation in the school environment, international and domestic students must have the opportunity to interact and work together in the dormitories and classroom (Peng & Wu, 2019) as "the issues of cross-adaptation of international students are largely attributed to cultural distance and difference" (Peng & Wu, 2019, p. 80). Thus, it does not help when international students are usually segregated into similar ethnic and cultural students in the dormitories, significantly reducing cross-cultural interactions. This segregation is also a cause of international students reporting that they were the least satisfied with social interactions with Koreans (Jon & Ayhan, 2021).

Participants who were more proficient in the Korean language and culture had a more manageable and positive experience in Korea. The importance of language lies in the fact that it is the primary channel for adaptation (Kim, 2001). Language allows individuals to acquire the essential communication function and leads the pathway to being understood, developing social capital, and becoming accepted members of the host society. The value of possessing competency in the host language lies in its role as a form of social currency in the mainstream culture (Kim, 2001). Those who are more familiar with the language and culture of the host country and are more culturally like the host country are better able to adapt and integrate culturally. The importance of cultural proximity in integration has been well established (Alcott & Watt, 2017; Kim, 2001). This finding validates other studies on the cross-cultural experiences of international students, such as those in China (Peng & Wu, 2019). There also exists a positive relationship between the level of stress and the discrepancy between the host culture and the culture of origin of the international student (Jin et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2004).

In contrast to positive experiences, the implicit discrimination encountered by the participants is consistent with past research in that it is one of the top acculturative stress factors that international students experience in South Korea (Lee et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2017). The participants’ perceptions of discrimination further support Korean students’ acknowledgment of recurring stereotypes and biases against certain cultures and nationalities (Jon, 2009). The conclusion that the darker the skin tone, the greater the discrimination the participants experienced can be observed in other countries, such as the United States (Monk, 2015). Stress stemming from perceived racism on behalf of international students can harm their physical and mental well-being and negatively impact their views of the host country (Wei et al., 2008). Therefore, it is crucial to recognize that the discrimination faced by international students in South Korea is a salient global issue as “racial prejudice and discrimination are continuing global phenomena” (Alcott & Watt, 2017, p. 1) and are likely to increase as the number of students crossing borders to learn keeps rising every year.

Expanding social support for international students is very important if the goal is to alleviate the stress of such negative sociocultural experiences. Social support is one of the most influential factors in assisting international students in integrating and adapting into Korean society because it “facilitates and buffers international students’ college adjustment, which is seminal for their success both personally and academically as well as for their well-being” (Lee et al., 2020, p. 3). The significance of social support in the cross-cultural adaptation of international students was evident in participant Samuel’s experiences. Like Samuel, those who can develop and nurture friendships with Koreans can obtain the social support needed to overcome many of the challenges they encounter daily in Korea. Past studies indicate that social support allows international students to adjust better.
and adapt to the host country by mitigating various sources of stress (Lee et al., 2020; Luo et al., 2019) such as those caused by maladaptive perfectionism and acculturation (Lee et al., 2020). Thus, Korean friends are vital for social and moral support.

Based on the international student participants’ perceived experiences in this study and previous research in the field, there appears to be a general pathway toward cross-cultural adaptation. The more a student is inclined to master Korean language proficiency and understand Korean culture, the easier it is to adapt and integrate into Korean society (the “in-group”) and for Korean society to accept an international student (the “out-group”). This increases the chance of successful cross-cultural adaptation and higher satisfaction in perceived experiences. Figure 2 illustrates this conclusion, the positive cycle of cross-cultural adaptation.

![Figure 2: The positive cycle of cross-cultural adaptation.](image)

Interestingly, this positive cycle can be reversed if there is a general lack of interest in the host language and culture and if there are repeated instances of miscommunication and unpleasant encounters with local people. Negative experiences compound whereby disinterest in communicating and interacting with Korean people increases the likelihood of dissatisfaction and cultural distance.

7. **Implications for Policy and Practice**

International students are at a distinct disadvantage compared to domestic students as they often need more local social and cultural capital compared to domestic students (Ballo et al., 2019). Based on the results of this study, many important implications for policy and practice can be made concerning the growing number of post-secondary international students in Korea.

At the institutional level, implementation of an inclusive curriculum could bring a greater understanding of cultural differences (Merola et al., 2019; Peng & Wu, 2019). Through communicative group activities and tasks that include experiential and hands-on learning to facilitate intercultural and collaborative exchange (Merola et al., 2019), schools can create and provide various kinds of mentoring programs, all of which may help international students overcome acculturation stress and more easily make cross-cultural adjustments through social bonding (Lee et al., 2020).
help bridge the existing divide between international and domestic students, as it has been found that international students with more local ties are better able to adjust psychologically (Deters, 2015).

From a national perspective, it is essential to aid this multicultural subgroup. There is currently no clear framework available to help Korean universities create an environment accommodating international students. Therefore, it is essential that the challenges of sociocultural adversity are addressed now. Whatever the specific government regulations, the case for promoting inclusive policies should be clear since international students are pivotal in promoting a positive image of Korea (Cordier & Alemu, 2017; Kazakova et al., 2021).

8. Limitations and Future Research Directions

Because the participants were limited to those attending one tertiary institution in Korea and interviews were conducted voluntarily, the perceptions of these participants may only be fully representative of some of the international student population. Hence, future research can investigate the cross-cultural adaptation of international students representing more than one post-secondary institution. Likewise, as this was an exploratory qualitative case study, important factors experienced by the international student community were identified. However, it was beyond the scope of this paper to uncover the interrelationships between the various social, cultural, and institutional issues in depth, as many complex factors are involved. Perhaps future research studies can explore this area.

9. Conclusion

Despite the various circumstances and differing nationalities, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds of international students, there is a commonality in their specific issues, challenges, and perceived experiences. This paper contributes to the growing subject of international students in Korean universities by articulating the feedback loop of cross-cultural experiences. Positive and negative cycles of adaptation demonstrate how the intensity of both positive and negative experiences compound. Examples of successful cross-cultural adaptation are individuals demonstrating high language proficiency and a strong affinity for Korean culture. The same is true for those who reject Korean culture, given their negative encounters with local people and institutions. Due to Korea’s demographic problem and increasing competition between universities, the rights and welfare of this multicultural group must be addressed. Successful cross-cultural adaptation is necessary for these people to integrate, which, in the end, will benefit the host country and its citizens.

10. Acknowledgement

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References


