

Immersion versus Engagement Strategies: Examining the Effects on Conversational Competence amongst Korean Students in an Intensive English Program

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Abstract—This study seeks to examine the effect that immersion versus engagement strategies has on the language growth and efficacy of Korean EFL students learning to speak conversational English in an Intensive English Program (IEP) at an American university. This study utilized quantitative research techniques to answer the various questions that arise in regard to the effectiveness of immersion in an intensive English program. Eight Korean students were selected to partake in the research with four currently attending the IEP program and four having since graduated from the same IEP program. The study was conducted through interviews and questionnaires to examine the effectiveness of immersion strategies within the IEP program. The study found that although some engagement strategies remained somewhat effective for Koreans learning conversational English, the students preferred immersion. The Korean students noted that their interaction with native English speakers in environments where they were immersed in English such as in living situations or extracurricular programs increased their retention of English over activities done in the classroom.

Index Terms—immersion, intensive English, engagement strategies, Korean EFL

I. INTRODUCTION

Learning to speak English conversationally and academically has long been a goal for international students who enter intensive English programs, or IEP, within American colleges and universities (Ping, 2014). Many of these students, coming from countries where English remains an academic subject, do not have much of an outlet to practice and gain competence in English for use as a communicative tool. IEP programs therefore utilize various strategies to aid students in English language acquisition in these intensive environments. Many IEP programs utilize forms of engagement, such as technology or group activities, in their instructional strategies to help cultivate a positive learning environment to boost English language acquisition (Hur & Suh, 2010; Huang et al., 2017). These strategies are utilized with the hope that students who enter IEP programs with different English proficiencies will gain a mastery of all aspects of English, including using English as a communicative tool conversationally. For many students, especially those from Korea, the need to improve conversational as well as academic English leads many students to study abroad in American IEP programs.

In Korean society, English language success remains largely dictated by high-stakes testing and most often overlooks the importance of learning to speak English as a conversational tool. Several different research studies have been conducted to elaborate on the extensive need for Koreans to push past this negative washback from the intense testing philosophy held in Korea (Choi, 2008; Ostermiller, 2014; Whitehead, 2016). Most Korean students that come to IEP programs abroad are often in need of some form of basic English speaking instruction in order to boost their competence in conversational English. IEP programs, therefore, utilize activities that are specifically engineered to engage students in a manner that allows them to gain greater English competence, such as group work and technology usage, two effective engagement strategies for Koreans (Lim, 2012). However, how effective are these strategies and how do they compare to the effects of immersion? The research presented in this study considers the positive effect that immersion and engagement strategies can have on Korean students studying in intensive English programs within the United States at American colleges and universities. Such a finding could, in theory, allow IEP programs to adapt instruction or alter school activities to enhance Korean student speaking and listening language retention and production.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A Need for a New Approach

Researchers consistently agree that Koreans, whether through negative washback from high-stakes testing or personal doubts of English competence, have difficulty in English language production regardless of the time spent studying English (Gu & Reynolds, 2013; Kim, 2006; Peng, 2006). Choi (2008) argues in her research on the impact that high-stakes testing has on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education that 47.5% of students who study English in

Korea do so because their parents desire them to do well on standardized testing as opposed to learning English as a communicative tool. Indeed, Choi as well as other researchers have stated that the negative washback brought about by the highly competitive Korean educational system and the exam-heavy curriculum hinders significant English output among students (Choi, 2008; Gu & Reynolds, 2013; Kim, 2006; Munoz & Alvarez, 2010; Ostermiller, 2014; Whitehead, 2016). However, as Ostermiller (2014) states, a majority of the participants in his study on private EFL instructors in Korea stated that “a high level of communicative competence is certainly an expectation of their children’s English education” (p. 23).

Sarah Gu and Eric D. Reynolds (2013) in their study on extensive speaking for Korean EFL learners state that in Korea, there is a “substantial cognitive distance [that] exists between *understanding* a language and being able to *produce* it with fluency, accuracy, and complexity” (p. 87), noting that output is the key to closing this gap. Researchers have suggested that students are unhappy with the current English educational system (Kim, 2006; Ostermiller, 2014). Some researchers even assert that cultural factors may contribute to the lack of motivation to focus on the output of English, with Kim (2006) stating that anti-American and anti-English sentiment may be to blame for a lack of interest in learning English. Choi (2008), on the contrary, suggests that social pressure to pass examinations and an inability to challenge the status-quo leads students to focus purely on grammatical forms rather than social language production. Peng (2006) also agrees that motivation to study English is primarily brought about by a desire to succeed academically rather than to use English as a life-long communicative tool.

Although the debate about what the cause of such a lack of English communication skills remains open, the problem remains clearly defined: a gap exists between academic, grammatical understanding of English and the ability to use English as a social, communicative tool. Choi (2008) asserts that “the problem is that most of [Korean students] wind up getting disoriented in pursuing the true goal of learning English and keep only one goal in mind, i.e. obtaining as high an EFL test score as possible” (p. 58). Peng (2006), on the other hand, suggests that tapping into student motivation will inevitably help students to learn English with competence, saying that frequent communicative production is immensely helpful in the development of second language competence (p. 51). Many researchers claim that immersion and engagement strategies, such as task-based language teaching, to name one example, would boost not only their ability to produce English but also a student’s ability to function in a social, English environment (Jackson, 2004; Lo & Murphy, 2010; Ostermiller, 2014; Oxford & Crookall, 1989; Choi, 2008).

Task-Based Language Teaching as a Form of Engagement and Immersion

In response to the challenges that Koreans face when learning English as a foreign language in Korea and abroad, specific strategies are required. Some researchers have advocated the use of task-based language teaching to close the gap between academic understanding and social conversation skills in EFL classroom instruction (Benson, 2016; Guchte, Braaksma, Rijlaarsdam, & Bimmel, 2016; Nerpravishta & Roseni, 2014; Ostermiller, 2014; Poupore, 2013). Ostermiller (2014) concluded through his study of the private EFL sector of the South Korean educational system that teachers should take a more task-based approach to increase communicative competence: “This approach also has a strong emphasis on exposing students to authentic language use. Through my experience, many of the tasks that my students are required to complete are not communicative; they do not require interaction amongst participants” (p. 4). Nerpravishta and Emilda (2014) echoed this sentiment that a task-based approach can aid as an engagement strategy or a form of immersion by providing students with a venue to utilize their English as a communicative tool: “Task-based teaching (TBLT) in [English learning] environments provides learners with natural sources of meaningful material, various situations for communicative purposes, and supportive feedback for greater opportunities in using language” (p. 1). Benson (2016) further asserts that TBLT promotes learning by doing. Indeed, these researchers have promoted the usefulness of task-based language instruction as an engagement strategy to utilize.

Motivation remains central to the implementation of a task-based language approach to intensive English classrooms. Many Korean students feel unmotivated by seemingly meaningless tasks. Ostermiller (2014) also points out that American teachers often fail to recognize student motivation or goals when selecting tasks for language acquisition. Poupore (2013) similarly notes that socio-cultural factors combined within an EFL classroom have the potential to rob Korean students of their motivation to complete English-learning tasks. Poupore’s (2013) study revealed that the number one reason for loss of motivation among Korean EFL students is a complicated, confusing, or difficult English task or prompt. Therefore, when teaching Korean students through the utilization of engagement strategies, it is paramount to take into account a student’s motivation levels and factors that affect said motivation. Long (2010) further points out that successful instruction through the venue of task-based language teaching is made possible by relevant instruction depending on the situation of the student. Long (2010) additionally states that “collaborative learning plays an important role” in task-based instruction (p. 2). This remains especially true with Korean students. Altogether, these researchers assert the importance of the task-based language teaching method amongst several different kinds of engagement techniques and immersion situations. Furthermore, these studies draw attention to the importance of including extracurricular tasks when engaging students with the content and the benefits that they can have on EFL instruction, especially in an intensive English setting (Benson, 2016; Ostermiller, 2014).

Growing Understanding of Immersion

The importance of immersion and engagement strategies in English classrooms has been a subject of debate in the United States since the late 1960s (Kim, Hutchison, & Winsler, 2015). Since then, educators and researchers have

sought to understand the impact that immersion-styled teaching and engagement strategies have had on English learners, specifically those from foreign countries. However, little research has been done to examine the effect that immersion in general has on the English conversational skills of foreign students in intensive English settings, especially abroad. Jackson (2004) conducted research on a group of Hong Kong students who traveled to England for an eighteen month English study. In her research, Jackson (2004) noted that the students first gravitated towards other Chinese students during the first half of the study-trip. Jackson noted of the students: "In the first half of the sojourn, in particular, most found it difficult to initiate and keep a conversation going with students from other parts of the world" (p. 268). Jackson (2004) also noted that cultural and social factors native to their home country also prevented the students from practicing their English, noting that elements such as peer pressure and unfamiliarity created hurdles for the students to utilize their English in an immersive environment.

Despite these hindrances to immersion instruction, another study conducted by researchers from the University of Oxford found that students who participate in an immersion program and are taught academic subjects in English are several times more likely to have higher vocabulary usage and have higher grades during English assessments (Lo & Murphy, 2009). More specifically, the study focused on two schools in which one school used English as the language of use in 70% of the instructional time while another school only taught English in the form of an English class. The students of the first school scored significantly higher on comprehension tests in nearly every category examined (Lo & Murphy, 2009). Indeed, researchers such as Lo and Murphy (2009) and others have made the case that being immersed in an English environment can greatly aid students in English development in various situations (Jackson, 2004; Oxford & Crookall, 1989).

III. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The purpose of this study is to examine the effect immersion and engagement strategies have on Korean students who are enrolled in an intensive English program at an American university to increase their competence in conversational English. Additionally, this study will evaluate student efficacy in their perspective of being prepared to be successful in the social English environment in an American university as well as the general American public. The following questions provided the basis for this study:

1. What effects do engagement strategies and immersion have on a Korean student's perceived confidence to produce English conversationally?
2. To what extent do engagement strategies contribute to Korean students' perceived communicative language development in intensive English classes in an English-speaking country?
3. To what extent does immersion contribute to Korean students' perceived communicative language development in intensive English classes in an English speaking country?

IV. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a quantitative data collection approach to reach its conclusions. The data was collected using surveys that utilized numerical categories in the form of Likert scales rather than open-ended questions, although open-ended questions were sometimes utilized to obtain biographical information and introductions.

Participants

After reviewing the educational history and competence of Korean students in an IEP program at an American university, a purposive sample of eight Korean students were voluntarily recruited to participate in the survey and interview process. All of the students that partook in the study were Korean and came to America to either study English in the IEP program or to study a degree within the academic life of the university but were first required to take IEP courses. The four Korean students who were currently attending the IEP program had graduated from a Korean high school and came directly to America to study English in a university setting. These students had little to no experience living in a foreign country within an IEP context and are all beginners to intermediate level English learners. Four additional Korean students had successfully graduated from the same IEP program having already graduated from Korean high schools and were then fully integrated into American social and academic life. All of the participants in the study were roughly the same age, consisting of individuals from eighteen to twenty-eight. Five males and three females participated in the study. All students were informed of the study and the anonymity of their identities and responses. Informed consent was, therefore, conveyed to the students.

Data Collection

Three areas of emphasis were analyzed in the data collection phase: 1) biographical information, 2) immersion's and engagement strategies' effect on English production confidence, and 3) the educational effectiveness of engagement strategies and immersion as a part of the IEP environment. In total, eight Korean students were interviewed and given questionnaires to complete about all three areas. All students were given informed consent before volunteering to partake in the study.

All eight Korean students underwent a preliminary open-ended questionnaire to determine their level of competence in speaking English conversationally, level of schooling in English, reasoning for coming to America to study English, and motivation levels for learning English. An open-ended questionnaire was selected for the beginning survey simply

because it allowed for freedom of expression and thought to give the researcher a sense of English proficiency and personal English confidence. The researcher then conducted a second questionnaire for both current IEP students and former IEP students to examine the effectiveness of the immersion and engagement strategies during their time studying in the IEP program. The first questionnaire was used to establish the participants' level of personal English confidence as well as general demographic information. Its results had no bearing on the second questionnaire which had to do with engagement strategies and immersion factors.

To answer the research questions, the researcher utilized quantitative data methods. Using the second questionnaire which utilized Likert scales, the researcher met with Korean students both in and outside the IEP program to determine the data. The second questionnaire given to the students was answered in response to the experience that they had in the IEP program at their university. A Likert scale ranking system of 1 to 4 allowed the students to evaluate the perceived effectiveness of various engagement strategies and immersion factors (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). An even number Likert scale was utilized to avoid the exploitation of neutral answers among participants. The questions focused on the effectiveness that immersion and engagement strategies had on the motivation and learning of a student in the IEP program and asked students to rank effectiveness using a numerical scale (Goertzen, 2017). By utilizing current and post-IEP groups of students, the researcher was able to examine the perceived effectiveness of either engagement strategies or immersion factors from students in the IEP and from students who have graduated from the IEP program. Furthermore, questions within the survey were intended to cover all aspects of the IEP process in regard to immersion and engagement strategies that are utilized in different settings throughout the program. After completing the questionnaire, the students participated in one-on-one interviews to review the students' response to immersion and engagement strategies in their efforts to learn conversational English. The subject of the questions remained the same for all students. For example, one student currently in the IEP was asked to further explain their feelings towards living with international roommates and how that has allowed them to learn English conversationally. The same question was asked of a post-IEP student but was rewritten to reflect the past rather than the present.

Data Analysis

The data analysis of the Likert scale data collected was analyzed by utilizing independent samples T testing (Dörnyei, 2007). The data analysis began with the compilation of the data into a collective pool segregated by IEP status as either current or post-IEP. Utilizing the data gained from the Likert scale samples, the data was combined within their categories to produce averages in regard to both the question asked and the classification of student (Treiman, 2009). Therefore, in regard to the averages produced from the Likert scale samples, the researcher was able to garner a single quantifiable numeral to place under the category of classification of student and/or the immersion or engagement strategy that corresponded with the answers of the students.

Following this initial step, the researcher utilized the SPSS statistical software program to determine if a significant difference exists between the categories examined. By determining if the data contains differences that are significant, the researcher was able to pinpoint areas of statistical significance to examine (Treiman, 2009). The trends that emerged were one of preference.

In order to determine a preference for engagement strategies or immersion factors, the research split up IEP and post-IEP responses into two tables. Then, the researcher compared the responses of each group individually against their engagement strategies answers and their immersion answers. The researcher then calculated the percentage value towards a preference of engagement or immersion with engagement represented by a negative percentage and immersion represented by a positive percentage. A "1" from the Likert scale represented a 0% preference for a position, whereas a "4" on the scale represented a 100% preference. The researcher first took the average Likert scale number per question and converted it to a percentage. After subtracting two comparing percentages, the researcher was able to quantify a percentage preference towards question over another.

The open-ended responses collected from the students were left in their original and raw state to showcase the English competency of the students. The grammatical errors and syntax structures are transferred verbatim from how they were originally written down on the survey. This was done to preserve the students' responses and eliminate researcher bias.

V. INTERPRETATION

Many similarities and contrasts were found to exist between the four Korean students that are currently attending IEP classes and the four Korean students who have previously graduated from the IEP to attend academic classes in the same American university. Furthermore, all individuals marked English language skills as highly important to their future careers. In addition, seven out of eight of the participants stated that they desire to learn English because it is the global language used to interact between cultures. Moreover, all participants said that learning English is personally very important while five out of eight stated that their parents held English education as highly important.

When it came to identifying the problems of learning to speak and eventually speaking English conversationally, all of the participants were in general agreement. When asked how the participants viewed their own ability to speak English, the participants currently in the IEP were generally negative of their own abilities, with some attributing it to their inability to formulate perfect sentences. The students who graduated from the IEP tended to have remarks that

cluded to a higher level of confidence. Below are the students' responses to the question: "How would you describe your English speaking abilities:"

TABLE 1:
HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR ENGLISH SPEAKING ABILITIES?

IEP Student 1	After I studied in IEP, I am improving my speaking English. But, I still have nervous when I talk to American. Because American speak so smoothly and fast.
IEP Student 2	I'm bad.
IEP Student 3	So bad. Speaking and writing are harder than reading.
IEP Student 4	I want to say much. My brain get confusion. My mouth hesitates so much. I say just Yes and No Lol.
Post-IEP Student 1	Depend on topic or context. But mostly I feel I am lack of vocab.
Post-IEP Student 2	Well...pretty good! I have no problems to communicate with other people.
Post-IEP Student 3	It's getting better.
Post-IEP Student 4	I feel like I do not have problem with listening classes and lectures.

The data shows that the Korean students not only feel a lack of confidence in speaking English but also feel that they are less willing to speak if the sentence that they want to say is not perfect upon conception. Quantitative data gathered showed that students who have graduated from the IEP program were more likely to have a boosted level of self-confidence in speaking English. The data shows that although the Likert scale findings were significantly different from each other, the p value of .058 suggests that the difference is due to chance, as shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2:
I FEEL COMFORTABLE SPEAKING ENGLISH TO AN AMERICAN.

(1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – agree, 4 – strongly agree)					
Mean Current IEP Student Score	Mean Post-IEP Student Score	t	df	Sig.	Mean Difference
2	2.75	-3.000	3	.058	-.75000

According to the data above, there does appear to be a significant difference between students who current attend IEP who feel comfortable speaking with Americans (M=2, SD=0) and students who graduated from IEP (M=2.75, SD=.5); $t(3)=-3, p=.06$, although this finding may be more due to statistical chance than a conclusive finding.

The second portion of the study attempted to delve into how immersion and engagement strategies potentially boost the perceived competence of Korean students to speak English conversationally. Using quantitative data, the students responded to statements made by circling four numbers with "1" representing "strongly disagree," "2" representing "disagree," "3" representing "agree," and "4" representing "strongly agree." In this portion of the study, it was found that students who have graduated from the IEP program and have utilized its immersion and/or engagement strategies in their language study felt more comfortable to speak English to non-native speakers. Table 3 demonstrates the results of the study below:

TABLE 3:
THE EFFECTS THE IEP ON CONFIDENCE LEVELS OF IEP STUDENTS AND GRADUATES.

(1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – agree, 4 – strongly agree)						
Question	IEP Student Averages	Post-IEP Student Averages	t	df	Sig.	Mean Diff.
I feel comfortable speaking English in my IEP classes.	3	3.25	-.522	6	.620	-.25000
If I feel that I cannot say an English sentence correctly, I would rather not speak.	2.75	2.25	1.414	6	.207	.50000
My classmates make me feel comfortable to speak English.	2.75	3.75	-2.828	6	.030	-1.0000

The data set suggests that out of the three questions to survey confidence levels for Korean students, only the third question in regard to speaking around classmates appeared to be significantly different. Students currently in the IEP program (M=2.75, SD=.5) and students who have graduated from the IEP (M=3.75, SD=.5) displayed greater perceived competence in speaking around classmates in English; $t(6)=-2.83, p=0.03$.

The evidence suggests that by the time students come out of the IEP program, they are much more willing to engage others in English and social interaction, even if personal confidence levels are unaffected. In fact, when the participants were asked what the hardest aspect of English language learning was to them, none of the post-IEP students answered "speaking" as one of their options.

The third section of the research conducted with the IEP and post-IEP students had to do more directly with the immersion and engagement strategies in and out of the classroom and how they affect the learning of conversational

English. All of the data collected in this portion of the research was quantitative. The table below compares questions asked of the students with a reference to an engagement strategy employed in the classroom. The other question used in the comparison is one that refers to a factor of immersion comparable to the adjacent engagement strategy question. The individual responses were compared using their percentage values of “1” equaling 0% and “4” equaling 100% preference for a particular engagement activity or immersion factor. The results were compared between current IEP students, as in Table 4, and post-IEP students, as in Table 5. The results for current IEP students can be seen in Table 4:

TABLE 4:
EFFECTIVENESS OF ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES VERSUS IMMERSION IN CURRENT IEP STUDENTS

(1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – agree, 4 – strongly agree)				
<i>Question in regard to Engagement Strategies</i>	<i>Average Score</i>	<i>Question in regard to Immersion</i>	<i>Average Score</i>	<i>Percentage Preference (Positive percentages being a preference towards immersion and negative towards engagement strategies)</i>
1. It helps me to learn to speak English the most when I study English from a textbook or lecture in groups.	2.25	1. It helps me to learn to speak English the most when I talk with native English speakers in English.	3.75	49.95%
2. It helps me to learn to speak English the most when I participate in group activities in class with other international students.	3	2. It helps me to learn to speak English the most when I live with Americans.	4	33.33%
3. It helps me to learn to speak English the most when I go somewhere outside of school on an organized tour (i.e. museum, IEP student social event).	2.75	3. It helps me to learn to speak English the most when I go somewhere outside of school and interact with native speakers and American culture (i.e. market).	3.75	33.33%
4. Speaking English is easiest when I am inside the classroom during English class.	2.5	4. Speaking English is easiest when I am outside of class interacting with people outside of the IEP program.	2.5	0%
5. Listening to recordings of English speakers speaking helps me to speak English better.	3	5. Learning English by listening to native speakers speak English helped me feel prepared to speak English.	3.25	8.33%
6. Learning English by using technology in the classroom has helped me feel prepared to speak English.	2.25	6. Interacting with American culture outside the classroom has allowed me to learn to speak English quickly.	3.25	33.33%

One can note that there are no negative percentages indicating that for at least five out of the six questions, immersion factors were chosen as being more effective than engagement strategies. Only question four remained neutral with a percentage of 0%. For five out of six of the questions, current IEP students maintained that immersion fostered greater English conversational competence than engagement strategies. Identical questions were asked of post-IEP students, as seen in Table 5 below:

TABLE 5:
EFFECTIVENESS OF ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES VERSUS IMMERSION IN POST-IEP STUDENTS

(1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – agree, 4 – strongly agree)				
<i>Question in regard to Engagement Strategies</i>	<i>Average Score</i>	<i>Question in regard to Immersion</i>	<i>Average Score</i>	<i>Percentage Preference (Positive percentages being a preference towards immersion and negative towards engagement strategies)</i>
1. It helps me to learn to speak English the most when I study English from a textbook or lecture in groups.	2.25	1. It helps me to learn to speak English the most when I talk with native English speakers in English.	3.75	49.95%
2. It helps me to learn to speak English the most when I participate in group activities in class with other international students.	3	2. It helps me to learn to speak English the most when I live with Americans.	4	33.33%
3. It helps me to learn to speak English the most when I go somewhere outside of school on an organized tour (i.e. museum, IEP student social event).	2.5	3. It helps me to learn to speak English the most when I go somewhere outside of school and interact with native speakers and American culture (i.e. market).	4	49.95%
4. Speaking English is easiest when I am inside the classroom during English class.	2.25	4. Speaking English is easiest when I am outside of class interacting with people outside of the IEP program.	2.75	16.65%
5. Listening to recordings of English speakers speaking helps me to speak English better.	3	5. Learning English by listening to native speakers speak English helped me feel prepared to speak English.	3	0%
6. Learning English by using technology in the classroom has helped me feel prepared to speak English.	2	6. Interacting with American culture outside the classroom has allowed me to learn to speak English quickly.	3.25	41.63%

The data displayed in Table 5 suggests that, as with the current IEP students, post-IEP students found immersion to be superior to engagement strategies in becoming competent in conversational English. Again, there were no negative percentages, indicating a preference towards immersion factors over engagement strategies with one question remaining neutral.

Noteworthy is the numerical difference between how the Korean students viewed the effectiveness of engagement strategies and immersion in the IEP program. When asked about different types of engagement strategies and immersion, the students consistently marked immersion as a more effective method of learning conversational English. The reason, as revealed through interviews, was that these preplanned IEP trips, although being an engagement strategy, did not challenge the students to move outside of their comfort zone to interact with native speakers. This is in contrast to trips to the market to buy food where a Korean student is forced out of necessity to speak with native speakers. During the interview, it was also revealed that during class or field trips, students were often afraid to genuinely interact and thus retreat to familiar ethnic lines. All of the students currently attending IEP stated this as being a factor.

Out of the questions given to the students in the IEP and outside the IEP, speaking to and living with native English speakers appeared to be the most helpful immersion activity for Korean students to learn to speak English. All eight Korean students answered “strongly agree” to immersion question number two. Both sets of students preferred living and talking with native speakers over participating in classroom engagement strategies. Consequently, the engagement strategies that were practiced inside the classroom, such as practicing conversation with other international students and going on field trips twice a semester, were ranked lower than a comparable immersion factor when asked if it helped students to learn English conversationally.

Throughout the data collection phase of the research, the Korean students noted that interaction with native English speakers whether in the classroom or outside the classroom helped to improve their ability to speak English conversationally over traditional engagement strategies utilized in the classroom. Worth noting, however, is question four which, while addressing engagement strategies and immersion, dealt with the ease of learning English conversationally. Although the students marked immersion as a more effective manner of language acquisition, they found it to be no easier a manner as were engagement strategies. However, the data suggests that students currently in the IEP program prefer living with Americans over participating in group work in class by 33.3%. Similarly, post-IEP students shared the same sentiment also by 33.3%. In five out of six questions for both the current and post-IEP students, a clear preference for immersion factors over engagement strategies can be seen. The one question in both groups that did not indicate a preference remained neutral because the difference between the two averages was nonexistent.

In the interview phase of the research, when asked about why interacting with native English speakers and other international students was effective at learning conversational English, the Korean participants noted that it allowed for them to free up their willingness to speak. Living with international roommates that only hold English as a common language or living with American students allowed for the Korean students to experiment with their English proficiency

skills out of necessity. The Korean students made it clear that living with foreigners forced them to communicate in English at least on a basic level and, therefore, allowed them to progress in their ability to communicate on a conversational level. Eight out of eight of the students noted living and interacting with foreigners as the best way that they learn or learned to speak English. This would suggest that natural immersion with foreigners on a daily basis allows the students to practice what they have learned in their English courses at their university IEP program. This surpasses the effectiveness of engagement strategies used inside of the classroom such as practicing predetermined conversations or going on field trips, an activity that could open up the possibility for Koreans and other international students to disengage from their surroundings and retreat to comfort zones. This is not to say, however, that immersion by itself would be effective without quality instruction within the IEP program. The immersion allows for students to utilize the knowledge being gained through strategies and instruction from the IEP program.

Indeed, the data suggests that the Korean students found the immersion that they have experienced as a part of the IEP program not only to be more effective for their conversational English acquisition, but also to boost their efficacy at production. In immersion contexts, the students perceived there to be some positive correlation between immersion and improved efficacy for conversational English.

VI. DISCUSSION

Although the students who took part in the research generally had a good understanding of the English language as an academic subject, the students, especially those currently in the IEP program, felt that their communicative competence was lacking. This is in line with the findings of Choi (2008) and Ostermiller (2014). Furthermore, it would seem that the educational system of Korea is not preparing Korean students well to use English outside of reading and writing, an element of negative washback previously discussed (Kim, 2006; Whitehead, 2016). The evidence does suggest, however, that the element that is most benefitting Korean students in this particular American IEP program is the immersion that they experience and not so much the engaged instruction that they receive in the classroom or through the curriculum.

When regarding the data, it remains evident that the Korean students preferred immersion over engagement strategies. In order to better reach out to Korean students in IEP programs or even those still studying in Korea, it is vital to consider what strategies best persuade students to take on English not just as an academic subject but rather as a communicative tool that furthers the life goals and plans of said students. The evidence suggests that immersion remains an effective tool to utilize in this manner. Perhaps the use of technology in the classroom to link students of different classrooms around the world can aid Korean students studying in Korea who, in reality, have very little ability to experience immersion in the same manner that Koreans studying abroad do. As noted by Lo and Murphy (2010), this will also allow students to achieve higher scores on exams, something that remains valuable in the minds of Koreans under the Korean educational system (Whitehead, 2016).

Additionally, the Korean participants noted that partaking in the weekly Conversation Partners program, where Americans come every Friday to the IEP program and spend an hour talking about any subject with international students, helped them to utilize their English-speaking skills. The evidence suggests that this form of instruction, being a task-based strategy championed by Ostermiller (2014) in his research, is producing fruit. This also supports the findings of other researchers (Benson, 2016; Guchte, Braaksma, Rijlaarsdam, & Bimmel, 2016; Nerpravishta & Roseni, 2014; Poupore, 2013). In order to aid Korean students in the development of their English conversation skills, it would seem that implementing more strategies such as these would help bring immersion into the classroom.

However, the research suggests that even good engagement strategies for Koreans, such as those laid about by Lim (2012) as being group work and technology usage, seem to have limited effect when compared to immersion factors. As Ostermiller (2014) stated, a task-based approach could remain a viable alternative in cases abroad where immersion is not an option. The research showed that students perceived authentic interactions outside the classroom using English to be most effective in developing conversation. Could task-based instruction, therefore, be utilized to enhance instruction to somehow mimic the factors of immersion that make IEP programs successful?

In order to maximize the effect that IEP programs can have on incoming international students and specifically Koreans, programs need to further expand opportunities for authentic immersion in American society. Such activities that allow for students to move outside of their comfort groups and intermingle with Americans is supported by the data to appear to be helpful in conversational language growth. Additionally, students must be allowed to move outside comfort zones during such experiences for these immersion strategies to fully take effect, as supported by the research of Jackson (2004). Practices, such as secluding international students to international housing with members of the same nationality, would, based on the findings, be unhelpful to conversational language development.

By placing students in situations where immersion remains a primary vehicle for language growth, Korean students tend to be more motivated to try to use English, if not internally motivated, then externally motivated by the situation around them. Peng's (2006) suggestion that motivation remains an important factor in raising a student's L2 competency is supported by the data collected in the research. Students may not have found it any easier to study English in immersion settings, as the research did not explore the ease of study, but students most certainly had a motivation for using English in immersive settings and found that it increased their efficacy to do so. Additionally, researchers such as Choi (2008) and Gu and Reynolds (2013) have raised concerns in their research that there remains a

significant gap between comprehension and production amongst Korean EFL students. The data suggests that immersion can theoretically help to close this gap by not only helping students to further understand the English language but to produce it out of necessity.

However, this research found that although immersion can help the perceived improvement of English conversationally with Korean EFL students, time spent in immersive IEP programs does not boost their confidence levels significantly. This is perhaps due to the concept of ongoing language development and one's never ending quest of language mastery. The Korean students that participated in this research noted that they still had some anxiety about speaking with native speakers, even though they could sense improvement in their ability to speak through the immersive factors of the program.

The data shows that although engagement strategies within in the classroom do tend to help in the learning process for speaking English, they are not perceived to be the most helpful by Korean students. In light of the data collected throughout the surveys and the interviews, it can be theorized that interaction with native speakers significantly aids in the development of conversational English. For the participants in this study, immersion surpasses engagement strategies amongst Korean students in its ability to increase the effectiveness of English conversation competence. The data also showed that confidence to speak English also increased.

VII. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

After extensive study of Korean learning habits in regard to conversational English, it can be theorized that English in an IEP setting is best learned through immersion outside the classroom. However, even inside the classroom, evidence suggests that interaction with native speakers is beneficial. Korean students who have graduated from the IEP program have, through the evidence that was gained through the quantitative data, improved in many areas of speaking English. However, more can be done. Based on this research, the IEP program at this university should expand the Conversation Partners program to include American students going on the IEP field trips as well. This will allow for the students to break out of the cultural and ethnic boundaries that prevent them from using English on a regular basis on these frequent field trips. Furthermore, the IEP program should instigate more in-class interaction with native speakers to include more immersion in the classroom rather than just having it exist outside the classroom. These additional steps will help to strengthen and develop a deeper competency for conversational English among Korean students.

The research conducted does raise the need for additional research. One question that arose from the results of this study concerns the actual effectiveness of incorporating native speakers, other than the teacher, into the classroom. How much do the native English speakers really affect the students and their learning within a classroom context? This study focused more on the Korean students' perception of effectiveness. It did not, however, observe real-time classroom instruction or data from school grading systems. More research needs to be done to fully understand how this specific strategy can positively affect the conversational English competence in Koreans towards real-time academic success.

In conclusion, the results from the research implied the benefits of immersion towards developing English conversational competence in Korean EFL students. Although engagement strategies can be powerful, especially if they are contextually appropriate, immersion remains the most effective way to learn English conversationally based on the data. Academic English, however, remains another matter entirely. Whether immersion has any effect over academic English would need to be answered in further research. However, in light of the findings from this research, it would seem appropriate for instructors and schools to import elements of immersion in English in whatever ways they can to better cultivate English learning in the classroom and outside, as well. Technology opens up a wide variety of options for instructors to choose from that could be used to connect and immerse students in English, even if those classrooms are located in a non-English speaking country. Even if immersion may be difficult to implement in the classroom, this research suggests that even immersion in tiny amounts can be constructive to a student's English conversational development and perceived increase in competence to utilize English.

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