

## Multiculturalism in South Korea and Differing Views on Adaptation Based on Foreign Interaction with Korean Culture

Gregg Landsman, Joung Hyun Ham, Hyun Jung Min

First Author, Hanseo University, professorlandsman@gmail.com

Corresponding Author, Hanseo University, aprilham@gmail.com

Corresponding Author, Hanseo University, elisamin@gmail.com

**Abstract.** This research is aimed to show multicultural interactions and a lack of adaptation from South Korea. Foreigners in South Korea were surveyed on their interactions with Korean culture and language. This study focused on how foreigners can interact and adapt to the culture of South Korea, and whether or not this is affected by their backgrounds. The results of the survey show that the multicultural initiatives of South Korea are poorly advertised and that the views of foreigners are not affected by their backgrounds but by the barriers to their interactions with Korean culture. Respondents identified common terms related to cultural identity and showed them to be in favor of multiculturalism when enacted correctly.

**Keywords:** Multiculturalism, Education, Adaptation, Interaction, Identity, Culture, Language

### 1 Introduction

Multiculturalism is not a new concept or problem. Countries throughout the world have to incorporate travelers and immigrants from other countries to compete in global markets. Influx of immigrants is a recent issue rather than a historic one for South Korea. South Korea is traditionally a homogenous culture, but must adapt to the global economy (2). Growing demands for foreign capital, foreign labor, and English speaking skills have lead to an influx of foreign residents. Foreigners will stand out, and depending on the area they emigrate to they will find this is an advantage or disadvantage. Their unusual appearances will mark them as a local celebrity or as an outcast. Depending on which way South Korea leans politically, foreigners- especially foreign educators- can be subject to scrutiny (3) (4).

The purpose of this study is to examine the interaction of the multicultural initiatives with foreign educators in South Korea. As South Korea is both homogenous and holds this as a point of pride- with one of the cultural pillars of the society being a common ancestry for everyone in the peninsula- it approaches multiculturalism differently than western counties such as the United States and Canada, where the foreign influx is due to issues such as declining birth rate and aging population (1). Teachers coming from English-speaking countries to South

Korea have a different perspective on Korean multiculturalism due to their backgrounds, and their backgrounds differ, affecting these perspectives. Backgrounds focused on for this study are the amount of time they have spent in South Korea, their national background, their education, and their fluency in the Korean language.

Results of the quantitative study highlighted distinct problems with the Korean multicultural model. The Korean multicultural model is poorly advertised. While well funded, the initiatives put forth by the Korean government are largely over managed and absent from the public eye (1). South Korea is now a multicultural entity, even if it did not choose when it joined the global economy (8), it is still an old and very traditional country. As stated earlier- rather than being an old issue which has dragged on for decades or even centuries, the influx of foreign labor, travelers, and citizens is a recent issue.

This study used a survey based on a previous questionnaire used by the University of Western Sydney in 2013. It was divided into four categories. The first category was identity, in which the respondents answered questions about their background, years in South Korea, level of education, and fluency in Korean. The second category was about their experience as foreigners. In particular, it was about how they have adapted to South Korea or if South Korea has adapted to them. The third category was a series of word association questions relating to cultural terms. Respondents would identify their definitions of common phrases and terms relating to multicultural theory. The last category was on the respondents' opinions on multiculturalism and multicultural education. The questions were on the interaction and adaptation of multiculturalism with education, and included an open ended question where respondents would write down their thoughts on multicultural education.

## 2 Methods

This study was performed on a random sampling of 123 foreigners currently living in South Korea, ranging from foreigners who have lived in South Korea for one to three years to foreigners who have lived in South Korea for over ten years. Subjects completed a survey on the subjects of multicultural education, experiences as a foreigner living in South Korea, and views on the responsibility of teachers, students, and administration regarding the multicultural experiences of foreigners in South Korea. The survey was based on a previous survey used by the University of Western Sydney in 2013 (5).

The variables taken into account on the survey were personal information relating to their time spent in South Korea, country of origin, education level, and fluency in Korean. Based on responses, the respondents were compared based on questions and answers about adapting to Korean culture, identification of terms relating to culture and multiculturalism, and attitudes towards multicultural initiatives in South Korea. It was hypothesized that there was a rising correlation between country of origin and time spent in South Korea and positive attitudes towards Korean culture. It was also hypothesized that there was a rising correlation between fluency in Korean and adaptation to Korean culture, and a rising correlation between educational of foreigners and acceptance of multicultural initiatives.

In order to produce mean, standard deviation, correlation coefficient and mean differences, Pearson correlation analysis, and one-way analysis of variance were used. To analyze the focus on variables as relating to questions on the survey, the multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and Duncan and Dunnett (T3) for post-hoc testing were used.

### 3 Results

Of the respondents polled, 34% have been in South Korea 1-3 years, 20% have been in South Korea 3-5 years, 28% have been in South Korea for 5-10 years, and 16% have been in South Korea for more than 10 years. 39% of the respondents polled in the survey are American, with 13% identifying themselves as Canadian, 7% as Filipino, and all other respondents falling into a variety of other nationalities. 65% of respondents polled had a graduate school education.

When asked about the multicultural policy of South Korea, the majority result was that there is no coherent policy. When asked about issues that included racism and xenophobia, tolerance compared to their home country, and whether being a member of their ethnic group affects their interactions with society, the majority of respondents stated that South Korea is less tolerant than their home country and that foreigners had to adapt into Korean culture to succeed in South Korea.

When asked to define concepts relating to cultural interaction and cultural adaptation according to multicultural theory, a significant majority placed more value culture relating to holding a society together and cultural identity than on shared beliefs or interactions.

Conversely, when given a series of statements about multiculturalism in schools, the respondents agreed with the idea that having students from different cultural backgrounds was a good thing. The final question of the survey was an open ended question asking for their opinion on multicultural education. Most respondents said they believed it was a good idea, but it has not been implemented well in South Korea.

From the results of the survey, the majority of the respondents stated that multiculturalism was a positive thing. They also stated that they did not believe South Korea had a multicultural policy, and that South Korea was less tolerant than their country of origin.

### 4 Discussion

An important finding is that cultural background does not affect how a foreigner views the multicultural initiatives in South Korea. On the contrary, half of the respondents polled either stated that there was no coherent multicultural policy, or that there was a policy but it was not a coherent one. Based on the data gathered, common traits shared by the respondents are a high level of education and western backgrounds, with outliers from eastern and eastern European countries. However,

when the responses are broken down, at first glance there are two common themes. First, that multiculturalism is a good idea. Second, it is not implemented well in South Korea.

The majority of the respondents stated that adapting to Korean culture is an important part of succeeding. Other common responses and agreed with statements point to foreigners having to adapt and integrate into the dominant culture, rather than having their own culture remain separate but viable. When compared to successful multicultural models (6)(7), the language barrier would be the largest obstacle, which contributes to the feelings of xenophobia and isolation by foreigners living in South Korea. The Korean language also serves as a major part of the Korean culture, with a holiday dedicated to the creation of the Hangeul alphabet, and the creator on the man won bill.

Further questions arise from this research. If South Korea were to incorporate other languages into its day to day model, would that make South Korea a more tolerant society? How many different languages should it incorporate, and how? Korean society encourages English as part of the standard curriculum, but Hangeul is the most common language. How can different languages be adapted into Korean society, which values its identity, without changing it into something that is not Korean society?

## References

1. Yongwoo Cho, "A Comparative Study of Korean and Canadian Multicultural Policies and Support Programs" *Asian Journal of Child Welfare and Development*, 2012, Vol 10, No 4, 49-66
2. Gi-Wook Shin, "Korea's ethnic nationalism is a source of both pride and prejudice, according to Gi-Wook Shin". *The Korea Herald*. August 2, 2006.
3. Rauhala, Emily (Dec 24, 2010). "South Korea: Should Foreign Teachers Be Tested for HIV?". *Time Magazine*.
4. Lee, Jiyeon (February 3, 2010). "Animosity against English teachers in Seoul". *GlobalPost*. Retrieved December 2010.
5. Megan Watkins, Garth Lean, Greg Noble, Kevin Dunn, "Rethinking Multiculturalism, Reassessing Multicultural Education" University of Western Sydney, 2013
6. John W. Berry, "Research on Multiculturalism in Canada," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 37 (2013) 663-675
7. Stackhouse, John; Martin, Patrick (2002-02-02). "Canada: 'A model for the world'". *The Globe and Mail*. p. F3. Retrieved 2010-09-12.
8. Stephen Castles, "Will Labour Migration lead to a Multicultural Society in Korea?", *Global Human Resources Forum 2007 / International Migration Institute*
9. Geneviève Zarate; Danielle Levy; Claire Kramsch (19 April 2011). *Handbook of Multilingualism and Multiculturalism*. *Archives contemporaines*. p. 377. ISBN 978-2-8130-0039-2.