Central Asian Students' Adjustment Experiences at a "Globalized" Korean University

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Abstract

This study investigated the academic and cultural experiences of undergraduate Central Asian students at a university in Ulsan, South Korea. The study was designed to examine the experiences of Central Asian students both in their adjustment to academic work, and to the cultural environment created by the internationalization policy of the university. Using ethnographic methods that included participant observation, an open-ended questionnaire, and interviews, we examined the policies for internationalization of higher education, and we described how the stakeholders are responding to the policies with their own adjustment strategies. The stakeholders featured in this study are students from the Central Asian republics enrolled at a Korean engineering university. We conclude with suggestions on the ways that institutions of higher education can better serve international students' integration into their new community.

Keywords: Central Asian students, adjustment, international education, globalization, South Korea

1. Introduction

An increasing number of students in institutions of higher education now undertake their education outside their own country. While the most popular destinations for international students are the US, UK, and Australia, some Asian countries such as China, Japan, and Singapore have begun to attract international students (Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007). South Korea (Korea, henceforth), which was the host country with the least number among developed nations in 2000, has seen a drastic increase in its international student population over the past decade. As of 2013, there were 85,923 international students enrolled in Korean institutions of higher education, seven times higher than that in 2003 (Korean Immigration Service, 2013). This increase followed the Korean government's initiation of the "Study Korea" project in 2005, the goal of which was to attract 100,000 foreign students between 2005 and 2010 (Shin & Harman, 2009). The largest source countries are China, Japan, the US, and Vietnam. However, the number of international students from so-called "resource-rich" countries in Central Asia, Africa, and the Middle East has also increased recently (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology [MEST], 2010).

Korea's efforts to attract international students is bringing about rapid changes in the sociocultural context of Korean education, since many institutions of higher education are making policies to respond to international students' demands. In this paper, we will explore how the internationalization of institutions of higher education creates a global environment in the local context in Korea, and how international students respond to that environment as implemented by the internationalization policy of a university. Hence, our goal in this article is to conceptualize the international student as a stakeholder in South Korea's policies for the internationalization of higher education. We begin the investigation with the questions: When science/technology students from Central Asia come to study in Korea, to which aspects of the host culture created by a higher education institution must they adjust and what are their adjustment strategies? The study attempted to understand the experiences of Central Asian students, both in adjusting to academic work, and to the cultural and social setting in which that work takes place, particularly the cultural environment created by the university's internationalization policy.

2. Literature Review

2.1 International Students' Adjustment to a New Environment

When one begins in a new institution, s/he faces adjustment issues which are more likely to occur when students live and work in a foreign environment (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). Barker et al. (1991) noted that problems experienced by international students are often affected by unfamiliarity with the host nation's cultural norms, and those problems are often manifested as difficulties in adjustment. Studies of international student adjustment have discussed a range of problems, including the pressures created by new roles and behavioral expectations, language, social difficulties, homesickness, procedures for dealing with the university and other authorities, and academic problems (Andrade, 2006; Coles & Swami, 2012; Khawaja & Stallman, 2011). However, adjustment is not determined solely by the international students themselves, since it is shaped through relationships with others and also affected by cultural differences.

Typically, studies of migrants and sojourners have examined adaptation to a host culture through the process of adjustment. Gu and Schweisfurth (2006) portrayed the process by which Chinese graduate students in the UK adjusted to the British style of pedagogy and intellectual production. In South Korea specifically, public concern and media attention have focused on the cultural adjustment of foreign brides and migrant workers (Chun, Kim, Nam, & Park, 2008; Kim, Yoo, Lee, & Jung, 2006; Han, 2007). However, there has been little attention given to multiculturalism in higher education. While some studies have demonstrated the practices by which Chinese students adjust to Korean universities (Park, 2013; Yim, 2009), they have not addressed the international students' responses to the policies of internationalization of Korean universities. Hence, in this study we give primary consideration to the newly-created sociocultural environment which is produced through the most recent iteration of internationalization policy.

2.2 Internationalization of Higher Education in Korea

Many Korean institutions of higher education have begun recently to recruit more foreign students in order to accelerate the process of internationalization of the institution, as the enrollment of foreign students increases the student population as well as raising the global index of the university (Park & Song, 2013). "Internationalization" refers to "policy-based responses that educational institutions adopt as a result of the impact of globalization" (Naidoo, 2006, p. 234), which should be differentiated from globalization itself, which is the set of political, social and economic forces influencing general trends of overall social change (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

One aspect of this policy-based response has been the use of English as a medium of research and instruction in many tertiary institutions in Asian countries (Andrade, 2010; Altbach & Knight, 2007). For example, in China, the use of the English language is seen as one of the most substantial factors influencing the internationalization of some tertiary institutions (Huang, 2007; Yang, 2003). Moreover, the University of Hong Kong has identified the English language as a medium of instruction and as a lingua franca on campus that is crucial to promote an "international perspective" for university members (Shin & Harman, 2009).

Korean higher education also has struggled recently to cope with the challenge of establishing and improving global competitiveness (Hong, 2009; McNeill, 2008). One of the strategies chosen by several universities is a policy that mandates English as the medium of interaction in all sectors of the university, including administration, research, and education. In addition, Korean institutions of higher education have tried to facilitate the process of sociocultural adjustment and have provided unique opportunities for international students in order to minimize problems associated with their adjustment (Park & Song, 2013). However, international students may still have severe difficulties interacting with host nation students.

Despite the enormity of the issues surrounding international students in higher education, ethnographic studies of their social experiences are rare, particularly in Korea. The only studies available have investigated their adjustment and psychological health, and the persistence or adaptation of particular groups from specific countries, such as China; these studies have been related generally to students' academic success and retention (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006; Park, 2013; Yim, 2009). Generally, prior studies have focused on students' adjustment to the academic and social life and the culture of the host country, whereas in this paper, we will also deal with the localized "global" culture that is created by the host country in the name of "internationalization." Through this approach, we provide a qualitative examination of international students' responses to the internationalization policy which may contribute to the improvement of policy by suggestion ways to serve the needs of international students in Korea.

3. Method

This study is part of a preliminary research project concerning the university's policy of internationalization. The data for this study were collected in 2013 over a period of one year. Access to international students was facilitated by an undergraduate research assistant (co-author Yejin Kim) who was able to meet several Kazakh students both on and off-line. She received crucial assistance from a Kazakh student who became a key informant and provided access to the information available online from the student SNS (Social Network Service). During the fall semester of 2013, Kim volunteered as a Korean staff member of UISO (University International Students Organization) which gave her the opportunity to meet the international freshmen in fall of 2013. Further, while Kim was mentoring some of the Kazakh students in chemistry, she had the chance to interview students and document observations about the daily lives of students from Central Asian countries. Kim also designed and administered an open-ended questionnaire to 30 student respondents. She also carried out in-depth individual and focus group interviews including 13 students, (9 from Kazakhstan, 1 from Uzbekistan, and 3 from Kyrgyzstan). The three Kyrgyz students were freshmen whose majors were undecided, but the remaining interviewees were sophomores and juniors majoring in various engineering fields. The Central Asian students also interact closely with Turkish students and those from other Muslim countries. However, the Central Asian students tended to be connected to each other prior to arriving in Korea as well, having participated in the same International Science/Mathematical Olympiads, or else being graduates from the same high school.

The open-ended questionnaire sought information from the participants concerning any difficulties they had experienced with respect to their course of study, and social and cultural life in Korea, and asked them to identify positive and negative aspects of Korean education and sociocultural life. In addition, an in-depth qualitative interview method was employed in this study. The use of qualitative methods helps to provide readers with real-life translations of what is being conveyed (Krathwohl, 1997, pp. 229-230). Interviews are often employed as an effective tool to understand people's experiences and to suggest useful interpretations of qualitative data collected (Krathwohl, 1997). Therefore, face-to-face interviews of individuals were used for the purpose of exploring the participants' perspectives on their experiences in this university. We conducted interviews with students regarding their overall experiences, and in the process of data analysis, we categorized their interview data in terms of social, cultural, and academic experiences. Further, two administration staff members in the admissions office and one chemistry TA were interviewed. Upon receiving consent forms, the participants were interviewed individually and in focus groups for approximately 30-60 minutes. All interviews were administered in English, recorded digitally, and transcribed.

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1 The University and its Internationalization Policy

Ulsan National Institute of Science and Technology (henceforth, UNIST), located in Ulsan, a city in southern Korea, is a new university that specializes in engineering. The institution was built in 2009, with a master plan based upon the policy of globalization. From the beginning, the official language of instruction for all subjects has been English. This regulation is seen as stringent and demanding in Korea, a country where English continues to be viewed as a foreign language. At the time of the university's founding, the effort to recruit Korean undergraduate students was a challenge because many promising students found it a struggle to manage the demands of engineering coursework in a foreign language. Scholarships were provided as an incentive to attract students despite the perceived difficulty of studying engineering in a foreign language.

In addition to recruiting students, the university has striven to locate and hire professors, researchers and administrative staff fluent in English. These members of the university community also have faced the challenge of finding ways to carry out their tasks in a non-native language. However, the university's slogan, "World top ten by 2030" clarifies the goal. Aiming for the "top" of a global academic space, the university proclaims that English is the key to entering this global league in science and technology research. China (Haugen, 2013) and Korea (Park & Song, 2013; Kim, 2005) are recent or "emergent" study destinations for university students. However, students from abroad studying in these countries normally choose to major in "language programs with weak links to research" (Haugen, 2013, p. 322). In contrast, students from Korea, China or Malaysia who study in "Western" countries are often tracked into science and technology majors. In the case of UNIST, most of the students study engineering, and their incorporation into research settings is one of the primary goals of the university.

The effort to internationalize the university is illustrated by a university publicity pamphlet that includes quotations from international students indicating why they chose to attend UNIST. One student from Kazakhstan said, "UNIST is my best choice because of 100% English lectures, convergence curriculum and an advanced,

high-tech research environment, all of which are above my expectations in terms of quality." A student from Hong Kong stated, "I tried to gather all information about possible future graduate schools for myself. UNIST was the most attractive school. Young and enthusiastic professors, a growing campus and advanced research capability in advanced materials, etc., all would be the stepping stones to help me grow as a global scientist."

These quotes may have been confected by the pamphlet authors and may not reflect the true sentiments of the students. However, the quotes illustrate a major assumption behind the policy: the university has the ability to produce global spaces by implementing the internationalization policy. The university seeks to produce global spaces by mandating the use of English, by recruiting students from abroad, and by providing specific services to ease the international students' adjustment. However, it is not clear if these policy moves are in fact sufficient to produce a globalized academic institution, as this also depends on how the international students experience and respond to the policies.

The current pattern is that China is the origin of most of the international students who choose to study in Korea (Park & Song, 2013). The fact that UNIST has very few Chinese students but a large number of students from the Central Asian republics, especially Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and also from Turkey, indicates a recruitment preference. The Central Asian republics and Turkey are viewed as "up and coming" nations and as important future economic partners. Universities across Asia are responding to the shift in policy toward the promotion of an entrepreneurial culture, innovation and profitability (Mok, 2003). Hence, as state policy has shifted to encourage universities to rely less on subsidies, many of the emergent study destinations are working to recruit students from abroad as a source of income from tuition fees. However, at UNIST, the policy is to provide the students with scholarships because the policy itself is not designed to generate revenues directly through international student recruitment, but in response to a broader conceptualization of globalization.

At this university, there are a total of 130 international undergraduate and graduate students from 26 different counties, which constitute 5% of the total student body. Among those, the Central Asian students constitute the largest proportion of the international student population in UNIST, with 57 of 130 international students originating in the Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan (33), Kyrgyzstan (21), and Uzbekistan (3). The number has increased drastically in recent years as the university has attempted to recruit international students proactively, particularly those from "resource-rich" countries and emerging market countries, including some African and Central Asian countries. The entire Central Asian student population at UNIST identifies themselves as Muslim. They are admitted based on their high school GPA and English proficiency and are granted scholarships that continue as long as their university GPA remains 3.0 out of 4.3. The university is proud of the fact that they accept "only the top 10% [of] students from good high schools in those countries" (a personal conversation with a staff member in the Admissions office).

The university operates the "University International Center" to facilitate the adjustment of international students. It has provided these students with various opportunities, such as "International night," an introductory Korean language course, a prayer room for Muslim students, and a kitchen where Muslim students can cook *halal* food, while Korean students simply eat in university cafeterias. Although there are other many international students in this university, we focus on Central Asian students because they constitute the majority of the international students in this university and because the university's internationalization policy is designed primarily to facilitate Central Asian students' welfare by such measures as the prayer room, a kitchen and the *halal* food menu at the dormitory cafeteria. Therefore, investigating Central Asian students' experiences in this university provides insights about the social environment created by the internationalization policy.

In contrast to the assumptions of the university's policymakers, in this research we do not assume that global spaces can be mandated automatically by internationalization policy. In contrast, we will show that the internationalization of the academic space depends upon the actual interactions of the students and other university stakeholders. Of special importance are the interactions between the international students and their peers, faculty and administrators as they strive to adjust to the host institution. In the following two sections we demonstrate the importance of students' responses to the policy by providing three examples of adjustment: food, language use, and adjustment to the academic environment.

4.2 Central Asian Students' Adjustment Experience

4.2.1 Adjustment to a New Dietary Environment

The Central Asian students in this university belong to the Muslim faith, so they have extremely limited choices of foods on the university campus and in Korea more generally. In Korea, animal fat is used for cooking and pork is one of the most popular foods, while Muslim students can eat only *halal* food (حلال, food that is allowed under the Islamic dietary laws) in which pork ingredients are forbidden. In response, the university has provided

two student kitchens (one for male students and one for female). However, many students lacked time on a busy day to prepare their own food, so the UISO (University International Student Association) requested that the administration serve a midday *halal* food meal at the student cafeteria. Following several meetings of the UISO with representatives of the administration and the food service company, the cafeteria began serving a *halal* lunch menu.

Almost all of the participants in the questionnaire felt serious discomfort about their diet, in spite of the the university's effort to meet their needs. The *halal* food menu at the cafeteria was welcomed by many Muslim students, and the university was proud of it. However, only up to 20 *halal* meals are provided per day, and only during lunch time, while the total number of Muslim students in the university is over 60. According to the administrator in charge of the students' welfare, including meal plans, the provider has complained that they do not make sufficient profit from the *halal* meals because the ingredients are too restricted and expensive in Korea.

Furthermore, Central Asian students are somewhat dissatisfied with the *halal* menu in the cafeteria because most of the dishes consist of vegetables and starch rather than meat, as the following Kazakh student expressed:

> "We Muslims have eaten various kinds of meat, such as horsemeat, beef and mutton in Kazakhstan. However, as soon as we came to Korea, we began to be considered as 'just vegetarians'."

The Central Asian students who are not completely satisfied with the food provided by the university cafeteria cook for themselves in the kitchen, which is available only to international students at the university. Since non-Muslim international students also use the kitchen, they have to use separate shelves, cutting boards and knives. The number of menus they can make with little money and time is limited only to three or four dishes. When they have meals together in the dormitory kitchen, they share food with other Muslim students from Turkey and Qatar. Furthermore, when non-Muslim students cook vegetables, they share the dishes with Muslim students as well.

The students sometimes have to make three meals per day, so they have to get up early in the morning than do Korean students. When they do not have enough time to cook for lunch or dinner, they eat leftovers from breakfast. Anyone who has more time to prepare the next meal shares the foods s/he made with other Central Asian students. While Korean students sometimes eat fried chicken delivered to their dormitory when they want something other than the university meal plan, Central Asian students cannot have fried chicken because they believe chicken blood is dirty according to the *halal* dietary laws. When they want to eat meat safely, they go from time to time to the *Masjid* (Mosque) in town or a neighboring city to buy beef, horsemeat and mutton prepared for Muslims in Korea.

Muslim students also desire sweets, such as cookies and chocolates. However, Korean snacks often contain unidentified animal oils and fats. The convenience store in the university sells very few snacks that can be viewed as *halal*. Thus, the students need to know whether or not the ingredients in the snacks include animal fat. Upon arrival in Korea, the first thing they had to do was search and record which foods they could and could not eat. When they want to eat other kinds of snacks, they have to examine the ingredients on the label and compare them with the "edible food" list which they keep saved on their cell phones.

Even in this situation in which edible food is limited, one thing they feel happy about with respect to their dietary life is "a lot of time to be together with other friends from my country," as expressed in the following by a Kyrgyz female student:

> "It is fun when we are together making cakes, cookies, and other kinds of foods…[but] we would never cook if we were at home in our country. We are enjoying this cooking time! The dormitory kitchen is like a comfortable home for us. We feel great relaxing in the dormitory kitchen, we are like a 'new family' in Korea."

Although the university does not provide sufficient *halal* food and they cannot purchase prepared meals in the local markets, the students try to adjust to the food menu implemented by the internationalization policy by relying on their network of other Muslim students. Although the local version of *halal* food served by the cafeteria is not what they normally identify as "our food," it is something created in the process of interaction between the university's internationalization policy and the international student body. Furthermore, the dormitory kitchen is an area of extensive interaction between Muslim and non-Muslim international students; through this interaction, they reinforce and define their definitions of *halal*, as they decide what they can share and what they cannot share at mealtimes with non-Muslims.

4.2.2 Language Use on Campus

Over the course of their academic life at UNIST, the Central Asian students naturally increase their fluency in

English while they study, carry out routine interactions and communicate with others in the university. When they arrive in Korea, the Central Asian students' language proficiencies are adequate for taking classes taught in English. Hence, as far as language goes, most of the students view being sufficiently fluent in English is the key to achieving academic success.

Many Central Asian students can speak three to four languages, among them, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Russian, English and Turkish. However, rather than using their own languages, they make it a habit to use English even when there is only one Korean student present in a group. Furthermore, they have made a student club called Silk Road, which was created to teach Russian, Turkish, Kazakh and Kyrgyz languages, as well as to share their culture with Korean students. These language lessons are taught by student members of the club, in addition to Korean lessons taught by a Korean member of Silk Road. By teaching their languages and customs to each other, they are trying to make new friends as they learn about diverse cultural and linguistic identities.

Although Central Asian students tend to be fluent in many languages, most of them cannot speak the Korean language well. Korean students expect international students to be integrated into Korean society by learning Korean, and feel that "English is only for international students, not for Koreans." This expresses the Korean students' feeling that they are "excluded" from the university's internationalization policy. Hence, although English as an official language is supposed to include internationals in the name of internationalization of the campus, international students are nevertheless expected to learn Korean. In 2013, UNIST began to offer an introductory Korean language class for international students, so that they could acquire basic Korean language skills. However, the language class lasts for only one semester, and they finish the course knowing only simple words, greetings, and methods to ask questions or introduce themselves. Hence, even though the university provides an opportunity for international students to improve their Korean, it is still not sufficient for them to survive in the university or elsewhere in Korea unless they make efforts to improve their Korean language skills on their own.

International students often complain that seeing some of the bulletin boards and posters written in Korean is "dreadful." Half of the posters attached to the bulletin boards or walls are written in Korean that international students cannot read, and many are related to student activities. For this reason, whenever they see the posters, they just ignore them, rather than trying to learn what they say. While Korean students perceive that there is "too much English on the posters," international students feel the opposite, that there is too much Korean on campus bulletin boards and posters. The following includes some of the discussions on SNS available for international students:

> "The poster for a special lecture is written in English, but then the language of the lecture itself is in Korean. What's the point? They want us to know about the special lecture, but then they don't want us to be there?"

> "I wish that there are more posters in English, because sometimes there is useful information and we cannot get it. I want to know what's going on in the university. I feel that I am not part of the community."

Hence, with respect to their academic lives, international students primarily want fair treatment through the consistent use of English. Numerous international students at UNIST, including Central Asian students, often notice that professors switch from English to Korean during lectures. In some classes, the instructors provide supplementary explanations of difficult material in Korean so that Korean students can understand better. This makes international students feel excluded from such important information and from the university community, and they also find it difficult to participate actively in the classroom. For example, one student explained,

> "Even though we international students normally think using Korean in class is unfair, I also understand that professors sometimes have to use Korean, because they are also Korean and here we are in Korea and this is a Korean university. I also feel it is fun when professors use Korean jokes in class, like '*Baksoo!*' ('applaud'), because I can learn some Korean words and culture better than just studying through books and internet."

This quote also suggests that with respect to their nonacademic lives, international students are very open to becoming familiar with Korean culture and Korean people. A student from Kazakhstan expressed the opinion that Korean should actually be used more often so that international students would have the opportunity to learn more of the language. He said, "I would really appreciate it if Korean friends try to talk to me in Korean so that I could enhance my speaking skills."

Still, many of the Central Asian students do not try to improve their Korean. Overall, Central Asian students do not have much difficulty as far as communication goes, because 33% of the international students in the university share a nearly common language. In this respect, they do not experience the isolation or distress that

other international students do because they can group together as "Kazakh students," "Central Asian students," or "Muslim students" in the university. The only way they can adjust to the situations in which Korean is used in addition to English is by getting together with other Central Asian students to help each other, as described further in the next section.

4.2.3 Adjusting to the Academic Environment

As mentioned above, because English is the language used in lectures, but not for other purposes overall, Korean is still an important tool of communication on campus. With respect to the language issue, not only Kazakh students, but all international students, feel alienated and find it difficult to become assimilated in the university community, even though they really want to be more deeply involved. In such cases, they have to find Korean friends who can help them. However, many hesitate to do so because they feel that asking Koreans for help might bother them and waste their time. This situation can be even worse during class. Hence, in order to reduce their reliance on Korean students, they use strategies such as those described in the following interview with a Kazakh student:

> "We have to make a group with two to three Kazakh or other international students who can take the same class together, because when Korean is used, we have to deal with that situation by ourselves. We feel awkward and uncomfortable when the language of the class is suddenly changed to Korean. We feel that we are excluded even from learning and studying. We are also UNIST students, but only Korean students will be able to understand the material better and have an easier time to get a top grade."

Upon arriving at UNIST, most of the Central Asian students share tips on life in Korea, and they also inform each other of details of the academic requirements and other arrangements at the university. With respect to academic adjustment, they tend to form small study groups while enrolled in similar courses. Dividing the course materials among several individuals, each of them can undertake some of the readings and then explain it to the others in their native tongue. Moreover, most of them have experience participating in different types of International and National Science Olympiads, so that each has some recognized expertise on a particular subject. For instance, those who are good at chemistry usually explain chemical principles to others to help students save time rather than spending large segments of time on reading materials. Older students also dedicate their time to mentoring incoming students, especially advising on which aspects they need to focus on. If possible, students save previous midterm and final exams and give those to new students to practice in advance. Sometimes, students prefer to do homework together, discussing, for example, how to solve calculus problems. If one finds a solution, s/he can explain it to the others.

In general, the Central Asian students adjust well to their academic life in UNIST. They are comfortable with English, causing many of the students believe that they can often do better than Korean students. Furthermore, it is not necessary for the science/technology students to adjust to a Korean style of pedagogy, because engineering curricula generally require students to learn such a vast quantity of material that students cannot survive unless they adopt the strategy of "plug, chug, cram and flush" (Bella, 2003). Hence, engineering students from outside South Korea are unlikely to find a pedagogical approach that is radically different from their prior expectations.

In addition to their secondary school preparation for academic performance in Korea, the Central Asian students also have strong motivations to succeed beyond individual hopes for success. For example, a driving force for them to come to Korea is their strong patriotism. Central Asian students are proud of their home countries and they believe that they will return to contribute to the economic development. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the post-socialist countries began to make efforts to boost their economic development. For this reason, undergraduate students from these countries are encouraged to study abroad to gain advanced knowledge and technology. Korea is seen as a model of rapid economic and technological development which they hope to emulate.

The Central Asian students work hard, but enjoy living in Korea as well. When we asked interviewees about the highly competitive academic environment in Korean universities, they responded as follows,

> "We never thought that we have to do better than Korean students and others, but we just think learning is important. Although we are a bit competitive, we are not obsessed with grades. There are much more important things than just school. That is, the grade is not the most important thing in your life. I sometimes watch some Korean students become very depressed and sad when they get low grades. But I think they do not need to act like that. I don't want to be bound by a numerical value like GPA."

Most of the Central Asian students actively participate in class and in team activities. It is difficult for freshmen to take part in class and team activities proactively, but they become active once they adjust to the academic life

in the university. One of the reasons they show such a high rate of participation in team projects is because they are fluent in English compared to many Korean students. Although Korean students' can be as proficient in English as the international students, they tend to be more reticent compared to international students. Hence, when the Central Asian students are on the same team as the Korean students, when the time comes to present the team's work in class, they Central Asians are most likely to be chosen for the task.

In their study of international students in the UK, Pritchard and Skinner (2002) found that international students had major difficulties in forging meaningful social relationships. Different food preferences, views regarding sexual openness, perceptions of time, and gender roles were just some of the cultural adjustments encountered. These researchers found that international students adapted eventually to the host culture, negotiating contrary worldviews and practices. International students face an array of cultural adjustments, but the responsibility is often left to the student to "adjust" or "adapt" to the host culture (Bevis, 2002). These issues greatly hinder their social integration as well as their academic progress.

In the case described in this paper, the international students are not expected to acquire competence in mainstream Korean culture. Unlike immigrants, most university students from abroad do not need to integrate into Korean social institutions such as the family or workplace. Furthermore, they are not expected to become fluent in Korean, given the increased prevalence of English throughout Korea, and in our research site the exclusive use of English in academics. Our study suggested that, while academic success is not hindered seriously due to cultural differences and the university accommodated their unique needs, such as those for a prayer room, *halal* food, and a kitchen, Central Asian students take strategies to remain separated from the university community and formed their own groups.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the experiences of international students in an engineering university in Korea. We examined the process by which students interacted with and participated in their academic communities and how the university, which promotes internationalization, provided the necessary support to help healthy adjustment among these students. Central Asian students at this university experience special demands derived from their cultural differences and the university's policies were developed to facilitate their adjustment. They adjust to this localized "global" environment where an internationalization policy was implemented to facilitate international students' lives in the university and in Korea. At times there were clashes between the ideals of the internationalization policy and actual practice, but international students adjusted to this newly-created global environment by developing their own strategies.

At one level, the internationalization policy of UNIST is successful because the Central Asian students have adapted easily to the Korean academic environment. However, some of the Central Asian students argued that UNIST is "not global enough" when Korean language appeared in academic (classroom) and extracurricular (student club) contexts. These situations call for the international students to negotiate the situation by utilizing intercultural communication skills. Furthermore, in order to contribute to Korea and its institutions, the internationalization of higher education must also provide adequate benefits for the Korean students as well as internationals. We assert this based on the idea that international education is not only designed to recruit international students or export education, but also to equip Korean students with cross-cultural awareness and intercultural competence in order to make them more capable and competitive in the global professional market (Kim, 2005).

Based on these findings, we recommend that the policies of UNIST should maximize the opportunities for students, faculty and staff to improve the skills of intercultural communication. This can take two forms: 1] the creation of environments in the university campus which are designed to foster intercultural interactions and 2] intercultural training for students, faculty and staff. Already we have described how the Central Asian students attempted to create an environment to foster intercultural interaction, when they created a club called "Silk Road" and offered classes in Russian, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Turkish and Korean. Their spontaneous effort is laudable, but realistically it must be matched by a coherent and generalized effort by the university to encourage intercultural interactions.

In addition, our investigation showed that some of the international students have difficulty acquiring the norms of interaction with Korean peers, professors and staff members, which leads to some conflicts which could be avoided. It is recommended that UNIST provide basic intercultural training for international students to familiarize them with the norms for interacting with Koreans, especially with authority figures such as professors and older students. There are problems which crop up in the classroom or in the laboratory which could be prevented through cross-cultural training. To design such an effective program of cross-cultural training, the

UNIST administration should take advantage of existing research in this area (Hammer, 1999), as well as carry out additional research on best practices within the unique context of UNIST.

In conclusion, education providers and policy makers in Korea should recognize the needs and expectations of international students as well as Korean students, and provide them with an environment that maximizes the opportunities for intercultural communication. Korean universities need to adopt a range of strategies to address international students' needs, such as providing more targeted academic and Korean language skills programs, increasing public lectures and signs in English, organizing activities for international students and assisting them in adjusting socially in the host culture. More importantly, the university should also foster host country students' global understanding and development of skills for living and working more effectively with culturally diverse people. In this study, we focused on Central Asian students' experiences, while other international students' or Korean students' responses were rarely examined. Further empirical studies on international education that deal with various stakeholders in relation to the internationalization policy will improve our understanding of policies and practices not only in Korea, but also other countries.

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