A Cross-cultural Understanding of Korean Students in the British Academic Context

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Back, Ju-hyun. 2010. A Cross-cultural Understanding of Korean Students in the British Academic Context. *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal*. *18*(3). 71-91. A questionnaire-based survey was undertaken with 124 Korean students enrolled at 16 UK universities to gain an broad overview where the main problems perceived to lie in relation to cultural factors, such as face, hierarchy and indirectness. The participants showed a fairly high level of passivity in the classroom interaction, unfamiliarity with the strictness in referencing and with different rhetorical pattern in written English discourse, which corresponds to many findings for Chinese students at UK universities. Interestingly, the Korean students seemed to have a favourable attitude toward supervisory meetings in the UK, which contrasts with majority of the previous findings for Chinese students who showed a high level of dissatisfaction with teachers' guidance in the UK, although both would have problem with interacting with their supervisors. The responses to the survey gave a clear indication that, apart from language difficulties, some degree of integration into the host culture was felt to be an important aspect of studying abroad by many of the students and also led to a better understanding of intragroup differences within the homeogenous group of confucian culture.

Key Words: International students, passive learners, academic culture, supervision, sociocultural norms. rhetorical pattern,

1. Introduction

Among various English-speaking countries the number of Korean overseas students in the UK has significantly increased since 1990, reaching 18,000 last

year (British Council, 2007), and the UK has thus become one of the principal destinations for Korean students studying overseas, and intercultural exchanges between the two countries have continued to accelerate. The fact that the UK has become established as one of the major study-abroad countries for Korean students, particularly at university level, implies many cross-cultural issues arising from different cultural norms or different expectations about are likely to have arisen, and to have been compounded by difficulties with mastering English.

Many Asian students are thus frequently reported as having serious difficulties or problems adjusting to a new cultural context: their academic problems of international students in English-speaking countries have been examined by Mullins, Quintrell & Hancock (1995), Chan & Drove (1997), Choi (1997), Biggs (2001), and others. Most of the studies showed a range of cross-cultural issues, regardless of language difficulties, as East Asian students from Confucianism-based culture, in particular, Chinese students, would encounter some conflicts deriving from different social cultural norms in academic context (Littlewood, 2000). They summarized a series of cross-cultural conflicts in expectations between Chinese students or other Asian students and western tutors in an academic context, from west-east cross-cultural perspectives.

Firstly, international students are often perceived as passive learners both in classroom (e.g. Chalmers & Volet, 1997; Kember, 2000; Liu, 2005), as also discussed in Back (2009): 'agreement, harmony, and face' is highly valued in China and other CHC[1] countries, (Cortazzi and Jin, 1997), and this may induce students to avoid expressing disagreement in face-to-face interaction in a group or class regardless of whether they, in reality, agree or not, because they believe that expressing disagreement involves a high risk of losing face[2]. In a similar vein, this tendency becomes stronger when it comes to the hierarchy in teacher

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1) Confucian Heritage Culture

2) This concept of 'face' in Korea may be defined as the image that is most likely to be approved by sociocultural norms in society, which is often termed as 'chemyeon' in Korean, and is more than a matter of just saving personal embarrassment (Jung, 2000). 'Face plays an important role in maintaining social harmony in hierarchical order by identifying one's own self in the community, which is based on education, seniority, or occupation' (Flowerdew 1998 cited in Back 2009).

- student relationship and thus is likely to discourage students to ask questions or express their views in the classroom: they tend to be concerned about interrupting teachers and losing teacher's face when teachers are not able to answer the questions. This is, however, in contrast with the idea that students are encouraged to, to a reasonable degree, express their opinions in confrontational argument in the British academic context.

The second culture-embedded aspect may appear in the area of rhetorical pattern. This has been, in particular, a problematic when it comes to English academic writing. Valuing an indirect way of persuading people of their views or ideas, Asian students thus avoid any confrontational mode of argumentation, something which is more valued in the linear and direct tradition of English academic writing (Scollon & Wong-Scollon, 1991). In the way of making an argumentation, many Chinese students are more accustomed to hiding the main idea until the final paragraph, although this varies across the genres of the texts. This may result in a significant mismatch of expectation, affecting assessment, as the students are required to show clear presentation for what they have learnt and how they understand certain areas of knowledge in these discourse contexts (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997).

As well as rhetorical pattern, 'plagiarism' is most definitely an area where many overseas students struggle and the cultural differences in attitudes towards acquiring knowledge may cause Asian students to plagiarize when writing essays (Baker 1997). Students from a collectivistic culture[3] tend to prefer to have the 'right' answers from teachers, believing that there are generally correct answers (Todd, 1997). For instance, Chinese students are thus more familiar with 'accepting' and 'reproducing' knowledge as delivered by teachers (Todd 1997:177), who represent 'experts' and 'authorities' (Cortazzi & Jin 1997:85). This attitude to knowledge may contrast with the expectations of UK university lecturers, for whom the learners are expected to show they

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3) The collectivistic culture is shaped as a social pattern in which individuals are intertwined within a range of human relationships consisting of collectives such as family, small or large community and nation (Trandis, 1995). Some major Confucian-based cultural factors, such as collectivism, face, hierarchy, and indirectness, which are interdependent and interrelated with each other, has long prevailed until the current 21st century in Korean society since the late 1990s.

understand the knowledge and can cope with contrary views and research results (Bloor & Bloor 1991). In this respect, copying is treated as a serious offence in British culture with its emphasis on individualism, and may result in a loss of marks in the assessment of the work or even in disqualification. In contrast, in a collectivistic culture, where sharing of ideas or knowledge is seen as a virtue for expressing in-group opinions, copying is considered as less of a moral problem, and a more of a form of cooperation (Baker 1997:115). Students' behavioural norms cannot be considered wrong in some cultural contexts although they are considered cheating behaviour in others.

However, it is important to bear in mind that some of the previous studies above showed a critical view on the few areas: first, stereotyping Asian students as all having particularly passive learning behaviors in classroom interactions may not be justified. Some of the literature have presented that there are misconceptions in the literature about Asian learners' difficulties in transferring from a passive learning style to an active or interactive one (Littlewood 2000, Biggs 2001). While many studies have dealt with problems of mixed group of multiple Asian students, mainly including Chinese students there have been also few detailed studies dealing with exactly how Korean students react to problems in this area. In particular, it is necessary to find out how Korean students feel about this and thus to how it affects any aspects of studying abroad including completing their academic performances, which can be compared with the issues of chines students or other East Asian countries.

Second, it is likely to be problematic to simply categorize the 'students asking from Asian backgrounds', or even 'Koreans', as a single homogeneous cultural group when discussing their cultural values or norms (Littlewood, 2000). Although people categorized them as 'Asian' that tend to share a 'Confucian heritage culture', this categorization makes it difficult to explain cultural diversity within the group. It can be risky to stereotype Asian students as a homogeneous group without considering intragroup differences in cultural factors or phenomena. Although some predictions about Korean students' problems in UK universities could be made, these were mostly on the basis of studies of students from other East Asian cultures (especially Chinese or Japanese), or my personal experience. What was missing was any real information about Korean students in the UK.

This study aims to investigate perceived difficulties and problems caused by cultural differences that Korean students may encounter in a different academic context of British higher education. In order to gain a broad overview of how far cultural factors affect studying at university and learning English by Korean adult learners in the UK, I conducted a questionnaire-based survey. The paper, in particular, focuses on what are specifically problematic issues to Korean students at UK universities, in the main areas of academic context such as interacting in seminar discussions or lectures, writing academic essays, and supervisory meetings.

2. Methodology

2.1 Aims, Participants, and Time

A nation-wide survey of Korean students currently doing their first degree, masters or PhDs in the UK was undertaken. For reasons of time and geographical spread, it was also decided to make it a questionnaire-based survey. The aim of the survey was to gather background data about students' experiences in academic contexts; the focus was on experiences that were different from what they had expected, and particularly things that were different from what their experience in Korea had led them to expect. The survey is thus focused on finding out where are the main problems perceived to lie in relation to cultural factors, and any specifically problematic areas to Korean students at UK universities as regards participating in classroom interaction, interacting with supervisors, and writing academic essays.

The data was collected from 124 responses. The sample comprised 124 students currently registered on degree courses, rather than ESL courses, who had at least half a semester's experience of a university programme in Korea. As the focus was on the students' experiences at college level, in particular in the context of a different academic culture, students on non-degree ESL courses would be excluded from the sample. Also, in order to compare what they had expected in Korea and what they experienced in UK universities, it would be necessary for the respondents to have at least half semester of Korean

university. The sample students represented a sample of about 8% to 10% of the HESA[4] figure for 2003, of 1684 Korean students enrolled in UK universities. Sixteen universities were selected, on the grounds that each had a reasonably large Korean community, based on British Council information. This resulted in a slight regional bias towards London, with more than two out of the 16 institutions being in the capital.

2.2 Administration and Procedures

Rather than a postal survey with a questionnaire in pencil and paper format, I decided an online administration by adopting on-line administration using self-administered questionnaire, which is more accessible to the respondents as the Internet is a common place activity for a large number of people. In the process of collecting data, I used specific strategy to increase response rate: I contacted the representative of each Korean community and asked them to send out the questionnaire and my explanatory email with a note supporting the survey and encouraging the students to reply. The basic idea was that respondents would be enlisted within the structure of their Korean communities: the request to participate would be sent from their representatives rather than directly from the unknown researcher.

The questionnaire has five sections: (1) Personal background (Q1~Q10) (2) overseas study (Q11~ Q19), (3) cultural adjustment (Q20~Q25), (4) cultural learning and communicative competence in language learning (Q26~Q27), and (5) cultural learning in different topic areas[5] (Q28~Q41). This paper presents the last section (Q28~Q41) which was mainly examined.

4) HESA: 'Higher education Statistics Agency' presents the number of students in higher education institutions at UK universities across the countries 2003 to 2004. It reports that the number of Korean international students was 1684 enrolled in UK universities.

5) The questionnaire was designed based on personal experience, the literature review, and data from the preliminary interviews which were undertaken with 12 Korean students (undergraduate(3), Masters(5) and PhD(4)) at a university in the north of England. All the questions used in th interviews were open-ended, focusing on cultural learning in different topic areas and the results showed that all the interviewees had all experienced cultural differences between Korea and UK universities in the areas of academic culture, such as supervision, writing academic essays, and feedback systems. Also, they had all faced problems caused by cultural differences.

With regard to the type of questions used, it was felt to be important to have both closed and open-ended questions (Dörnyei 2003). While many of the closed questions could end with an open 'other' option, the final section was different and needed a series of open questions. The language to be used was similarly problematic. As the survey was to be conducted in the UK, I decided to write the questions in English, though avoiding technical terms that might proved difficult to understand. It was therefore decided to give respondents the choice of answering in Korean or English, although it was assumed that the majority would probably choose Korean. The result was that a greater number of the answers from the respondents were in Korean than in English.

In the process of analysing data, the data was automatically encoded when each respondent answered the questions. In particular, the data were automatically entered in an EXCEL file, and then input to SPSS. In terms of handling missing data, an exclusion policy was created that proformas would be excluded if all or most of the questions after Q10 were unanswered (Q1-Q10 involved background information). Thirteen proformas had no responses from Q10 and all were excluded learning a valid sample of 111[6].

Due to the difficulty of systematically coding the data in a reliable way, I created the following policy for analyzing and reporting data from long answers especially from specific open-ended questions: I summarized the answers from the questions (Q37, Q39, and Q41). This had disadvantage that occasionally the questions were lost, but summarizing key concepts acted as a type of content analysis.

3. Findings

3.1 How does the Korean concept of 'face' affect classroom interaction?

The results of Q31 and Q33 show that most of the students reported fairly passive behaviour in seminars in Tables 1 to 3.

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6) The sample size of the three groups (undergraduate, masters, and PhD) was approximately equal, at 35, 36, and 40 respectively.

Table 1. Survey

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Not at all	12	10.8	13.0
	In a few seminars	51	45.9	55.4
	In most seminars	23	20.7	25.0
	in all seminars	6	5.4	6.5
	Total	92	82.8	100.0
Missing		19	17.1	
Total		111	100.0	

Passive behaviour in seminars Q31 Do you actively take part in the discussions with native speakers in seminars?

Table 2. Survey

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	1 (not at all)	11	10	12.0
	2	18	16.2	19.6
	3	29	26.1	31.5
	4	25	22.5	27.2
	5 (always)	9	8.1	9.8
	Total	92	74.2	100.0
Missing		19	17.1	
Total		111	100.0	

Passive behaviour in seminars: avoiding expressing strong arguments Q33A Do you normally avoid expressing strong arguments in seminar discussions?

Table 3. Survey

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	After class	44	39.6	47.8
	In the middle of class	17	15.3	18.5
	By sending email	25	22.5	27.2
	Never	6	5.4	6.5
	Total	92	74.2	100.0
Missing		19	17.1	
Total		111	100.0	

Passive behaviour in asking the teacher questions   Q35 Do you usually tend to ask the teacher questions?

5.4% of the 92 respondents who answered Q31 reported 'active participation in just a few seminars' (see table 1). In Q33, individual factors such as personality are likely to affect the results, but it remains striking that approximately 70% of the respondents claimed to avoid strong arguments in debates. Also, 47.8% of the sample students answered that they usually asked the teacher questions after class, and 27.2% of the sample students instead chose to send the lecturers emails personally if they wanted to ask a question (Q35, see table 3). The sample students had a strong tendency to avoid asking lecturers questions and passivity seems widespread. This would appear similar to Turner (2006)'s findings for Chinese master's students at a UK university that their unquestioning behavior in the classroom continued over the year: the participants 'frequently embarrassed to ask questions in class' (2006:38). These cases can be explained by the cultural assumption that Confucian values such as agreement, harmony, face were very much emphasized in Korean society as well as in China and Korean and Chinese people tend to avoid showing disagreement or criticism in public.

In particular, the reluctance to ask the teacher questions in Q35 may also be connected to different cultural assumptions about teachers' authority and a sense of respect for them, both of which can lead to 'passive' learning in the classroom. Both concepts are still strong in the modern Korean educational system, although many sociocultural aspects of education are becoming more westernized (Egeler 1996). To avoid interrupting teachers so that the teachers will not lose face, they might show a level of passivity in questioning during the lectures. In Korea, questioning is often interpreted as challenging teachers' authority (this is also partly discussed in Back 2009). This passivity can also be partly explained by the fact that Korean students are interacting in English, not in Korean, and might be concerned about formulating questions effectively, fast, or in incorrect English. However, this situation is unlikely to be solely the result of language difficulties. This is in line with Cortazzi & Jin's (1997) findings for Chinese students that the effect of these cultural factors held true even where English proficiency was high.

Although the responses to Q31, Q33, and Q35 above cannot give clear evidence for these cultural assumptions, we might expect this seminar passivity to cause problems for lecturers as well as students: British lecturers can easily

misunderstand Korean students' quiet behaviour in the classroom. They might not realise that this is 'a sign of a learning attitude which entails respect for teachers, classmates and superiors as guided by Confucian belief' (Kolrarik 2004:3). In short, it is worth doing further in-depth research on how far Korean students can adjust themselves to active participation in the classroom.

3.2 How does 'face' and 'hierarchy' affect developing interaction with supervisors?

The concepts of 'face' and 'hierarchy' can affect the interaction between Korean students and their supervisors in UK universities as much as they affect behaviour in class. The result of Q36 shows that Koreans did perceive cultural differences although these data (see Table 4) did not show up the details.

Table 4. Survey

	Responses*	Percentage of total responses*	Percentage of sample (N= 111)
The relationship between supervisors and students (Open, horizontal, equal relationship vs. hierarchical vertical ; relating to teacher's authority)	60	30.8%	54.0%
Students' rights to request academic advice when they need it	37	22.3%	33.3%
The duration of supervision	16	9.9%	14.4%
The content of supervision	20	12.3%	18.0%
The system of supervision	29	17.8%	26.1%
Total	N of total responses =162		

*Multiple responses were possible.

Perception of cultural differences in supervision: Q36 If you have noticed any differences between supervision in the UK and supervision in Korea, what do they relate to? (Tick all that are relevant)

In particular, 54.0% of the sample students said that they found cultural differences with respect to the relationship between supervisors and students in

relation to different cultural norms: the relationship between supervisors and students in Korea is vertical, relying on supervisors' authority and hierarchical position, while it is more equal and open in the UK. One respondent to Q37 (What are the differences in the between the items you chose above in the UK and in Korea?) commented that,

> *Personally I feel that the relationship between supervisors and students is more horizontal. Personally, in Korea, despite just two years' undergraduate experience in Korea, I had felt that most professors or lecturers were perceived as people of a high social status and thus, it was hard to approach them. I remember that it was very rare for the students to visit their academic staff. This led to the problem that my UK supervisor was very bewildered when I was as polite and considerate to him as I was in Korea. (P98[7]). Male. PhD. Translation)*

As the comment shows, some Korean students may not feel comfortable with voluntarily contacting their UK supervisors and interacting with them, until they have adapted to the different kind of relationship between students and supervisors prevalent in UK universities. It may not be easy for them to adjust to an more equal relationship, because they may unconsciously perceive lecturers or professors as authority figures. According to another Q37 respondent,

> *I just feel that academic staff including my supervisor in the UK are friendly, not authoritative. Best of all, free discussion with them is possible, and they encourage me to freely express my ideas or opinions and they respect my points whether these are right or not. However, in Korea it is difficult for me to tell supervisors that I have a different opinion."(P37.Male. Masters. Translation)*

48 respondents commented, like P37 and P98, that the relationship between students and supervisors or other academic staff in Britain is very horizontal, open, and equal. Staff and supervisors are not authoritative, but instead encourage students to freely express their opinions. Six respondents explicitly noted that this differed from a hierarchical and vertical relationship, which often discourages students from approaching their supervisors and discussing matters freely with

7) Participant 37

them on a relatively equal basis. These results, interestingly, do not completely correspond to the Turner (2006)' study for Chinese students in the UK that many participants felt their British supervisors are unfriendly and do not care about them, which implies they have an unfavourable attitude toward interacting with their supervisors in the UK. Similarly, the expectations made by Asian students in Prasad and et al.'s study (2004), also discussed by Cortazzi and Jin (1999): they mostly expected their supervisors to take care of them like parents.

33.3% of the respondents answered that they had discovered differences between the two countries in how far students' rights to request academic advice are guaranteed. Approximately 26.1% of the respondents also said that they had experienced some differences in the system of supervision itself; twelve respondents to Q36 commented that it is easier to meet or visit supervisors when they need academic advice in the UK or because the system guarantees regular supervision meetings. However, in Korea, as seven people pointed out, supervisory meetings have not been established yet at undergraduate level. Two comments illustrate these points,

> *I was required to meet my supervisor at the beginning and end of each term in my undergraduate years in the UK, but I did not even know who my supervisor was during my undergraduate courses in Korea. (P52.Male. Masters. Translation)*

> *The formal evaluation letter term by term is one difference from the Korean system. I have received more detailed academic advice or feedback in the UK.(P98. Male. PhD. Translation)*

In particular, four respondents who were doing postgraduate programmes commented in Q37 that they had done some work to help their supervisors in Korea, which was irrelevant to the students' own study or research work, but in the UK, they did not need to do such any extra work for their supervisors, and could concentrate on their own research. Having said that, 17 respondents commented on having difficulty actually contacting or interacting with their supervisors, due to language ability or unfamiliarity with the supervisory system in the UK. Similarly, many Chinese students in the UK have

problems with communicating with their supervisors, and thus they often hesitant to ask questions when they need to clarify some issues. (Turner 2006.). A further in-depth study for investigating how far Korean students can overcome this problem and develop interacting with their supervisors in the UK.

However, the possibility exists that there were biases in the responses to Q36 and Q37, due to an imbalance in experience. Firstly, there were some respondents who had never experienced postgraduate courses in Korea, as two respondents stated explicitly in Q37. Secondly, some respondents had experienced undergraduate education in Korea, but not in the UK. Even so, despite this unavoidable bias, there were areas in which Korean students clearly felt they had noticed cultural differences between Korea and the UK. The detailed data for how far Korean students find these differences are problematic and how they overcome difficulties is needed.

3.3 In what areas of academic writing do Korean students notice cultural differences in UK universities?

Writing an academic essay in English appears to be an area in which cultural conflicts can occur due to the different educational expectations and traditions in Korea and in the UK. Q38 asked 'If you have found any differences between British and Korean traditions and expectations in writing academic essays, what do they relate to?' There were two main areas where the Korean students reported experiencing cultural differences as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Survey

	responses*	Percentage of total responses*	Percentage of sample (N=111)
The level of strictness in referencing	52	46.8%	46.8%
Structuring an argument	44	39.6%	39.6%
Using some technical terms	15	13.5%	13.5%
Total	N of total response= 111		

*Multiple responses were possible.

Writing an academic essay: Q38 If you have found any differences between British and Korean traditions and expectations in writing academic essays, what do they relate to? (Tick all that are relevant)

Just under half of the sample reported that they had experienced cultural differences in terms of 'the level of strictness in referencing' (46.8%) and in 'structuring an argument' (39.6%). However, only 13.5% of the 111 identified 'using technical terms' as a problem. The survey results from Q39 support that 'both students at undergraduate and postgraduate level felt that UK universities enforce a stricter plagiarism policy than Korean universities'. This can be supported by three comments from Q39,

> In terms of plagiarism, there was a conspicuous difference in the extent to which plagiarism is perceived as important between Korea and the UK. In Korea, plagiarism is mainly considered on master's courses. (P113. Female. Undergraduate. Translation)

> In the UK, plagiarism is never permitted, and thus I felt it is important to give the origin of my ideas. From my experience, when he used my ideas, my supervisor confirmed that they came from what I suggested to him at a specific time. That really surprised me. (P98. Male. PhD. Translation)

> I have not noticed the importance of the 'plagiarism' and 'copyright 'issues in Korea. This caused me to have some fear of committing plagiarism especially when paraphrasing in the UK. (P94. Female. Undergraduate. Translation)

This appears similarly to the experiences of Chinese students; Edward and Ran's (2006) study shows that many lecturers at a UK university who experienced teaching Chinese students commented that most Chinese learners do not understand expectations and norms about 'copying culture' in the British higher education, which often led to a problem with plagiarism. Their lack of language ability also resulted in plagiarism. Presuming that this is an area in which Korean students also experienced difficulties, a further research is needed to see how far it becomes a source of serious problems and what the students do to overcome them.

The responses to Q39 also indicated that 'structuring an argument' was another culture related area of academic writing in which Korean students experienced difficulties. There were several correspondences here with the previous study data where it was suggested that, first, Korean students tend to be more indirect in discourse than people from more individualistic cultures (Holtgarves 1997). Thus, as 20 comments from Q39 indicated, the Korean students were not familiar with the topic sentence approach of directly asserting a topic before giving supporting ideas, which tends to be expected in English academic writing (Cortazzi & Jin 1997, Windle, 2000). For instance,

I can't still understand exactly British styles of structuring arguments. (P104. Male. Masters. Original)

Your topic sentence comes first in the UK, but in Korea, it tends to go to the end. (P110. Female. PhD. Original)

This phenomenon is in line with the findings from a comparative study between Taiwanese and American students showed that many Taiwanese students' English writings tend to be argued in a more indirect way than in American students' ones. Also, 37 percent of the Chinese students' assignments in Cortazzi & Jin's study were penalized for indirectness concerning the point or the topic of the argument, with comments such as 'where is the point', or 'I don't see the connection' (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997: 82). In addition, the responses to Q39 suggested that essay structure is given greater importance in the UK system, but in Korea, specific guidance for good essay writing at undergraduate level was not given to the students.

Finally, technical words can be hard for everyone, so there may be some element of general difficulty in the response here, although the worst problems could be limited to subjects dealing with sociocultural issues. Specifically, students said that they found it difficult to translate technical words in Korean texts into English when using Korean articles or documents, as the meaning of the words could vary across sociocultural contexts. For example,

The understandings of such terms as 'constitution' seem affected by historical and cultural context. (P104. Male. Masters. Original)

The results concerning difficulties with writing academic essays are still fairly general. It would be useful to find out, in a greater detail, how far Korean learners manage to adjust to writing academic essays in the UK and in what precise ways they manage to cope with problems or difficulties that arise.

3.4 Did Korean students notice cultural differences in UK universities as regards 'marker's feedback, comments, or marks for academic performance'?

The survey data suggest that many of the respondents did indeed notice cultural differences in feedback and marking between Korean and UK universities. The results are given in Table 6.

Table 6 Survey

	Responses*	Percentage of total responses*	Percentage of sample (N=111)
The level of usefulness of feedback or comments to improve your academic performance	33	35.1%	29.7%
The guarantee of the anonymity or fairness in assessment (e.g. anonymous or non anonymous marking / the level of punctuality in deadlines)	25	26.6%	22.5%
The overall content of feedback (which points are mainly assessed)	20	21.3%	18.0%
The system of assessment	16	17%	14.4%
Total	N of total responses = 94		

*Multiple responses were possible.

Marker's feedback, comments, or marks on academic performance: Q40 If you found any differences between how to give feedback, comment or marks, what do they relate to? (Tick all that are relevant)

The results of Q40 seem generally to support this hypothesis that most students would be very satisfied with the feedback system in the UK, and that

this area would not prove seriously problematic or difficult. In particular, it seems clear that 29.7% believed that feedback in the UK was very constructive and useful; indeed, as many as ten respondents commented on Q41 that they were very impressed by the detailed and systematic feedback they received in UK universities.

Most of the reports from Q41 suggested that 'anonymity or fairness in assessment' was more regulated and guaranteed in the UK. Fewer comments were reported for the other areas. Just five people reported that they had not received any feedback in Korea, and three reported that they had found no differences in the marking and assessment system. Although some differences in the specific areas of feedback or comment in the UK have been highlighted, this area appears to be less problematic than the other two areas of academic culture: interaction in supervision and writing academic essays. In future research, it would be worth looking longitudinally at the extent to which feedback helped Korean students develop their academic skills and thus, in real practice, whether it affected their perception of academic achievement. In addition, it would also be interesting to examine how far students give critical and objective comments on lecturers' evaluations through a further study.

4. Discussions and Conclusion

The findings from the survey with 124 Korean students enrolled at 16 UK universities gave several indications. At a general level, several key problematic areas in academic context in relation to cultural factors such as face, hierarchy and indirectness, and collectivism, were discovered: first, the survey results showed a fairly high degree of passive behaviour in the classroom by Korean students in the UK, as the majority of the respondents (approximately 70%) reported avoiding strong arguments in seminar discussions. Furthermore, a reluctance to ask the teacher questions in class was admitted by 47.8% of the sample. Second, the UK supervision system had proved to be a challenging area for many respondents and that the reasons were largely, though not entirely, cultural, as majority of the sample students agreed to find out unfamiliarity with teacher-student relationships (54.0%) and students' rights to request academic

advice when they need it (33.3%). Thirdly, writing academically in English can be a challenging area, particularly with respect to culture-related problems, in the two main areas of 'the strictness in referencing' in relation to plagiarism (46.8%) and 'structuring arguments'(39.6%).

At a more specific level, the data contributed to making attempts to avoid the stereotyping or generalizing of cultural issues across an apparently homogeneous cultural group. The findings about Korean students' passivity in the classroom and unfamiliarity with the strictness in referencing in relation to copying culture, and indirectness in written English discourse correspond to a number of findings for Chinese students at UK universities. However, interestingly, some differences between Korean and Chinese students in the area of interacting with their supervisors in the UK were discovered, although two group of students reported having problems interacting with their supervisors, caused by a psychological distance from teacher's authority. Chinese students have a quite negative perspective on role expectations of supervisory meetings in the UK, which contrast with Korean students' favourable attitude toward guidance or advice that their supervisors gave. A further study of how this can affect each group of students' progress in adjusting to British higher education at a longitudinal level is needed.

In terms of the methods used for collecting the data, serving as an qualitative data of the quantitative study, the comments from these open ended questions were useful in testing certain hypotheses about ideas or perspectives on culture specific aspects of learning in higher education (Oppenheim, 1992, 1996), although the data cannot be as rich and detailed as one might desire.

The responses to the questionnaire survey made it clear that, apart from language difficulties, some degree of integration into the host culture of academic context was felt to be an important aspect of studying abroad by many of the students. Thus, my studies could lead Korean students to develop a great cross-cultual understanding between two countries, but they also ultimately help academic staff who are native speakers of English and teach Korean students in the UK to understand the specific culture-related problems and challenges faced by Korean students during their overseas study.

In short, the survey showed that cultural factors definitely caused problems

for the many of the sample, but the results were inevitably rather general and sketchy and the cross-sectional nature of the survey hid both initial problems on starting the degree and adaptation up to the point of the survey. What is needed is a richer and more longitudinal study – implying a more qualitative approach with a smaller and more targeted sample.

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