

**Studying Abroad:**

**The expectations and perceived difficulties of two samples of Korean students at UK universities.**

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I dedicate my thesis to all the people above

## **Author's declaration**

I recognize that this thesis is an original piece of work and no part of it has been published previously, and no other author has been involved in writing it.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to determine the language and cultural issues perceived as important by Korean students in the context of British higher education. Looking into Korean students' perceived expectations of and goals for overseas study in the UK, it aims to investigate how far cultural factors affect Korean students' academic progress and social adaptation, and to what extent misconceptions or stereotypes about Asian learners can be justified. The study was conducted with two sample groups of Korean students: firstly, a questionnaire-based national survey was undertaken with 124 students, enrolled at 16 UK universities. In the second study, in-depth interviews were carried out with six masters' students at a Northern British university on a longitudinal basis, so that each individual had six interview sessions in a 'structured conversation' format across one academic year. The findings from both quantitative and qualitative approaches indicated that developing social interaction with native speakers is one of the most problematic areas for the Korean students, and thus appeared to induce a failure to establish a second language learner identity in the target culture. Their passivity also often occurred in the area of classroom participation, involving lectures and seminar discussions. This can be attributed to culture-related reasons rather than language problems: they were very concerned about politeness in relation to 'face' and 'hierarchy', and felt they were limited in overcoming the cultural barriers in a different academic culture. In particular, these cultural factors also affected the methodology itself of the study, as I employed culture-specific strategies in the process of sampling and data collection and this yielded positive results. The thesis will hopefully contribute to furthering the intercultural understanding between Korean students and British educational institutions, so that Korean students will develop more open and proactive attitudes toward being acculturated into the host culture, and the institutions will pay more attention to Korean students' expectations and difficulties as second language learners.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1. 1 The background to the study**

Korea has become one of the main sources of overseas students seeking advanced degrees in English-speaking countries (Park, 2006; Australian Education International, 2007). Korean students are going to overseas universities in increasing numbers for two main reasons; firstly, there is an undoubted desire among students to improve their communicative English competence. In parallel with this eagerness for English as a lingua franca, the aspiration for overseas study can be also explained by the prestige of attaining a degree from a university in an English-speaking country (see section 2.3.1). The desire that many students have to explore a new culture by living in a foreign country and studying in a different academic context motivates them to study overseas (see section 2.3.1). Recently, the Korean government has responded to the increased desire to study overseas by making the policies regarding overseas study more flexible (Reportworld 2006). In this era of 'globalization' of higher education, this has resulted in a tremendous increase in the number of Korean students in the USA, UK, Canada, Australia, and the Philippines (Country Commercial Guide, 2002). Korea is now established as a major source of overseas students in these English-speaking countries. .

Of the various English-speaking countries, the UK has become one of the most preferred for overseas study among international students, according to the results of a survey by International Graduate Insight Group (The Naeil News, 2008), with the number of overseas students in the UK increasing by 8% in 2005 (BBC, 2005). The number of Korean overseas students in the UK has significantly increased since 1990, reaching 18,000 last year (British Council, 2007). The British Government has made scholarships covering post-graduate tuition fees available to many Korean students in

various fields. As a consequence, the UK has become one of the principal destinations for Korean students studying overseas, and intercultural exchanges between the two countries have continued to accelerate (UK in Korea, 2007).

The fact that the UK has become established as one of the major study-abroad countries for Korean students, particularly at university level, implies that 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. In my own case, with no experience of supervisory sessions in Korea, I did not initially understand the supervision system in the UK at all. I also felt very stressed about speaking in seminars, because of a concern with losing face if my comments interrupted the discussion, or if others could not completely understand my words.

The problems of socially adapting to a new environment may also be a significant concern for Korean students. Again, to judge from my own experience, I had felt a strong sense of isolation when I joined activities on campus which included a large proportion of British students. While academic contacts with native speakers on the course were not a problem, I had difficulty developing interaction with native speakers and this often made me depressed. It was very different from what I had expected, as I thought I would have numerous opportunities to meet and interact with British students. Inasmuch as I had experienced difficulties adapting to life (both academic and social) in the UK, I thought that other Korean students might well have similar experiences, and it was this that motivated me to begin the present study.

## **1.2 Need for research**

There is now some evidence that the increase in the number of Korean students (and

East Asian students generally) studying at university level in English-speaking countries has not been entirely problem free. A number of studies have found that many Asian international students have reported serious challenges with adjusting to a new cultural context, ranging from language difficulties, to academic problems, and feeling of social isolation (Samuelowicz, 1987; Barker, et al, 1991; Choi, 1997; Cortazzi and Jin, 1997; Armitage, 1999; Beaver and Tuck, 1999; Heggings and Jackson, 2003; Major, 2005; Andrade, 2006; Myles and Cheng, 2003). In the majority of the studies, however, students from East-Asian countries including Korea, Japan, China and Taiwan were treated as a homogeneous group of 'CHC' (Confucian Heritage Culture) students and a range of cultural mismatches in the educational expectations deriving from cultural differences between East and West were explored in a global way. The difficulty is that it may not always be justifiable either to make gross East-West categorizations, or to attribute all students' problems to the influence of Confucianism. For instance, it is questionable to claim that *all* CHC students are passive learners or rote-learners.

Although I felt that many, possibly most, Koreans experienced problems specifically related to Korean culture and training, and anecdotally, some members of staff had suggested that Korean students sometimes found it particularly hard to adapt to life and work in the UK, there appeared to be little research focusing primarily on this group. There was thus a need for a study of Korean students in the UK, examining cultural and language issues, exploring their perceptions of challenges they faced academically and socially, and establishing how (or how far) they managed to overcome problems that arose.



### **1.3 Aims of the study**

This thesis comprises two studies, based on two different methods of data collection, involving both quantitative and qualitative approaches: The first is a cross-sectional questionnaire-based survey, while the second is a series of in-depth interviews over one academic year. The questionnaire-based survey across twelve universities in the UK, was conducted first and was designed to gain a broad overview of whether cultural factors affected Korean adult learners studying in English. It had two general research questions:

RQ1. Where do the main problems lie in relation to any specific cultural factors?

RQ2. Which group of students has the greatest difficulties: undergraduates, masters, or PhD students?

The results suggested that masters students had, or at least perceived themselves to have, greater problems than undergraduates and slightly more than PhD students. As the survey findings were necessarily limited and could not show the progress of the students' adjustment during their time in the UK, a further study was designed to obtain richer data through in-depth interviews with six masters students at a single university in the UK. At a longitudinal level, the study aimed to discover the pattern of the students' progress in developing social interaction and adjusting to British academic culture on one-year programmes. The interviews aimed to explore the following questions:



RQ3. What is specifically problematic to Korean Masters' students in the areas of (a) academic progress, (b) social integration into their host environment, and (c) the development of communicative competence?

RQ4. What caused key academic and social problems and challenges?

RQ5. To what extent and how did the students adjust to a different academic culture within the UK university system across the year?

RQ6. What attempts did they make to solve their problems?

#### **1.4 Synopsis of the Chapters**

**Chapter two** examines the literature relevant to the study up to the present, exploring predictions and assumptions about where the main problems lie in relation to any specific cultural factors, particularly with regard to Korean students' adaptation to the new cultural context of an English-speaking country. Firstly, I explore how the main cultural aspects deriving from Confucianism remain strong in current Korean society. The salient aspects of Korean culture shaped by Confucian values are highlighted, with due consideration given to the fact that Confucianism has developed slightly differently across CHC countries like Japan, China, Thailand, and particularly Korea. I focus on three aspects of Confucianism: *collectivism, social harmony and hierarchical relationships, and face in Korean society*. I go on to explore how cultural factors have affected contemporary Korean higher education, particularly in terms of the enthusiasm for education and the organisational culture of higher education. The final part of this section highlights the problems and difficulties many Asian students, particularly Korean students, can often experience in English-speaking countries such as the UK, USA, Canada, and Australia. Over and above the inevitable problem of language ability,

it is noted that many of the difficulties involving issues of social adjustment and academic success appear to be culturally related. Specifically, a range of cultural mismatches in expectations between Asian students and Western tutors and universities are presented in the following areas: the student-teacher relationship regarding supervision and interaction with staff, approaches to learning and teaching, 'copying' issues in relation to plagiarism in academic writing, and communication styles in both spoken and written language. In addition to these problematic areas, the isolation and 'culture shock' which can be associated with social integration into the host environment is also examined.

**Chapter three** describes how the preparatory work was conducted and details the research design for the questionnaire-based survey, including a series of preliminary interviews and the pilot study. The first part discusses the methodology and findings from the preliminary interviews which were undertaken with twelve Korean students at undergraduate, masters, and PhD level at the University of York. Methodological issues ranging from sampling students, to places, and times and interview techniques are described, as well as practical issues, such as managing and recording the interview sessions. The results from the twelve subjects are also presented in a series of theme-based categories; 1) Supervision system; the relationship between supervisor and students, 2) writing an academic essay; structuring an argument and plagiarism, and 3) reactions to markers' feedback, grades, or comments on academic performance.

In the second part of the Chapter I outline, how the main study was designed, giving the details of including the research aims, the survey sample, and the questionnaire design. Following the initial design for the main study, the details of the

pilot study, designed to diagnose any problematic areas of the questionnaire and thus to enhance validity and reliability, are described. I illustrate the 'think-aloud' method used with participants and the importance of the three-stage piloting technique employed. I also indicate the areas of items which were removed from, or modified in, the questionnaire after each of the three pilot phases.

**Chapter four** describes the actual survey conducted, reports its main findings and considers where further research is needed. Firstly, the details about the implementation of the survey are discussed, particularly focusing on the changes and modifications from the original design. I discuss the use of the on-line survey and the sampling methods used involving twelve universities in the UK. Also, the culture-specific strategies used in the process of sampling and administering the survey to increase response rates are explained. The main findings from a sample of 124 Korean students in UK universities are then reported, based round two main themes. Firstly, the respondents' overall opinions of cultural experiences in the UK are examined, focusing on where the main problems occurred, and whether these were affected by cultural factors like face, hierarchy, and indirectness. This first theme involves three sub-sections; 1) Learning culture through homestay, 2) Cultural adjustment when studying overseas (in relation to social interaction with native speakers and length of time in the UK), and 3) Cultural adjustment to UK academic culture (focussing on passivity in classroom interaction and interaction with one's supervisor, particularly relating to the concept of *face*). The second theme is the differences among the three groups (undergraduates, masters, and PhD), in terms of academic culture, language competence, and social interaction with native speakers.

**Chapter five** focuses on the methodological issues relating to the second main study: the in-depth interviews. Firstly, the sampling procedure to select the six students on masters programmes is discussed. Secondly, how the interview questions were developed with regard to consistency with the survey content is described. The main part of the chapter examines the details of the implementation and process of carrying out and checking the in-depth interviews. This section firstly shows the organisation of and schedule for the six interview sessions and how interview skills were developed with regard to increasing reliability and minimising bias. The section highlights how I modified and expanded ‘the structured conversation’ method developed by Toyoshima (2007). I illustrate the pilot study and how it was carried out in practice with regard to the language used, the length of time taken, and the method of recording data. The structured conversation method was also extended to cover multiple data sources (allowing data to be triangulated), as well as face-to-face interviews, and two ways of collecting qualitative data based on real-life settings between the interview sessions, (e.g. holding informal conversation meetings with small groups of the sample students). The third part of the chapter discusses ethical issues in interviewing. This includes how the researcher-participant relationship impacted on the interviews in both positive and negative ways, particularly focusing on the researcher’s role in counselling the participants. Finally, the methods of transcription and analysis are described, with reference to the main sources of data used in data analysis, checking the accuracy of the six participants’ transcripts, and the usefulness of a thematic approach to analysis.

**Chapter six** examines the first half of the in-depth interview findings, focussing on ‘social adjustment’. Following the descriptions of the personal background of the six



sample students and their motivation to study in the UK, the main results are presented in a theme-based structure, categorized into several sub-themes. At the first level, participants' impressions of British culture on their arrival and their initial worries at the beginning of their courses are presented. Secondly, their social interaction with native speakers is examined, 1) in the department, involving issues of interaction with supervisors and academic staff, and participation in departmental activities, and 2) with respect to the nature and extent of social interactions outside the department. The analysis focuses on the students' pattern of progress, level of satisfaction, and breadth of social interaction with English native speakers, and on their participation in social activities on and off campus, and I examine how these varied and intersected among the participants. Furthermore, both language- and culture-related reasons for the reported difficulties and challenges are analysed. I then examine the students' reactions to their problems and difficulties, and their attitudes towards developing their social interaction skills as the year progressed. Finally, issues of social or cultural withdrawal are discussed; whether and in what ways any of the students had experienced it and how it interrelated with the nature and extent of their social interaction.

**Chapter seven** reports the remaining findings from the second study, extending the analysis to the issues of 'academic learning' and 'developing communicative competence in English' which interconnect with the issue of 'social adjustment' in the previous chapter. As in Chapter 6, the students' pattern of progress, level of satisfaction, problematic areas specific to the students, underlying cultural and language-related issues, and their reactions to, or attempts to, overcome their problems across the year are investigated. Under 'academic learning', I first examine how the students' initial



worries presented in Chapter 6 changed over the year. I go on to examine the students' participation and interaction in the UK academic context, and in particular, their passivity in classroom contexts such as seminar discussions and lectures. This section also describes issues surrounding 'writing an academic essay', 'the feedback system', and 'learning styles in a different teaching and learning context' (which involves 'critical thinking' and 'learner autonomy'). Students' perceptions of cultural differences in these areas and the issues that they found most difficult and hard to overcome in one-year courses are presented. Perceptions of 'developing their communicative competence in English' and the level of satisfaction with their improvement in both spoken and written English across the six students are then explored in relation to the other two areas of 'social adaptation' and 'academic achievement'.

**Chapter eight** summarises and integrates the key findings of the two main studies. An overview of the key findings is then given using the thematic approach employed in earlier chapters. An attempt is made to integrate the findings from the two studies, looking particularly at how far the interview results supported or contrasted with the results of the larger survey. I tried too to consider how the combined findings can be understood in terms of the original research aims. I focus particularly on the limitation students reported with developing social interaction with native speakers and the impacts this can have. I then make a number of recommendations designed to help students adapt to a one-year graduate programme in a new environment and avoid the static or even declining pattern of adaptation reported in several areas. Finally, I look at the main limitations of the present studies and make a number of suggestions for future research.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1. Some cultural aspects of Korean society in general**

#### ***2.1.1 What is 'Confucianism'? - Historical background and its influence on society***

Confucianism has been defined in Wikipedia as 'an East Asian ethical and philosophical system originally developed from the teaching of the early Chinese sage Confucius'. Jin and Cortazzi (2006: 12) add the rider that the Confucian tradition is still relevant in the twenty first century at least in China;

*The tradition was influenced by Buddhist and Taoist teachings and has been largely overtaken by socialist ideas in modern China, but there is common agreement that the Confucian values are significant for modern socio-cultural attitudes affecting learning and communication practices (Bond, 1991; Watkins and Biggs, 1996; Gao and Ting-Toomey, 1998; Yao, 2000).*

Confucianism spread widely and influenced many other East-Asian countries, such as Korea, Japan, China, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong. Indeed, Confucian values such as harmony and filial piety which have been widely reflected in the media have continuously affected education, companies, and government work in these countries (Connor, nd). Also, the 'Asian values debate' of the 1990s was closely bound up with the role of a Confucianism-based social approach in modern society to economic development (Dupont, 1996). These Asian countries have been said to constitute what might be labelled a 'Confucian Heritage Culture' (CHC), in the sense that the main Confucian principles, and the values that derive from Confucianism, which have been dominant since ancient times, are still present (Watkins and Biggs, 2001, 1996, cited in Ho, et al, 2004).

### ***2.1.2 The ideas of Confucian thought - The six basic values***

Although there are differences in how Confucianism developed in different countries, there are a number of basic concepts common to all versions. In Confucianism, all that happens in the world can be judged by a set of ethical values:

*Only after the self is cultivated, can the family be regulated; only after the family is regulated, can the state be governed; and only after the state is governed, can peace be brought to the land (Confucius, 2006:8).*

In short, world peace is held to rely on the personality or character of individuals, which is in turn shaped by ethical values. The key values of Confucianism can be categorized into six basic virtues, which function as ethical principles regulating a person's proper behaviour in all conduct relating to family, society, economic life and government (Xu, 2006). The values are compassion (ren), filial piety (xiao), righteousness (yi), propriety (li), loyalty (chung), and reciprocity (shu) (Ross, 1996; The Columbia Electronic Encyclopaedia, 2003). The six values underline the fact that the main feature of Confucianism is 'maintaining social harmony', and thus:

*The society that Confucians aim to build is not one that is an aggregate of self-interested claimers, but one composed of virtuous individuals who live in harmonious relationships with other members of a community (Lee, 1996:367).*

This is based on the view that it is meaningless to see people independently of relationships with others (Brannigan, 2005), and thus "each of these relationships involves mutual actions and reactions and each person must carry out his/her part of the relationship." (Windows on Asia: Regional Teaching Ideas, nd). For instance, the notion

of 'propriety' emphasises the maintenance of interpersonal harmony, and to this end politeness, courtesy and discretion in human relationships are highly valued. In addition, avoiding strong emotion in face-to-face situations, which may lead to a conflict or an uncomfortable situation, is also an important part of maintaining harmonious relationships (National Multicultural Interpreter Project, 2000). Confucian thought also emphasizes loyalty to community, which in practice means doing work to benefit people in one's community. Thus, loyalty is not limited to just a virtue required in wartime, but is a quality people need to have in all aspects of life relating to family or community.

### ***2.1.3 How Confucianism continues to influence Korean culture***

Although Confucian values and principles spread over all East Asian countries, there were some variants in each country (Tu et al., 1992, cited in Hyun, 2001). With respect to 'Korean Confucianism', which flourished in the Yi Dynasty (1392-1900) labelled a 'Confucian state' (Yao, 2000), and Confucian thought, transplanted from China during the 6<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>2</sup>, substantially influenced Korean intellectual history and was modified to fit Korean conditions (Tamai and Lee, 2002). One of the main characteristics of Korean Confucianism was the concept of 'filial piety' (Honda, 1997; Moon, 1992).

'Filial piety' has become the main criterion in measuring morality and thus is emphasized as a fundamental part of all human behaviour in Korea. Numerous stories in East-Asian myth, literature and folklore describe filially-minded children who sacrifice themselves for their parents (Windows on Asia: Regional Teaching Ideas, nd). This notion of duty and family-centeredness contrasts with the idea from other cultures that children should be encouraged to 'be yourself' (National Multicultural Interpreter



Project, 2000). Inasmuch as filial piety is a culturally derived form of love towards parents in Asian moral values<sup>3</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> century Westerners might find it hard to accept that children could sacrifice their own wishes, or desires for the sake of their parents.

In a further extension, five cardinal relationships (오륜) are also emphasized as underpinning Confucian moral thought: father and son, ruler and subject, husband and wife, elder and younger brother, and 'between friends' (Xu, 2006). Specific duties are given to each relationship and people are expected to follow their duties throughout their life (Brannigan, 2005). Each of the six is an unequal and hierarchical relationship, except for the last one. They show how society under Confucianism forms a hierarchical and vertical structure, tied together by filial piety. These relationships are indispensable to understanding the characteristics of Asian cultures generally and filial piety in particular seems to be continuing to affect many social phenomena up to the present day. For example, in contemporary Korea, parental authority still has a very strong influence on the educational progress of children (Shin and Koh, 2005). Thus, parents' opinions and wishes strongly affect choices of university, and subject studied, as well as the sorts of jobs taken by their children. Shin and Koh (2005) employ the term 'familism' and comment that,

*Koreans are greatly concerned about the family matters such as family fame, the prosperity of family, and mutual support among family members. Familism in Korea is based on the Confucian thought of proper relations between the members of the family (p. 1)*

In Korean and many Asian families, the titles such as 'eldest brother', 'youngest sister', or 'second sister' clearly mark out the hierarchy within the family. The eldest son as the most important child is traditionally expected to take care of his

parents as they become older. This contrasts with the UK, for example, where this responsibility has often gone to the youngest daughters. This practice is still on going, even though many family customs are changing, as Asian societies become more industrialised and westernized. Indeed, in Korea, the legal system today supports egalitarianism, regardless of 'birth order and gender' within children in a family, when it comes to sharing family property or heritage (Shin and Koh, 2005).

The father nevertheless remains very much the head of the family in Korean and other Asian countries:

*The father is the authority figure, the head of the family, and he maintains a distant, strict, dignified relationship. He is the leader, the disciplinarian, and the economic provider. In many cultures the male provides the family's last name. In patriarchal societies male offspring carry the family heritage. (National Multicultural Interpreter Project, 2000)*

In spite of some changes in role expectation in families caused by sociocultural, or economic developments, even today, in traditionally 'patriarchal' societies, the father seems to have a great deal of authority to control and rule over his family. In a similar vein, showing respect towards ancestors and grandparents because of their authority and age are also valued. For example, although there is an increasing tendency towards the nuclear family in Korea, many extended families in Korea tend to have frequent gatherings and grandparents often live with their grandchildren (Won, 1998). Children are also expected to be obedient to their parents or grandparents.

Contemporary South Korean society is deeply rooted in Confucian values and ideology since a rebirth of Confucianism in the late 1990s, resulting from the 'Asian values debate' (Kim, 2005). Indeed Confucianism remains one of the most prevalent

factors influencing Korean cultural values in all aspects of everyday life (Lee, 1983; Park and Cho, 1995). Oh-Hwang (1993) put it as follows:

*Korea has traditionally been heavily influenced by Confucianism. It is present in every aspect of Korean society, including home, school, and community, and politics. Koreans are taught that filial piety is the basis of all conduct. (1993:35)*

So although South Korea currently looks very modernized, cosmopolitan, and westernised, all human relationships, educational processes and legal systems are shaped on the basis of Confucian values (Kim, 2005). Kim used the metaphor of two masks to express this:

*South Korea is a country that wears two masks. Walk through Seoul with its skyscrapers, spanking-new malls and urban cafes that line the streets and it looks every inch a cosmopolitan capital, mirroring Western influences. But this is just one face. Beneath this façade lies a society deeply rooted in Confucian values and ideology. Few, besides those who live and work in South Korea, understand how much traditional values shape every aspect of the country (p. 1).*

In order to observe more precisely how Confucianism has shaped Korean society and especially education, it is necessary briefly to examine some major Confucian-based cultural factors, such as collectivism, face, hierarchy, and indirectness, which still prevail in 21<sup>st</sup> century society. It is important to remember that these factors are not independent, but closely connected to each other.

### 2.1.3.1. Collectivism

The frame 'individualism-collectivism' is a key means of distinguishing a number of cultural values, norms, and expectations:

*Culture is a fuzzy construct. If we are to understand the way culture relates to social psychological phenomena, we must analyse it by determining dimensions of cultural variation. One of the most promising such dimensions is individualism-collectivism (Trandis, et al. 1988:323).*

This distinction between collectivism and individualism is determined by whether a culture values developing interdependence relations and group success or developing independence and individual achievement (Trumbull, et al., 2001: Table 1, cited in Ho, Holmes, and Cooper, 2004).

Individualism means that 'the individual is the primary unit of reality and the ultimate standard of value' (Kim, 2004:3). This implies that each individual is an important component of society and societies are to be seen primarily in terms of the individuals comprising them (Kim et al, 1984). Collectivism, on the other hand, stresses the harmony in 'the group - nation, the community, the proletariat, the race' (Kim, 2004: 3). The main point about collectivism is that the individual inevitably exists in relation to others and thus what is significant is individuals' social identity and responsibility within the groups with which they interact (Kim et al, 1984). 'Society' thus means more than just a collection of individuals. Accordingly, the distinction between the two cultural dimensions seems, in short, a matter of whether the group exists for the individual or the individual exists for the group. Thus, collectivists are most likely to stay in the group even though they are not satisfied with it, but individualists tend to leave it (Ho, et al, 2004).



From the above the collectivistic idea is closely related to the Confucian notion that the harmony within, and the well-being of, a group or society is of more importance than an individual's personal happiness and goodness. This does not mean that individuals need to sacrifice themselves arbitrarily for the sake of group profit, but in collectivistic societies, they are expected to take social responsibility, valuing harmonious relationships within the group more highly than the pursuit of one's personal needs. Table 2.1 summarizes these differences

<b>Collectivism<sup>4</sup></b>	<b>Individualism<sup>5</sup></b>
To foster interdependence and group success.	To foster independence and individual achievement.
To promote adherence to norms, respect for authority/elders, group consensus (We-ness).	To promote self-expression, individual thinking, personal voice (Me-ness).
Associated with stable hierarchical roles (dependent on gender, family background, age).	Associated egalitarian relationships and flexibility in roles (e.g. upward mobility).
Associated with shared property, group ownership.	Associated with private property, individual ownership.

Table 2.1 Collectivism vs. Individualism: Adapted from Trumbull et al (2001), cited in Ho, et al, 2004:5 and Kim (2004: 3).

While an emphasis on the collective nature of Korean society brings out a

number of points that will be important when looking at Korean students in the UK, it is important not to take the analysis to extremes. Trandis (2004), for example, notes that in any society there will be marked individual differences: some people will be more group oriented while others will be more individualistic.

### 2.1.3.2 Social harmony and hierarchical relationships

The English term 'collectivism' covers two separate concepts in Korean: *Kong Dong Chae* and *Jib Dan Ju Wi* (Browder, 2005). *Kong Dong Chae* has a positive meaning and is closely linked to 'cooperation'. The word 'Chae' implies a sense, a feeling that someone can develop. It originates from a traditional Korean event: it was conventional for farmers in the same village to gather to help an individual farmer who needed extra hands. It is currently used to describe how students are expected to help others who are having difficulty understanding material.

*Jib Dan Ju Wi*, on the other hand, is used with both positive and negative connotations and means, 'any kind of group thinking, ranging from the way that alumni of the same university share many of the same personality qualities to the sometimes cult-like behaviour attributed to some of the Korean religious groups' (Browder, 2005:4). Both of these concepts are connected with the maintenance of societal ties:

*It is very important to maintain networks connected with school or blood ties, as well as regional relations in Korean society. It is impossible to remove the influence of the university from which each individual graduated during his or her life and the university one graduates from determines which societal groups one can be a member of. Individuals make an effort to acquire and maintain these societal ties as a gateway to gaining social status (DongA. com, 22 Jan. 2008).*

This 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, cited in Hyun, 2001).

Familism in Korea remains an important cultural phenomenon as noted earlier. In particular, the strong parent-child bond in Asian families, which constructs a hierarchical relationship in a family, is very highly valued. Browder's (2005:5) ethnographic interviews showed this clearly: 'a Korean has a stronger emotional bond with her parents, respects them and feels responsible to them'. Also, the interview findings suggest that 'Korean parents are more supportive financially; this support is reciprocal, a sort of interdependency'. These views are closely associated with the primary vertical relationship between father and son in the 'five cardinal relationships'(오륜).

It seems clear that hierarchy has long been and still is a salient element characterizing Korean collectivistic society. In Korea, people are hierarchically connected, in a way that is determined by age, gender and social status (Kim, 2004). The Korean notion of 'Humaneness' is accordingly aimed at maintaining social harmony through individuals' proper behaviour in their place in the hierarchical social order (Halpin, 2002). This harmonization extends to the use of language. Speakers are expected to make appropriate use of honorific endings in the language and to take clear account of social factors, such as age, sex, family background, home town, social position, and the speaker's social status relative to the person being addressed.

For instance, the honorific interrogative verbal ending *supnikka*, an honorific suffix *nim*, and another honorific suffix *si* that follows the root of a verb indicate the

speaker's respect for the addressee in their vertical relationship (Lee, 2003). The following fragment from a conversation illustrates their use.

a. *Yoon cennmwu-nim-kkeyse hoyuy-ey chamsekha-si-ess-supnikka?*

*Executive director-hon-nom(honorofic) meeting-postp*

*attend-hon-past- int (honorofic)*

*'Did executive director Yoon attend the meeting?'*

b. *ung, chamsekha-si-ess-e.*

*yes attend-honorofic-past-dec*

*'Yes, he attended it.'*

*(Source, Lee 2003:386)*

Honorific endings thus indicate a certain grade of politeness and illustrate the social relationships between speakers and their addressees. This may explain why Koreans ask personal questions about age or one's home town at first meeting, something which could be intrusive to people from different cultures.

In short, in spite of the modernization, industrialization and westernisation in South Korea, people have a great tendency to maintain harmony with others, focusing more on their roles and responsibilities in the hierarchical structures of both the community and the family. Comprehending the influence of collectivism is crucial to understanding Korean culture.

### 2.1.3.3 The concept of 'Face' in Korea

#### A. Face ('chemyeon') in Korean Society



In spite of the difficulty in balancing universals and culture-specific features, face can be a useful factor in distinguishing cultural behaviours or phenomena in the cross-cultural study of two different cultural milieux (Kang, 2004). As noted above, Korean culture shaped by 'collectivism' tends to put more value on interdependence and hierarchy in human relationships. Since the individual is expected to fulfil his role in hierarchical relationships within society, socially desirable face, or image, which identifies one's own self in the society, becomes a key concept. Korean people thus consider the involvement aspect of face whenever they interact with others, and make any decisions (Choe, 2001) and they aspire to maintain or upgrade it when it comes to behaviour in public.

This 'involvement' type of face accordingly plays an important role in maintaining hierarchical order and harmonious relationships (Flowerdew, 1998). Flowerdew (1998) describes the interrelationship between hierarchy and face as follows:

*In accordance with Confucian tenets, society is hierarchically ordered, with due respect shown for age, seniority, and rank. In this type of interdependent relationship, peers, and especially superiors, must always be accorded 'face' and not caused to lose it through overt and public criticism. In other words, propriety must at all times be maintained. The individual's social and professional status automatically bestows him or her with 'authority', to such an extent that subordinates tend to assume that boss is always right, purely by virtue of their understanding. (p.325)*

Although Flowerdew (1998) is describing Chinese society, this comment applies equally to Korean society. Accordingly, 'face' in Korean society is closely intertwined with hierarchy and authority, which are in turn based on seniority, education, occupation or affiliation with other groups, so people need to preserve 'face' within

hierarchical order.

## B. Two types of face in Korean culture

The ‘involvement aspect of face’, highly emphasized in Korea, valuing interdependence and hierarchy in human relationships involves two specific types of face that Korean people pursue: ‘normative’ and ‘displaying’ face (Lim, 1994; Kang, 2001). These two types are well-suited to explaining certain specific aspects of Korean collectivistic culture. Korean society has certain normative face concerns that are different even from other Asian countries: Korean people tend to have more ‘other-face concerns’, maintaining ‘the face of the people with whom we are interacting’ than do Americans or Japanese, but fewer ‘self-face’ concerns than Japanese or Chinese (Gudyskunst, 2004, cited in Jiang, 2004:8).

Normative face may be defined as the image that is most likely to be approved by sociocultural norms in society. This ‘face’ is often termed as ‘*chemyeon*’ in Korean, and is more than a matter of just saving personal embarrassment (Jung, 2000). It is closely connected with prestige or reputation. For instance, if we examine collocations of *chemyeon*, ‘to lose face’ (체면을 잃다: 모욕을 당하다. 창피하다, 권위나 명성을 잃다) means ‘to be humiliated’ or ‘to lose respect, prestige or authority’. ‘To gain face’ (명성이나 권위를 얻다) means ‘to increase reputation or a good name’. Finally, ‘to save face’ (체면유지; 명성, 권위를 유지하다) means ‘to keep prestige or authority’ (adapted from Zhu (2003:315)). These concepts are prevalent in all aspects of life in Korean society. People are expected to behave within socially and culturally desirable patterns, so the images that they desire to project are closely linked to social and cultural norms. In the collectivistic culture of Korea, individuals, interdependent with others, are expected to

meet others' expectations, based on values such as hierarchy, empathy, reciprocity, belongingness, kinship, loyalty, and social obligation. In doing so, it is of great significance to have proper normative face according to one's situation, social position and values (Kang, 2004). For instance, when lunch time is almost finished, one conventionally asks one's friends or colleagues in Korea 'have you had lunch?'. This is a cultural norm to save others' face rather than self-evident inquiry: if one does not ask it, one can be considered as ignoring or showing a lack of respect for others and thus the others would lose face by being hurt (Choi and Yu, 1994).

This normative face has two implications. First, it is connected with easing interpersonal relations and aimed at maintaining harmony in the community. Another one is that people can learn normative face by learning through direct or indirect experiences. As normative face is associated with conventional patterns of behaviours in society, people can unconsciously or consciously learn it through interaction with others while living in the culture for long time.

The other type of face concern in Korean society is often called 'displaying' face. This has to do with 'the desire to show a positive self-image which is superior to others' (Kang, 2004:267). In this sense, it would appear to be something that runs counter to, or counterbalances, the altruism inherent in collectivism. Displaying face is slightly different from the 'positive face' of Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) in terms of its competitive aspects, although there is a correspondence between the two in terms of competence. Displaying face is deeply rooted in Korean society. It means that people in Korea desire to show their own self-images as being superior to others' in many situations. For instance, according to Kang (2004), housewives tend to praise their children or husbands for this reason. This seems to happen in the UK or USA, but

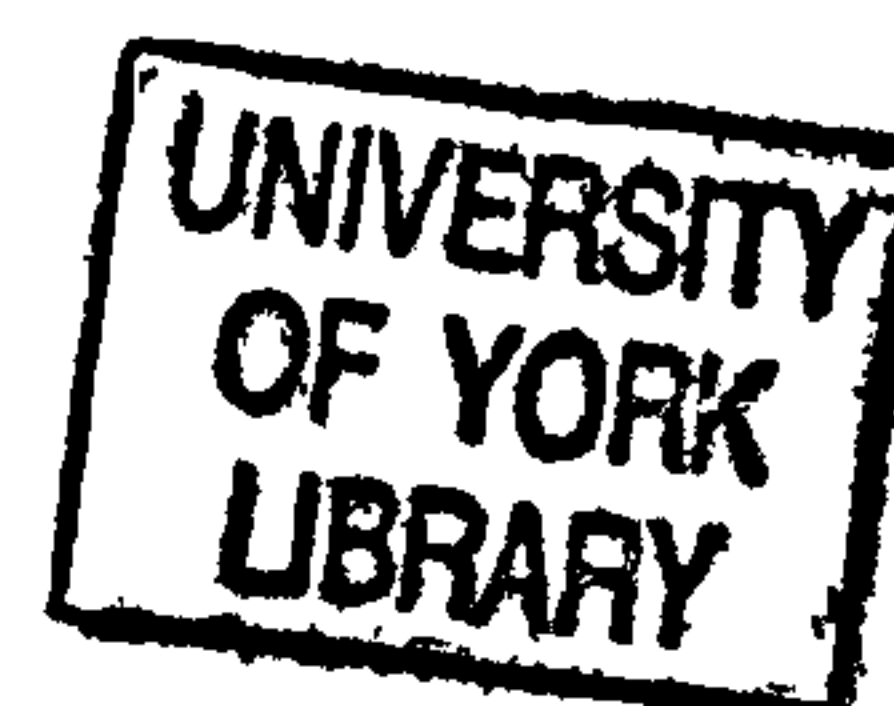
differs in the sense that children's academic competence is an important factor to maintaining their parents' face (Song, 2005). This also explains, according to a psychologist in India, why many parents in Asian countries thus hope to praise to others that their children are the best in the class (Park, 2006). Here, family reputation, highly valued in Korean society, can be closely associated with face. Koreans are certainly under a great deal of competitive pressure in all aspects of life, which perhaps leads them to display this sort of image to others.

Displaying face is often manifested in the form of conspicuous consumption, as a way of showing off one's wealth (Kang, 2004). By doing so, people try to demonstrate their higher social status than others in the community, which plays an important role in maintaining their face (Sung, 1994, cited in Kim, 2001). Therefore, displaying face is a key to understanding highly stratified and competitive aspects in Korean society, based on how people evaluate others' prestige, wealth, and social status (Kang, 2004).

As regards cross-cultural comparisons of 'face' between collectivistic and individualistic cultures, the findings from Kang's (2004) comparative study between Korea and America showed that normative and displaying image were both more significant in Korea than in America. For the present study, we may predict that Korean students who study abroad in the countries with individualistic cultures, such as United states, United Kingdom, and Canada, are highly likely to act and react in terms of face. It might also be predicted that face will be as relevant to the methodology of researching students as to interpreting their behaviour.

## **2.2. Culture in contemporary Korean higher education**

### ***2.2.1 Korean education in Confucianism-based culture: Educational enthusiasm for***





## *education*

### 2.2.1.1. Why Korean families are so enthusiastic about education

Amongst other areas in society, many studies have shown cultural differences between individualistic and collectivistic tendencies in the area of learning and teaching (Hofstede, 1986: Table 2; Chang and Chin, 1999). There is a great difference between the two cultural ‘philosophies’ on the question of what education aims at or what it is perceived as being. In an individualistic culture, students aim to acquire knowledge and develop skills, to reach a better standard of living in economic terms (Ho, et al, 2004). This differs from the collectivistic view that education is an important means to gaining higher social status (Ho, et al, 2004). In Confucian-based societies, what grade a child receives is considered more important than how much the child has developed, and thus, in practice, the grades seem to be treated as the most reliable criteria for evaluating the child’s academic achievement (Stevenson and Lee, 1991).

As a result, East Asian parents take a high level of responsibility for supervising their children’s homework regularly and expect their children to make good progress (Strom, et al, 1988). At a general level, many East Asians are highly motivated to achieve in school for several reasons: they desire to improve their socioeconomic status, to support the family reputation, to gain praise from their parents and teachers, and to get a higher-status occupation (Schneider and Lee, 1991, Siu, 1992).

In short, the importance of higher status in a hierarchical society, family prestige or honour, and a strong parent-child bond, stemming from Confucian thought, all lead people in that culture to a marked enthusiasm for education (Wollen, 1992). Currently, in addition to these traditional values based on Confucianism, the desire for

adaptation to a fast-changing society has become another reason for present-day educational enthusiasm (Sorensen, 1994). For example, in a survey of Korean middle and high school students by An et al. (1992), 78.7 percent of the respondents gave their main reasons for going to college as 'a practical necessity', and to get a good job or gain social recognition. So the evaluation of education in modern Korean society relates to social demands in a rapidly changing society, as well as to traditional attitudes in relation to family prestige or hierarchy.

On the other hand, Wollen (1992:22) notes that, 'in spite of this extraordinary commitment to education, South Korean educators are recognizing the deficiency of a rigid system culminating in a difficult examination for college entrance'. In other words, a very high level of competition in university entrance exams is linked to limited opportunity for employment (Shin and Koh, 2005). For instance, in the 1989-1990 school year, 800,000 students applied for just 200,000 university places (Shin and Koh, 2005). Shin and Koh (P.2) add, that 'the Korean educational system culminates in one of the most elite selection processes in the world with emphasis on equality of curriculum and instruction.' This phenomenon is because the prestige of a university is directly connected with the sort of job its graduates attain.

*Korean society places such a high priority on the college degree and consequently the college entrance examination that there are few other legitimate and respected avenues for personal success recognized in that country (Wollen, 1992: 22).*

The social links between seniors (sunbae) and juniors (hubae) in the same university or department, which can be called 'school ties'<sup>6</sup>(학연) markedly affect accessibility in the area of job employment and promotion. This also shows how hierarchical relationships

with this sort of tie are structured in Korea.

The popularity and competition among the subjects that students choose for university also reflect the relations between higher education and employment. The competition rate for applied sciences currently seems enormous, while many subjects relating to art or humanities have rapidly decreased (Lee, 2005). In other words, a large number of students tend to choose a few popular and competitive subjects, such as computer or medical sciences, English education, and finance, which give a better guarantee of getting a job and earning a good living. From a government perspective, there has been also lack of research and policy aimed at supporting departments of humanities and arts in many universities in Korea (Kang, nd). These situations have been criticized by many educators in Korea. According to Lee (2002:184), for example, 'university advancement has become merely a gateway for social success.' The 'presidential commission on Education Reform's Korean Education Reform toward the 21st century' remarked even more trenchantly:

*Overheated enthusiasm for education is manifested in overemphasis on the level of education attainment as, ...one's [prestigious] college degree is even foolishly considered as the indicator of character and personality [or success itself]. So strong is the parents' pride that they demand more and more education for their children willing to bear whatever the cost. This enthusiasm has been an asset, the underpinning of national development....It rather becomes a liability, when it encourages a blind pursuit of education irrespective of ones' aptitude and interest or even possibly burnout (Wollen, 1992:24).*

In short, it seems that, in Korea, academic success in higher education leads to success in life and is also directly connected with the pride of the entire family (Kolrarik, 2004). This is different from the individualistic view that a child's academic success

should be perceived in terms of individual competence or success. Due to this close relationship between academic success and a successful life in Korea, it is perhaps unsurprising that the frequent educational reforms by the Korean government have failed to discourage the blind enthusiasm for education.

Confucian thoughts and values, such as hierarchy, face, social status, and familism, have significantly influenced educational zeal, which is particularly based on university entrance examinations. To sum up, higher education in Korea has been perceived as primarily for job employment, which results in extreme competition in university entrance exams and stronger consolidation of school ties.

#### 2.2.1.2. The impact of educational enthusiasm on Korean society and culture of learning

Although Korean educational zeal has led to socioeconomic development in Korea and an expanded higher education sector (Lee, 2002), it is necessary to examine some major negative characteristics and problems that have resulted. These will be discussed in the area of organizational and learning culture in Korea. First, Korean society is extremely academically oriented and thus, people tend to rely on the prestige and popularity of their university or major for higher learning, neglecting personal interest or even aptitude. As discussed previously, academic success tends to be of a more guarantee of higher social rank, wealth, and even marriage with a higher-status partner.

In particular, academic 'cliques' are important in recruitment and promotion within organizations. For example, in some cases, there is a school-tie relationship between the vice-chancellor and the deans of each department in a university, who themselves studied at the same university. People tend to recommend juniors who attended the same university as themselves for recruiting and promoting in school or



other organizations. Where there is stiff competition, people from other universities may be denied the opportunity to show their skills or competence. People in specific universities, including prestigious ones, preferred and supported by some major companies in Korea, are far more likely to be offered a position in industry or commerce after graduation. This all accelerates the development of 'factionalism' (Lee, 2002:184). Moreover, in a circular fashion, focusing on the instrumental role of education for gaining socioeconomic status serves to further degrade the academic role of education.

Educational enthusiasm, then, has resulted in excessive competition, and thus primary and secondary education is test-oriented and aimed at success in university entrance examinations (Lee, 2002). This has led primary and secondary learners to rely on the 'cramming method' that emphasizes rote-learning (Kutieleh and Egege, 2004). The lack of critical and creative thinking common to many Asian students can also be explained, in part, at least, in terms of this culture-derived phenomenon (Biggs, 1997; Mills, 1997; Cadman, 2000 cited in Kutieleh and Egege, 2004). In other words, students may be far more accustomed to memorizing knowledge being delivered by teachers for tests or exams than to creating their own ideas and thinking from critical perspectives. One might predict that this 'passive' approach to learning is highly likely to cause problems when Korean students start university courses in the UK.

### ***2.2.2. The Confucian impact on organizational culture: what are the main characteristics of the organizational culture of the higher education?***

The impact of Confucianism on organizational culture appears in some salient features of educational administration. Firstly, most organizations in Korea are formally and

hierarchically structured by a strict communicational style (Lee, 2002). In as much as 'age' and 'social status' are the major factors affecting hierarchical relationships generally in Korea (Shin and Koh, 2004), the hierarchy between superiors and subordinates and the old and the younger have become established in the area of education (Lee 1997, 1998). Lee (1999a) quotes a good example: at an academic staff meeting in a university, the order of seating is strictly determined by social status, age, and gender. Moreover, junior staff are expected to respect their seniors and use honorific language forms, which again reflects the fact that age is one of the most important elements in maintaining hierarchical order in Korea (Lee, 1997, 1999a, 1999b).

Secondly, the interpersonal relationships between the members of the teaching staff and between staff and students merit examination, to investigate how hierarchical authoritarianism permeates Korean higher education. Students show a strong tendency to respect and obey their lecturers, and the lecturers in turn tend to take care of their students in a manner similar to parent-child relationships (Janelli, 1993; Lee, 1997; 1998; 1999b, 2001). Students' respect towards lecturers is analogous to 'filial piety' in the father-son relationship, one of the 'five cardinal relationships'(오륜 see section 2.1.1). Lecturers can be considered 'a ruler' in class, with a similar role to that of a king, or a father (Shin and Koh, 2004:2). Both ethical values in this sort of relationship and the teacher's social authority underpin the student-teacher relationship in Korea (Janelli, 1993; Lee, 1997; 1998; 1999b). It is thus worth investigating how far Korean students expect academic staff or supervisors to take on a parental role in UK universities.

Furthermore, students' respect toward their lecturers is also traditionally based on the high level of value placed on the teaching profession in Korean society (Yum, 2000, cited in Shin and Koh, 2004). The teacher in Korea as in other East-Asian

countries is regarded as an important authority figure, respected by students as a 'dispenser of knowledge' and a 'moulder of character' (Siu, 1992; Strom, et al, 1981 cited in Shin and Koh, 2004: 2). This may lead students to unconsciously believe that the lecturer is always right and his or her authority should never be challenged.

'Face' is also a significant factor in hierarchical relationships, as discussed in section 2.1.3.3, and is related to age, status, or rank, and seniority. In Korea, saving face is an important way of keeping authority, and thus, superiors are expected not to lose face through criticism or confrontation in public (Flowerdew, 1998). It is accordingly unsurprising that the concept of face is reflected in the field of education. Indeed, according to Murphy (1978:43), 'Hong Kong students display unquestioning acceptance of the knowledge of the teacher or lecturer.' As a result, students are often very reluctant to express their opinions so as not to challenge their lecturers' authority. The same situation exists in Korea (Lim, 2003). As a recent study of students and teachers in Korean high school science classrooms showed, the teacher-student interaction was 'a scene of directing teachers and obeying students' (Lee, et al, 2003: 67).

In western countries, where the concept of face is weak, as a result of the prevailing individualistic culture, students are more willing to speak up in class and be open to public confrontation (Ho, et al, 2004). As a result, it may be assumed that this teacher-student relationship embedded in Confucian society has led to a degree of passive attitude by students with little interaction with teachers and the dominance of teacher-centred learning styles in class. It may also lead students to worry if they are not continuously guided by their teachers, to a degree that UK teachers would consider 'spoon feeding'. However, a researcher should not remain wedded to the conception that Korean students are reasonably stuck with this passive learning deriving from

Confucian values, and it is worth investigating to what extent they show passive behaviour in classrooms in the UK and passive learning styles are affected by Confucian values or other factors.

Thirdly, despite the constructive impact of Confucianism on organization in higher education, such as building harmony in humanitarian relationships, ‘academic collectivism’ has had, as noted above (see section 2.2), a negative impact on Korean higher education (Lee, 2002). Academic collectivism promotes a strong sense of consolidation among people who have studied at the same universities or institutions, excluding people from different ones (Lee, 2002), and creating a network of school ties throughout society. It has also impeded overt discussion between students and teachers, as well as between junior and senior staff. Lee (2002) is scathing:

*Academic collectivism has been closely related to solidarity among alumni composed of homogeneous social ties not only forming an academic sectarianism between school factions but also aggravating academic ostracism between institutions. Owing to this evil effect, academic freedom has now become nothing but a concept in current Korean higher education. Therefore, the establishment of harmonious personal and sociopolitical order on a collectivistic society is still far in current Korean education (p.104).*

### **2.3. Korean international students in higher education**

So far, a number of key cultural factors shaping Korean society overall and, in particular, the field of education in Korea, have been examined. I turn now to how these cultural factors or phenomena influence what happens when Korean learners go overseas to study in higher education. In particular, I shall examine the major difficulties or problems faced by Korean university students studying in English speaking countries,



such as the UK, the USA, Canada, and Australia.

### ***2.3.1. Why many Korean students study overseas***

The number of students studying overseas for higher education has greatly increased in the last ten years, with students aiming generally at both getting a degree at university level and learning English as a second language. According to a recent survey about overseas study ([www.datanews.co.kr](http://www.datanews.co.kr), 2005), 21.8% of Korean university students were preparing for overseas study ([isplus.com](http://isplus.com), 2006). It was also found that 97.6% of the students who were not preparing for overseas study nevertheless desired to study overseas if possible. This boom in overseas study has led to an interesting phenomenon: in many cases, CVs or résumés for jobs in Korea involve writing about study overseas, ranging from short-term ESL learning to university degree achievement. It seems that overseas experience has subtly become a requirement for joining a company in Korea ([www.reportworld.com](http://www.reportworld.com), 2006).

The large number of Korean overseas students can be explained in terms of many factors. Firstly, from a sociocultural viewpoint, it is clear that the educational zeal of Korean families has encouraged children to study overseas to obtain high socioeconomic status: getting a degree in a prestigious university of an English-speaking country may give a greater chance of getting a better job. However, educational zeal is not just limited to gaining social status and family fame, and it further extends to the needs for the country to remain competitive in the context of globalization ([www.datanews.co.kr](http://www.datanews.co.kr), 2006). A survey reported in [www.datanews.co.kr](http://www.datanews.co.kr) (2006), which the two on-line research organisations ([www.jobkorea.co.kr](http://www.jobkorea.co.kr) and [www.campusmon.com](http://www.campusmon.com)) conducted with 1,047 university students at undergraduate level

to investigate the reasons for overseas study showed ([www.datanews.co.kr](http://www.datanews.co.kr), 2006) that 25% of the respondents were preparing for overseas study to develop Korea's competitive power<sup>7</sup>.

Secondly, as English is the *lingua franca* of the world, Korean people are highly enthusiastic about learning English as a second language. Indeed, regardless of their subject at university level, lecturers in many Korean universities are now required to give lectures in English<sup>8</sup>, and thus English communicative competence is a major concern in getting a job in many areas (Kim and Oh, 2008).

The final motivation is Koreans' aspiration for cross-cultural experience (Beaver and Tuck, 1999). Many Korean students desire to have many opportunities to meet and interact with native speakers in a foreign country to raise their cultural awareness and to enrich their learning experience in a different academic context (Chalmers and Volet, 1997).

### ***2.3.2. Difficulties and challenges that Asian international students face when studying abroad***

Despite their hope of successfully undertaking academic studies when studying abroad, many Asian students are frequently reported as having serious difficulties or problems adjusting to a new cultural context. There have not to date been many studies dealing specifically with Korean students' problems or difficulties at university level. Choi (1997) and Armitage (1999) investigated certain problematic areas, such as language, finance, cultural differences, and academic problems experienced by Korean students in Australia. Samuelowicz (1987) summarised the major problems encountered by international students in Australian universities as:

*English language proficiency, coping with the Australian educational system and its demands, cultural adjustment to life in a foreign country and provision of support services and usefulness to overseas students. (p.121)*

This evidence suggests that many Korean learners may have difficulty achieving a smooth transition from their own culture to a new target culture when studying overseas, using English in real-life English-speaking situations. These difficulties can be categorized into three main problem areas: language ability, learning in a different academic culture and the psychological aspects of cultural adjustment, involving social interaction for life in a new culture.

#### 2.3.2.1. Learning in a different academic culture / cultures of learning

Although many students are linguistically prepared to undertake university programmes at a general level (Park, 2006), they might not be very accustomed to many aspects of learning in a new and different academic setting. Following Cortazzi and Jin (1997:77), ‘academic cultures’ can be defined as ‘the systems of beliefs, expectations and cultural practices about how to perform academically’. They involve certain expectations, norms and values in professional academic activities such as academic staff meetings, conferences, and research work (Cortazzi and Jin, 1997). Overseas learners need to have some cultural knowledge of what is expected and how things are performed in the field, understanding cross-cultural differences between their own and the host country. It has frequently been claimed that overseas students from Asian backgrounds encounter more difficulty adapting themselves to academic life in western universities than international students from other western nations, regardless of the language question (Littlewood,

2000; Marsella, et al., 1985; Ward and Kennedy, 1993). Cortazzi and Jin (1997:78) summarised what they thought were the main factors contributing to this, creating a list of the cross-cultural gaps between what Chinese and CHC students expected and what their lecturers expected (Table 2.2).

<b>British academic expectations</b>	<b>Academic expectations held by Chinese and other groups</b>
Individual orientation Relatively horizontal relations Active involvement in class Verbal explicitness in argument More expectation of speaker/ writer responsibility Independence of mind Creativity, originality Discussion, argument, challenge Seeking alternatives Critical evaluation	Collective consciousness Hierarchical relations Passive participation in class Contextualised communication More expectation of Listener/reader responsibility Dependence on authority Mastery, transmission Agreement, harmony, face Single solution Hesitance to give negative points in evaluation

Table 2.2 Academic culture gaps between the expectations of British university staff and those of CHC overseas students (after Jin, 1992; Jin, and Cortazzi, 1993).

The cultural gaps outlined in the above two lists show that most Asian students including Koreans valued relates to concepts deriving from Confucianism. Many of the differences between the two groups are clearly likely to cause students serious difficulties. A good example is a high value placed by Chinese and other groups on



‘agreement, harmony, and face’ (Cortazzi and Jin, 1997). This is likely to 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. This contrasts markedly with the idea that, in British academic culture, learners should, to a reasonable degree, express their opinions and participate in confrontational argument. British tutors may feel that overseas students are very reluctant to participate in the learning context.

While Chinese students tend to be passive towards lecturers, they are very active with respect to listening and writing in their minds. In other words, Chinese and other Asians believe that listeners or readers are required to play a more active role in understanding ‘what it is that the speaker or author intended to say’ (Hinds,<sup>9</sup> 1987:144). This way of looking at the communication process applies to Korea as well as Japan and China (Hinds, 1987). In these countries, listener or reader responsibility is perceived to be more emphasised for effective communication than speaker or writer responsibility, so that the role in contextualising the meaning is placed more heavily on listeners or readers. Based on the respect towards authority of speakers and writers, many Asian students thus have a greater tendency to rely on knowledge or information transmitted by teachers, which may lead to rather teacher-centred classes. This contrasts with the western teachers’ expectation of active group discussion ‘with some argument and challenges of viewpoints in an effort to seek alternative interpretations or evaluate approaches critically’ (Cortazzi and Jin, 1997:79). This mismatch in expectations between the two cultures is one challenge that overseas learners are very likely to face and have to overcome if they are to be academically successful.

The information in Figure 2.2 was derived from research on Chinese students.

It could be dangerous to generalize all the academic expectations involved to Asian students generally and Korean students in particular: as noted earlier, even though they share many cultural characteristics, there are variations across East Asian groups.

Nevertheless, there is likely to be a series of cultural mismatches when UK teachers and Korean students interact, with their different cultures of learning. The term 'cultures of learning' (Cortazzi and Jin, 1997) involves all cultural norms and expectations held by both teachers and students present in the classroom. According to Cortazzi and Jin (1997:83),

*It is impossible to give serious consideration to inter-cultural issues involving overseas students without some notion that fundamental presuppositions about how to learn, how to teach, what constitutes 'good' work, how to participate in learning contexts, etc., can vary from culture to culture. It is not simply that overseas students encounter different ways of teaching and learning; rather such encounters are juxtaposed with the cultures of learning they bring with them. All too often, both British tutors and the students themselves are not aware of what is involved.*

At the very least, we may conclude from this that, overseas students who are accustomed to Confucian traditions need to understand these cultural differences and mismatched expectations. Unfortunately, as noted earlier few studies have specifically investigated cultural gaps between Korean and British academic expectations, and more research is needed.

#### A. The student - teacher relationship

##### a. The influence of the student- teacher role in the learning and teaching context

In Confucian culture, shaped by collectivism, a teacher's authority is strongly reflected

in the relationship between teachers and students and thus affects how teachers teach students, the learning styles that students adopt and how students take part in various classroom activities. The teacher, in general, plays a role in guiding students as a moral model and a transmitter of knowledge,

*CHC student-teacher interaction is not lubricated with the democratic oil of warmth and first names, but with the oil of respect, which is a more effective lubricant in a hierarchical, collectivist culture (Biggs, 1998:730).*

Indeed, the respect towards and the authority of, teachers in Korea are epitomised in an old Korean saying that *'one should not step even on the shadow of one's teacher'* (AsianInfo.org, 2005). Although teachers' authority has been degraded of late by many sociocultural changes, traditional ideas about what teachers should be and how to respect teachers still remain strong in the Korean educational system (Egeler, 1996). This leads in many cases to 'passive' learning, in which students are very hesitant to suggest their opinions voluntarily to their teachers. The link with Confucianism was noted by Kolrarik (2004:3),

*[p]assivity is not attributed to low English proficiency or lack of cooperation, but rather a reticence based on a cultural form of respect (Boyle 2000a). A student's quiet behaviour is a sign of a learning attitude which entails respect to teachers, classmates and superiors as guided by Confucian belief (Cortazzi and Jin, 1997).*

This passivity can be explained by the belief that giving voluntary comments or asking questions may interrupt teachers and thus cause a loss of the teachers' face. Korean students tend to listen to teachers rather than express their ideas (Cortazzi and Jin, 1997), which in turn leads to teacher-centred classes and learning. The learners are more

familiar with internalizing information given by teachers by memorising, rather than being critically analytical. The belief is that the teacher is always right and his or her authority should not be challenged (Flowerdew, 1998).

As a result, since students may often behave in ways that they have been familiar with in their native culture, they may not actually recognize ‘clues’ that they are being given by a teacher in the host country to offer their ideas or opinions (Lim and Griffith, 2004).

In western academic culture, however, learners are encouraged to voluntarily express their own ideas and actively interact with teachers (Cortazzi and Jin, 1997). This is supposed to lead to learner-centred learning through which learners are expected to develop autonomy and independence. Table 2.3 summarises Cortazzi and Jin’s points about the contrasting perceptions of teachers and students roles in higher education in English-speaking countries, especially between Chinese students and British teachers.



<b>Student (Chinese) view of teacher roles</b>	<b>Teacher (British) view of teacher role</b>
<p>Be an authority, expert.</p> <p>Be a model: knowing that, how to</p> <p>Be a parent, a friend.</p> <p>Know students' problems.</p> <p>Give us answers, clear guidance.</p> <p>Teach us what to do</p>	<p>Be a facilitator, an organiser.</p> <p>Be a model of how to find out.</p> <p>Be a friendly critic.</p>
<b>Student (Chinese) view of student roles</b>	<b>Teacher (British) view of student roles</b>
<p>Develop receptivity, collective harmony, apprenticeship, deductive learning.</p> <p>Respect the teacher: learn by listening and reflection.</p> <p>Learn methods, technical advances.</p> <p>Focus on the product, the result.</p>	<p>Develop independence, individuality, creativity, and inductive learning.</p> <p>Participate: engage in dialogue.</p> <p>Develop critical thinking.</p> <p>Focus on the process of learning, research skills.</p> <p>Ask if there are problems.</p> <p>Find out answers.</p> <p>Should know what to do or work it out.</p>

Table 2.3 Different perceptions of teacher and student roles in higher education: Chinese students and British teachers from (Cortazzi and Jin, 1997:85)

These mismatches in role expectations between Western teachers and Chinese students may cause a degree of conflict in the learning and teaching context, and Korean students can be also assumed to experience this cultural conflict while studying abroad in the UK.

Western teachers are likely to feel that Asian students have a low level of participation in classroom activities and show a lack of autonomy (Wong, 2004).

On the other hand, Chinese students may feel that teachers from western countries are not sufficiently prepared to transmit their knowledge in a lecture or a seminar, and asking for active participation and involvement is not really teaching (Li, 1999). The evidence would suggest that such mismatches can be generalised to other Asian students including Koreans, but this requires further research into cultural gaps between Korean and British perceptions of teachers' and students' roles. It might be beneficial to examine which aspects of these gaps Korean students find more salient and of greatest concern.

To summarize, role expectations of western teachers and international students in an English-speaking country differ: while teachers advise or guide students, encouraging students' autonomy and independence in a student-centred approach, the students may expect their teachers to advise on all steps of the learning process as authoritative 'mentors' (Chan and Drover, 1997:56). Accordingly, both teachers and students from different cultural backgrounds need to be sensitive to each other's expected roles. In particular, it seems clear that Asian students who are familiar with teacher-dependent, 'spoon-fed' learning need to assimilate more of the interactive and independent learning styles of the western educational context.

#### b. Supervision and interaction with staff

As well as classroom activities, supervision is also a culture-bound topic that has different norms of student-professor interaction (Burrell and Kim, 1998). Many overseas students are not very certain about what the supervisory meetings are for at the

British higher education level, and thus show a reluctance to contact their supervisors for meetings, even when invited to do so (Channell, 1990).

Channell (1990) explained this,

*It was pointed out that due to their former mode of education in a hierarchical structure, many overseas students would find it very difficult to approach a tutor despite blanket invitations to do so at the beginning of the course (1990:71).*

For instance, from my own experience of doing an MA in the UK, I was very hesitant to contact my supervisor at the beginning of the first term because I did not know firstly when and how I needed to make contact, and secondly what supervisions were for, and thus, how to prepare for them. In the absence of published reports, it is perhaps worth summarising my own experience as an undergraduate in Korea in the 1990s: in common with most of my peers, I experienced only one meeting with my supervisor at the beginning of the first year and did not have any other supervision meeting until I graduated.

Channell (1990:72) asserted that 'many overseas students felt inhibitions which prevented them from seeing a tutor for fear of losing face'. This means that face appears to be a significant factor which impedes overseas students accessing their supervisor. Considering that 'face' is involved and the authority of supervisors is highly valued in Korea, it may be predicted that many Korean students will hesitate to contact their supervisors. Indeed, the findings from Allen and Higgins' (1994:70) survey describe the fear reported by an overseas student: 'it is hard, if I complain he will think I am no good.' Channell gave an explanation for this cultural conflict in faculty culture from two

different perspectives. First, from the overseas students' point of view, many were not sure about what exactly they were expected to do at first, and thus, they had less contact with academic staff, which in turn led to their receiving insufficient advice and guidance from their supervisor. They nevertheless wanted their research supervisors to become the ideal type of both 'a counsellor and a teacher' (Channell, 1990:74). This is based on the assumption that the 'teacher, like parents' will show sufficient care and concern to be aware of students' problems and to offer help unasked' (Cortazzi and Jin, 1997:86). It is worth investigating how far Korean students in the UK expect their supervisors to adopt a parent-like role.

On the other hand, from the perspective of university academic staff, it is very hard to establish and maintain the highly accessible personal relationship which would satisfy international students' demands (Elsley, 1990:57). As Brown and Atkinson (1988:129) pointed out, 'supervising overseas students may require more time, effort, and skill than supervising home British students'. In practice, the staff often feel highly pressured by these demands for time and attention (Elsley, 1990:58). International students are seen as 'over-dependent' (Baker, 1997: 118).

Accordingly, to cope with these asymmetrical expectations, international students need to understand the culture-specific areas in their new academic setting. Thus they need to interpret their professors' intentions and establish the extent of their supervisors' responsibilities for teaching, research administration, and support, being aware of cultural differences between the two countries (Burrell and Kim, 1998). Conversely, however, staff need to understand cultural issues of what they expect from the students. Channell (1990) concluded,



*It became clear when we compared our student and our tutor data that the two groups bring to the relationship two very different sets of expectations of each other. These expectations, on either side, are conditioned by the previous cultural experience of the two groups. Hence, we were able to identify mismatches in expectation, leading to misinterpretation of the others' behaviour, as a cause of difficulty in the student-tutor relationship (p.63).*

In short, due to the absence of published reports on specifically Korean cases, further research in this area is necessary to find out to what extent Korean learners are affected by such cultural issues and how far they are problematic to their learning.

#### B. Culture-based mismatches in learning and teaching approaches

Much of literature shows that mismatched expectations between CHC international students and western teachers impeded successful learning and teaching. As previously discussed, in Korea with its strong Confucian values, both the emphasis on teachers' 'authority' and excessive educational zeal in relation to the family reputation still have a great impact on students' learning styles: they rely on passive learning in which rote-memorization and the 'cramming' method' are emphasized (see section 2.1.3.3). A study of overseas students and academic staff at Queensland University also showed that the staff there believed that most Asian learners were very dependent on rote-learning, and that this led to low participation in the classroom (Samuelowicz, 1987). However, how far this is a causal link is unclear and further research on how far a preference for rote-learning affects Asian students' low participation in reality is needed.

It can be assumed that this 'rote-learning' or 'parrot learning' in which heavy memorisation is involved no longer plays a major role in the process of most Western university-level programmes (Cortazzi and Jin, 1997:86). Instead, a high level of student participation in interactions between lecturer and student, and between students

is thus expected. This participation is not however always forthcoming. In a study by Bodycott and Walker (2000) on two teaching academics working in Hong Kong, western teachers had difficulty activating discussion in classroom with Chinese overseas students because no students would ask questions (Ho, et al., 2004).

In short, it seems clear that CHC students tend to be teacher-centred, more focused on passive learning, reliant on transmitted knowledge, and familiar with and dependent on rote-memorization. They tend to listen to teachers rather than actively participate in class by asking questions or offering ideas to teachers. This contrasts with western cultural learning approaches, in which autonomy, active participation, interaction between teacher and student, and critical thinking are more emphasized. These cultural barriers may be assumed to cause overseas students to face difficulties or problems while studying abroad at a university level, but it is not clear how far these affect Korean students.

However, this assumption about the impact of cultural factors on Asian students studying in English-speaking countries may not be always forthcoming. Some researchers argue that one should avoid the stereotypes of all Asian learners having certain cultural features, by over-generalizing or oversimplifying cultural mismatches between Western teachers and East-Asian students. It is important to consider factors such as gender, disability, talent, and individual specific preference in the range of diversity in the multicultural classroom (Ho, Holmes, and Cooper 2004). Ho, Holmes, and Cooper in particular argue for this point:

*Although a dominant learning style is likely to be prominent in a particular culture, caution must be taken not to over-generalize because individuals differ within a culture. For example, just because a student likes to work*

*independently does not mean that she may enjoy trial and error learning (p.18).*

In the words of Irvine and York (1995), 'stereotyping and stigmatising are a consequence of labelling different ethnic groups with particular learning styles'(Ho, Holmes, and Cooper 2004: 18).

With respect to adjustment to overseas learning, it may not be always advocated that learners need to abandon their usual approaches and completely transfer to new methods of study<sup>10</sup>. It is questionable how far the students can do this within the limited time of studying abroad. This may cause students' experience of cultural withdrawal or feelings of anxiety and insecurity. From an ethical perspective, this may lead to extreme ethnic discrimination and stereotyping on the part of teachers unless individual factors, such as educational backgrounds, skills, and abilities, are considered (Burns, 1991).

Lastly, Biggs (1996) emphasizes the potentially positive role of cultural contexts for CHC students' adaptation to learning overseas. Biggs and Watkins assert that

*While CHC systems have large classes, seem highly authoritarian, and are examination oriented, it may be that the expectations and perceptions held by those students would create a different effect from that which those same characteristics would have on students in a Western system with different expectations. Indeed, the high performance of CHC students indicates precisely this (2001: 278).*

Accordingly, CHC students need to obtain insights into what is suited to the western system as well as what it expects, but it is questionable how far Korean students can use effectively their own learning strategies as well as adapt to new ones.

### C. Culture and 'copying' issues

In terms of attitude to the learning context, 'copying' is a cultural issue that may lead to serious difficulties and confusion for students from a collectivistic culture. There are two related phenomena: collusion between students on assignments, and plagiarism in academic writing (Baker, 1997). First, according to Baker (1997:115), in British culture with its emphasis on individualism, copying is treated as a serious offence, 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). Baker described his experience thus:

*Some years ago, as a visiting lecturer, I was teaching the principles of management to a group composed entirely of mature, overseas students taking a diploma course in management at a British college. When the coursework was handed in for assessment, I became virtually certain that collusion had taken place. Several pieces of coursework were almost identical, even down to the illustrations and actual words used. The students involved were all from the same, Asian, country. I reported the matter to the course director, who, as it happened was from another Asian, country.... The assignment had been first written by the most senior manager in the group, to whom the others reported in the department back in their home country. The assignment was then circulated among the other managers as a model answer. I was outraged; this was cheating. My instinctive reaction was to punish the students involved by awarding no marks to them for the assignment. ....'*

Students' behavioural norms cannot be considered wrong in some cultural contexts although they are considered cheating behaviour in others. The Korean



approach to copying seems similar to Baker's (1997) view above. Anecdotally, from my own experience at undergraduate level, constraints on sharing ideas or knowledge, and the rules against others' ideas in academic work were less strict than in the UK. However, my experience in Korea is limited to the undergraduate context several years ago. I could find no studies dealing with recent Korean approaches to sharing information, so research is needed into how Korean students treat the ban on collusion in the UK.

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 plagiarise when writing essays (Ho, et al., 2004). Students from Confucian-based cultures tend to prefer to have the 'right' answers from teachers, believing that there are generally correct answers (Todd, 1997). They are more familiar with 'accepting' and 'reproducing' knowledge as delivered by teachers (Todd, 1997:177), who represent 'experts' and 'authorities' (Cortazzi and 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 understand the knowledge and can cope with contrary views and research results (Bloor and Bloor, 1991). Ho et al. (2004) note that plagiarism and 'intellectual property-rights' are not yet seriously considered to be important in the Chinese higher education culture.

In terms of Korean students' attitudes towards plagiarism, there has, as with collusion, been a lack of research specifically on Korean cultural standards and any problems Korean students have faced. It is thus of some interest to investigate the differences between Korean and British cultural norms regarding plagiarism at university level, although it is assumed that Korean cultural norms have aspects in

common with Chinese ones, as it has been discovered that many of Asian students in UK universities including Korean students have faced problems with issues of plagiarism (Hayes, 2003).

#### 2.3.2.2. Culture-specific areas in learning English

Although many Korean overseas students have a high level of English proficiency as measured by IELTS or TOEFL exams, they still struggle hard with life and academic studies in an English-speaking country (Park, 2006). Many of these difficulties can be explained as cross-cultural difficulties, 'using a second language in a school [or educational] setting also involves sociocultural norms' (Major, 2005: 84). In other words, the difficulty may derive from culture-specific areas of language learning, rather than grammatical inaccuracy (James and Watts, 1992). Thus students need to cope with a range of sociocultural and emotional factors.

#### A. Culture and communication styles

This section discusses how verbal and non-verbal communication differ across cultures and how these influence overseas study. The argument is based on the assertion made by Kramsch (1998) that language and culture are closely bound together; in Hall's words, 'culture is communication and communication is culture' (Hall, 1959: 169). The connection is relevant to both learning and teaching contexts where overseas students may often face problems caused by cross-cultural differences when communicating with native speakers. Their students' communication styles in English may often differ depending on their cultural backgrounds, though they have a high level of English

language proficiency (Cortazzi and Jin, 1997).

In particular, some cultural aspects of oral conversation, such as uses of intonation, pauses, eye contact, body language, rhetorical patterns and ways of presenting information can considerably affect communicating as well as grammar and vocabulary (Smith, 1987; Saville-Troike, 1989; Gudykunst, 1994). The cultural differences in these aspects of communication style may influence classroom behaviour, such as whole-class and group discussions, question and answer interaction, or giving a presentation in whole class contexts, as well as interaction with native speakers (Burrell & Kim, 1998). For instance, the Chinese students tend to have a more 'circular' way when giving presentations, while American students tend to get directly to the point (Johnson, 1997:51). It is worth investigating in what areas and how far the cross-cultural differences in communication styles can be problematic specifically to Korean students when interacting with native-English speakers and undertaking academic written work in the UK.

#### a. Directness vs. indirectness in the culture of communication

The level of directness employed differs across cultures. It is frequently argued that people from collectivistic cultures tend to show a higher level of indirectness in language use and discourse than people from individualistic cultures (Ambady et al., 1996; Holtgraves, 1997, cited in Sanchez-Burks & Lee, Nisbett, Zhao, and Koo, 2003). One might therefore expect cross-cultural communication between CHC students and native-English speakers to result in a range of misunderstandings.

First, cross-cultural differences in the level of directness may be shown in the apparently simple example of expressing 'Yes' or 'No' (Cortazzi and Jin, 1997). For

instance, Japanese students tend to avoid saying 'no' to show disagreement, while they say simply 'yes' to express the fact that they are listening to the other person and understand, rather than to show agreement. This, it is argued, is due to their belief that 'directness is thought to cause offence or loss of face' (Christopher, 1984; Random, 1987, cited in Cortazzi & Jin 1997:80). They also tend to use ambiguous expressions such as 'perhaps', 'I'm not sure', or 'it is very difficult', rather than directly saying 'no' (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997:80). This can be explained in terms of vagueness having a positive cultural role: 'vagueness is a form of politeness in Eastern culture used to resolve or avoid embarrassing situations' (Windle, 2000:7). This style of communication similarly relates to students from Korea (Windle, 2000:7), as well as those from other CHC countries. However, it is noted that there would not be always a strict dichotomy between western and eastern culture in terms of indirectness in that indirectness can be also used in English and varies across English speaking cultures.

In western communicational contexts, ambiguity and vagueness are not always considered so appropriate (Windle, 2000). English speakers may consider that the clearer and less vague an utterance is, the more appropriate it is, at least as an academic communication. As well as explicitness in discourse, the use of precise vocabulary is also highly valued as a western communicational norm. This contrasts with the cultural norm in Korean university or general discourse: 'ambiguous messages are not only appropriate but admirable, for they indicate wisdom on the part of the speaker' (Windle, 2000:7). This cultural clash would seem highly likely to cause serious cross-cultural misunderstandings between Korean students and their western teachers, particularly where western teachers do not understand the cultural values involved (Windle, 2000).

Second, with respect to rhetorical patterns in discourse, there are broadly two



cultural ways of communicating: 'deductively' or inductively'; it is often characterised by whether the topic or the main idea comes first, followed by the background information to support it, or the reverse (Cortazzi and Jin, 1997; Windle, 2000). Native English-speakers are often more direct and straightforward here as well: introducing the topic or the main idea first, when they argue deductively, although this may not be always true in certain areas of academic discourse. However, the reverse may often appear as the preferable format in Eastern countries. As a study by Scollon and Wong-Scollon (1991) pointed out,

*Differing approaches toward discourse result in difficulty and confusion when Asian and Westerners communicate in English. In Chinese, Korean, or Japanese discourse, topics are usually introduced inductively; topic introduction is delayed and indirect. Conversely, English-speaking Westerners introduce topics early in a conversation (p. 113).*

Scollon and Scollon (2000) also claimed that Chinese and other Asian students tend not to introduce their topic directly, but in most cases, at least in conversation, explanations come first in the pattern of 'Because A, and because B, and because C, therefore D'. However, it has been also noted that they also claimed against generalising about a culture as it varies across discourse types.

It has been argued that this rhetorical tendency appears in writing performances too (Cortazzi and Jin, 1997). In much Chinese students' writing, the main idea of the text is hidden in the final paragraph, and the readers have to predict the topic while reading the article (Gonzalez, Chen, and Sanchez, 2001). From my experience, this appears to be true for Korean students too. Valuing more 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 (Oliver, 1971 in Kachru, 1997:341). The result can be a significant mismatch of expectation,

*Some British tutors see the Asian students' preference as 'drifting', 'waffling', 'beating around the bush', 'not getting to the point'. Some Asians see the British pattern as 'a give-away' since 'there is no reason to listen or read once the main point is known', whereas 'the main point cannot be appreciated without necessary background, so we give background first, then tutors will know what we know' (Cortazzi and Jin, 1997:82).*

Furthermore, in academic writing and seminar discussions, the choice of discourse pattern is not a simple matter of cultural differences, but it has a significant impact on assessment. This is because the students are required to present what they have learnt and how they understand certain areas of knowledge in these discourse contexts (Cortazzi and Jin, 1997). For instance, 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 and Jin, 1997: 82). Thus, non-native students in the UK need to understand cultural differences in rhetorical patterns and adjust to Anglophone cultural norms in order to achieve academic success in a written assignment (Kachru, 1997).

What makes the problem even more complex is that the norms themselves can vary (Tannen, 1989). As Low (1999) for example noted, the acceptability of animate expressions varies markedly across the types and purposes of academic text, such as book, brochure, volume, monograph, working paper, chapter, assignment, essay, paper,

thesis, dissertation, report, and review. It is thus noted that cultural differences between Eastern and English-speaking countries in terms of rhetorical pattern cannot be always distinctively justified and varieties within a culture need to be considered.

The cultural barriers in rhetorical patterns may impede the English non-native learners' academic progress and reduce enthusiasm for individual creativity in writing (Kachru, 1997). It is important for overseas students including Koreans to strike a balance between keeping to conventions and exploiting cultural varieties of patterns and individual creativity in expression.

#### b. Other non-verbal communication mismatches

In the broadest definitions 'Non-verbal communication, could include all nonverbal behaviours that are involved in the transmission of experience or information from one person to another' (Siegman and Feldstein, 1978:5). This definition involves all the areas of physical environment such as space or distance, physical movement including posture, gesture, and eye contact, and paralinguistic features which cover vocalic aspects of non-verbal behaviours such as tone, pitch and accent (Woolfolk and Brooks, 1983). The definitions of paralanguage, in particular, can be defined in several ways: Crystal (1966, 1987) defines it in two-way distinction between 'prosodic features' which include pitch, loudness, duration, and silence, and 'paralinguistic features' such as timbres which are perceived to be less universal and thus have a wider range of variations across linguistic communities than prosody (Crystal 1969, 1987).

On the other hand, Kramsch (1998:27) makes a three-way categorization: 'verbal', 'paraverbal' (which involves Crystal's prosodic and paralinguistic features, such

as stress, intonation, and tempo, and ‘non-verbal signs’ (gestures, tone of voice, and gaze). Although the definitions of the terms like paralanguage, or paralinguistic features differ markedly, there seems no clear-cut distinction in categorizing these signals. The important point is that these all non-verbal behaviors contribute to conveying the message in human social interaction by helping to interpret the messages across contexts and situations (Kramsch, 1998). Indeed, physical aspects of communication such as making eye contact and expression in gestures can at times be a more important means of transmitting our feelings and attitudes than are words themselves (Adelman and Levine, 1993). Indeed, a study in the United States found that the speaker’s tone of voice and facial expressions played a crucial role in delivering as much as 93 % of the speaker’s message (Pease, 1990).

Although ‘non-verbal communication’ seems often overlooked in cross-cultural studies of language learning, this aspect of communication is also heavily culture-bound. As Samovar and Porter (2004) noted,

*From your use of eye contact to the amount of volume you employ during an interaction, your culture influences the manner in which you send and receive nonverbal symbols (p. 172).*

The meaning and interpretations of non-verbal behaviour, in some cases, can differ across cultures and may cause misunderstanding (Pease, 1990). A simple example would be the circle gesture made with the thumb and index finger. In many English speaking countries, this means ‘OK’ or ‘good’, but in France it means ‘zero or nothing’ (Pease, 1990; Adelman, 1993). As Samovar and Porter (2004) also pointed out cultural values may be contained in this sort of communication;



*Smiling and shaking hands tells us that a culture values amiability. Bowing tells you that another values formality, and rank and status. It is not by chance that Hindus greet each other by placing their palms together in front of them while slightly tilting their heads down; this salutation reflects the beliefs that the deity exists in everyone, not a single form (pp. 172-173).*

We might perhaps include silence too as non-verbal behaviour. The meaning of 'silence' clearly differs across cultures. In collectivistic cultures, 'silence' in many cases is an indirect expression of disagreement (National Multicultural Interpreter Project, 2000). Thus remaining silent often means 'I have listened to you' not 'I agree with you' (National Multicultural Interpreter Project 2000: 21). In the Korean context, Choe (2001: 10) claimed that 'many Koreans remain silent when they want to politely convey negative responses'.

Indeed, western teachers may not always understand the roles that silence plays for Koreans and Asian students generally in cross-cultural communication contexts. This seems to happen most often in 'yes-no' question responses. In addition to the ambiguous expressions previously mentioned, rather than simply saying 'no', keeping silent rather than directly saying 'yes' or 'no' also indicates a high level of indirectness on the part of Asian students. Ho et al. (2004) added that students who are asked a question need time to give a thoughtful answer, and again Western teachers sometimes misunderstand this silence. Western teachers can be embarrassed and frustrated when students are silent instead of answering 'yes' or 'no' to a very simple question such as 'do you like it?' (Windle, 2000). Pak (1973) explained the different notions of silence of western and Asian people;

*[M]aking decisions ('Yes' or 'No') very much depends on harmony or balance between people or situations ...[A]ccording to our sense, this kind of 'Yes' or 'No' (without knowing) the other party's situation seems meaningless or superficial. Sometimes, the question itself seems strange and nonsensical. That is why we often hesitate to answer 'Yes' or 'No', or keep silent or non-committal (p. 108).*

A third use of silence in Korea and other collectivistic cultures, in addition to marking disagreement and respect, is to show modesty (Choe, 2001). A quiet student is more respected and perceived as more cultivated than one who actively asks questions or speaks up in class (Kim, 2004). From the Confucian perspective, this seems to also underlie the concept of 'self-effacement' (Flowerdew 1998). It is based on the Confucian cultural value of 'propriety', emphasizing that individuals need to have 'modesty' or 'humility' appropriate to their social status (Flowerdew, 1998). According to this concept, students who talk tend to degrade their own ability or skills in front of others. According to Bond (1991), it has been found that people in collectivistic cultures have a tendency to use less positive terms to describe themselves than, do, say, Americans. The result is that cultural clashes in interpreting silence can and do occur: western tutors may often regard students who do not talk and answer questions as 'defiant and disrespectful' in interaction (Windle, 2000: 6).

This cultural concern for 'modesty' in relation to self-effacement may also have a negative impact on learning a second language (Kim, 2004). It makes students reluctant to actively participate in discussion, to take part in argumentative debates, or to interact with their English native peers or teachers.

Not only this, but western teachers' embarrassment caused by Korean students' silence in interaction can itself lead students to serious cultural problems; the students

lose face and, at the same time, feel concerned about teachers' losing face, by degrading their authority (Cortazzi and Jin, 1997).

Lastly, there may be some communicational mismatches between Asian students and western teachers in making eye contact. According to Ho et al. (2004:11), 'direct eye contact is viewed as rude in many Asian cultures but in western countries, lack of eye contact signals a student's disinterest and disrespect'. Certainly in Korea, looking older people or people of higher status in the eye is considered as impolite or disrespectful (McCargar, 1994). Korean overseas students may well find it hard to modify this cultural norm, and adapt to the different norms of the host country.

#### B. Language problems in academic related contexts

Though they need to use English as second language in a different culture to learn and survive, many overseas students will encounter language problems while studying in English-speaking universities (Ferris and Tagg, 1996). In particular, at university level, the interactive aspects of teaching and learning, such as asking questions, giving comments, and making presentations may become a dilemma for East Asians, accustomed to their traditional 'spoon-fed' system of learning and teaching (Ferris and Tagg, 1996). East Asian students' second language ability may thus compound problems due to a lack of familiarity with teaching and learning approaches, and the combined result can seriously affect academic work.

Spolsky (1977:20) noted that 'it must be obvious to all that incomprehensible education is immoral'. Therefore, English as an alien tongue, may be a disadvantageous factor to the international students studying in the universities of English-speaking countries (UNESCO, 1953). Cammish (1997) called this combination of study

approaches and language a 'double burden' (UNESCO, 1953:48). The 'double burden' is likely to be particularly problematic for students who do not have any previous overseas ESL learning experience. Cammish (1997:144) commented that,

*Problems in studying at advanced level through the medium of English may depend very much on the type of experience of learning English the overseas students have had. For some, English is a foreign language, learned as a school subject. Attitudes, motivation, methodology, techniques and teacher expertise vary widely from country to country and within each country. Some students may have been taught with what might be classified as a 'communicative approach' and will be confident and adept linguistically at a conversational level, capable of 'surviving' in the foreign language situation. Their surface fluency may be deceptive, however; if they have had little experience of learning about skills, their aural comprehension skills, for example, may not be sufficiently developed for coping with extended periods of listening such as in lecturer and the students may tire easily.*

There may well also be a large gap between the English used as a foreign language in the students' home country and the English used in their overseas environment. This gap will be particularly noticeable in academic contexts where social and cultural factors are involved, such as oral interaction in small-group discussion (Cammish, 1997). Similarly, understanding metaphorical expressions by lecturers, underlying cultural norms and values, may prove very demanding for overseas learners (Littlemore and Low, 2006). In such cases, learners experience the double problem of culture being embedded in language items, as well as manifested in language use (Alptekin, 1984).

According to Choi's (1997) survey, the Korean students in a Victoria university in Australia believed that they had difficulties with speaking (52%), writing (25.5%), and listening (17.0%), but less with reading (4.3%). An interesting point in the survey is



that their perception of difficulties in academic skills was displayed in the following order: class discussion (48.9%), written assignment (31.9%), understanding lectures (21.3%), and reading assignments (17.1%). One should not read too much into this parallelism, as Cho (1991:316) noted that the labels for the different genres may contribute to the difficulty rating:

*The main difficulties students encounter while studying abroad involves not only acquisition of the English language, but also the way language is used in the academic context. Moreover, the use of similar labels for study genre, such as essays or exams, may mislead Korean students to expect something similar to those genres found in their home country.*

It may be concluded that methods used to research such perceptions need to include a means of discussing expectations with the students.

a. Academic oral and listening skills.

Academic listening in classroom discourse is a demanding area for non-native students even with a high level of English proficiency (Ferris and Tagg, 1996). It is now agreed by virtually all applied linguists that listening is not a 'passive' skill, but is better described as a 'receptive skill', which involves 'receiving, decoding, understanding, and reacting to the message heard' (Cammish, 1997:149). 'Decoding' means active 'inferencing' and informed guessing or hypothesising. In this connection, Cammish (1997) suggested the three essential skills students need to develop are:

- 1. Understanding the content of lectures;*
- 2. Following the more rapid and informal registers used in discussion;*

3. *Grasping instructions in more practical and /or face-to-face situations;*  
(p.149).

In *Understanding the content of lectures*, the students might be often lost while listening to the lecturer. In particular, when lecturers continue to talk without pauses for a long period (Cammish, 1997), it may be difficult to continually pay attention to what they are saying. Mason's (1995) study showed that even students with a high score on TOEFL for admission to university programmes may not be linguistically competent enough to understand academic activities. An earlier study by Ostler (1980) demonstrated that overseas students' proficiency in listening and speaking in the classroom was frequently lower than their ability to understand casual conversation, such as talking with friends, or carrying out basic transactions, such as interacting with shop assistants. Ferris and Tagg (1996) pointed out that:

*ESL college/university students are often intimidated by academic speaking tasks, including both formal presentations and participation in large- or small-group class discussions. Reasons for hesitation appear to stem from insecurity about linguistic competence and differences between the native and L2 culture with regard to classroom discourse (p. 300).*

Academic oral skills may be more demanding for the students in that speaking requires them to produce words and sentences on their own, rather than just use their listening skills (Cammish, 1997). In particular, at university level, most courses involve a broad range of verbal activities, such as, giving presentations, doing pair or group work, and holding seminar discussions, and all require speaking ability high enough to successfully express one's ideas or pass information. According to Park's (2006) survey

findings from Korean students enrolled on Australian undergraduate programmes, 40%<sup>11</sup> of the respondents said that they had a problem with speaking in classroom activities such as making a presentation or seminar discussions. It is worth investigating how far Korean students' speaking difficulties can affect their adapting to a new academic context in UK universities.

#### b. Academic literacy and writing skills

Students who are non-native speakers of English need to develop skills of scanning or skimming to summarise the content of academic texts, which are necessary as input to and preparation for, essay writing (Cammish, 1997). Poor English ability may hinder grasping important knowledge or information through reading. The Ferris and Tagg (1996) survey showed that their Asian students, including Korean students, had particular problems with understanding technical terms in reading activities. The survey also showed that the lecturers were very concerned about their students' writing skills. They pointed to students' lack of ability in: 'technical writing, responding to essay examination questions, research papers, grammar, coherence / logic and combatting plagiarism' (Ferris and Tagg, 1996: 309).

With respect to students' writing skills, lexical choice and minor grammatical mistakes seem to cause fewer serious problems. Cammish (1997) commented:

*Where writing skills are concerned, particularly in essay work, it is not usually choice of lexis which is the main problem although students for whom English is a foreign language may sometimes use near synonyms which render meaning rather nebulous (p. 154).*



### c. Pragmatic competence

Some pragmatic areas of language learning, such as how to apologize, to make requests, and to make and respond to compliments, might not appear at first sight to be likely to seriously affect students' academic work. Nevertheless, students may have often experienced problems in these communicative actions in everyday life when they interact with native speakers, both inside and outside the university community. Moreover, the result may well determine how they are treated by academic and administrative staff and when negative this in turn may help to destroy their confidence.

It is unsurprising to find that communicative acts of apology, request, refusal, and compliment differ markedly across cultures. The cross-cultural study of requesting in Korean and English by Byon (2004) demonstrates a strong preference by the Koreans for apologizing when making a request. This happens in British English in some situations, but in Korea this appears highly likely to reflect the Korean cultural factors of both hierarchy and face. If and when this tendency is transferred to their L2 speech acts, this may result in unfortunate cultural clashes. Byon points out,

*In an American college social setting, the students normally accept that it is their legitimate right to make a request to their professors, as long as the content of their request is related to their academic affairs. Making an apology before and after making a justifiable request may make [the] students look unnecessarily subservient or indebted to the professors, which does not conform to the egalitarian social perception of American human relationships (p. 1689).*

Similarly, another cross-cultural study of Korean and American English by Kwon (2004) also shows a strong tendency by the Koreans to pause and apologize before refusing when it came to interaction with higher-status individuals. Communication



failure or misunderstanding may well happen if Korean learners of English follow their culture-specific refusal strategies when communicating with native English speakers (Kwon, 2004).

Thus, many Korean overseas students might appear highly likely to experience communicational conflicts at the pragmatic level, caused by cross-cultural differences between their own and the host culture, leading to misunderstandings or even to communicational breakdown in cross-cultural interactions. However, once again, there is a lack of research on just how far cultural differences at the pragmatic level do in fact influence learning English by Korean students and what the problems are at university level.

#### 2.3.2.4. Social isolation in the host environment

Many overseas students may encounter 'an inability to become socially accepted' in not only educational but also social terms in the new culture (Hammer, 1992 cited in Furnham, 2004:16). Although this seems just as true when native English students feel isolated, overseas students, from very different cultures, tend to have a heightened sense of isolation (Zhang, et al., 1999; Brown, 2008). Many overseas students in New Zealand, for example, reported a great concern about social isolation in a 1992 study by James and Watt. In particular, overseas students' social isolation may be manifested in the classroom. According to Volet and Kee (cited in Chalmers and Volet, 1997), the Asian students' minority status can make them feel intimidated in classroom. Moreover, in the survey of 1,250 international and local students enrolled at three South Australian universities by Mullins, et al. (1995), many of the Asian students reported that they felt local students tended to disregard their comments during tutorials.

Overseas students may find it harder to interact with classmates from English-speaking countries to discuss the academic subject matter at hand, and have fewer opportunities to make local friends. Beaver and Tuck's (1999: 5) survey findings showed that Asian students, including Koreans, had a greater anxiety about making friends than the other two groups of international students studied (Pakeha students and Pacific Islanders). In short, social isolation can be associated with social interaction on and off campus. I noted earlier (see section 2.3) that one of the key factors why Koreans go abroad to study is a strong expectation of experiencing another culture and interacting with people, so this may be also one of the aspects of their overseas life that fails to satisfy students' expectations (Hellesten and Prescott, 2004). In the absence of published research, there is a need for a study on how far Korean students can develop their social interaction with native speakers in the host country.

#### 2.3.2.5. Psychological aspects of cultural adjustment

Overseas students' rapid adjustment to a new culture is crucial if they are to make a success of their study abroad (Furnham, 2004). The combination of having to overcome linguistic problems, trying to discover and adapt to new academic practices and expectations and surviving in a new social environment is highly likely to engender stress, anxiety, and a sense of insecurity (Zhang, et al., 1999).

As well as academic stress, students face a whole range of other problems with living in a foreign culture: accommodation difficulties, making friends and setting up a social network, loneliness or homesickness, the lack of language and social skills (Furnham and Bochner, 1986). Psychologists (McNamara and Harris, 1997; Tilburg and Vingerhoets, 1997 cited in Furnham, 2004:16; Brown, 2008) have highlighted both

positive and negative aspects of the overseas students' situation: they are often 'well educated, highly motivated, adaptable and better off than many of their peers, but some remain vulnerable to depression, illness and poor academic performance' (Furnham, 2004:16). This may lead to 'culture shock'. Indeed,

*Culture shock might be called an occupational disease of people who have been suddenly transplanted abroad (Oberg, 1960:185)*

In the transfer to a new culture, familiar body language or signs in one's own culture are hard to forget, making one feel as if one is 'a fish out of water' (Oberg, 1960). One may experience 'frustration, anxiety, feeling rejected by and rejecting the host culture' (Beneke and Kuster, 2002: 1).

With regard to the psychological impact of the stress or problems which overseas students experience, the term 'foreign-student syndrome' (Ward, 1967) has been coined. Its characteristics are 'vague, non-specific physical complaints, a passive, withdrawn interaction style and a dishevelled, unkempt appearance' (cited in Furnham, 2004). Ward (1967:4) also notes the relevance of students' attitudes towards what is essentially a psychological problem:

*Depressed and 'culture-shocked' overseas students tend to somatise their problems so as to avoid losing face, thus providing them with the justification to attend clinics for medical, as opposed to psychological help.*

There are as yet few detailed studies on how Korean students deal with their problems and stress. We might predict, given the discussion so far in this chapter, that their previous experience of a very rigid education system and parental zeal mean that

Korean students will experience foreign student syndrome in a particularly strong way.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

So far, a range of problems that many East Asian overseas learners, and particularly Korean students, are likely to confront while studying in English-speaking countries have been examined. From an East-West cross-cultural perspective, cultural differences may generate a whole series of mismatches in expectations between Asian students and western tutors or universities in an academic context, as well as in their social life. This assertion is based on the idea that the students' difficulties cannot be entirely explained in terms of language ability. There is also the question of how cultural factors stemming from Confucianism may affect Korean students' learning when using English in a different educational context. For instance, we may predict that Korean students who are familiar with passive, teacher-dependent styles, and rote-learning, are particularly likely to have difficulty in adjusting to interactive practices in class, such as asking a question, thinking in a critical way, or debating and arguing.

However, it is important to bear in mind that some of the literature has presented a critical view of Asian learners by 1) the stereotyping them as all having particularly passive learning styles, and/or 2) treating the category 'Asian' (or CHC) in as implying cultural homogeneity, which is also true in reverse in that not all English-speaking countries or cultures alike.

First, on the subject of stereotyping Asian students as passive learners, there is a range of studies which have linked being Asian and passive with learning difficulties in English-speaking countries (e.g. Chalmers and Volet, 1997; Kember, 2000; Sowden, 2005a; Liu, 2005; Kumaravadivelu, 2003). Biggs (2001), however, has shown, that



there are misconceptions in the literature about Asian learners' difficulties in transferring from a passive/rote-learning style to an active or interactive one. The assumption that they would all have great difficulty in modifying their approaches could not explain the consistent academic success in higher education of Asian overseas students (Biggs, 1999). This indicates, Biggs argued, a successful adaptation to the demands of a western academic programme, rather than failure to cope.

Again, a study by Littlewood (2000) showed that this stereotyping of passive Asian learners may not be a reality, but may exist more in people's minds. According to the results of Littlewood's (2000) study with 2,307 students at senior secondary and tertiary level in eight East Asian countries<sup>12</sup>, including Korean students, 'help keep the atmosphere friendly and harmonious' in group-work, which stems from their collectivistic values. However, the students' responses showed they reacted positively to active and independent learning. The findings from the survey suggested that

*[i]f Asian students do indeed adopt the passive classroom attitudes that are often claimed, this is more likely to be a consequence of the educational contexts that have been or are now provided for them, than of any inherent dispositions of the students themselves (Littlewood, 2000: 33).*

Again, there have been few detailed studies dealing with exactly how Korean students react to problems in this area. In particular, it is necessary to find out how far Koreans' traditional learning styles can be successfully transferred to a new approach, how the students feel about this and thus how it affects any aspects of studying abroad including completing their academic performances.

Secondly, 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 (Beaver and Tuck, 1999; Littlewood, 2000; Zhang, et al., 2003). Although people categorized as 'Asian' tend to share a 'Confucian heritage culture', this categorization makes it difficult to explain cultural diversity within the group. Beaver and Tuck (1999) support this:

*...it is not uncommon in research to classify Samoan and Tongan immigrants to New Zealand as Pacific Islanders. Unfortunately such a categorisation glibly ignores the significant cultural differences between the two cultures. To some extent the groupings used in this study reflect cultural astigmatism, and the reader is alerted to the inherent problems in these and similar classifications (p.4)*

It can thus be risky to stereotype Asian students as a homogeneous group without considering intragroup differences in cultural factors or phenomena.

To sum up, there is little research into the cultural and language problems of Korean overseas students, in the context of British higher education. To find out how far cultural factors affect studying at university and learning English by Korean adult learners in the UK, the present study will attempt to address the following two broad research questions:

1. Where are the main problems perceived to lie in relation to cultural factors?
2. Which subgroup of students reports the most serious problems:  
undergraduates, masters, or PhD students?

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> 'A lively debate throughout the 1990s on the universal nature of rights and values, and whether these are compatible with the values and concepts of rights common to Asian peoples, has attracted the attention of politicians and scholars in Asia and elsewhere. Although this "Asian values debate" has subsided in recent years, it has incited controversy in many respects. Its political, economic, social, cultural and moral ramifications, its substance, its name, the characterization of the issues, and even the identity and position of many of the individuals who have chosen to take a stand on it or on issues they see as inextricably related, have provoked clashes' (Boll, 2001:45).

<sup>2</sup> It is when Chinese culture flourished and spread throughout East Asia generally.

<sup>3</sup> Asian values have been defined as putting emphasis on a consensual approach, communitarianism rather than individualism, social order and harmony, respect for elders, discipline, a paternalistic State and the primary role of government in economic development, linked to the premise that 'there are values and patterns of behaviour that are common to Asian countries and peoples'. In contrast, "Western values" have been associated with transparency, accountability, global competitiveness, a universalistic outlook and universal practices, and an emphasis on private initiatives and the independence of the private sector (Boll, 2001:45).

<sup>4</sup> The representative of most Asian culture.

<sup>5</sup> The countries with the highest individualism scores from Hofstede's study include United States, Australia, and United Kingdom. Canada, Belgium, and Sweden (Workman, 2008)

<sup>6</sup> 'School ties' is connected with 'academic-collectivism' in which there is a strong bond between people who are studying in or graduated from the same schools or institutions (Lee, 2002: 104).

<sup>7</sup> In the survey, the respondents also reported other reasons, such as a lack of respect for degrees obtained in Korean universities (17.1%), dissatisfaction with the Korean educational system (11.3%), and the conventional perception that a degree from overseas is superior.

<sup>8</sup> The number of lectures delivered in English for the first semester of the 2008 academic year in universities in Korea has increased: Core 1186 lectures (33.76% of all the courses in the University), Seokang(199/ 17.92%), Seoul (592/12.4%), Sungkwan(371/15.7%), Yonsei (668/ 27.02%), and Hanyang(498/18.3%).

<sup>9</sup> He also pointed out that in reader-responsible languages (such as Japanese), 'there is greater tolerance for ambiguity, imprecision of statement, and an entirely different attitude toward the writer...such that English-speaking writers go through draft after draft to come up with a final product, while Japanese authors frequently compose exactly one draft which becomes the final product' (1987:145).

<sup>10</sup> This is reflected in the 'deficit model' of Asian learner (Volet & Renshaw,1996).

<sup>11</sup> 5.9% students strongly agreed, and 32.2% students agreed with 'I have a problems with making presentation or seminar (Park, 2006:101).

<sup>12</sup> The number of student is in brackets: Brunei (39), Mainland China (371), Hong Kong (286), Japan (212), South Korea (344), Malaysia (605), Thailand (355), and Vietnam (95). There were also responses from 349 students in three European countries: Finland (130), Germany (158), and Spain (61) ( Littlewood, 2000: 32).

## **Chapter 3: Study one: Preparatory work**

### **3.1 Introduction**

From the literature review in the last chapter it was clear that, 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 my personal experience. What was missing was any real information about Korean students in the UK. One way to obtain a broad overview is to conduct a survey. It was therefore decided that Study One would be a national survey of Korean students currently doing their first degree, masters or PhDs in the UK. For reasons of time and geographical spread, it was also decided to make it a questionnaire-based survey. The aims of the survey were to gather background data about students' experiences in social and 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.

This chapter describes the preliminary work that was undertaken: specifically a series of preliminary interviews and the pilot study. These will be dealt with in turn. The chapter ends with a discussion about the construction of the final questionnaire and the accompanying administrative procedure. As will become clear, cultural values and expectations, such as face and politeness, were not only the focus of the content of the survey, but played a major role in the development of the method. Indeed, the importance of these factors in the design of research procedures using Koreans as subjects is largely ignored in the literature and represents, as a set of secondary findings, one of the original aspects of this dissertation.



## **3.2 Preliminary interviews**

### **3.2.1 Aims and methodology**

Researchers are frequently advised to establish, in advance of any design work, what issues their intended population are concerned about and the sort of language they use to express them. Indeed, such preparatory work lies at the basis of ‘Grounded Theory’.

Denscombe (2003: 102) for example suggests:

*To fine-tune the questions and concepts that will appear in a widely circulated questionnaire, researchers can use interviews to supply the detail and depth needed to ensure that the questionnaire asks valid questions.*

It was therefore decided to hold twelve preliminary interviews with students at a university in the north of England, who were working at all three levels: undergraduate, Masters and PhD.

### **3.2.2 Participants, times, and places**

In order to recruit twelve participants in the university, I selected first seven students who were fairly close to me and listed in the Korean society of the university, and asked them to participate in the interviews. To find the other five, I checked who was available by contacting the members of Korean society. Twelve Koreans who were currently at a university in the north of England agreed to participate. Of the twelve, three were undergraduates, five were doing masters courses and three were doctoral students (though one of the latter had completed his PhD several months previously). The relevant information is summarised in table 3.1.

ID	Sex	Age	Subject	Level
A	M	36*	Economics	PhD
B	F	23	Social Policy	Undergraduate
C	F	30	Linguistics	Undergraduate
D	M	34*	Social Policy	PhD
E	F	34*	Health Economics	Masters
F	F	25	History	Undergraduate
G	F	31	English Literature	Masters
H	M	35*	Sociology	PhD
I	F	26	Psychology	Masters
J	F	26	Health Economics	Masters
K	M	26	Computer Science	Masters
L	M	29	Computer Science	PhD

\*Participant was older than the researcher

Table 3.1 Survey, preliminary interviews: interviewees

I started the interviews on 11 Feb 2005. They lasted between one and two hours. Hitchcock and Hughes (2000) consistently emphasised the importance of establishing a good rapport, involving empathy and understanding, between interviewer and interviewee. An attempt was accordingly made to create a relaxed, informal context. Eight students were interviewed in the university coffee bars and the remaining four were interviewed in their rooms in college. Each interview was held over a coffee or in some cases a meal.

### 3.2.3 Method of interviewing

As the survey related to cultural differences and problems that Korean students might feel highly sensitive about, it was clearly crucial, even in the preliminary interviews, to develop a rapport such that the interviewees not only felt able to talk freely and honestly (Burns, 2000), but were able to modify statements and add comments when they wanted.

By implication, I needed as interviewer to actively play the sort of highly supportive role advocated by Lofland (1971). This argued against the rigidity of a structured interview. However, I was equally concerned that if I adopted a completely unstructured approach, it might be hard to exercise adequate control over the questioning, to take notes efficiently, or, in the light of the need to retain a sense of decorum, an appropriate air of seriousness and politeness (section 2. 1. 3. 3). I therefore, decided to use a semi-structured format. This involved the use of an outline interview schedule, but I encouraged interviewees to speak their minds at all times. The potentially sensitive personal nature of the content, plus the fact that the aim of the interviews was 'discovery' rather than 'checking' (to use Denscombe's terms), implied that individual interviews would be more appropriate than group interviews or focus groups.

It was originally intended to record the interviews, but as a result of marked hostility and panic on the part of the first interviewee, this was abandoned. I accordingly took field notes during the interviews, but I tried to note down some important comments verbatim. This was not without its difficulties, as I found it hard on many occasions to write fast enough to keep up with the speaker. Another problem with taking notes is that it forces the researcher to make interpretative summaries earlier in the research process than one might wish (Walker, 1985: 109). The researcher is also forced to rely on memory to supplement the notes, at the point where the interviews are being analysed. The problem of reconstructing on the basis of partial memory increases the more the interviews are spread out in time. To help overcome, or at least, reduce these problems, I firstly tried to add background notes about the interviewees themselves, about their attitude to the interview and about anything interesting which occurred during it. After writing up the substance of the interviews, I gave each interviewee a

summary report and we had a face-to-face discussion about the extent to which it accurately reflected their opinions. The brief time delay also served to let the interviewee modify anything they considered rash or spoken in haste. The result was thus considered to constitute a reasonably accurate record of the opinions and experiences of the twelve students.

At the request of the interviewees, all interviews were conducted in Korean. Most of the interviewees spontaneously expressed concern about the language to be used and some clearly did not have a high degree of oral fluency in English. Korean was also used for cultural reasons. In Chapter 2 I noted the need for Koreans to deal with factors like age, sex, status and intimacy in social interactions, in a way that is stricter and more formal than for most English people. On the one hand, the use of Korean is simply practical in this sort of circumstance, as the language contains the lexis and honorifics to manage these concerns. However, Koreans tend to feel it is polite and respectful to interact in Korean, rather than in a foreign language, regardless of the situation and how fluent they are (Media Daum, 2006). It will be noted from Table 3.1 that four of the interviewees were older than the researcher. Not only would both parties have spent much of an interview conducted in English thinking about how linguistic errors might affect their own and the other person's face<sup>1</sup>, but it would be extremely hard to ask questions (or at least to elicit useful answers) from interviewees who saw themselves as having higher status than the interviewer. The choice of language thus played a major part in creating a workable rapport.

It was important that interviewees understood what type of response was wanted to the various questions, given the topic and the nature of the research. At the beginning of interviews two to twelve, I therefore started with an explanation of my



research questions. However, out of a desire to create an informal atmosphere, I did not start interview one like this. The result of the first interviewee not understanding what I was doing was that I had to repeatedly add explanatory statements throughout the interview. One needs to be careful not to assume that technical terms are transparent or self-evident. In this case, I realised that several interviewees did not understand the acronyms 'EFL' and 'ESL' and hence differences between them. I therefore explained what they meant. One way of helping interviewees understand questions and to work out how to give relevant, detailed answers was to give periodic examples based on my own experience. This met with positive reactions from the students concerned. This did not appear to involve 'researcher bias' and leading the interviewees (see Hitchcock and Hughes, 2000:88), as they were all able to reject the examples in favour of their own experiences, where relevant. Having said that, I did elect to use a weak form of leading question, in an attempt to elicit greater precision and detail; I worded questions as 'What are....?', rather than 'Have you ever found...?' (Legard, et al., 2003).

#### **3.2.4 The interview questions**

Most of the questions I used in the interviews were open-ended. The interviews focused on cultural differences in academic styles between the UK and in Korea: specifically if the interviewees had ever found differences during their stay in the UK, and if there were any problematic areas. Also, I tried to discover how far those differences affected or at least were perceived to affect, their achievement in terms of academic performance in the UK. The interview schedule was divided into three topic areas (see Appendix I), and focused on the key question of 'cultural learning in different academic situations'.

### **3.3 Preliminary interviews: data analysis**

The interview data analysis relied on the field notes that I took during each interview. As previously mentioned, taped-recording was abandoned out of consideration for the interviewees' hostility and panic. As the raw data of the interaction in the interviews primarily consists of comments, descriptions and summaries, it was probably unavoidable that there is a degree of bias deriving from my interpretation when sorting and synthesizing the information.

Descriptive analysis can be used to display a particular phenomenon or theme (Ritchie, et al., 2003). To present cultural differences in some specific areas of academic culture and the subjects' difficulties, the data frameworks for descriptive analysis were created by using thematic charts.

In terms of the first category of the personal background questions, tables 3.2 and 3.3 show the summaries of the interview content across the language learning and academic background of participants.

	Academic background in higher education in Korea	Length of stay in UK		Any other English-speaking country (where/ how long/ ESL or University programme)
		Degree course	English learning experience in UK	
A	UG/ Masters	4 years	No	No
B	Two semesters of UG	2 years	2 years	No
C	UG/ Master/ 4 semesters of PhD	6 months	No	No
D	UG	7 months	3 months	No
E	UG/ Masters	7 months	No	No * 7 years stay in Italy
F	2 semesters of UG	1 years 7 months	1 year	No
G	UG/ Masters	7 months	No	No
H	UG/ Masters	1 years 7 months	1 year	
I	One semester of UG	4 years 7 months	1 year	No
J	UG	7 months	1 year	No
K	2 semesters of UG	6 years	2 years	No
L	UG	7 years	1 year	No

Table 3.2 Survey, preliminary interviews: participants' academic and language background

As shown above, all participants had undergone a minimum of one semester on an undergraduate course in Korea, which is a reasonable condition for comparing the culture of learning and teaching in academic contexts between the UK and Korea. Also, more than fifty percent of the participants had cultural experience through a homestay.

With regard to cultural learning in different contexts, the key points brought up are summarised in Table 3.3.

Area	Topic	In the UK	In Korea
<b>Supervision</b>	The relationship between supervisor and students	More open and horizontal relationship.	Vertical and hierarchical relationship.
	Supervisory system and other issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students' right to received satisfying academic advice is guaranteed.</li> <li>• Active discussion with supervisors and other academic staff is common at all levels.</li> <li>• In particular, at undergraduate level, there are commonly two supervisors: for student life and academic learning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher's authority is highly valued and respected.</li> <li>• Students are not familiar with debate and, in practice, rarely have a free discussion with supervisors at all levels.</li> <li>• It is problematic that non-active supervision is still ongoing in undergraduate systems.</li> </ul>
<b>Writing academic essays</b>	Structuring an argument	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deductive approaches are more common.</li> <li>• Counter-argument is highly valued and different views should be respected and discussed.</li> <li>• The structure of introduction, body and conclusions should be clear</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inductive patterns are more common.</li> <li>• The means of arguing is less important.</li> </ul>



	Plagiarism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The appropriate use of hedging devices is important.</li> <li>• The rules are very strict. Even at undergraduate level, students are taught sufficient information about the rules.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is less strict, but more important at postgraduate level. At undergraduate level, most students have not learned the rules referencing or how to use them.</li> </ul>
<b>Marker's feedback, grade, or comments, on performance</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anonymity and fairness are guaranteed</li> <li>• Very detailed feedback with good points and bad points given</li> <li>• Essays are assessed point by point: argument, ideas, and even punctuation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal intimacy, emotion and preference may be a circular factor</li> <li>• Anonymity is of less concern than in the UK</li> <li>• Just a grade, such as A, B or B+ given</li> </ul>

Table 3.3 Survey, preliminary interviews: Summary of perceived differences in academic practice, Korea-UK

The points in the table 3.3 are discussed in more detail below.

### 3.4 Preliminary interviews: Results and discussion

Interestingly, all the students agreed that they felt the relationship between students and supervisors was equal in the UK, whereas it was vertical and much more hierarchical in Korea. Particularly, at undergraduate level, they suggested that it had not been easy to

voluntarily contact and discuss matters with supervisors in Korea (section 2.3.2.1). This can be explained by the fact that hierarchical authoritarianism still permeates Korean higher education. This fits the comments in section 2.2.2.2. where it was argued that students tend to strongly respect and obey their supervisors, based on the notion of 'filial piety' in parent-child relationships. 'Face' which is of more concern in the hierarchical relationship between teachers and students in Korea (also section 2.3.2.1), often impedes Korean students accessing their supervisor in the UK. The students' comments were very much in line with Channell (1990:72) who found that 'many overseas students felt inhibitions which prevented them from seeing a tutor for fear of losing face'. Thus, several students mentioned that this had caused some problems with contacting supervisors in the UK, which has a different supervisory model with a more egalitarian relationship, when they need to request academic advice or ask a question.

For example, subject F reported being still very hesitant after almost three years in the UK, to ask her supervisor a question,

*"I am very worried to ask a question which could be very trivial because I don't want to bother her."*

Subject A said much the same thing,

*"Still hard to feel comfortable discussing things with my supervisor, though he is very considerate. Frequently I bow as a greeting and try not to show my back when I come out of his room after supervision sessions."*

It is clear from the data that all the interviewees, not just persons A and F, were concerned about the teacher losing face and still did not know how far they could make a request about their academic work. In addition, at postgraduate level, the interviewees

explained that some of the differences in the student-supervisor relationship derived from the different systems of the two countries. In the Korean university system, masters or PhD students are asked to work as both researchers and teaching assistants for their supervisors. Thus, not only can they find it hard to find the time to get on with their own research, but both the students and supervisors are more systematically interdependent for their academic work. Although most of the subjects had successfully adjusted to different supervision methods in the UK, they reported that they were still not wholly comfortable with the notion of a more equal and active relationship with their supervisors. In particular, five of them (A, D, E, F and H) still wanted their supervisors to control and guide their relationship in supervisory meetings. This is partly in line with Cortazzi and Jin's assertion (1997:86; section 2.3.2.1 b) that supervisors in China are expected to play the parent-like role by 'showing sufficient care and concern to be aware of students' problems and offering help unasked'. This reinforces the suggestion made in section 2.3.2.1.b that it would be useful to investigate how far Korean students have problems with supervision in UK academic contexts.

In terms of writing an academic essay, especially in the field of structuring an argument, all twelve of the interviewees mentioned they had not learnt the important points of writing academic essays and had not been given specific guidance for good essay writing at undergraduate level in Korea. The suggestion was that, in Korea, less importance was placed on essay structure and the mechanics of arguing than in the UK.

According to subject C,

*"I remember that I did not learn any rules or guidelines for a good academic essay when studying for my undergraduate course in Korea."*

So we may hypothesise that, many, even most, Korean students are likely to feel very concerned about how to write an essay in their first term at a UK university. Another finding about academic writing was that the Korean students were not familiar with the method of direct and straightforward introduction of the topic first (see also Cortazzi and Jin, 1997; Windle 2000, section 2.3.2.2.1). Furthermore, most of them said that they did not understand how to formulate a counter-argument. Indeed, for the six interviewees doing non-science subjects (B, D, F, G, H and I), how to develop a counter-argument based on critical viewpoints was one of the most difficult aspects of writing academic essays.

In terms of the extent to which plagiarism was emphasized, most of the interviewees reported that it was not taken seriously in Korea and the rules were rather generous at undergraduate level. It would be worth investigating through quantitative methods in the main survey if both students at undergraduate and postgraduate level feel that UK universities enforce a stricter plagiarism policy than Korean universities, and if they do, how far this becomes a source of problems.

In addition, two students reported difficulties with translating technical words in Korean texts into English when using Korean published articles or documents. Persons B and D both gave the example of the sociocultural meaning of the term 'welfare', which differs between countries. The question of technical terms having different meanings may be more of a problem in the humanities and social sciences than in science subjects, but these reactions suggest that the topic is worth investigating further.

Finally, unlike other aspects of academic culture, most subjects reported feeling very satisfied with the feedback system in the UK, commenting that feedback indicating



point-by-point good and bad aspects of work was useful from a practical point of view to develop academic skills and as a help for future work. Additionally, five interviewees (A, B, F, G, and L) said that they were very much in favour of the anonymity and fairness in marking in the UK system. Person B described her experience,

*I think it is very good that students' names should not be given to markers; instead a reference number is put on the essay paper. I do not have to be worried about personal emotions or my relationship with markers. When I was studying at university in Korea, honestly I was very concerned about these things especially when I held views that differed from those of the lecturers.*

Clearly subjects felt strongly about feedback, so this again seemed to be a topic that would be worth pursuing in the main survey.

### **3.5 Preliminary interviews: The evaluation of the interviews**

As I was well acquainted with each interviewee, it is possible that this intimacy may have influenced the findings or the data. The extent to which I was able to create a cordial atmosphere in which the respondent could deliver subjective and personal opinions or information to me may have varied depending on the degree of friendship between us. Age and seniority may also have affected the interaction; I found it easy to guide the interviews with subjects who were the same age as me, or younger than me, but I was more concerned about losing face and being polite when asking the four interviewees who were older than me.

From an ethnographical point of view, one cannot remove the influence of the researcher (Cicourel, 1967, cited in Hitchcock and Hughes, 2000). It is thus very important to keep a balance between subjectivity and objectivity as a researcher in the

relationship with the interviewees (Conteh, et al., 2005). In this case, I shared similar experience and opinions in relation to many of the questions, as I was an overseas student at the same UK university with undergraduate experience in Korea. This had the advantage that I could emphasize the point for social bonding purpose early in the interview, but it had the disadvantage that it was very difficult for me to manage the balance between acting as a researcher and as a student during the interviews.

In the process of data analysis, my prejudices and values were inevitably involved in interpreting the meanings of what the interviewees said. Furthermore, as previously discussed, note taking also added a further limitation to the research: it was not possible to check in detail for researcher bias. To compensate for this disadvantage, I checked with the interviewees at the end of the interviews that my notes were a reasonable record of what they had said.

With respect to the responses from the interviewees, all the items worked, but the number of interviewees who gave opinions about using technical terms across sociocultural contexts was very limited; two interviewees who were studying in the Department of Social Policy offered their opinions with a couple of examples. Moreover, both were reluctant to answer questions using expressions like ‘ I have not thought about that’ or ‘I don’t do that very well’, even when examples were given.

### **3.6 Preliminary interviews: Conclusion**

The 12 preliminary interviews were intended to indicate what sort of cultural and academic problems Korean students in the UK were concerned about. The results showed that the interviewees at a university in the north of England 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 these cultural differences. It was therefore decided to include all the topics they had raised in the main survey questionnaire. Sections 3.7, 3.8, and 3.9 describe how the questionnaire was constructed and piloted.

### **3.7 The questionnaire-based survey: Research design**

#### **3.7.1 Research Aims**

This national survey was aimed at obtaining a broad overview about the extent to which cultural factors affected Korean university students' academic study and learning English. The aim was to sample 100 students across a range of universities. In addition to eliciting data about students' experiences generally, I wanted to find out whether there were marked intergroup differences between undergraduates, masters, and PhD students. The survey is thus focused on the following research questions:

RQ1. Where are the main problems perceived to lie in relation to cultural factors?

RQ2. Which subgroup of students reports the most serious problems: undergraduates, masters, or PhD students?

#### **3.7.2 Survey sample**

The subjects of this survey were to be Korean students who were currently studying at UK universities (on undergraduate, Masters, and PhD programme) and who also had undergraduate experience in Korea. As the focus was on the students' experiences at higher education 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 a semester's experience of Korean university.



In order to sample 100 Korean students, I planned to select sixteen universities across the country, based on the information about the number of Korean students on British Council and Korean community websites. In particular, I selected the twelve universities at which a minimum of 20 Korean students were currently registered. This led to an inevitable bias towards the London area, despite the aim of a balanced distribution of sampling across the country. As five London universities had more than 20 Korean students, I decided to approach these five. Another consideration for university sampling was the ability to contact each representative of Korean community in the university. Having designed a postal survey, I intended to post the package of the questionnaires to each representative, expecting that he or she would agree to distribute the questionnaires to the members of the society. This would function as a means of saving time and cost. Furthermore, I expected that this would help to reduce the incidence of a delivery failure more than if I posted the questionnaires to each individual student. Just as importantly, my desire to contact the representatives as a way of approaching potential respondents reflected one of the cultural assumptions discussed in the previous Chapter. This was that face is highly valued in the hierarchical structure of Korean society in relation to age, status, and seniority: I felt it would be more effective and polite for me to contact and greet each representative of each Korean community first to request their cooperation. In addition, I thought it would help if I was able to use the Internet communities through which a large number of Korean students interacted within a university or with inter-university associations.

To save time and money I decided to use a self-administered questionnaire with an explanation of the aim of the survey and details of how to complete it in the rubric.

### 3.7.3 Questionnaire design

The rubric was intended to ‘create rapport with the respondents and to convince them about the importance of the survey and of their role in contributing to it’ (Dörnyei, 2003:77). In addition to the survey title, my name, and the organization (the University where I was enrolled at), I wanted to stress the importance of obtaining the respondents’ opinions. In particular, two things needed to be emphasized: the respondents could choose whether to answer the questions in Korean or English and there was a guarantee of ‘anonymity’ and ‘confidentiality’ (as basic ethical principles of data collection (Oppenheim, 1992)). Greetings and a contact number also needed to be included. The rubric would thus be designed to produce a positive effect for increasing the response rate, by making the potential respondents feel interested in the survey and secure about participating in it.

The questionnaire would be designed based on personal experience, the literature review (Chapter 2), and data from the preliminary interviews. It was decided to have five sections: (1) *Personal background*, (2) *Overseas study*, (3) *Cultural adjustment*, (4) *Cultural learning and communicative competence in language learning*, and (5) *Cultural learning in different topic areas*. Under personal background, the respondents would be required to answer which courses they were doing at university level (undergraduates, masters, or PhD).

In the section on cultural experience with ‘overseas study’, students would be asked about homestay experience and their level of cultural awareness. In the third section, I intended to focus on the question of the degree of satisfaction with UK life in the following areas: academic achievement, English learning (speaking, writing, speaking and listening), and social interaction with native speakers. On cultural learning

and communicative competence in language learning, I planned to ask how far students had developed their English pragmatic competence in a second language as regards speech acts like how to make a request, or how to respond to a compliment from a native speaker. Finally, in the last section, the questions would ask students about their experiences of cultural differences in various situations that they had faced in their life in the UK, such as '*Leisure activities (English movies, English newspapers, or English TV programmes)*'. This part would also include experience of academic culture, in the context of seminars and lectures, supervision sessions, academic writing, and feedback. The aim would be to ask about problems with social interaction with native speakers and about problems generally in adapting to a different academic culture.

With regard to the type of questions used, it was felt to be important to have both closed and open-ended questions. 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 result was that it was unclear just how many open questions respondents would be willing to answer - it was hoped that the pilot tests would be able to give a reasonable indication.

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 prove difficult to understand. However, it was clear from the preliminary interviews that respondents might well feel happier answering in Korean. 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.

### **3.8 Pilot study: Aims and methodology**

The pilot work was conducted in order to ensure the final version of the questionnaire was effective by trying out the questionnaire and thus making revisions where necessary. Piloting particularly focused on 1) checking the participants' reactions to the length of the questionnaire, 2) monitoring the time spent to complete it, and 3) respondents' feeling about comprehensibility of the questions. The length of time was a particular concern, as the draft questionnaire was quite long and could lead to participants feeling bored or inconvenienced. I was also not sure whether they would be happy with an English-version questionnaire, although I tried to avoid using technical terms and difficult words or expressions.

The questionnaire was piloted on fifteen Korean students at a university in the north of England, including five of the students who had participated in the preliminary interviews (A - E in table 3.3). All the fifteen Korean students who were currently doing an undergraduate, masters, or PhD course at a university in the north of England in 2005 agreed to take part in the study. Relevant personal information about the students is summarised in Table 3.4. The piloting was done in three phases, each comprising five individual sessions. I did not decide on three phases at the start and to recruit 15 people at once; I simply added another phase and five more people every time it was clear items needed changing. The subjects in the table are in order of piloting phases: Subjects A to E are for the first piloting phase.



<b>Piloting phase</b>	<b>ID</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Level</b>
1	A	F	23*	Social policy	Undergraduate
	B	F	30*	Linguistics	Undergraduate
	C	M	34	Social policy	PhD
	D	M	35	Economics	PhD
	E	M	26*	Computer Science	Masters
2	M	F	34	Economics	Masters
	N	M	24*	Biology	Undergraduate
	O	F	26*	Politics	Masters
	P	M	29*	Politics	Masters
	Q	F	31*	Education	Masters
3	R	M	45	Economics	Masters
	S	F	26*	Computer Science	Undergraduate
	T	M	35	English Literature	Masters
	U	M	42	Politics	Masters
	V	M	38	Social policy	PhD

\* Participant was younger than the researcher

Table 3.4 Survey, pilot study: Participants

In theory the researcher ought to repilot an instrument until no further changes are needed (Gorard, 2001:103), but in this study there was simply not enough time to do this. A compromise was adopted and the pilot study was repeated three times, with five respondents in each cohort over a period of three weeks. The students for the first sessions were contacted in April 2005 and the first sessions with participants A to E were conducted between 17 and 23 April. In terms of venues for the sessions, six were carried out at students' rooms in college; the other nine were undertaken at college bars

and common rooms on campus. The locations were selected as being particularly quiet.

### **3.8.1 Administration and procedure**

Although piloting is often carried out in two phases, focusing first on questions of wording and then on administrative adequacy (Gilham, 2000), an attempt was made in this case to test both together, by adapting Fowler's method of 'cognitive laboratory interviews' (Fowler, 2001). When a laboratory interview is conducted, which items are unanswerable, confusing, or incomprehensible are checked in a follow-up discussion. The pilot study was accordingly divided into two parts: each participant was firstly asked to complete the questionnaire making notes on the sheet itself and then a face-to-face discussion between the researcher and each participant was arranged. In order to cope with the respondents' work schedule, two methods of conducting the study had to be used. The first eleven individual sessions included both the questionnaire completion and an hour-long follow-up discussion. However, in the case of the remaining four sessions, the questionnaire completion was conducted first, but the discussion had to be carried out the next day. The potential drawback of students forgetting problems was reduced by their having made written notes on the questionnaire format.

At the first stage, the questionnaire completion, I did not intervene, in order to reduce possible researcher bias. The participants were given a draft copy and asked to read the rubric (i.e. the instructions) and to complete the questionnaire in their own time, making notes on any problems that arose. They were also asked to react to the length of the draft questionnaire. In terms of the languages used for answering, the respondents were told that both English and Korean were allowed.

In order to critically diagnose problems with a questionnaire after the

respondent had finished, I needed to gather information about how the respondents comprehended and answered the questions. To this end Fowler's (2001) 'Think-Aloud' (Fowler, 2001) procedure was adopted. In Fowler's version of this method, the respondents are asked to show the way they answer the questions and what they are thinking about, and thus the researcher can check if she or he did not understand (or misunderstood) the questions. Fowler (2001:109) described two common tasks,

- (1) *To ask respondents to say in their own words what they think the question is asking;*
- (2) *To ask respondents to explain how they chose a particular answer over others.*

For the pilot study, the second task was used, and respondents were asked in the follow-up discussion, to give any critical comments orally if they were confused, or could not understand, or if something was unclear. I tried to limit my responses to brief clarifications, explanations, and translations in order to reduce researcher bias and to avoid breaking the respondents' train of thought. At the end, there was a joint discussion about problematic issues raised and the length of the questionnaire.

All the sessions were recorded with the permission of the participants and transcribed. I also took notes while the participants were talking; these were used as a basis for the discussion. I monitored and added notes on each respondents' completion time of the questionnaire. The 'Think-Aloud' discussions were retrospective rather than concurrent in order to be able to measure the questionnaire completion time.

### **3.9 Pilot study: Results and discussions**

#### **3.9.1 Comments from respondents**

Despite my request, several participants (A, B, N, O see table 3.3) who were younger than me did not give any critical (i.e. negative) comments orally at any point in the discussion. However, two of them checked and commented on a few questions they could not understand, and which they considered unclear in the questionnaire draft.

This can be explained in terms of face-related cultural factors: Koreans tend to avoid directly expressing themselves to others when social factors such as age, seniority, or social status are concerned (Yum, 1987), believing that giving criticism in public or face-to face discussions leads to losing face (section 2.3.2.1). Also, they tend to avoid strong emotions in interaction, based on the virtue of ‘propriety’, a Confucian value. It will be recalled from chapter 2 that Koreans appear to have more ‘other-face concerns’ (involving the face of the people with whom they are interacting) than Americans or Japanese (Gundyst, 2004 in Jiang, 2004:8). Inasmuch as ‘face’ plays a crucial role in maintaining hierarchical order and a harmonious relationship in Korean interactions (Flowerdew, 1998), it can be concluded that ‘face’ affected the way in which the respondents acted in the discussion in the pilot study. As a result, there was less negative comment or indeed fewer comments at all by the younger students.

#### **3.9.2 Overall Summary of results**

In terms of the main points to be examined at the pilot stage, some revision was made in the area of the language used in the questions. Initially all questions were in English, but from the second piloting phase, there was some Korean language support. The aim was to make the instructions clearer and help the respondents to understand the questions



precisely. However, one respondent (student C) suggested to me at the first piloting phase, that it would be better to construct the questionnaire completely in Korean to increase the response rate. According to him, it would be impolite or not common courtesy to use English with Korean respondents, even in the written form of the survey questionnaire. It is not known how the others felt about this matter, although none of them complained about using English.

Despite this uncertainty about how the potential respondents would be feel about the questions in English, I did not want to write the whole of the questionnaire in Korean. I was concerned that I would lose the original meaning of the questions when translating them into Korean. I also thought that the students would be far less pressured about reading the English questions than about speaking in English, as the written questions are not very complicated. I expected that Korean students would be thus less sensitive and concerned about losing face than in the interview interactions. Rather than translating the whole questionnaire into Korean, I adopted a compromise in that I gave extra written explanations in Korean where the pilot respondents did not seem to understand. For instance, as student D reported in the first piloting phase that he was not sure about the meaning of 'How to make a request to a native speaker in the UK' in question 26, I added an explanation in Korean.

Another example involved technical terms. Seven respondents could not understand some of the words or phrases, such as 'ESL', 'word for word translation', or 'cultural withdrawal'. Again, I added brief translations in Korean to relevant items.

Together with the issue of language appropriateness, the other important things to be considered in a pilot study are the questionnaire length and the completion time. The researcher needs to note whether the respondents' idea of the maximum desirable

length is rather less than the researcher's, and whether fatigue sets in before Dörnyei's limit of half an hour (Dörnyei, 2003). I asked each respondent to check their own questionnaire completion time, and the result was that they took on average 45 minutes and 40 minutes for the first and second pilot phase respectively. The questionnaire was therefore shortened for the third pilot phase, so that it would last 20 to 30 minutes. In the event, the revised version took a mean time of 25 minutes. Approximately thirty percent of the questionnaire was eliminated over the three pilot phases.

Firstly, according to the respondents' critical comments and opinions, several questions that the respondents could not understand completely or about which they felt very ambiguous, were revised. Twelve respondents pointed out that the 'rating scale' was rather unclear in four questions that asked about frequency. A number of items under '*Leisure activities*' (in questionnaire section *E 'Cultural Learning in different areas in the UK'*) were accordingly modified by adopting a different way of measuring frequency using an interval scale.

*29. How many hours do you spend on the following and how useful are they in improving your English?*

*Movies: Hours a week (approx): 0    1    2    3    4    5 or more hours*  
*Cinema/TV/ DVD)*

The rating scale for this item was changed to a banding system:

*Movies: hours a week (approx): 0    less than 1 hour    1-2    3- 4    5- 6    more than 6*

Figure 3.1 Survey, pilot study: Example of the question to be modified.

The clarity of three questions (Q20, Q21, Q24) also needed to be improved. In the case of question 24 about the number of questions respondents had asked in lectures, four persons in the first pilot complained about its ambiguity: they could not understand if the number of questions asked was to be counted by term or by lecture. In order to clarify what was required, a Korean explanation was added in the second pilot. But even here, two respondents said that it was hard to give a numerical estimate. As Q24 was similar, it was decided to remove Q24 from the third pilot.

Secondly, in two cases, the instructions were faulty, or respondents did not do what they were asked. Question 18 is an example of the former. The instruction was that respondents should rank order the responses. Person B's responses were as follows:

*18. What are the advantages to you of studying in the UK (an English-speaking country)? Please put 1 (very important) – 5 (not important) in the box to mark the level of importance.*

- |             |            |  |
|-------------|------------|--|
| <i>18.1</i> | <i>(2)</i> | <i>Learning the living English in the contact with native-speakers.</i>                |
| <i>18.2</i> | <i>(2)</i> | <i>Learning British culture and raising cultural or intercultural awareness.</i>       |
| <i>18.3</i> | <i>(2)</i> | <i>Increased confidence in speaking with native speakers.</i>                          |
| <i>18.4</i> | <i>(3)</i> | <i>Developing idiomaticity and knowledge of colloquial conversational expressions.</i> |
| <i>18.5</i> | <i>(3)</i> | <i>Having more opportunities to experience British mass media such as magazines.</i>   |

Figure 3.2 Survey, pilot study: Example of a question to be modified (Q18).

Again, it was felt that the easiest solution was to add a brief explanation in Korean that rank ordering was needed. In addition, despite the various checking processes, occasional grammatical or phrasal errors remained, but the piloting appeared to show that they did not stop the Korean respondents interpreting the questions appropriately and giving the sort of answers I was looking for.

I also modified seven questions with missing responses as there might have been indications that the respondents had not understood the instructions, or that something was wrong. For example, five open-ended questions, such as question 28, for example, which many respondents did not answer, and which may have been felt as requiring quite long answers or just been difficult to answer, were eliminated.

*28. Have you ever noticed any differences in humour between British and Koreans in films? Yes/No*

*If yes, how different are the British and Korean senses of humour?*

Figure 3.3 Survey, pilot study: Example of a question to be modified (Q28).

In the first pilot phase, question 28 received only two responses, suggesting it might well have been very difficult to answer. Indeed, two persons who did not answer the question in the first phase commented on their questionnaire sheet that, ‘I understand what this means, but I am not really sure about whether my feeling is right or not...’ and ‘I have no idea’.

Items where the same answer was chosen by every participant, or by none, were, in three cases, removed because it would be difficult to apply statistical analysis to them (Dörnyei, 2003). For example, the items asking about ‘the advantages of overseas learning’ were endorsed by all the respondents.



In particular, a series of questions about ‘culture in different situations in the university’ was reduced by integrating the items into ‘multiple choice’ format questions with more response fields added as the result of the second pilot. Also, more Korean instructions for the questions were added to raise the response rate. An example is the following:

*37. Have you noticed any differences between supervision in the UK and supervision in Korea? Yes/No (Please circle)*

*37.1. If so, what are they? Have they been particularly problematic in any way for you? Please, write your opinion in terms of the relationship between supervisors and students, duration or content.*

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Figure 3.4 Survey, pilot study: Example of the question to be modified (Q37).

This was modified to the following:

- *In Interaction with supervisors or lecturers (지도 교수와의 교류)*
- 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).*
- The relationship between supervisors and students.*  
*(Open, horizontal, equal relationship vs. hierarchical (relating to teacher's authority, vertical 과 연관 시켜 생각해 보세요).*
  - Students' rights to request academic advice when they need it.*
  - The duration of supervision.*
  - The content of supervision.*
  - System of supervision.*

Figure 3.5 Survey, pilot study: Example of a modified question (Q37).

As a result of removing questions through the first and second piloting, fifty percent of the questions were left, and then finally the ‘*Cultural learning in different topic areas*’ section was condensed after the third pilot phase. This modification was the result of two persons’ comments about the need to tighten up long items. What had been six categories were reduced to three.

Overall, the results of each pilot study from the first to third are summarised in the Table 3.5 below.

Pilot study which was administered	<b>The main points in the revision after administration of each pilot study</b>
The First pilot	The language used in the questionnaire: Only English → Korean translations added to give clearer instructions and understanding of questions  Modifications in wording: 8 Qs  Questions eliminated: 11 Qs
The second pilot	Modifications in wording: 14 Qs  Questions eliminated: 28 Qs
The third pilot	Questions eliminated: 3Qs

Table 3.5 Survey, pilot study: Summary of changes made.

From the above table, the greatest number of modifications in wording and the item eliminations were made after the second piloting with more focus on the length of the

questionnaire. In fact, the system as a whole in the third piloting worked well and little further change was needed for the main survey. The final questionnaire consisted of 42 questions (Appendix V).

### **3.10 Pilot Study: Conclusions**

This pilot study, conducted over three weeks in March 2005, was a useful diagnostic tool to get feedback from respondents and was conducted over three weeks in March 2005. The pilot sessions were carried out on three groups of five Korean students at a university in north of England. The pilot study was divided into two parts: (1) individual completion of the questionnaire and making notes on the sheet itself and (2) a face-to-face discussion between me and the respondent using Fowler's (2001) 'Think-Aloud' procedure.

In particular, it is worth noting that the cultural factor of 'face' also affected the research itself in relation to age: despite my request, several respondents who were younger than me avoided giving any critical comments orally at any point in the discussion. Many Korean students seem to believe that giving criticism in public or face-to face discussions leads to losing face (see section 3.2.1.)

In terms of the results of the piloting, the wording of the nine questions was modified, and eleven questions were eliminated as a result of the first pilot sessions. In addition, after the first draft, Korean explanation was used in certain parts to make the instructions clearer. The second pilot was particularly focused on cutting down the length of questionnaire by removing questions and by integrating options. Improvement in the clarity of instructions through Korean translations was also made. In short, as a result of the second pilot study, twenty-eight questions were eliminated, and

explanations using Korean for some part of the instructions for five questions were provided. The three open - ended questions were changed into closed questions using multiple choice format. Thus, the first and particularly second pilots resulted in a reduction in length of the questionnaire and contributed to resolving wording problems.

Due to revisions in many parts of the draft questionnaire in the first and second pilots, the whole system worked and thus there were not any wording problems in the third pilot study. In terms of the length of the questionnaire, the subjects completed the questionnaire on average in 20 to 30 minutes. It was very similar to the final revised questionnaire used in the main survey, as only one part of the questionnaire was modified from the feedback after the third pilot sessions. Details of this and other aspects of the main study are discussed in the next chapter.

#### Note

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<sup>1</sup>Face here and in the rest of this chapter relates primarily to 'normative face' (see section 2.1.3.3.)



## **Chapter 4: Main study one: Questionnaire-based Survey**

Based on the preparatory work of both the preliminary interviews and the pilot study, which were discussed in Chapter 3, a final questionnaire consisting of 42 questions was constructed for the national survey. This chapter focuses on how the survey was administered and processed, including discussion of the changes made from what I had originally planned and the main results. Implications for further research and main study 2 are given.

### **4.1 Administration and procedures: Modifications and methods used**

I originally intended to conduct a postal survey with a questionnaire in pencil and paper format, but finally decided on on-line administration (see section 3.2). I thus adapted the survey form to an on-line version using a commercial on-line survey tool (<http://www.freeonlinesurvey.com/>) without changing the number of questions or question types. There were the two reasons for the change.

The first reason was that, since the survey was to be carried out in June, several of the respondents were likely to be out of the UK at the time, possibly doing field work, so it was felt that questionnaires sent by post might never reach them. Secondly, using emails and the internet is now a commonplace activity for a very large number of people (Department of Commerce, 1998) – indeed, it has been estimated that more than 295 million people across the world particularly in the region of Europe, Asia Pacific and North America access the internet (Ingram, 2000). Both email and the internet are also essential tools for students and staff in universities and schools in both Korea and the UK. It was therefore assumed that all respondents to the survey would have little difficulty assessing or completing an online version of the survey (McMillan and Sheeh

an, 1999). The on-line format is particularly convenient for the researcher - data can be returned fast, and being already in electronic form, can be collected rapidly and accurately for input into statistical packages like SPSS (Fowler, 2001; Llieva, Baron, and Healey, 2002).

Having chosen to use an internet survey, I decided to separate the web-based questionnaire display from the email request to participate. Firstly, questionnaires tend to look better when presented in a browser window than in an email letter or as an attached file (Llieva, Baron, and Healey, 2002). Secondly, personalising contact with the respondent using an email letter which functions like the cover letter in a postal survey can be effective for optimising the response rate. Respondents were asked to click the web address to access the questionnaire.

Despite the potential advantages of combining a web-based survey and an email letter, a high response rate was still not guaranteed, however, and this led me to use two specific strategies to try and increase the response rate and encourage respondents to complete the questionnaire.

First, I made a change to the survey rubric in the email letters: I wrote the rubric in Korean rather than English, very politely requesting the readers to participate. In Chapter 3 I noted that the preliminary interviews were conducted in Korean for the sake of cultural reasons like age, sex, status and intimacy in social interactions (section 3.2). The rules are stricter and more formal in Korea than for most English people. As well as facilitating face-to-face communication in the interviews, the use of Korean in the rubric is likely to be more effective when it comes to making a request to Korean people, as the language contains the lexis and honorifics to manage both politeness and respect (Media Daum, 2006; see section 2.1.3.2).

Being polite is an important strategy in interpersonal skills in both written and spoken communication in Korean culture (section 2.2.1). It will be recalled that Korean culture has the two types of 'face' ('Chemyeon'), normative face and displaying face (section 2.2.1); the request letter employed strategies relating to normative face,<sup>1</sup> in particular, giving an apology before making the request (Appendix XII). This strategy is a means of satisfying, or saving others' face in a normative way; making an apology, expressing thankfulness, and giving the reasons for the request first were an attempt to make the reader understand and to be sympathetic to the requester's situation.

The second strategy to increase the rate of response involved deciding how best to approach respondents: I made initial contact with Korean communities in three main ways. My approach was based on my cultural assumptions with respect to the role of face in the hierarchical structure of Korean communities, and was an attempt to overcome respondents' feelings that their privacy was being invaded (Fowler, 2001:74). 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. All parties would thereby save face, respect would be maintained and the ice would be broken in an acceptable fashion.

I needed first to contact the various representatives of the communities of the sixteen sampled universities (see section 3.7.2). To do this, I searched the British Council website to find contact information about representatives such as their email addresses or phone numbers. I then emailed or phoned all the representatives, requesting that they and their students or communities participate in the survey. In case there was a problem about them using the society's distribution list to contact members, I suggested two other alternatives - either they could send me a copy of the distribution list, or they

could allow me to post a message on the society's electronic bulletin board.

With regards to the first method above, ten representatives accepted my invitation; they were willing to forward my survey request emails with the questionnaire directly to the members of the Korean societies as well as answer the survey questions. As a result, the response rates from the universities such as, Oxford, Cambridge, Newcastle, Surrey, and Lancaster University were comparatively high. In particular, there was a conspicuously high response rate from a university whose representative was my senior in age, which implies that the face-related strategies worked. I also used one connection (학연) based on school ties: the representative was someone who had previously graduated from a northern British university before me. It was previously noted (Chapter 2.1.1) that this sort of tie between seniors (sunbae) and juniors (hubae) is a major aspect of Korean education and society. I therefore employed a route that is standardly used, even expected, by Koreans. The high resulting participation rate shows that Korean communities tend to depend fairly heavily on their representatives who control the community issues.

However, this does not mean that the representatives can arbitrarily control the survey responses from their members. I did not intend to use the representatives' authoritative power, and try to compel the society members to answer the questions. Rather I tried to make people in the communities participate voluntarily, and the representatives' invitation to complete the survey remained just that, an invitation.

An interesting point was that five students sent emails back with the friendly comment that they had been asked by their representatives to send back confirmation that they had completed the questionnaire. This partly shows that the strategy in relation to hierarchy and face in the communities yielded a positive result.



With respect to the second contact method, a Korean association representing several London universities and two other universities sent me a list of 200 emails of the community members but without personal names, instead of forwarding my message to the members, although this was not my preferred option. I thus emailed each person, then I checked and emailed again in case of delivery failure. When I checked the lists of emails returned due to delivery failure, 56 of the 200 had not been delivered. There was, unfortunately, no way to rectify this problem.

I was also concerned that the respondents receiving my survey emails might feel displeased that I had somehow found out their email addresses. Indeed, six people emailed me after answering the questions to ask how I knew their addresses, commenting that they were quite embarrassed to receive emails from a person that they did not know. In these cases, I apologised for embarrassing them and confirmed that anonymity was guaranteed and I only knew their email addresses, but not their names. This incident led me to add another apology in which I expressed my regrets at bothering them: "Can I begin by saying I very much appreciate your participation in the survey. As a person that you have never met before, I really apologize for embarrassing you and being impolite about bothering you with my request for research participation. I would be grateful if you could understand my situation. I am only able to only greet you and make requests through email; I cannot meet you face-to face." These exchanges also seem to show that interpersonal communication can occur between researcher and respondents more in an internet context than it could with a purely postal survey. It is also clear that ethical issues, such explanations and guarantees of confidentiality, need to be considered particularly carefully when the researcher approaches the respondents in online research.

In addition, I sent reminder emails (using the distribution list that I had received from the representatives) to two universities (Newcastle and Bath) six months after I started collecting data in July 2006. Although it was time consuming to send reminders to the potential respondents on an individual basis, I assumed that respondents would feel more respected, which again would increase the response rate. This also would give respondents who had not responded to the initial email, another opportunity to participate in the survey.

Finally, one university representative, who said it was not possible to forward my email with the survey questionnaire to the members of the society and did not accept the idea of sending me lists of members' email addresses, allowed me to post a message on the bulletin board, but unfortunately this proved impossible, for technical reasons. In the event, I had 124 responses from 12 universities, with 24% from the London area (see Appendix II)

## **4.2. Data Collection**

I collected the data at the end of the academic year from June to July 2005. By the end of July, I had received 124 responses. As no more appeared, I stopped collecting data at the beginning of August 2005. The result was just over the anticipated 100 and appears to have been around 7% of the Korean students in higher education in the UK. This can be estimated from the HESA figures for Korean students for 2004 to 2005. These gave 164 research students, 682 following taught postgraduate courses, 684 doing a first degree and 150 'other' students, making a total of 1680. However, HESA figures include students doing foundation, language preparation and sandwich courses, who are not strictly the focus of this study. They also do not differentiate between those with and

without experience of degree level work in Korea (section 3.7). It is thus extremely hard to estimate the size of the target population, but excluding 'other' students and hypothesizing that 50% of undergraduates had experience of university work in Korea would bring the response rate to just over 10% (124/1188). The lack of precision about the target group meant that proper random sampling was not possible. If one adds to this the culturally determined need to approach students via their representatives wherever possible, the result is that one can select universities which attract the most Korean students (using the 'British Council'<sup>2</sup> website), but ultimately the final sample has to be self-selected. It is important to recognize that self-selected samples can be biased, towards extreme options (Oppenheim, 1992; Dörnyei, 2003).

Interestingly, in the process of data collection, four people over and above the 124, who were not eligible as respondents, sent me emails asking whether they could participate in the survey. A typical comment was:

*I am very interested in this survey, but I don't think that I am an appropriate person to answer the questions because...I have grown up in the UK since secondary school days. However, can I participate in the survey? (24, Aug. 2005)*

Another student, who was currently doing an MA in TESOL, sent me an email back to confirm that he had completed the questionnaire, but took the opportunity to ask me my views on cultural learning in a second language. He wrote;

*I have just finished the questionnaire and I think it is a very interesting topic. Do you think learning cultural things is very important in learning a second language? As a researcher in the area of second language education, I wonder why it is important. Could you tell me by email if you have time later? Thank*

*you and good luck (extracted from the email received on 2 Aug. 2005, originally in Korean, but translated into English).*

I accordingly replied to this message and I wrote two pages of comment on the issue, as it would not affect the survey results. The respondent further asked me for some book references and expressed gratitude for allowing him to participate. There were also three respondents who asked me to give them the information on how to administer an Internet survey using a commercial company. According to their email, they needed information on on-line surveys for their MA dissertations.

Finally, I was very impressed that 37 respondents sent emails back to confirm that they had completed the questionnaire, and to show their interest in the topic. In all cases, I also gave my thanks in return. What became clear from these responses is that it is possible to construct complex relationships between the researcher and respondents through a distance 'survey'. Although there is no direct involvement of the researcher in the data collection (Flowerdew, 2001), interaction between researcher and respondents can occur: respondents reply to the researcher to ask questions and researchers give information or their opinions by emails, or there is an exchange of information confirming respondents' survey participation, saying 'thank you' and sending encouraging messages to each other.

#### **4.3 Processing and Analysing Data**

The data was automatically encoded when each respondent answered the questions and the results of each question were visually displayed as a chart or diagram. 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 leaving a valid sample of 111. In addition, I found quite a lot of incorrectly entered values in close-ended questions; these responses are simply omitted from the relevant analyses.

Although the questionnaire employed primarily closed questions it included twelve open questions or open responses, partly in an attempt to get detail, but also to act as a psychological safety valve and as a means of simulating interaction in a context where the researcher was not physically present. However, it was anticipated that some respondents would feel open questions made completion time consuming and would not answer some or all of them (Oppenheim, 1992, 1996). In practice, Q37 had 61 responses, while there were 49 responses for Q39 and just 41 for Q40.

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 summarised the answers from the questions (Q37, Q39, and Q41). This had disadvantage that occasionally the questions were lost, but summarising key concepts acted as a type of content analysis.

The main data analyses relate to the two research sub-questions. The first part examines the respondents' overall opinions of cultural learning in higher education. The aim is thus to examine where the main problems occurred, and whether these were perceived as being affected by cultural factors such as face, hierarchy, and indirectness. At this level, a number of pairs of questions were linked to see the relationship between them: how far, for example, 'duration of overseas study', 'breadth of interaction' (Q20/Q21), and 'degree of interaction' (Q30) were associated with certain aspects of

overseas life, such as competence at communicating in English (Q26), favourable attitudes toward British culture (Q23), and the degree of satisfaction with social life or academic achievement. The analysis also aims at diagnosing what is problematic to Korean students in different academic contexts, such as supervision (Q36) or academic writing (Q38), caused by cultural differences students have noticed. The data analyzed at this level are reported using simple frequency counts, t-tests, and correlations. The alpha level was set at 0.05 in all cases.

The second part of the analysis focuses on examining the intergroup differences among the three groups (undergraduates ~ masters ~ PhD), in terms of the degree or breadth of interaction with native speakers and problems in the area of academic culture and social life. The aim was to discover which of the groups had the least interaction with English people and which reported the most, or the most serious problems. In order to assess this, group membership Q4 (undergraduate/ masters/ PhD groups) was treated as an independent variable, which was linked with five key questions about life in the UK using one-way ANOVA, Kruskal-Wallis tests, and Chi-square tests. The alpha level was again set at 0.05.

#### **4.4 Results and Discussion**

The first part of the analysis, aggregating undergraduates, masters, and PhD students, is given in section 4.4.1. To aid readability, a theme-based approach has been taken, involving four main themes: personal background, the impact of homestays, adjustment to the UK cultural context and adjustment to academic work. The second part of analysis, or intergroup differences, is given in section 4.4.2.

**4.4.1. How far are Korean students able to learn and communicate while at university in the UK?**

**4.4.1.1. Personal background of the participants**

As this questionnaire-based survey was designed to examine the cultural and language problems experienced by Korean international students in higher education in the UK, all of the respondents were undergraduates, masters, or PhD students; there were no ESL (English as second language) students. The sample size of the three groups was approximately equal, at around 35 to 40, as shown in Table 4.1:

Q4 What courses or programs are you taking??

Sub-groups	Frequency	Percent
Undergrad.	35	31.5
Masters	36	32.4
PhD	40	36.0
Total	111	100

Table 4.1 Survey : Academic level of participants (undergraduate/masters/PhD)

The duration of stay in the UK for the 103 respondents who answered Q9 was on average just over 4 years (see Table 4.2).

Q9

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
UK duration <sup>3</sup> (Months)	103	3.0	156.0	51.7	38.0

Table 4.2 Survey: Length of stay in the UK in months (Q9)

#### 4.4.1.2 Learning culture through homestay

With respect to the importance of raising cultural awareness in second language learning, the results from Q19 show that many (c. 64%) of the 103 respondents to Q19A agreed that ‘becoming aware of cultural differences or correspondences between the UK and Korea helped them to develop conversational skills in English’ (Q19A). This is shown in the Table 4.3:

Q19A : During your stay in the UK, how far do you think that becoming aware of cultural differences or correspondences between the UK and Korea helped you to develop conversational skills in English?

	Rating	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	1(not at all)	2	1.8	1.9
	2	12	10.8	11.7
	3	23	20.7	22.3
	4	40	36.0	38.8
	5(very much)	26	23.4	25.2
	Total	103	92.7	100.0
Missing		8	7.2	
Total		111	100.0	

Table 4.3 Survey: Awareness of culture in second language learning (Q19)

The average score of 3.73 suggests that most of the respondents believed that cultural understanding was an important factor in improving their oral communicative language skills. At a general level, one might expect that learning English as a second language in an overseas country would help students to understand the host culture better and, as discussed earlier (section 2.2.3.1), such factors are known to motivate Korean students to study overseas in the hope of cross-cultural experience in a different cultural context



(Beaver and Tuck, 1999).

Overseas study can enable some students to experience the culture of an English-speaking country in a very direct way. Homestay is one such method. Among the advantages of homestay living is that the students, are or ought to be exposed to cultural life with a local family and can see how different daily life is from that in their home country. As Robbins (2001:1) comments, 'the main advantage of homestay is the individual, personal attention that students receive from their teacher, who has time to focus on exactly the areas that students need to improve'. The interaction occurs generally in an informal and comfortable setting such as having a meal, a coffee break, gardening together, or watching TV in a living room, and conversation can cover a broad range of topics. Although the homestay family is thus immediately more likely to become a source of support, helping the students adapt to their new environment and learn English, it is questionable how far homestay family hosts are supposed to act as teachers. This can differ across personal or situational factors. Interestingly, more than fifty percent of the respondents in the preliminary interviews had had homestay experience and reported experiencing cultural differences (section 3.3), but the proportion was lower and not more than 50% (43.69%) here.

Q14 Have you ever experienced living as a homestay with an English speaking family in the UK or other English-speaking countries?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Yes	45	40.54	43.69
	No	58	52.22	56.31
	Total	103	92.79	100.0
Missing		8	7.2	
Total		111	100.0	

Table 4.4 Survey: Frequency of homestay experience

However, 60% of the students who answered the question positively tended not to have interacted very actively with their homestay family as the results of Q16 show:

Q16 How often did you talk to your last homestay family about your daily life, including cultural aspects of life?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Almost never	3	2.7	6.7
	Less than 1 hour a day	24	21.6	53.3
	1-2 hours a day	10	9.0	22.2
	More than 2 hours a day	8	6.5	17.8
	Total	45	40.5	100.0
Missing		66	59.5	
Total		111	100.0	

Table 4.5 Survey: Frequency of interaction with homestay family

The above data show that 53.3% of the 45 respondents had less than one hour's conversation a day with their homestay family. Despite the more encouraging results from 40.0% of the respondents who answered 1-2, or more than 2 hours a day, the

degree of the students' interaction with native speakers might not have been as much as the students had expected. For this reason, it is likely that overseas students may have felt that they had less opportunity to learn English conversational skills and cultural information than they had hoped. Thus, it is worthwhile investigating further how students' satisfaction with their social life overseas and their interaction with native speakers changes from the beginning of the term to the end of the academic year. In study 2, I will examine this through a series of in-depth interviews.

In addition, 44.4% of the respondents to Q17 (N=94) had noticed and experienced cultural differences in the area 'Respect toward family member's personal life'. 40% had also experienced cultural differences with respect to 'Roles within a family: who does what', deriving, like respect, from differences between individualistic and collectivistic cultural values, as shown in Table 4.6.

Q17 Did you experience cultural differences in family customs with the homestay family? Please tick as many as are relevant.

	Responses*	Percentage of total responses*	Percentage of the 'Yes' respondents
Roles within a family: who does what	18	27.7%	40.0%
Wedding customs	7	10.8 %	15.6%
Respect toward family member's personal life (individual. vs. collective values)	20	30.8%	44.4%
The way of taking care of and disciplining children	14	21.5%	31.1%
Other	6	9.2%	13.3%
	N of total responses=65		N of the Yes respondents=45

\*Multiple responses were possible. Percentages are percentages of total responses, not respondents.

Table 4.6 Survey: Cultural differences noticed during homestay

Two sample responses to Q18 serve to illustrate this:

*I have felt that each member in a family in the UK is more independent, open, and individual, while in Korea, the relationship between family members is emphasized. (P 67. Female. Undergraduate. Translation)*

*It appears that parents intervene in their kids' lives less in the UK. In general, individualism is overwhelming in UK families. Also, the relationship between parents and children is equal, while that of Korean society is still vertical and hierarchal. (P 50. Male. Masters. Translation)*

Although the respondents' subjective emotions or prejudices will have affected their perceptions, the data nevertheless suggest that there were some genuine cultural differences between life in the two countries as regards the tendency towards individualism or collectivism.

#### **4.4.1.3. Cultural adjustment when studying overseas**

The 'Internationalization' or 'globalization' of higher education, as well as the 'educational zeal' of Korean families, has encouraged Korean students to study overseas (section 2.3.1) and thus the whole number of Korean students who were studying overseas to take degree programmes has increased by 14 % from 2006 to 2007 (Korean-American Educational Commission, 2007). This can be explained by several factors relating to the benefits of overseas study, such as learning English as a second language, achieving an academic degree, or learning culture by immersing oneself in the host culture (Williams, 1987; Dwyer and Peters, 2004). It is, therefore of considerable interest to note how far Korean students in UK universities feel their experience when at



university matches their expectations. The data from Q22 suggest that the Korean students in the sample were least satisfied with the level of informal interaction with British people (Table 4.7 to 4.12).

Q22A To what extent are you satisfied with the following aspects of your life in the UK?: 'Academic achievement'

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	1 (very dissatisfied)	5	4.5	5.1
	2	7	6.8	7.1
	3	31	27.0	31.3
	4	39	35.1	39.4
	5 (very satisfied)	17	15.3	17.2
	Total	99	80.1	100.0
Missing		12	10.8	
Total		111	100.0	

Table 4.7 Survey: satisfaction with 'academic achievement in the UK

Q22B To what extent are you satisfied with the following aspects of your life in the UK?: 'Improvement in spoken English'

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	1 (very dissatisfied)	6	5.4	6.1
	2	12	10.8	12.1
	3	27	24.3	27.3
	4	38	34.2	38.4
	5 (very satisfied)	16	14.4	16.2
	Total	99	80.1	100.0
Missing		12	10.8	
Total		111	100.0	

Table 4.8 Survey: Satisfaction with 'improvement in spoken English' in the UK

Q22C To what extent are you satisfied with the following aspects of your life in the UK?: 'Improvement in written English'

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	1(very dissatisfied)	5	4.5	5.1
	2	10	9.0	10.1
	3	27	24.3	27.3
	4	41	36.0	41.4
	5(very satisfied)	16	14.4	16.2
	Total	99	80.1	100.0
Missing		12	10.8	
Total		111	100.0	

Table 4.9 Survey: Satisfaction with 'improvement in written English' in the UK

Q22D To what extent are you satisfied with the following aspects of your life in the UK?: 'Number of British friends'

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	1 (very dissatisfied)	12	10.8	12.1
	2	28	25.2	28.3
	3	26	23.4	26.3
	4	23	20.7	23.2
	5 (very satisfied)	10	9.0	10.1
	Total	99	80.1	100.0
Missing		25	10.8	
Total		111	100.0	

Table 4.10 Survey: Satisfaction with "Number of British Friends" in the UK

Q22E To what extent are you satisfied with the following aspects of your life in the UK?: ‘Interaction with academic staff’

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	1 (very dissatisfied)	8	7.2	8.1
	2	16	14.4	16.2
	3	34	30.6	34.3
	4	34	30.6	34.3
	5 (very satisfied)	7	6.3	7.1
	Total	99	80.1	100.0
Missing		12	10.8	
Total		111	100.0	

Table 4.11 Survey: Satisfaction with ‘interaction with academic staff’ in the UK

	Q22A	Q22B	Q22C	Q22D	Q22E
Average score /5	3.56	3.46	3.53	2.90	3.16

Table 4.12 Survey: Average level of satisfaction with the five aspects of UK life

It appears to be the case that it is harder to interact informally with British friends than with academic staff. This is also supported by the results of a recent survey on ‘sociocultural adjustment to Britain, by Chinese foundation students at a British university’, where respondents rated making friends as the second of nine areas of difficulty<sup>4</sup> (Spencer-Oatey and Xiong 2006). Indeed, international students generally have been found to socialize in national groups rather than in groups with British people (Lewins, 1991:101). Various reasons suggest themselves for this isolation. Firstly, there is low communicative competence in the second language, which can impede students from being sociable with British people. This occurs generally at the point of first

arrival, and they are, according to Lewins(1991), likely to feel more confident about communicating in English as their second language as they stay longer. However, how far this actually happens remains unclear and needs to be investigated further. Secondly, international students' socialization may be directly connected with feelings of homesickness and loneliness, a topic which seems to be easier to investigate in interviews rather than by questionnaire.

#### *A. Social interaction with native speakers in the UK*

The degree or breadth of interaction with native speakers might seriously impact on how the students adapt to the new environment of the host country, as well as on the extent to which they improve their English communicational skills. This also extends to their cultural attitudes toward the host culture, and could contribute to whether or not they experience culture shock or other psychological phenomena.

First, the results from Q20 and Q21 show the range of interaction with native speakers (see Table 4.13).



Q20 Which native speakers do you interact with in the course of a typical week? Tick all that are relevant.

	Frequencies*	Percentage of total responses*	Percentage of sample (N= 111)
Lecturers/ Academic staff (e.g. supervisors)	75	36.6%	67.6%
Catering staff	20	9.8%	18.0%
Friends in college (accommodation)/courses	67	32.7%	60.4%
Friends outside college	35	17.1%	31.5%
Other	8	3.9%	7.2%
	N of total responses =205		

\*Multiple responses were possible.

Table 4.13 Survey: Range of interaction with native speakers (Q20)

As predicted, the above results reflect the fact that most of students' interaction takes place with course mates or academic staff in academic settings. Since students could tick whichever groups they interacted with, it was possible to compute a new six-point variable (Q20 total) whose values represented the number of groups ticked. This gave a rough index of the breadth of interaction and could be used to establish who had minimal interaction with any groups.

Q20total

	Number of items ticked	Frequency	Percent
Valid	0	12	10.8
	1	35	31.4
	2	36	32.4
	3	16	14.4
	4	10	9.0
	5	2	1.8
	Total	111	100.0

Table 4.14 Survey: Breadth of interaction with native speakers

This computation makes the assumption that the 12 people who ticked none were genuinely implying that they did not meet any native speakers. This may be true, but the data may represent forgetting or even misinterpretation of the question. Despite this slight uncertainty about the valid number of respondents, the proportion of respondents who ticked none, 1, or 2 of the five items was almost 74%, which strongly suggests that the breadth of interaction by Korean students in UK universities seemed to be quite limited, being restricted to a few areas like academic contexts. Further research is needed to investigate how actively students interact informally off campus and what they do to try to have more interaction with native speakers.

The results from Q21, with the same method of recomputing the data to give a Q21total, show the breadth of interaction with native speakers through participation in social activities both on and off campus:

Q21 If you participate in any organised social activities with native speakers of English in the UK, which things do you take part in? Please tick **all** the things that you take part in.

	Frequencies	Percentage of total responses	Percentage of sample (N= 111)
Leisure clubs (e.g. Dancing, sports)	34	26.8%	30.6%
Volunteer work such as working for disabled or elder people, or counselling	8	6.3%	7.2%
Study group	25	19.7%	22.5%
Part time job (such as serving at 'party' or seminar lunch, working at university library)	24	18.9%	21.6%
Religious group	28	22.0%	25.2%
Other	8	6.3 %	7.2%
		N of total responses =127	

Table 4.15 Survey: Range of participation in social activities

Q21total

	Number of items ticked	Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	0	35	31.5
	1	41	36.9
	2	25	22.5
	3	9	8.1
	4	1	0.9
	Total	111	100.0

Table 4.16 Survey: Breadth of participation in social activities

As Table 4.15 shows, the Korean students broadened their social interaction with English people through leisure clubs (30.6%), religious groups (25.2%), study groups

(22.5%), part time jobs (21.6%), volunteer work (7.2%), and undefined other activities (7.2%). An interesting point is that the proportion of respondents who ticked ‘religious groups’ was as high as 25.2% ,which may suggest that participation in religious social activities is one of the main aspects of social life by Korean students generally in the UK. In Table 4.16, the problem of the valid number of respondents again occurred, but as in the case of Q20 total, the assumption was that the 35 people were implying that they did not participate in any social activities with native speakers in the UK. This assumption is less likely to be problematic than Q20total given that social activities are not an essential part of competing their degree courses. More than 90% of respondents, who ticked none, 1, or 2, again showed the Korean students’ limited level of interaction in UK universities, particularly in non-academic contexts. It is worth investigating further how far their participation in these activities encourages interaction with native speakers, and the improvement of communicational skills in English.

At a more specific level, I examined the relationship between the breadth of interaction and several other areas of life in the UK. First, I examined how far the breadth of interaction with native speakers (Q21 total) correlated with improving communicational skills in English (Q34). At 92, the sample size was considered large enough to use a Pearson product moment correlation.

Q21total x Q34	N	(Spearman) rho	P (2-tailed)
	92	-.288	.005

Table 4.17 Survey: Breadth of interaction and perceived improvement in participation in classroom interaction

The results show a lowish, but significant (at the 0.005 level) negative association



between breadth of meeting native speakers and participation in class – students who were more active in class tended, surprisingly, to interact with fewer NS groups. The correlation is possibly lowish because Korean students tend in general not to be very active in classes (section 2.3.2.1), but it might be wondered to what extent encouraging them to meet more people outside class might give them the confidence to participate more actively in formal class environments.

Second, I also examined the correlation between the breadth of interaction (Q21 total) and the degree of favourable attitude toward British culture (Q23: Have you developed a more favourable attitude toward target (British) culture since coming to the UK?).

	N	(Spearman) rho	p (2 tailed)	Sig. level.
Q21 total x Q23A	99	.258	.010	0.05

Table 4.18 Survey: Breadth of interaction and attitude toward British culture

The results (Table 4.18) show that the Korean students who participated in more social activities with native speakers in the UK tended to have more favourable attitudes towards British culture. Again the association is lowish, at around 0.3, but nevertheless significant, suggesting that students who interacted with more groups tended, in general, to have more favourable views towards British culture. Associations do not establish causality, but again one might encourage students to develop more favourable attitudes, on the assumption that active participation in interaction with native speakers through various social activities can enable the students to ‘have empathy for the values and perspectives of cultures other than their own, and an awareness of international and multicultural influences in their own lives’ (Gary, Murdock, and Stebbins, 2002:4)

The correlations between breadth of interaction and satisfaction are reported in Tables 4.19 to 4.23. Except for one (satisfaction with interaction with academic staff), the other four reached significance; satisfaction with academic achievement, satisfaction with both spoken English and written English, and satisfaction with number of Korean friends. This time, the nature of the items logically suggests a degree of directionality – interaction is more likely to contribute to satisfaction than the other way round.

Q21 total x Q22A	N	(Spearman) rho	p (2 tailed)
	99	.225	.025

Table 4.19 Survey: breadth of interaction and satisfaction with ‘academic achievement’

Q21 total x Q22B	N	(Spearman) rho	p (2 tailed)
	99	.216	.031

Table 4.20 Survey: breadth of interaction and satisfaction with ‘improvement in spoken English’

Q21 total x Q22C	N	(Spearman) rho	p (2 tailed)
	99	.286	.004

Table 4.21 Survey: breadth of interaction and satisfaction with ‘improvement in written English’

Q21 total x Q22D	N	(Spearman) rho	p (2 tailed)
	99	.268	.007

Table 4.22 Survey: breadth of interaction and satisfaction with ‘number of British friends’

Q21 total x Q22E	N	(Spearman) rho	p (2 tailed)
	99	.130	.199

Table 4.23 Survey: breadth of interaction and satisfaction with 'interaction with academic staff'

It is not unreasonable to argue that many Korean students expect to have a fair amount of interaction with local people to improve their spoken skills of English, and students who have more interaction tend to be more satisfied with their social interaction with British friends in and outside university. It is thus worth investigating further how far attempts to increase interaction can lead to developing a broader range of social contact with British friends in and outside university.

Despite the important role of social interaction in Korean students' lives, the lack of it does not appear to be significantly associated with the incidence of cultural withdrawal. This is shown in the following tables where a t-test for independent samples was used on Q24 (Have you ever experienced any *withdrawal*?) and Q20total (breadth of NS contacts), and Q24 and Q21 total (breadth of activities with NS). In both cases, Levene test showed that the sample variances were not significantly different (the probability levels were well above 0.05).

#### Group Statistics

	Q24	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Q20total	Yes	27	2.370	1.115	.215
	No	71	1.958	1.034	.123

Independent Samples Test

Q20total	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.750	.389	1.727	96	.087	.413	.239	-6.16E-02	.887
Equal variances not assumed			1.670	44.061	.102	.413	.247	-8.54E-02	.911

Table 4.24. Survey: Breadth of interaction with native speakers and cultural withdrawal

Group Statistics

	Q24	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Q21total	Yes	27	1.222	1.086	.209
	No	71	1.239	.902	.107



Independent Samples Test

Q21total	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.451	.504	-.080	96	.937	-1.721E-02	.216	.446	.412
Equal variances not assumed			-.073	40.391	.942	-1.721E-02	.235	.492	.457

Table 4.25. Survey: Breadth of interaction in activities with native speakers and cultural withdrawal

In both cases, the result was non-significant. This is particularly interesting given the fact that I would expect that the students who experience cultural withdrawal are unlikely to be active in social activities with native speakers, and vice versa. This topic is perhaps not ideally suited to questionnaire surveys; it is more appropriate to discuss it in face-to-face interviews and will be explored further in study 2.

As well as the breadth of interaction so far discussed, I examined the association between the degree of interaction with native speakers in the UK and adaptation to a new culture in both academic contexts and other aspects of overseas daily life. The first point was to see how far the students who spent more time discussing with native speakers both formally and informally (Q30) had a favourable attitude towards British culture (Q23A).

Q30 x Q23A	N	(Pearson) r	p (2 tailed)
	99	.140	.184

Table 4.26. Survey: Correlation between degree of interaction and favourable attitude towards British culture

The result rather surprisingly was again not significant, but it is also possible that time spent depends somewhat on whom the students talk to. The result might differ depending on whether they discuss things with their supervisor or their British flatmates.

Second, the correlation between the degree of interaction and English communication skills was examined: specifically how far the degree of the interaction with native speakers related to the three English pragmatic areas in Q26. This is based on the assumption that pragmatic competence is one of the most important areas of second language communicative skills (Byon, 2004). Not only does successful communication require linguistic ability relying on vocabulary and grammar, but it also requires knowledge of behaviours and linguistic expression appropriate to the cultural conventions of the country. It may accordingly be expected that interaction with native speakers would help to enhance pragmatic competence in the second language.

The following Tables show the Pearson correlations for Q26a ('How to respond to a compliment from a native speaker in the UK'), Q26b (how to express disagreement or refusal to a native speaker in the UK context), and Q26c ('How to make a request to a native speaker in the UK').

Correlation

	N	(Pearson) r	p (2 tailed)
Q30x Q26A	92	.257	.013

Table 4.27 Survey: Correlation between degree of interaction and 'how to respond to a compliment from a native speaker in the UK'

Correlation

	N	(Pearson) r	p (2 tailed)
Q30x Q26B	92	.233	.025

Table 4.28 Survey: Correlation between degree of interaction and 'how to express disagreement or refusal in the UK'

Correlation

	N	(Pearson) r	p (2 tailed)
Q30x Q26c	92	.343	.001

Table 4.29 Survey: Correlation between degree of interaction and 'how to make a request to a native speaker in the UK'

All three results were significant though again they were all around  $r = 0.2$  to  $0.3$ . It might be tentatively concluded that the amount of the interaction does seem to have been affected by pragmatic competence in spoken English. Inversely, it may also be possible that people who have a higher level of pragmatic competence in English are more likely to have more interaction with native speakers.

In addition to examining the association between interaction and pragmatic skills, I examined the link between interaction and seminar behaviour – specifically with respect to (a) actively participating in seminars containing native speakers (Q31), (b) avoiding giving strong arguments (Q33A), and (c) avoiding giving opinions (Q34A).

It will be recalled that all three are problematic areas for many Korean students (see 2.3.2). The correlations are given in Tables 4.22 to 4.24. and the results were all significant in the three cases.

**Correlation**

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

Q30x Q31	N	(Pearson) r	p (2 tailed)
	92	.413	.000

**Table 4.30 Survey: Correlation between degree of interaction with native speakers and active participation in seminars**

**Correlations**

**Q33 Do you normally avoid expressing strong arguments in seminar discussions?**

Q30 x Q33A	N	(Pearson) r	p (2 tailed)
	92	-.210	.044

**Table 4.31 Survey: Correlation between degree of interaction with native speakers and avoiding giving strong argument in seminar discussion**

**Correlation**

**Q34 Do you normally avoid suggesting your ideas to the whole class or a large group?**

Q30 x Q34A	N	(Pearson) r	p (2 tailed)
	92	-.344	.001

**Table 4.32 Survey: Correlation between degree of interaction with native speakers and avoiding giving opinions in whole class**

These associations above are again fairly predictable; I would expect the students who have more interaction with native speakers to tend to be more active in seminar



discussions in Table 4.30. The two negative correlations in Table 4.31 and Table 4.32 imply that the students who had less interaction with native speakers are more likely to avoid being active in seminar discussions.

So far, it has been found that the degree of interaction with native speakers is closely linked to communicational skills in English that involve culture-specific aspects. Finally, I tried to investigate the relationship between the degree of interaction and the degree of satisfaction with particular aspects of life in the UK (Q22). To do this, I examined the correlation between Q30 and Q22a, Q22b, Q22c, Q22d, and Q22e. The result was that the correlations with Q22b, Q22d, and Q22e were significant while those with Q22a and Q22c were not. (See tables 4.33 to 4.37).

#### Correlation

Q30x Q22A	N	(Pearson) r	p (2 tailed)
	92	.194	.064

Table 4.33 Survey: Correlation between degree of interaction with native speakers and satisfaction with 'academic achievement'

#### Correlation

Q30x Q22B	N	(Pearson) r	p (2 tailed)
	92	.306	.003

Table 4.34 Survey: Correlation between degree of interaction with native speakers and satisfaction with 'improvement in spoken English'

Correlation

Q30x Q22C	N	(Pearson) r	p (2 tailed)
	92	.188	.073

Table 4.35 Survey: Correlation between degree of interaction with native speakers and satisfaction with 'improvement in written English'

Correlations

Q30x Q22D	N	(Pearson) r	p (2 tailed)
	92	.540	.000

Table 4.36 Survey: Correlation between degree of interaction with native speakers and satisfaction with 'number of British friends'

Correlations

Q30x Q22D	N	(Pearson) r	p (2 tailed)
	92	.349	.001

Table 4.37 Survey: Correlation between degree of interaction with native speakers and satisfaction with 'interaction with academic staff'

We might logically infer a degree of directionality again here, that Korean students' degree of interaction with English native speakers in UK perhaps influences the degree of satisfaction with 'improvement of spoken English', 'number of British friends', and 'interaction with academic staff' which are communication-related aspects of overseas life. This suggests that students who discuss with native speakers more frequently or for a long time may tend to be more satisfied with their overseas life, especially with enhancing their spoken English skills and having British friends. 'Having British friends' in Q22 relates to Korean students' 'social adaptation' on and off campus. Particularly in the light of Ingman and Ollendick's (1999: nd) US survey finding, 'many

international students fail to develop significantly interpersonal relationships with American students and report lower levels of social adjustment than American students'. In this respect, it is worth investigating further how and to what extent Korean students actually make a positive effort to have many British friends in the UK. Thus, further research may show how far Korean students are concerned about developing social interaction with native speakers in UK and how they try to overcome any problems or difficulties with social adjustment.

So far the focus has been on social interaction and social adjustment during study abroad: how many social activities Korean students participate in, who they typically meet in the UK, and how much time per week they usually spend speaking to native speakers relates to their satisfaction with certain aspects of overseas learning and may possibly help to develop communicative competence skills. We might suggest that a number of Korean students ought to have more frequent and broader interaction with native speakers, which would help them with more successful social adjustment. However, as mentioned above, further research is necessary to investigate how far they are in fact concerned about extending such interaction, how problematic they perceive their level of social skills to be and what attempts they make to overcome the problems.

### *B. Length of time in the UK*

As well as other factors such as the breadth or degree of interaction with native speakers discussed above, duration of stay of overseas study may determine how far students are satisfied with their overseas life or feel they can improve their English skills. I began by examining the link between duration of stay (Q9) and cultural withdrawal (Q24) using a t-test. The results are shown in Table 4.38 below and were not significant.

### Group Statistics

	Q24	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
UK duration (month)	Yes	20	48.700	40.253	9.001
	No	64	50.266	35.133	4.392

### Independent Samples Test

Q24	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.002	.966	-.168	82	.867	-1.566	9.321	-20.107	16.976
Equal variances not assumed			-.256	28.633	.877	-1.566	10.015	-22.060	18.929

Table 4.38 Survey : UK duration and experience of cultural withdrawal

This result strongly suggests the amount of time spent in the UK did not crucially affect 'cultural withdrawal'.

I next looked at the correlation between length of stay in the UK in months and Q23, in order to see how far the length of stay related to the level of favourable attitude toward British culture. The result was also non-significant (Table 4.39).

### Correlations



UK duration (months) x Q23A	N	r	p (2 tailed)
	85	.206	.059

Table 4.39.Survey: Correlation between UK duration and attitude towards British culture

This result again goes against my expectation that those who had been in the UK longer would tend to hold much more favourable views.

The relationship between stay duration and perceived pragmatic competence in communication skills (Q26a, Q26b, and Q26c) was however different, being significant in all cases.

#### Correlation

UK duration(months) x Q26A	N	(Pearson) r	p (2 tailed)
	85	.325	.002

Table 4.40 Survey: Correlation between UK duration and pragmatic competence ('how to respond to a compliment from a native speaker in the UK')

#### Correlation

UK duration(months) x Q26B	N	(Pearson) r	p (2 tailed)
	85	.331	.002

Table 4.41 Survey: Correlation between UK duration and pragmatic competence ('how to express disagreement or refusal in the UK')

#### Correlation

UK duration(months) x Q26B	N	(Pearson) r	p (2 tailed)
	85	.327	.002

Table 4.42 Survey: Correlation between UK duration and pragmatic competence ('how to make a request to a native speaker in the UK')

This suggests that Korean students who stay for a longer time are more likely to have or

report having a higher level of pragmatic competence in English even though they do not report extensive interaction with native speakers. It seems clear from the survey result with the Korean students that a longer stay is likely to contribute to intercultural competence in foreign language, but less to favourable attitudes towards culture or its opposite, feelings of complete cultural withdrawal.

When stay was correlated with the four aspects of overseas life and language use, the results were as follows.

**Correlation**

UK duration (months) x Q22A	N	(Pearson) r	p (2 tailed)
	85	.084	.443

Table 4.43 Survey: Correlation between UK duration and satisfaction with ‘academic achievement’

**Correlations**

UK duration (months) x Q22B	N	(Pearson) r	p (2 tailed)
	85	.222	.041

Table 4.44 Survey: Correlation between UK duration and satisfaction with ‘improvement in spoken English’

**Correlation**

UK duration (months) x Q22C	N	(Pearson) r	p (2 tailed)
	85	.216	.047

Table 4.45 Survey: Correlation between UK duration and satisfaction with ‘improvement in written English’

**Correlation**

UK duration (months) x Q22d	N	(Pearson) r	p (2 tailed)
	85	.355	.001

Table 4.46 Survey: Correlation between UK duration and satisfaction with ‘number of British friends’

### Correlation

UK duration (months) x Q22E	N	(Pearson) r	p (2 tailed)
	85	.234	.031

Table 4.47 Survey: Correlation between UK duration and satisfaction with ‘interaction with academic staff’

Stay duration was significantly associated with improving spoken and written English the number of British friends, and interaction with academic staff, but not with satisfaction with academic achievement. However, the data do not indicate how fast the students adjusted to a different academic context by overcoming the difficulties or challenges they faced: this is again something that is better explored via interviews and will be discussed in study 2.

Finally, I examined the further correlation between length of stay and Q30 (‘How much time per week do you spend discussing things (formally + informally) with native speakers?’) to see if the length of overseas study related to the degree of interaction with native speakers in UK (Table 4.48).

### Correlations

UK duration (month) x Q30	N	(Pearson) r	p (2 tailed)
	80	.357	.001

Table 4.48. Survey: Correlation between UK duration and degree of interaction with native speakers

The correlation between the two was significant at the 0.01 level, and matched my expectation that the students who stay longer are more likely to spend more time per week in discussion with native speakers.

In short, the length of stay correlations partly support the ‘more is better’ ideas

of Dewyer and Peters (2004:2) 'the longer students study abroad, the more significant the academic and cultural development and personal growth benefits' as well as the findings of the survey by 'Institute for the International Education of Students'(IES) (2004) - which concluded that a longer stay gives greater benefits in several areas including 'intercultural development' and 'academic commitment' (Dewyer and Peters, 2004:2). Specifically, 88% of more than 3,400 respondents in the IES survey reported that intercultural development 'continues to influence interactions with people from different cultures' (Dewyer and Peters, 2004:2) for their full year.

So far the duration of overseas study has been discussed as a major factor impacting on certain areas of overseas learning: a longer stay appears to enhance communicative competence in intercultural communications and result in a higher degree of interaction with native speakers. Also, long stay students feel more confident about interacting with British friends and academic staff, and using spoken and written English.

#### **4.4.1.4 Cultural learning in different areas:**

The main part of the questionnaire is concerned with where students' main problems lie in relation to specific cultural factors. This section focuses on the different genres or tasks which Korean students often experience during their academic courses, such as seminars, lectures, supervision sessions, and academic writing assessments (see Chapter 3: Pilot study). Although other activities, such as going shopping or meeting neighbours, are relevant to students' overall experience, this part deals with more institutionally-based aspects of their overseas learning. Rather than highlighting intergroup differences, my main aim here is to identify what areas appeared to be problematic to the sample as



a whole, as a result of cultural differences in the new academic context of a UK university. I anticipated in particular that problems would be related to the key Korean cultural factors of face, hierarchy, and collectivism discussed in Chapter 2.

The survey results will contribute to gaining an overall understanding of how far Korean students in UK universities adapt themselves to different academic expectations or norms, given that many Asian students have been reported as having difficulties or challenges in a new cultural setting (see section 2.3.2.1).

***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 4.49 to 4.50.

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

		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	

Table 4.49 Survey: Passive behaviour in seminars

Q33A Do you normally avoid expressing strong arguments in seminar discussions?

		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	

Table 4.50 Survey: Passive behavior in seminars: avoiding expressing strong arguments

Q35 Do you usually tend to ask the teacher questions?

		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	

Table 4.51 Survey: passive behaviour: asking the teacher questions

55.4% of the 92 respondents who answered Q31 reported ‘active participation in just a few seminars’ (see table 4.50). 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 answered that they usually asked the teacher questions after class, and 27.2% instead

chose to send the lecturers emails personally if they wanted to ask a question (Q35, see table 4.51). The sample students had a strong tendency to avoid asking lecturers questions and passivity seems widespread. This would appear to support the general cultural assumptions reported earlier about Asian overseas students, and Koreans, in particular. It was noted in section 2.3.2.1 that Confucian values such as agreement, harmony, face were very much emphasized in Korean society, and that Korean 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 westernised (Egeler, 1996). As I noted earlier, Korean students also tend to avoid asking questions, in order to avoid interrupting teachers so that the teachers will not lose face. In Korea, questioning is often interpreted as challenging teachers' authority.

This passivity can also be partly explained by the fact that Korean students are interacting in English, a second language, and not 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, as Cortazzi & Jin (1997) found for Chinese students that the effect of these cultural factors held true even where English proficiency was high. It would be of considerable interest to discover how their lecturers reacted to the students' passivity, and more importantly, what might be realistically be done to help Korean learners.

This survey was essentially cross-sectional and undertaken when all

respondents had had at least 8 months in the UK. The results thus hide the patterns of adaptation. One might assume that many Koreans would be very passive in lectures and seminars at the beginning of the year, so it is important to examine how they change term by term. If we presume that Korean students find the UK system difficult, it is necessary to examine how they go about adjusting to British expectations, including how far they perceive the different cultural norms or conventions in learning and teaching contexts between the two countries.

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 again worth doing further in-depth research on how far Korean students can adjust themselves to active participation in the classroom. This again is more easily achieved by interviews than questionnaire and will be addressed in study 2.

***How does the Korean concept of 'face' affect 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 4.52) did not show up the details.



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)

	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.

Table 4.52 Survey: Perception of cultural differences in supervision

In particular, 54.0% of the sample said that they found cultural differences with respect to the relationship between supervisors and students in relation to different cultural norms. The results were similar to those I received from the preliminary interviews with the 15 Korean students in section 3.3.4.1. All 15 interviewees agreed that 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, which made the students more ready to approach their supervisors. 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. 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. 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 a 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 them on a relatively

equal basis. As previously noted from the preliminary interview data, this cultural difference in the supervisor - student relationship between two countries often causes problems or challenges that Korean students need to overcome when studying overseas. Both sides need to both be aware of the differences and to adapt to a new kind of relationship.

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 Q37 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.

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. I will consider in more detail in the in-depth interviews how far Korean students find these differences are problematic and how they overcome difficulties.

***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 (table 4.46.)



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)

	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 responses=111		

\*Multiple responses were possible.

Table 4.53 Survey: Writing an academic essay: In what areas have you found cultural differences in traditions and expectations?

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. I will discuss these one by one.

First, as both the preliminary interview data and survey data show, the extent to which plagiarism was emphasized was of considerable concern to the Korean students. It was assumed from the literature review that ‘copying’ as a cultural issue between collectivistic and individualistic cultural contexts might lead Korean students to experience cultural conflicts when studying overseas (see section 2.3.2.1.) and 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’ (Chapter 3.4.1). 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 only 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 never 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)*

Presuming that this is an area in which Korean students experienced difficulties, how far it becomes a source of serious problems and what the students do to overcome them will be investigated in the in-depth interviews in study 2.

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 interview data (see section 3.4.1.) where it was suggested that, first, each higher education context had its own traditional way of structuring arguments: inductive methods in English and deductive ones in Korean. This is also based on the assumption from the literature review that there are cultural differences in communication styles, particularly in rhetorical patterns in both spoken and written English (see section 2.3.2.2.1.). Moreover, Korean students tend to be more indirect in discourse than people from more individualistic cultures (Ambady et al., 1996; Holtgarves, 1997, cited in Sanchez-Burks, et al., 2003). 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 and Jin 1997, Windle, 2000, see also section 2.3.2.2.A). 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)*

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. This is also a point that also emerged in the preliminary interviews (see section 3.4.2).

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)*

*I often encountered difficulty with translation deriving from sociocultural differences as a researcher doing a PhD course in 'medical history'. For instance, I still struggle with translation of 'Jung', 'gi' and 'sin', which are the main medical concepts coming from the Chosun Dynasty, into English. Thus, I have used a footnote to explain the meaning of these terms. (P98. Male. PhD. Translation)*

The results concerning difficulties with writing academic essays are still fairly general. It would be useful to find out, in 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. This again is more suited to investigation by interview and will be addressed in Part 2.

***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 4.54.

Q40 If you found any differences between how to give feedback, comment or marks, what do they relate to?  
(Tick all that are relevant)

	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.



Table 4.54 Survey: Marker's feedback, comments, or marks on academic performance: In what areas have you noticed cultural differences?

The preliminary interviews suggested 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. The results of Q40 seem generally to support this hypothesis. 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. This may conversely suggest that they believed that feedback in Korean universities was not helpful.

Most of the reports from Q41 suggested that 'anonymity or fairness in assessment' was more regulated and guaranteed in the UK. This corresponds again to the results from the preliminary interviews (see section 3.4.1). 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. This will be addressed in the next study .

So far, the survey data from Q36 to Q41 have made it clear that several

differences in academic culture between the two countries were noticed by the Korean respondents. Moreover, many aspects of the data, especially from open-format items, such as Q37, Q39, and Q41, correspond closely with the responses in the preliminary interviews. 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 downside is that data cannot be as rich and detailed as one might desire. The best way to achieve this richness is via qualitative analyses (Dörnyei, 2003).

#### **4.4.2. Who has the most problems and is least satisfied?**

The second main part of the data analysis involves testing intergroup differences among the three groups (undergraduates, masters, and PhD). The sample size for each group becomes much smaller (undergraduate (35), masters (36) and PhD (40)), but it still possible to get an idea about how far the three different groups felt satisfied with various aspects of their life overseas in higher education, including social interaction and how far they felt they had developed their communicative competence in cross-cultural communication. The results are important as they were used to help to determine which group will be focused on in study 2.

First, in order to assess the mean differences in the duration of overseas study among the groups, I ran a one-way ANOVA with 'length of stay in the UK as the dependent variable.

Q :UK duration (months)

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Under*	39	69.000	40.658	6.511	55.820	82.180	9.00	156.00
Master	34	36.471	30.006	5.146	26.001	46.940	10.00	124.00
PhD	30	46.400	34.246	6.253	33.612	59.188	3.00	144.00
Total	103	51.680	37.955	3.740	44.262	59.098	3.00	156.00

\*Under= Undergraduates

Table 4.55 Survey: group differences in UK duration

### Test of Homogeneity of Variances

UK duration (month)

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
2.020	2	100	.138

### ANOVA

UK duration (month)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	20400.757	2	10200.378	8.061	.001
Within Groups	126541.671	100	1265.417		
Total	146942.427	102			

**Post Hoc Test**

**Multiple Comparisons**

Dependent Variable: UK duration (month)

**Tukey HSD**

		Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
(I) Q4	(J) Q4				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Under	Master	32.529*	8.347	.001	12.672	52.387
	PhD	22.600*	8.639	.027	2.048	43.153
Master	Under	-32.529*	8.347	.001	-52.387	-12.672
	PhD	-9.929	8.911	.508	-31.129	11.270
PhD	Under	-22.600*	8.639	.027	-43.153	-2.048
	Master	9.929	8.911	.508	-11.270	31.129

\* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Table 4.56 Survey: Length of stay by academic level (ANOVA)

The overall result was significant ( $p=0.01$ ), for the three means of undergraduates (69.0) > PhD (46.4) > masters students (36.5). The masters students had thus been in the UK for the shortest amount of time. The Post Hoc Test shows that the mean differences between Undergraduate and the two graduate groups are significant, but that between Masters' and PhD group is not. In addition, the difference between undergraduates and PhD students also reaches significance.

The next question was to establish whether the groups interacted differently with native speakers. To this end, I performed a one-way ANOVA, with the transformed Q20 total as the dependent variable. Q20 total, it will be recalled, is a measure of reported breadth of interaction.



**Descriptive Statistics**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Q20total	103	1.99	1.116	.00	5
Q4	111	3.99	.832	3	5

**Kruskal-Wallis Test**

**Ranks**

Q4		N	Mean Rank
Q20total	Under	34	57.74
	Master	31	50.27
	PhD	38	48.28
	Total	103	

**Test Statistics (Grouping variable Q4)**

	Q20total
Chi-Square	2.137
df	2
Asymp.Sig	.343

Table 4.57 Survey: Breadth of interaction with native speakers by academic level (Kruskal -Wallis test)

The result was non-significant, although both masters' and PhD's means were lower than the undergraduate mean. To aid clarification, I transformed the variable into 3 scores and, created a new 'Q20 condensed'; rating 2 and 3 were recoded as 2, and 4 and 5 as 3.

Q4 \* Q20 Condensed Crosstabulation

		Q20 Condensed			Total	
		1.00	2.00	3.00		
Q4	Under	Count	8	21	5	34
		%	23.5%	61.8%	14.7%	100.0%
	Master	Count	13	15	3	31
		%	41.9%	48.4%	9.7%	100.0%
	PhD	Count	18	15	5	38
		%	47.4%	39.5%	13.2%	100.0%
Total		Count	39	51	13	103
		%	37.9%	49.5%	12.6%	100.0%

Table 4.58 Survey: breadth of interaction with native speakers by academic level (Crosstabulation)

Visually, the number of undergraduates in class 1 (i.e. few contacts) was half that in the masters or PhD groups (23.5% vs. 41.9% and 47.4%). Although the difference between the means was not significant in the Kruskal-Wallis Test above (Table 4.57), the visual displays in Table 4.58 show that both masters and PhD students had lower levels of social interaction or contact with native speakers than the undergraduate groups.

Another example of intergroup differences in social life comes from the data in Q21total, which it will be recalled, related to breadth of participation in social activities containing native speakers.

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Q21total	111	.984	.980	.00	5
Q4	111	3.99	.832	3	5

### Kruskal-Wallis Test

#### Ranks

Q4		N	Mean Rank
Q21total	Under	35	65.36
	Master	36	58.87
	PhD	40	58.51
	Total	111	

#### Test Statistics (Grouping variable Q4)

	Q21total
Chi-Square	1.105
df	2
Asymp.Sig	.576

Table 4.59 Survey: social activities with native speakers by academic level(Kruskall -Wallis test)

The overall result was again non-significant ( $p=0.58$ ), though both masters' and PhD's means were lower than the undergraduate mean.

Thus, the test results for the three groups with respect to Q20 total, and Q21total have not shown any significant intergroup differences for social interaction, even though from a raw data point of view, the masters' and PhD's mean scores are consistently lower than the undergraduate mean score.

Third, the results from Q20total and Q21total can be directly linked to the results from Q22 (see sec. 4.4.1), which show a generally low level of satisfaction with interacting with local people. In particular, respondents were disappointed by the amount of or opportunities for, interaction they were able to have. As the results of Table 4.10 (section 4.4.1.3) suggest, it seems to be the case that it was harder to interact informally with British friends than with academic staff, which means that social interaction can be something of a struggle.

As well as looking at the overall picture of Q22, it is important to examine the intergroup differences in detail. In particular, the data suggest that the masters' students had the lowest level of satisfaction with the 'improvement in their spoken English'. As the Leven test ( $p = .006$ ) showed that the data was not appropriate for ANOVA, I performed a Kruskal-Wallis Test on Q4 (the three groups) and Q22b (Improvement in spoken English).

#### Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Q22B	99	3.46	1.091	1	5
Q4	111	3.99	.832	3	5

#### Kruskal-Wallis Test

##### Ranks

Q4		N	Mean Rank
22B	Under	33	67.98
	Master	30	40.43
	PhD	36	41.49
	Total	99	

#### Test Statistics (Grouping variable Q4)

	Q22B
Chi-Square	21.187
df	2
Asymp.Sig	.000

Table 4.60 Survey: Satisfaction with 'improvement in spoken English' by academic level (Kruskal-Wallis Test)



Table 4.60 (above) shows very marked intergroup differences, with both the masters and PhD students being considerably less satisfied with their improvement in spoken English than undergraduates. The results do not give any insight, however, into the reasons for the dissatisfaction, and further research would be useful on why they felt dissatisfied, to what extent this was a serious problem, and how they were responding to it.

With regard to other aspects of life in the UK, the masters' students appeared from the raw frequencies to be also less satisfied with the areas of 'Academic achievement' (Q22a), 'Number of British friends' (Q22d) and 'Interaction with academic staff' (Q22e) than the other groups'. A Levene test of the homogeneity of group variances for Q22a and Q22d suggested that ANOVA was not appropriate, so Kruskal-Wallis tests were used instead. Tables 4.61 to 4.63 show the results for Q22a, Q22d, and Q22e.

#### Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Q22A	99	3.57	1.022	1	5
Q4	111	3.99	.832	3	5

#### Kruskal-Wallis Test

##### Ranks

Q4		N	Mean Rank
22A	Under	33	51.45
	Master	30	46.07
	PhD	36	51.94
	Total	99	

Test Statistics (Grouping variable Q4)

	Q22A
Chi-Square	.900
df	2
Asymp.Sig	.638

Table 4.61 Survey: Satisfaction with 'academic achievement' by academic level (Kruskal-Wallis Test)

The result was non-significant, but visually masters students looked rather more dissatisfied with 'academic achievement' than the other groups, as the mean rank of each group showed: PhD (51.94) > undergraduates (51.45) > masters (46.07). This is interesting given the earlier finding that long-term overseas study does not necessarily relate to a higher level of satisfaction with academic achievement (see sec. 4.4.1.3). Further research is needed to give a clearer answer to the question of what aspects of academic culture make students feel very unsatisfied or lead them to fail to adjust during the academic year.

In Q22d, 'British friends' includes any British people they meet socially in the colleges, the department, social clubs on campus, or at any social meetings in relation to religious groups or a part-time job.

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Q22D	99	2.91	1.187	1	5
Q4	111	3.99	.832	3	5

### Kruskal-Wallis Test

#### Ranks

Q4		N	Mean Rank
Undergraduates	Q22D	33	56.47
Masters		30	43.35
PhD		36	49.61
Total		99	

#### Test Statistics (Grouping variable Q4)

	Q22D
Chi-Square	3.484
df	2
Asymp.Sig	.175

Table 4.62 Survey: Satisfaction with 'the number of British friends' by academic level (Kruskal-Wallis Test)

Although the overall result for Q22d (satisfaction with number of British friends) is non-significant, the mean rank for masters students is 43.35, versus 49.61 for the PhD and 56.47 for the undergraduates. Given the relative shortness of the course, one might expect that masters students would be least satisfied with contacting and talking to native friends in UK. However, it is important to admit that great caution needs to be taken interpreting the results.

The overall result for Q22e (interaction with academic staff) using ANOVA shows that all 3 means are virtually identical, with the masters students between the PhDs and the undergraduates. (See Table 4.63)

Q22E

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Under	33	3.091	1.071	.187	2.711	3.471	1.00	5.00
Master	30	3.100	1.185	.216	2.658	3.542	1.00	5.00
PhD	36	3.278	.914	.152	2.969	3.587	1.00	5.00
Total	99	3.162	1.047	.105	2.953	3.370	1.00	5.00

Test of Homogeneity of Variances

Q22E

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
1.389	2	96	.254

ANOVA

Q22E

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.765	2	.382	.344	.710
Within Groups	106.649	96	1.111		
Total	107.414	98			

Table 4.63-1 Survey: Satisfaction with 'interaction with academic staff' by academic level (ANOVA)

Despite this overall result, the figures for Q22e in a cross tabulation do suggest that masters' students visually appeared to be the most dissatisfied with contacting supervisors or other academic staff, in that, aggregating scores 1 and 2 show the



masters' group at 33.3% having more dissatisfied students than the PhD group (16.7%) or the undergraduates (24.2%).

**Q4 \* Q22E (interaction with academic staff) Crosstabulation**

		Q22E						Total
			1.00	2.00	3.00	4.00	5.00	
Q4	Under	Count	4	4	11	13	1	33
		%	12.1%	12.1%	33.3%	39.4%	3.0%	100.0%
	Master	Count	3	7	7	10	3	30
		%	10.0%	23.3%	23.3%	33.3%	10.0%	100.0%
	PhD	Count	1	5	16	11	3	36
		%	2.8%	13.9%	44.4%	30.6%	8.3%	100.0%
Total		Count	8	16	34	34	7	99
		%	8.1%	16.2%	34.3%	34.3%	7.1%	100.0%

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	7.209	8	.514
Likelihood Ratio	7.664	8	.467
Linear-by-Linear Association	.562	1	.453
N of Valid Cases	99		

a 7 cells (46.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.12.

Table 4.63-2 Survey: Satisfaction with 'interaction with academic staff' by academic level (Crosstabulation)

Although the intergroup differences do not always reach significance, there is nevertheless a repeated tendency for more masters than PhD or undergraduate students to choose value 1 or 2, signaling a very low level of satisfaction with academic

achievement, improvement in spoken English, making friends with British people, and interacting with academic staff such as supervisors or other lecturers. This might be explained in relation to masters students' length of stay in the UK: the masters' students have been in the UK less than the students doing PhD or undergraduate courses, but it is important to note that it came up as non-significant. Given the fact that their actual courses were, however, only 12 month ones, they would need to adjust faster. Further research is thus needed to investigate why masters' groups appeared to express lower satisfaction with aspects of their life in the UK.

On the question of 'who has the least favourable attitudes toward British culture', the intergroup differences for Q23 ('Have you developed a more favourable attitude toward target (British) culture since coming to the UK?') are shown in the following table.

#### Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Q23A	99	3.34	1.135	1	5
Q4	111	3.99	.832	3	5

#### Kruskal-Wallis Test

##### Ranks

Q4		N	Mean Rank
Q23A	Under	33	60.27
	Master	30	45.93
	PhD	36	43.97
	Total	99	

Test Statistics (Grouping variable Q4)

	Q23A
Chi-Square	6.874
df	2
Asymp.Sig	.032

Table 4.64 Survey: Group differences in favourable attitude towards British culture by academic level (Kruskal-Wallis Test)

The result was significant at the 5% level although it appears visually to be the case that the group differences exist only between masters and undergraduate groups or between undergraduates and PhD rather than between masters and PhD. Among those respondents who chose value 1 or 2, those who were PhD students (30.6%) expressed a less favourable attitude towards British culture than those who were undergraduates (15,2%) or masters (16.7%).

On the question (Q24) of cultural withdrawal, the crosstabulation (Table 4.65) shows almost identical values for the three groups; in each case approximately 27% of students said that they had experienced withdrawal. A Chi-Square test showed that the differences were non-significant.

Q4 \* Q24 which group experienced most cultural withdrawal Crosstabulation

		Q24		Total	
		Yes	No		
Q4	Under	Count	9	24	33
		%	27.3%	72.7%	100.0%
	Master	Count	8	22	30
		%	26.7%	73.3%	100.0%
	PhD	Count	10	25	36
		%	27.8%	69.4%	100.0%
Total		Count	27	71	99
		%	27.3%	71.7%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.031	2	.984
Likelihood Ratio	.031	2	.985
Linear-by-Linear Association	.015	1	.903
N of Valid Cases	98		

0 cells have an expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 8.27.

Table 4.65 Survey: Cultural withdrawal by academic level (Chi-square)

This result was somewhat unexpected; I had anticipated that the masters' group would report a higher 'yes' figure, as a result of having less time to adjust.

The final set of analyses concerned which group was least confident in pragmatic areas in English. Kruskal-Wallis Test was run on Q26a as follows.

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Q26A	99	3.45	.961	1	5
Q4	111	3.99	.832	3	5



### Kruskal-Wallis Test

#### Ranks

Q4		N	Mean Rank
Q26A	Under	33	62.39
	Master	30	44.60
	PhD	36	43.14
	Total	99	

#### Test Statistics (Grouping variable Q4)

	Q26A
Chi-Square	10.254
df	2
Asymp.Sig	.006

Table 4.66 Survey: Pragmatic competence (How to respond to a compliment from a native Speaker) by academic level (Kruskal-Wallis Test)

The result shows a marked group difference between the undergraduate and the two graduate groups, with the lower mean rank for PhD (43.14) and masters (44.60) groups than for undergraduates (62.39).

Q26B Which group is least competent: How to express disagreement or refusal to a native speaker in the UK

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Under	33	4.000	1.031	.179	3.635	4.366	1.00	5.00
Master	30	3.167	1.117	.204	2.750	3.584	1.00	5.00
PhD	36	3.194	.980	.163	2.863	3.526	1.00	5.00
Total	99	3.455	1.100	.111	3.235	3.674	1.00	5.00

### ANOVA

Q26B

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	14.740	2	7.370	6.816	.002
Within Groups	103.806	96	1.081		
Total	118.545	98			

Test of Homogeneity of Variances

Q26B

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
1.111	2	96	.333

Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: Q26B

Tukey HSD

		Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
(I) Q4	(J) Q4				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Undergrad.	Masters	.833*	.262	.006	.209	1.458
	PhD	.806*	.251	.005	.209	1.402
Masters	Undergrad.	-.833*	.262	.006	-1.458	-.209
	PhD	-2.778E-02	.257	.994	-.640	.584
PhD	Undergrad.	-.806*	.251	.005	-1.402	-.209
	Masters	2.78E-02	.258	.994	-.584	.640

\* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Table 4.67 Survey: Pragmatic competence (How to express disagreement or refusal to a native speaker in the UK) by academic level (ANOVA)

In terms of who perceives themselves to be least pragmatically competent in how to express disagreement, the overall result was significant at  $p=0.002$ . The multiple comparisons showed that the main difference was again between graduate and undergraduate groups, though the masters students had the lowest mean score.

Q26C Which group is least competent: How to make a request to a native speaker in the UK

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Under	33	4.030	.984	.171	3.682	4.379	1.00	5.00
Master	30	3.500	1.009	.184	3.123	3.877	1.00	5.00
PhD	36	3.306	.749	.125	3.052	3.559	2.00	5.00
Total	99	3.606	.956	9.612E-02	3.415	3.797	1.00	5.00

Test of Homogeneity of Variances

Q26C

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
1.111	2	96	.333

ANOVA

Q26C

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	9.528	2	4.764	5.709	.005
Within Groups	80.109	96	.834		
Total	89.636	98			

Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: Q26C

Tukey HSD

		Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
(I) Q4	(J) Q4				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Undergrad.	Masters	.530	.230	.060	-1.828E-02	1.079
	PhD	.725*	.220	.004	.201	1.249
Masters	Undergrad.	-.530	.230	.060	-1.079	1.83E-02
	PhD	.194	.226	.666	-.343	.732
PhD	Undergrad.	-.725*	.220	.004	-1.249	-.201
	Masters	-.194	.226	.666	-.732	.343

\* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Table 4.68 Survey: Pragmatic competence (How to make a request to a native speaker in the UK) by academic level (ANOVA)



The overall result, with respect to who is least pragmatically competent in how to make a request, was significant at  $p=0.005$ , but the multiple comparisons showed that undergraduate-masters difference does not quite reach significance, although the main difference was between undergraduate and PhD groups.

In summary, putting together the results above of Q26a to Q26c suggests that the graduate students had on the whole less confidence in their pragmatic skills than the undergraduates, with little difference between the masters and the PhD students. This can be partly explained by the fact that undergraduate students have more opportunities to speak in class, than graduate students.

#### **4.5 Questionnaire-based survey: Conclusion**

The questionnaire survey was conducted with the main aim of obtaining a broad overview about the extent to which cultural factors impact on academic learning using English by Korean adult learners in higher education in the UK. It focused on various aspects of learning in the UK such as supervision, lectures and seminars, and writing academic essays. A sample of 124 Korean students was obtained reducing to 111 after exclusions, which may be roughly estimated as comprising about 8 to 10 % of the total number of Korean students on degree courses at UK universities (1684 from HESA statistics) though the impossibility of accurately counting the target population of sample students who had experienced undergraduate courses in Korea were thus in a position to compare their experiences between Korean and UK universities needs to be emphasized. The sample was balanced between undergraduates, masters, and PhD students. Although the sample was ultimately self-selected, an attempt was made to

make it representative by covering the UK universities which had the highest numbers of Korean students.

I selected the sixteen most popular universities in the UK, based on the figure for the Korean students in the universities as given on the British Council website. It is important to note that each of the 16 universities had their own Korean community and provided detailed information about it on the website. This was an advantage, as collaboration with the local Korean society led to a higher response rate than might otherwise have been achieved. To this end, I used culture-specific strategies based on the idea that certain cultural factors such as 'face' and 'hierarchy' need to be taken into account to optimize data collection. I therefore started the survey administration by contacting each representative of the community to ask them to forward the questionnaire proforma. This derived from the idea that 'politeness' is an important interpersonal skill.

There were rarely enough comments to allow a content analysis, but the comments served a valuable illustrative purpose, as well as being suggestive as regards the next stage of the research.

The data analysis had three main purposes: (1) finding out cultural differences in general and (2) discovering the differences between Korean students' experiences of the UK and Korean systems, and (3) probing or testing the hypotheses from the preliminary data and literature reviews. It is hoped to publish the full results elsewhere, but, for reasons of space, the discussion of the survey results focused on ten main questions (Q9 recorded as length of stay in months, Q20, Q21, Q22, Q23, Q24, Q26, Q30, Q33, and Q34).

The first finding was that many respondents believed that raising cultural

awareness of the second culture through overseas learning in English-speaking countries could benefit their second language skills, although paradoxically there was quite a low level of interaction between many of the Korean students and their homestay families.

Each of the three groups (undergraduates / masters / PhD) reported slightly different problem profiles, but the master's students stood out in several interesting ways: firstly, they appeared to have a lower level of social life during their courses and had less interaction with native speakers (Q 20 and Q21), although the differences did not always reach significance. As shown in the data from Q22, they were also less satisfied with their improvement in spoken English than the other students, their number of British friends, and even their academic achievement.

More generally, key cultural differences between Korea and the UK have been discovered: passive participation in lectures and seminars (Q31, Q33, and Q35); unfamiliarity with teacher-student relationship in interaction with supervisors (Q36 and Q37); adjustment to different rhetorical patterns; the strictness about plagiarism (Q38 and Q39); the different systems for feedback, comments, and marking on the academic performances in the UK (Q40 and Q41). The findings indicate that a range of cultural factors, such as face, hierarchy, collectivism, and indirectness, which currently permeate Korean society and higher education, were felt and perceived by the Korean students.

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. As the MA group stood out as different from the undergraduate group or at times the PhD group, partly no doubt because they only had a year in which to adapt, I decided to focus Study 2 on a group of masters students at a university in the north of England. Study 2 will be reported in the next two Chapters.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> See section 2.1.3.3

<sup>2</sup> The website lists the 16 universities most popular to Korean students.

<sup>3</sup> Recoded as 'months' from the original open responses.

<sup>4</sup>The main items were as follows. Understanding jokes and humour in English (46.4%), making friends with British people (41.1%), dealing with physical closeness and touching in social settings (35.5%), carrying on with your favourite leisure activities (34.9%), writing up that can earn you good grades (31.2%), dealing with the staff working in the finance or accommodation (30.2%), talking about study issues with students of other nationalities after class (28.8%), making friends with people of other nationalities (26.4%), and starting a conversation with people of other nationalities and keeping it going group (25.6%).



## **Chapter 5: Methodology, in-depth interviews**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Although the questionnaire survey findings, which were discussed in Chapter 4, showed that cultural factors clearly caused problems for many of the Korean students at UK universities, they were inevitably limited with respect to revealing the progress of the students' adjustment during their overseas study in the UK: they were not able to give the details for how their initial problems changed across the terms, how they reacted to the problems or challenges they encountered and thus how far they were able to overcome cultural and language difficulties. In order to examine these topics, rich longitudinal data are required, implying a more qualitative-based approach and a smaller targeted sample. As the group of Masters' students in the survey seemed to report more problems than undergraduate or PhD groups in the questionnaire survey, I therefore focused on 6 Korean students who were currently studying at the University of York as the target sample for the second study. I accordingly conducted in-depth interviews with six Korean masters' students from the first to the final term of their courses. This chapter describes the in-depth interview work that was carried out term by term, focusing on how each session of the interviews was administered and processed across the year and what occurred in the process of interviewing each student. The results are presented in Chapter 6.

### **5.2 In-depth interviews: Aims and methodology**

At a general level, the survey findings indicate that a range of cultural factors, such as face, hierarchy, collectivism, and indirectness, which still permeate Korean society and

higher education (see Chapter 2 and Chapter 4), are felt by Korean students, and Masters' students in particular, to hinder their academic progress and their social integration into the host environment. As the questionnaire data was rather general and sketchy, it was not feasible to discover 'what lies behind the answers to the questions' (Gillham, 2005:3). Thus, further 'in-depth' research in a 'real-life setting' (Gillham, 2005:3) was needed to examine the pace of students' progress in developing social interaction skills and adapting to the academic culture of British universities, especially on short one-year masters programmes. It was therefore decided to follow up the questionnaire survey with a series of in-depth interviews with a small sample of masters' students across one academic year. The in-depth interviews aimed at answering the following questions:

- 1) What is specifically problematic to Korean Masters' students in the areas of (a) academic progress, (b) social integration into their host environment, and (c) the development of communicative competency?
- 2) What caused key academic and social problems and challenges?
- 3) To what extent and how did the students adjust to a different academic culture within the UK university system across the year?
- 4) What attempts did the students make to solve their problems?

Limitations of time and the quantity of data that can be involved suggested a sample size of six. The aim was to adopt a case study approach whereby each individual could be tracked in reasonable detail across the three terms and the summer vacation. However, while selecting six students at the same university in the same calendar year

ensured a degree of comparability, it also meant that it was quite possible that the students would interact with each other at times, say at the Korean Society, in an attempt to discuss and resolve their problems. Nevertheless, it was felt that, as long as appropriate checks were made individual histories could be built up, and the design allowed comparisons to be made and discussion in terms of key themes.

### 5.3 Sampling: Participants, times, places

Six Korean students studying at MA level at a northern British university agreed to participate. Of the six, five were attending non-science related courses and the other one was undertaking a science-related course. The relevant information is summarized in Table 5.1.

ID	Sex	Age	Subject
NJ	M	36*	MA in Social policy
BK	F	26	MA in Linguistics
YJ	M	35*	MA in Social Policy
JM	M	28	MSc in Financial Mathematics
MK	F	29	MA in TESOL
HC	F	43*	MA in TESOL

\* Participant was older than the researcher

Table 5.1 In-depth interviews: Summary of baseline information on the 6 participants.

In order to reduce bias across courses, I originally planned to have a balance between students on science-based courses and those studying non-science related subjects. This was based on the assumption that according to the nature of the disciplines, different

types of academic performance would be required and different assessment methods employed. However, in the event this was not possible and there was only one 'science' student approachable, who was studying for an MSc in Finance Mathematics.

In terms of recruiting the students, I first contacted the representative of the Korean Society within the university (2005 to 2006) to obtain information on how many members were undertaking masters programmes during the academic year; just eight Korean students were currently enrolled at the University on Masters' programmes. Three of them were doing the MA in Social Policy and two were undertaking the MA in TESOL, so having two on the same course. One of the eight was not appropriate because he had previously taken another masters course in the UK, so I excluded him as a participant. Among the remaining seven students, I first contacted the four youngest students, as it was easier for me to ask for their participation in the interviews. I then contacted two older and married students whom I had met at an informal meeting when they first arrived at York. The remaining person as one of the oldest Korean students was not easy to interact with. Living off campus with his family, he did not often participate in informal meetings with other Korean Society members, and had little interaction particularly with other single students. I felt uncomfortable about interacting with him in the long-term sessions, although he quite possibly would have accepted my request and given me useful data.

None of the six students refused my request and they all appeared to have a positive attitude towards participating in the interviews all the year. In particular, I was most concerned about losing face when I made a request to the students who were older than me. Besides age, I was also concerned about losing face when it came to informing each participant that they needed to be interviewed six times, term by term, and thus



that interview sessions would still be set up when they had finished the taught part of their courses.

The interviews consisted of six sessions for each participant, and altogether 36 interviews were conducted over the three academic terms and the summer vacation. The time frame for each participant's interview sessions are shown in Appendix VII. The interviews were scheduled at each participant's convenience. Each participant had two interview sessions each term; one in week one or two and another in the final week. However, the sixth interviews were undertaken in September/October, in the final week of the academic year, so there was a rather longer interval between the fifth and the final interviews. There were two reasons for delaying the final interviews. The first was that I did not want to disturb them while they were in the process of writing their dissertations, in most cases, the most important part of their assessment at MA level.

The other reason was that the final interview sessions had a slightly different aim from that of other sessions as they involved the participants' overall evaluations of their adaptation in each topic area across the year as a whole. The sixth interview their sessions needed to function as a 'review stage' (Gillham, 2005) allowing me to confirm (or not) what each participant had reported in his or her term time sessions; they thus required more time for discussion than the other sessions. At the end, I presented my summary of what they had described as their experiences and opinions over the year as a whole and asked them to give me feedback on my summary as Gillham (2000) suggests. This was intended to minimise researcher bias when it came to interpreting the participants' responses.

In terms of venues for the sessions, most of the interviews were carried out in a study room, college bars, or common rooms on campus. First I tried to hold the

interview while having lunch with the student in college catering facilities, but there was so much background noise that communication often broke down. The subsequent locations were thus selected as being particularly quiet.

#### **5.4. Developing the interview questions**

The interview questions were developed mainly from the questionnaire survey data I conducted (Chapter 4), in an attempt to retain a degree of consistency and compatibility between the two studies. All of the interview questions were open-ended questions, and they were revised several times; language issues were less critical than with the survey questionnaire because the students were used to face-to-face interviews which, by their nature, offer the possibility of checking validity at the time of interviewing; i.e. whether the participants' answers are accurate and relevant (Denscombe, 1998). Thus the interviewer can, in theory, at least, immediately correct misunderstandings, by using devices such as prompts and probes.

The set of questions for the in-depth interviews covered three sections; *'Background questions'*, *'Feeling questions'*, and *'Experience and knowledge questions'* adopted from the six types of question illustrated by Patton (1990). The first interview sessions dealt with initial issues experienced by the students on their arrival. The second to sixth sessions, however, focused on how these initial feelings and problems changed, on how far the students had managed to adapt, observations on how they had reacted to the challenges presented by relocation and on how they had overcome other problems related to their student status. The questions thus differed slightly from session to session and I added or removed questions as necessary (see Appendix VIII and IX). In the final interview sessions, the questions included a request for a holistic evaluation of

each participant's adjustment, over the year.

Taking each section in more detail, *'Background questions'* asked about the programme that each student was currently doing at the university, about their personal academic history, and about their motivation for studying in the UK. This section was only included for the first interview session. The *'Experience and knowledge questions'* covered problems or difficulties in the three sub-categories; 1) social interaction with department staff, 2) social interaction outside the department and 3) academic areas. Problems 'in social interaction with department staff' dealt mainly with the process of interacting with one's supervisor and the supervisory system in the UK. 'Social interaction outside the department' was designed to examine to what extent the participants were able to be socialised into UK society in comparison with their initial expectations. This section formed a major part of the interview content, and focused on their interaction with British people through informal meetings or participation in social activities. The questions in the academic areas involved key aspects of the UK academic context, such as writing academic essays, participation in seminars and lectures, and the feedback system. Each theme also had smaller categories, such as 'structuring an argument' or 'language problems' in the area of 'academic writing'. The sections were addressed in the above sequence.

## **5.5 Administrations and procedure**

### **5.5.1 Ethical procedures**

As in-depth individual interviews were chosen as the method of interviewing, the six participants necessarily had to be interviewed at staggered times. Although all the participants agreed to participate in the six interviews, it was not easy to organise and

timetable the actual sessions. I felt I had to apologise to them for holding such frequent and regular meetings which would likely disturb them and I tried to avoid their busiest times, especially when they had a lot of course work to do. I also had to be flexible about postponing interview sessions, especially for NJ and YJ who needed to change to a week later for their sixth interviews.

Prior to the first interviews, I created an 'interview agreement form' (see Appendix VI) in English, which stated the aim of the interview research, and indicated that it was part of my PhD thesis, and emphasised the importance of obtaining accurate data from the participants. In particular, the form confirmed that anonymity and confidentiality of responses were guaranteed. I also explained how the data were intended to be used at the report stage, focusing on the fact that every effort would be made not to distort their views or harm them in any way. All the participants signed the form and formally agreed to participate in the interviews before their first interviews started (in line with the procedure suggested by Hannan (2007)). For ethical reasons, the participants were given the right to see how their responses were used and thus they were able to check their responses, while the interviews were being undertaken or after they had ended (Hannan, 2007). Despite the importance of the ethical assurances on the form, it has to be admitted that most of the participants did not appear to read them very carefully. They all gave their signatures individually, but seemed to consider this no more than a formal aspect of the interview work.

At the beginning of the first interviews, I tried again to make the participants understand the purpose of the interviews. I did this by informing them of my research question and why the longitudinal procedure for collecting the data was necessary. This was designed to meet one of the ethical principles suggested by House (1990), 'non-



manipulation’, which emphasises the participant’s right to understand what the interviews are intended to discover and how their answers will be processed. Besides these ethical matters, I wanted the interviewees to try to think what issues in everyday life could be relevant to the set of topics chosen for the interviews. To help them be clear about the topics and issues, I tried to avoid using any jargon or technical terminology, following my experience in the preliminary interviews (where several interviewees could not make a distinction between ‘EFL or ESL’, see section 3.2.). I also gave a number of examples based on my experience, especially during the first and second interview sessions, in order to guide them towards providing relevant, detailed responses. Furthermore, my examples were used as a part of ‘probing’<sup>1</sup> to expand or develop their responses. This interviewer *self-disclosure* in less structured interviews, was intended to help facilitate the participants’ talk (Abell, Locke, Condor, Gibson, and Stevenson, 2006). In Reinharz and Chase’s (2003) words,

*Interviewer-self-disclosure takes places when the interviewer shares ideas, attitudes and/or experiences concerning matters that might relate to the interview topic in order to encourage respondents to be more forthcoming (p.79).*

While this was designed to encourage them to give more useful answers to the questions, it could equally and easily cause a degree of researcher bias as Mathers, Fox, and Hunn (1998) have noted; my own perspectives were inevitably reflected in the examples I brought into the discussions, and this may have affected the participant’s responses (Denzin, 1970: 133). While Cohen, Manion, and Morison’s assertion (2000: 279) is fine as an ideal,

*At all times, an interviewer must remember that he is a data collection instrument and try not to let his own biases, opinions, and curiosity affect his behaviour.*

- it was not, in this particular instance, easy to overcome the dilemma of being both a skilled researcher and a neutral observer: I had difficulty finding a balance between using my interviewing skills to extract useful information from the participants and reduce intervention in their responses with my personal perspectives. This tension will be discussed further in both next section and section 5.5.5.

### ***5.5.2. The methods of 'structured conversation'***

With regard to 'the degree of control over the interview exercised by the interviewer' (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995:3), I adopted Toyoshima's (2007) 'structured conversation' method (Conteh and Toyoshima, 2005) that has been shown to work well with Japanese university students and an older interviewer with experience of the same institution. Toyoshima (2007:120) explains 'structured conversation', which she developed and tested for use in 'eliciting learning histories', as follows:

*In this research, I proposed mainly to address questions to the informants in line with the topics I had structured, but it was the informants who decided how they would answer them. This suggested that our interaction would not be a question-answer type in some parts, as can be seen in structured or semi-structured interviews; rather, they would be more naturalistic conversations within the overall structure. I therefore developed a semi-structured format which I called structured conversation (Conteh and Toyoshima, 2005).*

The in-depth interviews with the six Korean students meet Toyoshima's key

assumptions; the students were all university students on taught courses; Toyoshima's sample students were undergraduates, and mine were masters' students. Secondly, the teacher-student relationship was based on experience of the same institution; I also shared the experience of the six Korean students, in the sense that I did my MA at York and was thus a 'senior' who had attended the same university. Like Toyoshima, I shared culture and L1 (Korean) of the students.

However, it is important to note that I modified and extended the method of 'structured conversation' to fit the situation, applying the method to postgraduate students rather than undergraduate students. I will show how the conversational style of interaction was adapted and developed in the in-depth interviews, in terms of data collecting procedure with the six Korean students in the following sections.

### ***5.5.3. Piloting and running the interviews***

Prior to conducting the interviews, I had originally planned to do several pilot interviews as 'a try-out of a prototype of the real thing' (Gillham, 2005:22), to obtain useful feedback on points to be altered and modified. However, in the event, piloting was virtually impossible for several reasons; first, there was lack of suitable students with whom I could conduct the pilot interviews, as new MA students tend not to arrive before early October, at which point I needed to recruit the actual sample and hold the first interviews. Secondly, it was clear that I would need to use a range of variations in interviewing technique, or at least employ a range of questions across participants and sessions. This can be partly explained in terms of 'ethnographic context of the interview' (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995: 170); each conversation encounters situational and linguistic factors that affect interviewers and participants differentially. Thus, I

would need to adopt slightly different ways (or degrees) of clarifying questions, probing responses further, and giving examples across individuals and sessions. For these reasons, I had to adopt the compromise position of using session one interviews as pilots and reflecting on whether I needed to make changes: a procedure used successfully in Low (1995) for 'Think Aloud interviews'.

After monitoring what happened in the first interview with NK, it was clear that there was not much wrong methodologically and few problematic areas, except for the need to schedule a longer time for interviews than I had intended. Subsequent interviews were thus planned to last 45 to 60 minutes. This allowed me time to explain the aim of interviews and introduce the topic areas involved in each set of questions. I tried to explain more to make the participants understand each topic area in the thematic set of questions. After interviewing NK, I was more confident about categorising the various topic areas, discovering that 'some overlapping topics could be dispensed with altogether so that the interview is better focused on distinct areas' (Gillham, 2000:54). This made it easier to organise the interviews as well as keep the interview to an hour.

One reason for the lengthy interviews was that the greater degree of flexibility offered by the conversation-based interview style led to long discussions on some topics, with the result that several interviews took over one and a half hours. A good example was the area of 'interaction with supervisor', where the participants gave a large amount of in-depth information. Also, I had difficulty in sensitising myself to make a smooth transition from one question to another, especially when the participant continued to talk about a specific point for quite a long time. Thus, during the second sessions, I tried to take control of the situation in the sequenced interview questions, by allocating approximate times for each theme.



In addition to the length of the interviews, situational factors such as time and place were discovered to affect collecting data; a peak lunch time interview with YJ in a college canteen at the first session was so noisy that he and I were too irritated to discuss or write, and thus rather less data was gathered in the first interview than in the other sessions. I thus moved the interviews to a different time and place. This helped me to compensate for the interview circumstances.

The result of carefully monitoring how the interviews ran for the first two weeks and treating this as a piloting stage was the finding that the students did not seem to have problems with understanding and answering the questions. In practice, there was no serious miscommunication between the participants and myself, and all seemed to be quite interested in the research topic and recognised that they needed to talk about the experiences, feelings, and perspectives that they encountered during their courses. This continued until the final session interviews. Although there were few significant errors or difficulties from the first interview sessions, they were useful to develop my interviewing skills of managing time and situation, in particular by sensitising me to categorise each topic areas distinctively. As well as observing the first interviews as a piloting stage, I operated a continuous monitoring of methodological impact until the final interviews and thus checked what I needed to improve at every interview session. For instance, I found out that they often seemed to give the opinions that I would want rather than on their own, when I gave them the examples based on my experiences to make them understood the questions better. To minimise the researcher's bias, I emphasised 'your own feelings and opinions' when questioning and increasingly reduced giving my examples, as they had a greater understanding of each question.

With respect to the language used in the interviews, all were conducted in Korean, as were the preliminary interviews. As the in-depth interviews required both detail from the students and diplomacy from the researcher, using Korean as the mother tongue (of both researcher and participant) was considered to be far more advantageous in enabling free discussion and avoiding 'errors' in the process of recording and transcribing. There were thus language-based, content and face reasons for using Korean (section 3.2.1).

As regards, timing, the majority of the 36 interviews took about an hour, with some sessions of interviews lasting an hour and a half and other later ones reducing to around 45 minutes, where there was little new to report.

At the level of recording data, I not only took notes during the interviews, but also tape-recorded the sessions, with the agreement of all the participants. Fortunately, the students all seemed unconcerned about speaking while the audio-recordings were carried out. The situation was thus very different from what occurred in the preliminary interviews, where the first preliminary interviewee showed signs of panic and looked very nervous during the tape-recording process, which led me to give up tape-recording and rely purely on notes.

The audio-recording was carried out without any technical problems, but it took a substantial time to transcribe the 36 interview recordings (Hannann, 2007); each individual interview took several hours to transcribe. Audio recording the interviews allowed me to focus my attention on interacting with the participants rather than on taking field notes; I did not need to be in a rush to write fast enough to keep pace with the participants or be concerned about losing the original wording. I could thus focus in

the notes on summarising the main points from the participants' comments, and on recording my 'observations'. This procedure was as suggested by Guion (2001), and enabled me to overcome 'the problem of reconstructing on the basis of partial memory' (section 3.2, p.76).

#### ***5.5.4. The methods of collecting data: Data triangulation***

Extending the method of 'structured conversation', I created an integrated design, relying on data collection from multiple sources and methods to collect the qualitative data. This was in effect data triangulation, which Wiersma (1986), Miles & Huberman 1994, and others have argued is an appropriate approach for case studies. Described as 'attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint' (Cohen and Manion, 1986: 254), triangulation aims at increasing reliability and validity of the qualitative data.

With this in mind, I combined three different data collection procedures from the six participants; the first method relied on the participants' responses obtained in the thirty-six interviews. These involved the method of in-depth and structured conversation in face-to-face settings, has been as discussed above. Secondly, to achieve a holistic understanding of the interviewees' progress of adaptation and change across the academic year, I initially tried to ask them to write regular diaries about what specifically happened to them to present at the next interview session (as suggested by Marin˜o et al., 1999; Bowling, 2002). However, this seemed to be rather difficult for the participants to accomplish in real time. When I suggested diary keeping to them, they seemed not to accept it, although no one overtly expressed strong rejection, which may have been to shield me from losing face. I concluded that the necessity to write down

their experiences regularly would prove to be quite disturbing to several of them. Instead, I asked them to email or tell me between interviews whenever something specific, relevant to the issues highlighted in the interviews, happened to them. HC, YJ, and MK started emailing me between their first and second interview sessions. Indeed not only was MK very active when being interviewed, in telling me about experiences that shocked her in the UK and unexpected events which occurred, but she also frequently telephoned me to talk about her experiences. I was able to use this data in later interviews to remind the participants of specific anecdotes, feelings, and changes that they had experienced. Although I did not initially intend to use these methods above, they in fact contributed to developing a more integrated approach to data collection across the year.

The final source of data derived from informal conversation meetings with groups involving the sample students; I tried, for example, to participate in social meetings of the Korean community, in the course of which I tried to hear and pick out experiences or opinions that were provided by any of the six participants. I also made several attempts to create informal meetings with participants, and connect with them in a more intimate setting such as over dinner. However, it was not easy for me to organise this type of informal meeting with NJ, YJ, and HC who got married and who were older than me. As they tended to spend most of their time with their family, I personally thought it would not be good etiquette to ask them for another time to have dinner or tea, outside the interview hours. Furthermore, they tended to have more social meetings with other families in the community of married people, and thus I did not have many opportunities to personally meet them. For this reason, such informal meetings were limited to the younger students.



The meetings with MK, BK, and JM were intended to explore the process of their adaptation in UK university life in more natural settings and function in a similar way to the previously mentioned diaries. The students discussed many issues they currently faced in a sort of 'focus-group discussion' and made more complaints about some aspects of their university life in the UK. Using a data source which relied more on 'the description and explanation of phenomena as they occur in routine, ordinary natural environments' (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995: 296) yielded very positive results, though it inevitably led to a slight imbalance between participants; the data from the 'focus-group discussion' can be limited to younger students' experiences and feelings, which would have led to a research bias against the older participants.

#### ***5.5.5. Ethical issues of interviewing: Whether the relationship between researcher and participants affected the interviews***

Given the fact that in-depth interviews are mainly based on 'open-ended face to face interaction' between the researcher and the interviewee, establishing the relationship between them is a matter of considerable importance (Berry, 1999; Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995). Moreover, the fact that the study was longitudinal inevitably meant that a relationship developed between me and each participant, which was affected by questions of age, seniority, and friendship. I became, for example, particularly comfortable when interacting with MK and JM as 'the degree of friendship' (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995:91) with them was greater. They became active in giving their opinions, and sharing their experiences, and proportionally more responses were gathered from them as the terms continued. BK also became more prepared to comment

in the interviews as an active informant. All three seemed to become increasingly more self-motivated to answer the questions. It was also easy to keep in contact with them outside the interview discussions, by for example having tea with them individually, or inviting them to dinner for a group discussion as mentioned in section 5.3.1.

However, I had more difficulty probing the responses from NJ who was older than me, and I did not have opportunities outside the interviews to contact him. The distance between him and myself, due to age and lack of intimacy, made me feel uncomfortable with him in the interview situation and this continued until the final session. This also occurred to a lesser degree in the cases of HC and YJ, though I was able to become more relaxed with them as the year progressed. I was very concerned to be polite when interacting with them, especially NJ; I repeated 'don't worry; that's enough' when they did not comment or make any response. This happened far more often than when I interviewed the younger students like MK, and JM, and using honorific language in Korean was essential when conversing with them.

The upshot was that even though they were active in giving responses during the interviews, the amount of data in the field notes, taken during the interviews with NJ and YJ was rather less than that for the other participants. Age and degree of intimacy in the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee thus affected me and the way I acted.

In line with Toyoshima's (2007) suggestions about establishing a good rapport with the participants, I also played a role in counselling them as an experienced student, in a sense, as a senior to them where I was older than they were. As a result, even though I was not a trained counsellor, they often asked me to give them advice or help when they had problems or questions. Indeed, they tended to rely on my advice and

suggestions rather than directly solve problems on their own. For example, YJ asked me if he needed to contact his supervisor first, or whether it would be bothersome to ask a question when he needed to clarify some points. He said that my advice would help him and seemed to respect and rely upon it. In her interview sessions as well as on the telephone, MK often reported what happened to her in supervisory meetings, and tried to confirm if she was doing the right thing or not in preparation for writing her first academic essay, showing me the outline she made for the essay. She also asked me in two sessions (I3 and I4)<sup>2</sup> to counsel her, as an acquaintance or senior who had an experience of studying abroad rather than a technically qualified counsellor, when she experienced cultural withdrawal. In the case of HC, a student ten years older than me, I became increasingly close to her by counselling her at the particular point when she struggled to meet her supervisors during the second term. She seemed to be psychologically relieved when I gave her some suggestions or advice on her problem. This can be partly explained as the cultural habit of Korean university students to rely on 'the ties between seniors (sunbae) and juniors (hubae) in the same university or department, which are called 'school ties' (학연) (see section 2.1.1) ; this tends to involve obtaining information on programmes or other academic issues as well as on job employment after graduation and functions as an example of how hierarchical relationships with this sort of tie are structured in Korea. Indeed HC noted in her second interview,

*When I attended a master's course in Korea, I remember that I depended far more on the information that my senior in the department doing a PhD course gave me. She gave me a lot of guidance and advice on university activities I could participate in, as well as conventions or traditions in the department. In reality, it was far easier to contact seniors than the academic staff. (HC, I3)*

Although this relationship can vary across personal situations or characteristics, the tendency for Korean students to rely on the tied relationship between junior and senior and offer respect toward the senior as an experienced person seemed to be quite strong for this group of interviewees; apart from the language question in relation to contacting departmental staff, the relationship between them and myself consolidated, as I had to play a stronger counselling and advisory role as the interview sessions progressed. This interdependent relationship between the researcher and participants most definitely benefited the study, as it contributed to the extraction of very rich data from them. Moreover, being a periodic consultant to the participants led them to become and stay motivated to participate in the interviews and thereby continue to provide me with a large amount of information. The changes of role implied a continuous negotiating of identity (in Block's 2000 terms) throughout much of the year. The problem was not to maximise the expectation of identity, to aid learning, as it was with Block, but rather to such negotiation and use it to strengthen the study rather than to let it get out of hand (Abell, Locke, Condor, Gibson, and Stevenson, 2006).

Despite contributing to developing a constructive rapport with the participants, this sort of intervention can generate negative research effects; first, the counselling was sometimes responsible for extending the interviews. I originally planned forty five minute to one hour interviews, but they often became longer, lasting one and half hour or even on occasions two hours. In an extreme case, a 2 hour session with HC (I 3) contained only fifty minutes of interview, with the extra hour and ten minutes involving me counselling her about existing academic worries and a supervisory problem.

It was particularly hard to keep intervening in the middle of interviews to check



the validity of the students' responses, as well as instigate sensible turn-taking when the participants were older than me. Rather than directly asking for their reactions, I also tried to use a more indirect approach using polite language devices; 'Is it correct that you feel .....

(Kvale, 1996:149), 'it would be better if you give me more details', but if you don't have any idea now, it would be OK to tell me later'. This is explicable as a concern about politeness, where stopping in the middle of comments would be rude. Thus I was stuck with retaining politeness and saving face while carrying out the interviews with older students. This is a slightly different approach to validity checking from Toyohsima's procedure, which involved systematically saying 'So you did X?' or very directly 'you mean you did Y' in the middle of interviews.

In order to improve the quality of the interviews and reduce the counselling time, I tried to use another time slot to discuss problems with them shortly after the interview session had ended if possible, or to telephone or email them at home. This received positive reactions. I often brought topics that I felt the participants did not understand very well back at the end of interviews in order to draw out more relevant data.

Secondly, the relationship between the researcher and the participants as a junior - senior one inevitably caused a degree of bias in terms of the credibility of their answers; the students may have tried to give some answers that they felt I, as the researcher, wanted. Although the sample students in the interviews were not my peers, Hitchcock and Hughes (1995:89) describe a similar situation thus;

*If for example the teacher and the interviewees are known to each other there may be a degree of reciprocity taking place, that is the respondent may feel that they have to give the researcher the kinds of answers and responses it is*

*assumed the researcher wants. This is especially problematic when conducting interviews with peers as Platt (1981c:75-70) pointed out.*

Although the research effects were more likely to appear as the relationship became more developed later in the year, I tried to minimise the possible effects by avoiding any leading questions and reducing my views or ideas on the interview questions as examples. Nevertheless, it was, in practice, difficult for me to balance keeping objective and developing the interviewing skills of drawing out information of the participants, such as giving examples of my experience and counselling them in the interviews which may have affected the interview results. Although I felt that the participants generally seemed to show their own perspectives and ideas honestly, it was impossible to avoid researcher effects completely.

## **5.6 Transcribing and analysing the interview data**

### **5.6.1 *The basic sources of data analysis***

The longitudinal interview data were analysed manually, and based on the three sources; the transcribed audio-recorded interview data, notes taken during the interviews, and extra information sheet. The audio-recorded interview data were transcribed verbatim in Korean. The transcription was accomplished shortly after each interview, so that I could more easily remember the interview content and check any points needing clarification (Gillham, 2005). Remaining problems could be brought into the next interview session and discussed. Fortunately, the interviews were audio-recorded without technical problems or noise and thus there were few problems with transcribing them. I inserted some pauses, hesitations, and intonations, which, I thought, might have affected the participants' answers, such as indicating their emotions and responses (see Appendix X).

Transcriptions were analysed in Korean and only translated into English where extracts needed to be cited. I adopted Guion's (2001:2) interview guide, and the extra information sheets that I completed consisted of a 'face sheet' describing the time, place, and date of each interview session plus 'demographic information about the participant' that covered participants' personal information, such as age and sex.

Another aspect of the extra information was the 'post-interview comment sheet' covering the researcher's comments, feelings, and evaluation of each interview after it ended. Lastly, I completed a post-interview diary to check my reactions against the original verbatim transcripts from the audio-taped materials. For instance, I found that BK tended increasingly to make complaints about her study progress over the year, and so I kept a diary about my observations on her attitudes, and feelings across the interview sessions. As 'a source of analytical reflections' (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995:296), it contributed to discovering her changes over time, and helped me develop a detailed profile indicating how BK differed from the other participants.

Although the participants were asked to check the transcripts of their interviews to increase the accuracy and reliability of their responses (Gillham, 2005), this was very time-consuming and they did not want to review their transcripts. Attempting to avoid using the data in any way that would distort or harm the participant's responses, I chose a methodological procedure of identifying the outcomes I noted during the interviews; I tried to give a short verbal summary of what they said at the end of each interview session to confirm if I had misunderstood or distorted points. However, it was so time-consuming in the first interview with NJ that I could not continue it in later sessions. Instead I emailed both NJ and YJ the interview notes or particular points to be checked after the interview sessions. In the case of BK, MK, JM, and HC, I was able to

crosscheck my notes with them in the interview as well as focus on specific points that each of the participants had made after the final sessions. Moreover, I checked the accuracy by having a feedback discussion for summarising the interview content with each participant at their final interview session, as previously mentioned in section 5.3.

Having made an effort to minimise the research bias that could come from distorting or misinterpreting data in the process of data transcription (Hannan, 2007), I created a profile book for each participant, based on the three types of data listed above. Compiling the six case studies helped when it came to systematically summarising the data in a theme-based way at the final stage of data analysis.

### ***5.6.2. The participants' time frames***

In order to plot a very clear trajectory of how each participant developed across the six interviews, I made a time frame for each participant's interview sessions (see Appendix VII). This time-based categorisation of the qualitative data helped to give a greater understanding of the pattern and degree of each participant's adjustment as the terms progressed.

### ***5.6.3. The content analysis of the transcribed data***

As the interviews focus on the longitudinal data from each participant across the year, at the level of processing data, it was not simple to rely on computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software like CAQDAS or ATLASTI. As a result, I manually put the transcribed data into categories, based on the time frame of the six interview sessions and key themes (see Appendix XI). The theme based analysis underlay *Grounded theory*



(Glaser and Strauss 1967). As Hitchcock and Hughes 1995:296) explains,

*This approach argues for the detailed grounding of theory in the systematic and intensive analysis of empirical data in a microscopic detailed fashion. The researcher collects and compares data, codes the data and begins to organise ideas which emerge from the data.*

At a basic level, the ‘thematic analysis’ itself was not a tough task (Gillham, 2005:130), as a set of open-questions were pre-set in a thematic frame and the ‘structured conversation’ assisted me in arranging the data. The main categories and codes were created at the same time as the data was collected. Reviewing the transcriptions and other sources, the data was thus classified across patterns and themes, based on an ‘inductive approach’, with ‘data being explored in terms of both the general and particular units of meaning displayed within them’ (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995:296).

However, a more complex task was organising the data in chronological order, simultaneously with the theme-based categories. Considering that each participant had a slightly different pattern across times and themes, it was necessary to create personalised data classifications. To help manage the data systematically in terms of both theme and time, the data were categorised into two ways; (1) using both time frame and key themes and (2) only the themes without a time frame. I thus created a variety of ‘cross-tabulation’ frames (as suggested by Mathers, Fox, and Hunn, 1998), plotting different sessions by different participants, or different themes by different participants. Also for certain themes, the data from each participant was presented in an individual table with different time indications. This helped to discover the different and corresponding patterns across the six cases and also capture chronological changes in a

specific area within a particular individual. The results are reported in Chapters, 6 and 7.

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<sup>1</sup> Probing is about getting the respondent to tell you more about something where you sense there is more to be told (Gillham, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> I3 =Interview 3, so I4 =Interview 4

## **Chapter 6: Study Two: Results and Discussion: Part 1**

### **6.1 Introduction: In-depth interviews**

The longitudinal interview data from the six Korean Masters' students were analysed to find the main focuses: what specific problems the students had, why these were problematic to them, how they changed or how far they improved, and finally what they did over the one year to try and overcome these problems. In order to aid readability, I will first discuss the participants' personal backgrounds before examining the main areas that each student faced studying overseas. The results are presented via a theme-based structure, based around the three interrelated areas of: 'social adaptation', 'academic learning', and 'improvement in English skills'.

In the first part of the findings (Chapter 6), each interviewee's personal background comprising their academic experience in Korea will be, at first, discussed as well as their motivation to study in the UK. I then deal with the main issues of the first part; how each interviewee's socio-cultural adjustment was accomplished for their one year of study, especially highlighting their social interactions with native speakers in the UK. In addition, their first impressions of British culture on arrival are noted, as is anything that made them feel insecure. How they coped and interacted with the things they highlighted as important at the first interview sessions will also be discussed. In particular, 'social adaptation' will focus on the students' level of satisfaction, and breadth of social interaction with English native speakers, and on their participation in social activities on and off campus.

In the second part (Chapter 7), the participants' progress regarding 'Academic learning' will be mainly discussed, and how far they were satisfied with their academic achievement in a different academic context, including supervisory meetings, writing an

academic essay, and participating in seminars and lectures. I also consider how far they perceived that different learning styles had affected their academic achievement during the course of the academic year.

Another important section of Chapter 7 will deal with the participants' progress in improving their English as a second language; which of the four skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) they perceived to be least or most improved is investigated with respect to situational and cultural factors.



## 6.2 The respondents' personal information

### 6.2.1 Personal background

<b>ID</b>	<b>Academic background in higher education in Korea</b>	<b>English learning experience in the UK</b>	<b>Experience of any other English-speaking country</b>	<b>IELTS score</b>
<b>NJ</b>	BA in Philosophy	1 month (EFL preessional course)	No	6.5
<b>BK</b>	BA in English Language and Literature	No	United States / 1 year / BA course as an exchange student	6.5
<b>YJ</b>	BA and MA in Sociology	1 month (EFL preessional course)	No	6.5
<b>JM</b>	BA in Electronics	1 year, 3 months (General English courses and IELTS preparation course)	No	6.5
<b>MK</b>	BA in English Language and Literature	No	No	6.5
<b>HC</b>	BA and MA in Counselling	1 year (General English courses and IELTS preparation course)	No	6.5

Table 6.1 In-depth interviews: participants' academic and linguistic backgrounds

It can be seen from Table 6.1 that none of the six participants had a substantial background of ESL study although only one participant had no experience at all. All of them had completed undergraduate programmes at Korean universities and two of the

participants had taken masters' courses in Korea, which provided a good basis for comparing the cultures of learning and teaching in academic contexts between the UK and Korea. However, this was not the case for the other four students, who had not experienced masters' courses in Korea. In order to minimise the potential bias arising from these imbalances of experience, I have focused more on tendencies and patterns of behaviour, alongside participants' attempts to overcome their difficulties or problems and on the overall progress of their adjustment during the one year, rather than concentrating upon cross-cultural differences in specific academic areas.

### **6.2.2 Participants' motivation to study in the UK**

It is of some importance to examine what motivated the participants to study overseas for their masters' courses. Such an understanding may allow us to observe where particular students placed the emphases of his and her studies. The six subjects focused mainly on academic success and language competency, which is in line with the reasons discussed in Sec 2.3.1 concerning why Korean students tend to go abroad to study (see Table 6.2).

<b>ID</b>	<b>The motivation to study for a master's degree in the UK</b>
<b>NJ</b>	<p>To understand British culture (traditions, values, and beliefs) and thus find out what are the differences between Korea and the UK.</p> <p>To learn English as a second language in an English-speaking culture with more focus on communicative language competence.</p> <p>To achieve an MA degree from a UK university.</p>
<b>BK</b>	<p>To study language and linguistics (English) in an English speaking country and experience the culture of the target language, in order to learn her subject and the language better.</p> <p>To achieve a degree in a shorter time than at US or Canadian universities (one-year MA programme).</p>
<b>YJ</b>	<p>To acquire knowledge more systematically in the UK, where both theoretical foundations and practical research have been developed.</p> <p>To obtain the prestige of a degree from a UK university.</p> <p>To expand his world view by experiencing cultural diversity.</p> <p>To enhance his English ability by maximising the benefit of using English through interaction with native speakers as well as by means of acquiring knowledge and expressing opinions in academic contexts.</p>
<b>JM</b>	<p>Primarily to improve his English in an English language culture and secondly to achieve a Master's degree.</p> <p>To experience British academic culture.</p>
<b>MK</b>	<p>To improve her English skills and gain an MA degree in the UK. This means she would be more qualified to teach English in Korea (this was recommended by the high school where she had been working as an English teacher).</p>

	<p>To experience British culture and language (she was looking forward to learning British accents and cultural information).</p> <p>To complete a Masters course in a shorter time (one-year in the UK) for practical reasons.</p>
HC	<p>To develop English communicational skills by using English through interaction with British people in a British cultural context (she desired to learn British English and thus speak English more naturally and fluently in real speaking and listening contexts).</p>

Table 6.2 In-depth interviews: participants' motivation to study in the UK

It appears to be the case that all six participants expected to improve their English communicational skills in a British cultural context, in addition to gaining a master's degree there. They believed that prolonged exposure to an English-speaking culture would be beneficial to the development of their communicative competence. In this respect, they anticipated encountering numerous opportunities to interact with native speakers through various informal social activities. As JM commented,

*Most of all, I think the best thing is to meet many British people and experience British culture, as well as getting a masters' degree for the course here. I really want to improve my English and thus speak with many British people and take part in many social activities during the course. (JM, 11)*

Using English in academic contexts such as the classroom or in seminars was seen by students as an additional advantage to studying on a university programme in an English-speaking country, contributing to their competency in English. Besides language competence, the six also desired to explore a new culture through interaction with local people. However, none of them seemed to anticipate what specific cultural



differences they would experience in the learning and teaching context of UK higher education.

Despite their aspirations to improve their language abilities, their primary goal of overseas study was seen to be that of successfully receiving a Master's degree from a UK university, anticipating that the Masters' degree awarded by a UK higher education establishment would guarantee them getting a more prestigious job or better educational opportunities than in Korea. This is supported by the idea that a university's prestige may be linked to the prestige of a job, as was mentioned in section 2.3. A degree from a 'developed' English-speaking country such as the UK or USA is perceived as being highly valuable, although it still depends on the prestige of the university in that country (www.datanews.co.kr, 2006). The fact that an MA normally lasts just one year in the UK was given as a key reason for choosing UK universities by the participants NJ, BK, and MK (see Table 6.2.).

In short, the participants were mainly motivated to develop their English communicative competence by interacting with English native speakers in the UK and experiencing British culture, whilst obtaining the prestige of a British higher degree and doing so in a shorter span of time than elsewhere.

### **6.3 Socio-cultural adaptation**

#### ***6.3.1. Feeling questions at the first interview sessions (impressions and worries)***

Participants' initial impressions of British culture on their arrival and what worried them most at the beginning of the courses, as desired in the first set of interviews, are summarised in Table 6.3 and Table 6.4.

ID	First impression of British culture on your arrival?
NJ	He was very impressed that British people commonly shared a house together and he was interested in traditions or values which underlay cultural behaviour. (I1)
BK	British people were seen as less likely to interact with people who are not really close, and thus be hard to approach. (I1)
YJ	He thought that British people do not care about how other people behave or think, or about how others think about themselves. They respect the diversities among each other, but they also tend to be less warm and friendly. (I1)
JM	He thought that the individual's rights are more respected in the UK and British people tend to depend heavily on self-reliance. He was very surprised to see people waiting for a long time without complaining, for example, at bus stops and restaurants. (I1)
MK	It is a rational society when it comes to money. People are not friendly and it is hard to get close to them. (I1)
HC	Office work is too slow and retarded in many cases. She was very impressed that there was such a variety of charity shops, which she interpreted to mean that British people are economical and even frugal. (I1)

Table 6.3 In-depth interviews: First impressions of British culture on arrival

All six students rapidly discovered a variety of cultural aspects appertaining to the UK which involved both favourable and unfavourable opinions of British culture. Both YJ and JM pointed out that British people tend to behave in a fairly individualistic way, which was partly shown in the data from the questionnaire survey (see section 4.4.1.2). In particular, MK and BK reported having unfavourable opinions of the apparent unfriendliness displayed by British people, and thus felt it would be difficult to make

British friends.

<b>ID</b>	<b>What makes you feel most worried?</b>
<b>NJ</b>	English language skills for both academic learning and communicating with people in real life (especially listening skills). Understanding lectures. The thought of writing an academic essay (structuring an argument, language use, and plagiarism). (I1)
<b>BK</b>	The thought of writing an academic essay (structuring an argument and plagiarism). (I1)
<b>YJ</b>	English skills for academic learning and communicating with people in real life. Understanding lectures. Completing the degree programme successfully. Writing an academic essay (structuring an argument and plagiarism). (I1)
<b>JM</b>	English skills for communicating with people. Understanding lectures. Completing the degree programme successfully. (I1)
<b>MK</b>	Isolation as a foreign student. Completing the degree programme successfully (holistic academic worries). (I1)
<b>HC</b>	Writing an academic essay as an assessment (paraphrasing and plagiarism). Completing the degree programme successfully. (I1)

Table 6.4 In-depth interviews: Participants' initial worries

All of the subjects were very concerned about writing an academic essay, given the fact that English academic writing would be a major part of assessments for academic success on their Masters' courses. This concern derived from the fact that they were not at all confident about their written English, as well as from their lack of background

knowledge of how 'academic writing in English' should be carried out. This would imply that their initial feeling of insecurity about writing academic essays partly is associated with lack of confidence in using English (Brown, 2008). In addition to language concerns about written English, more culturally specific areas such as structuring an argument and the strictness with respect to plagiarism were seen as problematic and a particular challenge for NJ, BK, YJ, and HC. According to HC,

*I am not really sure about the criteria for avoiding 'plagiarism'. In particular, when I paraphrase, I feel most concerned about committing plagiarism. I have heard that plagiarism is taken seriously and considered illegal here. I also took a masters course in Korea, but referencing or plagiarism were not considered as seriously as here. I really panic about this area whenever I practice academic writing in my English support course. (HC, II)*

MK added,

*Although I have been teaching English to high school students in Korea, I have not learned or been taught how to write academic text in English systematically in Korea. I do not understand how to structure an argument in English. Also, I feel very unclear about the criteria for plagiarism as well as using English words for writing. (MK, II)*

Academic writing thus appeared to be one of the greatest worries that the five participants had at the beginning of the first term, which was directly linked to a concern about their academic achievement, and the marks they would obtain for their assessed work. In addition to academic writing, MK reported that she was afraid that she would be isolated as a foreigner because she felt very pressured to communicate in English when interacting with people on and off campus. This can be explained not just by her language problems, but also her first impression that British people are



unfriendly and hard to get close to.

With regard to what attempts the students made in order to overcome the areas that they were very concerned about, these included: watching TV to improve listening skills (by BK, and JM), recording lectures to support missing points in the lectures (by NJ, MK, and HC), meeting people to improve their spoken English on and off campus, (JM and YJ) and taking academic writing courses (NJ, YJ, and MK). It is worth noting how each participant reacted to their difficulties or problems as the term progressed and the next section will discuss the variations in their reactions, changes, and attempts to address their problems alongside how these adjustments progressed in the different areas.

### ***6.3.2. Social interaction with English-native speakers in the UK***

#### **6.3.2.1. Social interaction with department staff**

##### ***A. Interaction with supervisors***

The interview data from each interview are summarised in Tables 6.5 to 6.10.

**NJ**

<b>Interview sessions</b>	<b>Problematic areas and reactions</b>
<b>I1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● He did not understand supervision sessions: he met his supervisor only once at the beginning of the first term in Korea (He had no experience of supervisory meetings in Korea).</li> <li>● He was waiting until his supervisor contacted him, but he was rather concerned about this matter.</li> </ul>
<b>I2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● He discussed a 'practice essay' in the second meeting and this proved very useful to him. He sent emails to express his gratitude for the day's meeting after he got back home.</li> <li>● He found several communicational difficulties in English when he needed to express himself in detail / in depth.</li> <li>● He never contacted his supervisor, even when he had a question or academic problem: he was very hard to contact. He thought even using emails would disturb his supervisor.</li> <li>● He was not clear how far he could request any academic advice.</li> </ul>
<b>I3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● He felt the supervision meetings were always useful to him, but still hesitated to contact him: He expected his supervisor to send emails for the meetings and take care of him with academic advice.</li> <li>● He sent emails rather than ask questions in face-to-face interactions.</li> </ul>
<b>I4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Not much had changed.</li> <li>● He met his supervisor to discuss his dissertation topic.</li> </ul>
<b>I5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● He met his supervisor very rarely.</li> </ul>
<b>I6</b>	<p>Overall self-evaluation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● He expected his supervisor to manage all the supervision meetings.</li> <li>● He hesitated to contact him many times, even when he desperately needed to request academic advice.</li> </ul>

Table 6.5 In-depth interviews: Problems with and reactions to the supervisory systems: NJ

**BK**

Interview sessions	Problematic areas and reactions
I 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●She did not know what the supervision sessions were for in the UK educational system ; she had no experience of supervisory meetings in Korea.</li> <li>●She was not encouraged to contact her supervisor frequently. She hesitated to ask questions.</li> <li>●She had met her supervisor only once at the beginning of the first term.</li> </ul>
I 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●She met her supervisor twice during the first term.</li> <li>●Although she understood the supervisory meetings more than in I1, she was not familiar with them.</li> <li>●She had only a very short conversation with her supervisor. Overall, she did not actively ask questions, even though she needed to clarify some points.</li> </ul>
I 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●She was not satisfied with the supervisory sessions: she thought that the supervisions she had did not guide her towards deciding on a topic for her dissertation.</li> </ul>
I 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●She received quite useful and satisfying advice from her supervisor.</li> </ul>
I 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●She felt that supervisions in the UK were not very useful overall.</li> <li>●She was dissatisfied with the supervision system itself, which seemed to rely on students' independent research and voluntary contact. She expected to meet her supervisor regularly and frequently.</li> </ul>
I 6	<p>Overall self-evaluation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●She expected the supervisions to take the form of regular meetings. She found it hard to adjust to voluntarily contacting her supervisor.</li> <li>●She hesitated many times to contact her supervisor when she needed to request academic advice because she was afraid that she would disturb him.</li> </ul> <p>This did not encourage her to improve herself academically.</p>

Table 6.6 In-depth interviews: Problems and reactions in supervisory systems: BK

YJ

Interview sessions	Problematic areas and reactions
I 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● He did not understand what the supervision sessions were for in the UK: he had not experienced them in Korea.</li> <li>● He emailed his supervisor once and was very grateful to receive useful advice about the reading lists and useful courses.</li> </ul>
I 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● He met his supervisor twice.</li> <li>● He was more confident in, and had adjusted to, contacting his supervisor, and felt he understood the supervision system better. He was not still very clear what the supervision was about, though found that supervision meetings were very useful as long as he was active about making contact and asking questions.</li> <li>● He was satisfied with his supervision meetings and grateful for his supervisor's caring attitude.</li> <li>● He still hesitated to ask his supervisor any questions.</li> <li>● He generally used emails to ask questions rather than the face-to face discussions, because he was not confident about his communication skills.</li> </ul>
I 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● He tried to use polite linguistic devices both in discussions and email letters (He was always worried if he needed to say 'how are you' or use 'could / would').</li> <li>● He discovered cultural differences in the relationship between students and supervisors: it was less hierarchical and vertical in the UK; he felt less unwilling to ask questions or request academic advice from his supervisor than previously.</li> <li>● He was very impressed by interacting with his supervisors using emails.</li> </ul>
I 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● He was 70% satisfied with his supervision meetings.</li> <li>● He still struggled with verbally expressing his in-depth ideas to his supervisor.</li> </ul>
I 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● He discussed his dissertation with his supervisor once, but he had communication problems; his supervisor could not fully understand what he thought.</li> </ul>
I 6	<p>Overall self-evaluation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● He had adjusted well to the supervision system in the UK and thus he did not hesitate to ask questions, although he had still problems with communicating fluently with his supervisor.</li> <li>● He found that he could approach his supervisor more in the UK and thus supervisory meetings could benefit his academic achievement, but he still hesitated to contact him in many cases.</li> </ul>

Table 6.7 In-depth interviews: Problems and reactions in supervisory systems: YJ



JM

Interview sessions	Problematic areas & reactions
I 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● He did not understand the supervision sessions in the UK; he had not experienced them in Korea.</li> <li>● He really hesitated to email his supervisor for cultural and language reasons; he was concerned about being impolite to ask the supervisor for academic advice and had a fear of speaking in English. But he tried to email his supervisors to ask some questions.</li> </ul>
I 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● He met his supervisor three times using the advertised office hours: he still had a lot of difficulty with using English when discussing things with his supervisor.</li> </ul>
I 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● In most cases, he only sent emails to ask questions, instead of interacting face to face.</li> <li>● He thought most supervisors in UK universities were less authoritative than in Korea and he thus hesitated less to email his supervisor than in the first term.</li> </ul>
I 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● He often sent emails to ask questions.</li> <li>● He was quite satisfied with his supervisors' help both psychologically and academically: he felt that his supervisor was very caring and considerate about his lack of competence in spoken English.</li> </ul>
I 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● He sent emails to his supervisor to ask questions about his dissertation and he was satisfied with the supervisor's guidance and comments.</li> </ul>
I 6	<p>Overall self-evaluation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Supervision meetings across the course were very useful to motivate and encourage him to study hard.</li> <li>● He was very positive about the relationship between supervisors and students, which was he thought more rational, open, independent, and vertical than in Korea.</li> </ul>

Table 6.8 In-depth interviews: Problems and reactions in supervisory systems: JM

**MK**

<b>Interview sessions</b>	<b>Problematic areas &amp; reactions</b>
<b>I 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●She did not know what the supervision sessions were for and had not experienced them in Korea.</li> <li>●She was just waiting until her supervisor contacted her first.</li> </ul>
<b>I 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● She understood what the supervision systems in UK higher education were for after meeting her supervisor three times.</li> <li>●She felt more adjusted to the meetings: she was satisfied with the guidance and advice about the outline for the essay by her supervisor, and felt more confident in interacting with her supervisor. This encouraged her to study.</li> </ul>
<b>I 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Her supervisor was so caring that she felt psychologically more comfortable with talking to her and more actively asked questions or requested academic advice.</li> </ul>
<b>I 4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●She felt supervisory meetings were very satisfying and settled down both psychologically and academically.</li> </ul>
<b>I 5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● She discussed her dissertation with her supervisor and this was useful to her, although there was still a language barrier what it came to expressing herself in detail.</li> </ul>
<b>I 6</b>	<p>Overall self-evaluation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●Interacting with her supervisor was a very good experience, in that she learned a different academic culture as well as improved her academic and language skills.</li> </ul>

Table 6.9 In-depth interviews: Problems and reactions in supervisory systems: MK

**HC**

<b>Interview sessions</b>	<b>Problematic areas &amp; reactions</b>
<b>I 1</b>	<p>She did not understand what supervision sessions were for; she had not experienced any in Korea even though she had completed a master's course.</p> <p>She was concerned about when she could contact her supervisor.</p> <p>She felt psychologically distanced from her supervisor, which made her panic when meeting him.</p>
<b>I 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● She had met her supervisor three times and now she felt clearer how supervision meetings worked in the UK, but she did not think they were very useful, because of the very limited time for a meeting. She also tried actively to ask the other academic staff questions whenever she needed to know something.</li> </ul>
<b>I 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● She felt less satisfied with supervision meetings than she had expected, so she tried to rely on the other lecturers. This did not meet with positive reactions, in part, because she was not accustomed to asking questions to lecturers or seminar leaders.</li> </ul> <p>The problem was that she felt that her supervisor was not very caring, and was not considerate about her cultural or language barriers.</p>
<b>I 4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● She felt very dissatisfied with her supervision meetings, so instead of asking her supervisor for academic help, she tried to rely on doing literature research on her own or asking the other academic staff after class using emails.</li> </ul>
<b>I 5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● She felt her supervisor was more open than in previous terms when discussing dissertation matters, but she was not very satisfied with her supervisor's advice.</li> </ul>
<b>I 6</b>	<p>Overall self-evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● She thought that supervision meetings were more systematized than in Korea, even though her supervision meetings were not useful to encourage her to work hard or improve her study skills.</li> <li>● She was not satisfied with her supervisory meetings and was not very active to solve the problems with supervisory meetings overall.</li> </ul>

Table 6.10 In-depth interviews: Problems and reactions in supervisory systems: HC

Although there were some individual variations in the students' adaptation to supervisory meetings in the UK as summarised in tables 6.5 to 6.10 above, the key point is that none of them appeared to know initially what the meetings were for. This is

supported by both the preliminary interview data (see section 3.4) and the open-ended data from the survey (see section 4.4.1.4). In Korea, although all the subjects had experienced at least an undergraduate degree, none of them were aware who their own supervisors had been, they had not, in most cases, actually met their supervisors, or understood why supervisors are necessary. Consequently they did not have any background knowledge of supervisory systems. This shows quite clearly that there are cultural differences in the concept of supervisor between the two different academic contexts.

Because of this lack of experience and understanding, the students said that they felt very reluctant to contact their supervisors at the beginning of the first term and could not overcome this passivity. This can be explained by the cultural assumption that the Korean students had experienced a more hierarchical and vertical relationship between teachers and students in Korea (see section 2.3.2.1. A.a). In the first interview sessions, although they found out who their supervisors were and wanted to meet them, NJ, HC and YJ reported being very worried about waiting until their supervisors first contacted them. They were not clear about whether this was the more courteous procedure or not and were also concerned about what they needed to prepare for their first supervision meetings. HC commented that a psychological distance from her supervisor as an authority figure led her to hesitate to contact her supervisor. She unconsciously thought that the relationship between her and her supervisor in the UK should be hierarchical, of the sort she was accustomed to in Korea.

Alongside this cultural reason, the students all agreed that they were not confident about speaking with their supervisors. NJ was very reluctant to communicate verbally with his supervisor because he often experienced misunderstandings when



conversing with him. However, their lack of oral language skills did not cause serious problems as three cases showed: NJ, YJ, and JM preferred to email, and thus mostly emailed to ask questions or request academic advice, especially when they needed to clarify details. This may also imply that these students were more accustomed to written than to spoken English.

In terms of their level of satisfaction with interacting with their supervisor, it is inevitable that there would be variation resulting from the different personalities involved, and the different situations of the supervisors, courses, and departments. However, it was clear that each of the students reacted differently when they became dissatisfied with their supervisory interactions; BK gave up actively contacting her supervisor when she was not very satisfied with her supervisory meetings, finding that they did not encourage her to improve her academic skills. HC on the other hand relied, from the end of the second term, upon self-study and research, making several attempts to actively contact other academic staff when she needed to ask a question.

Masters students need to adapt faster than PhD or undergraduate students (see section 4.4.2.), but the interview data make it abundantly clear that all six participants found it hard to adjust to supervisory meetings in the UK within the framework of a year. By the end of the year, they were still quite passive about contacting and interacting with their supervisors, even when they had tried to improve the situation and resolve their problems. In order to understand why the six students all appeared to express little satisfaction with their interactions with their supervisors, it is necessary to examine the range of specific behavioural patterns.

First, all six participants reported that they were very concerned about being polite in terms of using language and meeting the role expectations of their supervisors.

In other words, they tried to use polite linguistic devices with formal expressions such as 'could you', or 'would you' when verbally communicating with them or writing emails. They were also very hesitant to ask their supervisors for academic advice, in order not to disturb them, or cause them, to lose face, in the event that the supervisor was unable to help them. Even when the students came to understand the academic expectations of supervisory meetings and the relationship between students and supervisors in the UK, this tendency to be concerned about being polite did not change very much. For instance, NJ noted,

*As I experienced in the first term, I think I bothered my supervisor, making him open such a silly email I sent as soon as I got home after I finished my supervision meeting in the first term. The email was to express my gratitude for the meeting with him; "Thank you very much for giving me your time for the meeting today. I hope that I did not bother you...." Although I realised what a useless email he would think it was, I still hesitated about whether I needed to express my gratitude whenever I had a meeting with him. (NJ, 15)*

Y.J. commented similarly on using linguistic devices to express politeness;

*I think I always used 'would you..., could you..., ' whenever I talked to my supervisor or emailed her. Also, I was always hesitant; clearly, it is not the best way to start with 'How are you' in such an email. I think it can be rude to make direct requests in an email. Although I think this derives from politeness – involving values that I am not accustomed to in Korea and thus it is difficult to understand that I do not need to think about the question of politeness so much here. I am always worried about being rude. (YJ, 13)*

His comment shows that politeness was a serious problem when it came to communicating with supervisors and requesting academic advice from them. In addition, his attempt to be polite before making a request comes from pragmatically culture-

specific behaviour in the Korean communicational context (see section 2.3.2.2. on the cross-cultural differences in 'making a request' between Korea and America).

Secondly, the questionnaire survey results showed that 22.9% of the respondents reported that they had discovered differences between the two countries in how far students' rights to request academic advice are guaranteed (see section 4.4.1.4.). It was anticipated that the interview results would be largely similar, and this expectation proved to be correct. However, it needs to be born in mind that while the interviews were able to highlight areas of concern to all the six students, there was a limit to the extent to which they were in position to directly compare the UK and Korean systems, as only two (YJ and HC) had undertaken MAs in Korea.

Despite the above limitation, I made an attempt to examine particular areas that contrasted, based on the data from YJ and HC, who had experienced MAs in Korea. As HC noted,

*I did not have any regular supervision sessions in Korea when I did my master's course, although it depends on the department. During the course in Korea, I always felt a psychological distance between my supervisor and me, which discouraged me from contacting him, even though I needed to discuss my dissertation with him. During the course in Korea, in many cases, I contacted my seniors more often than my supervisor; they were mostly on the PhD courses, when I needed to discuss things and request academic advice. (HC, II)*

HC's comment neatly illustrates the finding by Prasad and Mannes (2004) that a vertical relationship between students and supervisors, deriving from Confucian values concerning the relationship between students and teachers, makes it difficult for students to contact their supervisor. Rather than attempting to interact with their

supervisors, students tend to rely more on interaction with their seniors. The relationship between juniors and seniors does not only relate to getting jobs (see section 2.2.1), but seniors also play an important role in handing down information and their university experience to their juniors. Thus, it is unsurprising that HC would have felt more comfortable about asking her seniors for academic advice in the department than about contacting her supervisor either in Korea or the UK.

Due to a lack of experience with supervisory meetings in Korea, HC said she did not know how to prepare for her UK supervision meetings at the beginning of the first term, and was very unsure about whether or not to wait until her supervisors contacted her first. She asked me several times at the first and second interview sessions whether it was preferable to wait until her supervisor first emailed her. Although she felt more adjusted to the supervisory sessions in the second and final term, she was still concerned about whether she would disturb her supervisor or not whenever she asked him for academic advice on her work. Although YJ was less concerned about meeting his supervisor than HC, he also asked me for some advice on his supervision sessions during the year, as he too was unfamiliar with meeting and discussing things with a supervisor:

*Initially, I thought I would bother my supervisor if I contacted him before he emailed me. I had been just waiting until he had time and thus could email me. I was very worried if I was doing the right thing or not. I am very unfamiliar with meeting and discussing things with my supervisor. I was concerned that I would make a mistake during the first supervisory meeting. (YJ, I1)*

Although the two students expected their supervisors to contact them first, which was in fact the right thing to do, the important point is that they were not clear about what to do



and what would be polite and courteous. It is, in particular, noteworthy that both participants tended to discuss the matter of their supervision sessions, and the relationship between them and their supervisors, with me first, rather than directly discussing the question with their supervisors. They tended to depend more on my suggestions or advice to sort out their initial worries in the first term, considering me as a senior who was experienced at the MA level. Like HC and YJ, the other participants also frequently tried from the first interview to the fifth to ask me about supervision matters, such as how many times they could meet in a term, or how often it is acceptable to email one's supervisor to ask questions. This tendency was particularly extreme during the first term, but continued, albeit at a lower level, throughout the year.

Having grown accustomed to the non-existence or formality of Korean supervisions, NJ was not aware of the supervisory role in the UK or of students' and teachers' responsibilities, and thus he did not initially have any understanding of what his supervisor could do for him during the academic year. BK similarly reported that she did not understand the supervision system in the UK, pointing out at the beginning of the course,

*I do not expect my supervisor to do anything for me, and I do not try to actively contact him or rely on the meetings when needed. In fact, I guess it would be impossible for my supervisor to care for his students individually. (BK, I1)*

In short, none of the students initially perceived how UK supervision sessions are organised and run, or understand the role of a supervisor with respect to their overall academic achievement. They were not aware of cultural differences in the supervision system between the two countries and were still accustomed to a strong vertical

relationship with their supervisors.

Interestingly, this finding does not completely correspond to 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, a view which may well lead to a quite different series of cultural mismatches between international students and their supervisors in the host country. The confusion on the part of the six Korean students changed when they developed a greater understanding of the UK supervisory system. Although they did not anticipate their supervisors caring for them in the first term, by the second term B.K *did* complain that her supervisor did not seem very caring.

As discussed in sec 6.4.2.5, the confusion about the function of UK supervision sessions seems to have led to considerable uncertainty by all six participants about how far they could request academic advice from their supervisors. Moreover, even when the students had experienced supervisions, the reluctance to ask for advice persisted. Thus, YJ noted,

*I feel I am getting more confident about contacting my supervisor now in the second term, but I am still unsure if I can request any advice from him or not. In the first term, I asked him to guide me in making an outline for my assessed essay, but I am not sure if I can ask again him to give me some guidance for another essay this term. (YJ, I3)*

Lastly, the survey findings showed that 37% of the respondents said that they found cultural differences in the relationship between supervisors and students (see section 4.4.1.4.). It was anticipated that the interview data would be analogous, and as the year progressed, all the participants except for BK reported that they were

increasingly able to discuss things with their supervisors, based on a more equal and open relationship between the two of them. As JM put it,

*I felt that the authoritarian position of supervisors and other academic staff in Korea made me hesitate to approach them. However, in the UK, supervisors appear more approachable and open to the students (JM, I5).*

Despite having a favourable attitude towards an atmosphere where they could discuss things freely with their supervisors, the students were nevertheless unable to fully overcome the cultural barriers which discouraged active interaction. They remained in general fairly passive about contacting their supervisors even at the end of the year, though YJ and JM attempted to contact and interact with their supervisors more actively and voluntarily than the other four. This problem only serves to highlight the difficulty of adapting to very different cultural norms within the space of a one year programme.

***B. Interaction with other academic staff and department activities***

The interaction patterns of each participant are summarised in Table 6.11 below.

<b>ID</b>	<b>Interaction with academic staff other than one's supervisor</b>	<b>Participation in receptions and departmental social events</b>
<b>NJ</b>	<p>He did not attempt to interact with other academic staff from. (term 1 to the end of the year)</p> <p>He never expected to have unclear interaction except with his supervisor. (I1)</p>	<p>He participated in the first reception, expecting to interact with other students and academic staff. (I1 and I2)</p> <p>He continued to participate throughout the year, although it was not as useful as he expected. (term 1 to term 3)</p>
<b>BK</b>	<p>She did not attempt to interact with other academic staff: she did not have any chances to interact with them and she was not even willing to create any interaction with other academic staff across the year.</p> <p>She did not feel academic staff were friendly and considerate, although they were not authoritative. (term 1 to term 3)</p>	<p>She participated in the first reception, expecting to interact with other students and academic staff.</p> <p>She continued to participate throughout the year.</p> <p>She complained that there were few departmental activities where the students and staff could freely converse with each other. (I5)</p>
<b>YJ</b>	<p>He did not attempt to interact with academic staff all the year when he needed to discuss or ask something; he was concerned if it would be impolite or not.</p> <p>He never expected to have this sort of interaction except with his supervisor. (term 1 to term 3)</p>	<p>He actively participated in each reception until the end of the second term.</p> <p>He intentionally attempted to interact with staff and students. (term 1 and term 2)</p> <p>Formal receptions only occurred three times, which was not useful enough to practice communicational skills with them. (term 1 to term 3)</p>



<p style="text-align: center;"><b>JM</b></p>	<p>He tried to actively ask questions and discuss things with other academic staff, by creating meetings on his own.</p> <p>He often had some misunderstandings in communication with them.</p> <p>Since the final term, his tendency to actively interact with the academic staff has diminished.</p>	<p>He actively participated in each reception every term, trying hard to interact with staff and students.</p> <p>Although he felt more receptions or formal meetings were required to improve his communicational skills, he felt it was good to see people in the department. (term 1 to term 3)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>MK</b></p>	<p>She was not comfortable with interacting with academic staff.</p> <p>She was very afraid that her lack of English skills would lead to misunderstandings and was thus concerned about losing face; she never expected to interact with other academic staff and she only relied on supervision meetings. (term 1 to term 3)</p>	<p>She participated in the receptions in the first and second term. Initially, she intended to improve her communicational skills through interaction with people in the department, but it was less satisfying than she expected. (I3 and I4)</p> <p>It was a very good experience to exchange cultural points with her coursemates who were mostly international students. (term I and final term)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>HC</b></p>	<p>She tried to rely on interaction with other academic staff when she felt the supervision meetings were not useful at all from the second term. This did not help her to improve either her academic or her language skills.</p>	<p>She participated in the introductory reception, but it was hard to interact with people and get to know them. (I1)</p> <p>She participated in the receptions only twice (term1 and term 2) because it was not really useful to interact and use her communicational skills.</p> <p>She never attended social events from the third term.</p>

Table 6.11 In-depth interviews: Progress of interaction with other academic staff and in department activities.

As Table 6.11 shows, there were individual variations in the students' experiences of

and feelings about adjustment to the UK higher education system, although none of them were very satisfied with the frequency of formal receptions, or active about creating interactions with academic staff. BK felt British people are not friendly and hard to get close to (see Table 6.3). In line with this, she made no attempt to have any interaction with academic staff other than her supervisor, which continued until the course ended. NJ, YJ, and MK did not expect to have much interaction with other academic staff except for their own supervisors, and thus did not attempt to speak with any other staff during the course. It is also interesting that YJ and MK, who were fairly active and positive about meeting their supervisors, only relied on their interaction with their supervisors in the department.

However, HC (see above) tried, in the second term, to rely on interaction with other academic staff instead of her supervisor, to obtain academic advice, as she found her supervisory sessions unhelpful. Nevertheless, this approach did not help her to develop her academic skills very much. Of all the participants, JM was, from the middle of the first term, the most active in interacting with academic staff and tried to set up a number of informal meetings by himself, even though he had language problems communicating in English. He was initially very keen to interact with other academic staff, in the belief that this would help him to develop his academic skills, but these attempts to set up interaction gradually reduced over the second term.

It is also worth noting that the five respondents wanted to interact with people through participating in the departmental receptions, although they felt that the frequency of these departmental activities was not sufficient to develop their social interaction. NJ, BK, and JM participated in the receptions every term, while the others stopped going in the final term. MK particularly said that she anticipated that these

‘formal’ social activities would lead to a series of informal meetings with department friends, but in reality the receptions failed to motivate them to interact very much.

### 6.3.2.2. Social interaction outside the department

The social interaction of the Korean students in the UK can be divided into three categories; interaction with other Koreans, interaction with other international people, and interaction with British people. This categorisation is adopted from Brok and Levy (2005), who talk about interaction in ‘monocultural settings, multicultural settings, and intercultural or bicultural settings’. The relevant data from the interviews is summarised in Table 6.14.

ID	Who did they meet most frequently?
NJ	<p>Most of his social interaction was focused on Korean people from term 1 to term 3. Sometimes, he interacted with other international students on the course or flatmates in the college (in most cases, they were Asian students, such as Chinese or Japanese).</p> <p>He initiated interaction with British classmates on a few occasions, but his interaction with British people was minimal and increasingly diminished across the terms. He met almost only Korean people during the final term.</p>
BK	<p>She continued to have interactions with other international classmates until the course ended.</p> <p>She tried hard to avoid Korean people in the first term, but she increased her interaction with them after term 2.</p> <p>She interacted at times with British people in the Church, but had limited minimal interaction with British people elsewhere during the year.</p>

<p><b>YJ</b></p>	<p>Most of his social interaction was with Korean people during the year.</p> <p>He had minimal interaction with British students on the course as well as at the British church, or at the restaurant where he temporarily had a part-time job during the course.</p> <p>He had minimal informal interaction with other international students during the course.</p>
<p><b>JM</b></p>	<p>He had interaction with Korean people, other international students in the department and the Athletic Union, and British people even off campus in the first term.</p> <p>From term 2 to the end of the course, he made few attempts to have interaction informally with native speakers, because he found it was hard to make friends with British people. Instead, he focused more on interaction with other international students or Korean students.</p>
<p><b>MK</b></p>	<p>She was keen to interact with British people in term 1, but became more discouraged as the term progressed.</p> <p>From term 2, she focused more on meeting Korean people than other international students or British people in the church, but informally she met them two or three times a month and discussed things (with them).</p> <p>During the final term, she had minimal interaction with other international students or British people.</p>
<p><b>HC</b></p>	<p>Almost all of her interactions were with her Korean family and Korean classmates during the year and had minimal interaction with British people. She could only talk to British people when she visited her son's school once in a while and talked to the other parents.</p> <p>From the second term, she often interacted with several international friends after class until the course ended. .</p>

Table 6.12 In-depth interviews: Pattern of participants' social interaction

It can be seen from Table 6.12 that there was a range of variations in the



students' pattern of social interaction over the year, although none were able to overcome the tendency to rely on 'monocultural interactions' with Korean students. NJ initially tended to meet Korean people far more frequently than British people, or people from other countries. This continued up to the last term and his attempts to meet native speakers became less and less frequent: he had a limited time for meeting native speakers and was very reluctant to use his English in an intercultural or multicultural setting. He felt that he was becoming more confident in speaking to native speakers during the first term, but his English communication skills deteriorated as the opportunity to speak with native speakers reduced. During the final term, he had a very low level of interaction in multicultural and intercultural settings, and instead relied on speaking with his family and other Korean people.

Although BK tried hard not to meet other Korean people in the first term, focusing instead on interacting with other international students, from the end of the second term she depended more on interaction with Korean people than with people from other countries. The result was, she said that she felt isolated and discovered that the potential for improving her spoken English was quite limited when she communicated with her international friends. On her course, most of her classmates (over 80%) were international students. She believed that it was not feasible to make British friends or to develop her English skills by interacting with her classmates. She also found that there was not much interaction between the international group of students and the British students. She was accordingly very reluctant to join social meetings as an international student and even developed a fear of approaching British students from the second term. She showed a similar reluctance to talk to department staff, and represented an extreme case in terms of interaction with British classmates

(see Table 6.11). This led her to focus on the negative aspects of overseas study in relation to social interaction with local people, and she was the most frustrated of the group in this respect.

YJ was different, as he focused on meeting Korean people throughout the first term, as did N.J. However, in the second term, he became more active about speaking to native speakers, attempting to have informal meetings with people at his British church. He said that he was very interested in becoming socialized into British society, even though he said he experienced a number of challenges, such as communication problems, or a lack of opportunities to make British friends.

JM was very proactive in setting up and participating in many informal social meetings with native speakers, as well with as other international students, mainly from his course. He also participated in social clubs to play sport and did part-time jobs to improve his spoken English skills, although these did not in the event provide him with many opportunities to speak with British people. However, from the second term, the opportunities to speak with native speakers decreased and he reported feeling more comfortable mixing with Korean people for his final months at the University. Although he did not manage to have as much interaction as he had initially expected, and although the interactions he did have did not notably contribute to enhancing his spoken English skills, it is worth emphasising that he did try to enjoy meeting people from the UK and other countries, which stimulated him to explore many cultural aspects of British society.

MK was initially motivated to meet British people and other international students, and was quite excited about exploring different aspects of culture in the UK. However, she had far less opportunity to meet British people than she expected and did not actively set up meetings with them. In particular, she could not overcome the

problem that she was still very intimidated by speaking to native speakers as miscommunication often occurred, even in the last term. As well as problems with language, she formed an unfavourable attitude towards British students, seeing them as hard to approach, and believing that they were not interested in meeting international students. She did not have any informal meetings with British students at all during the third term, so she is a more extreme case than BK.

Finally, HC said she could not afford to converse with people other than her family due to lack of time. She met a few other Asian classmates during the first term, and thus her passivity in creating social interactions with native speakers was reinforced. She had just a few informal meetings with a British classmate and other international friends after classes during the second term. Although this did not, she felt, contribute to her developing communicative competencies in English, she did enjoy speaking to them in English and attempted to have more opportunities to meet British people. However, a very limited cycle of interaction with both native speakers and Korean people (except for her own children) prevailed over her social life during the course.

Consequently, it appears to be the case that all six students relied more on a 'monoculture pattern of interaction' with other Korean people and to have far less interaction with native speakers than they expected. This is similar to Trice's (2004:681) survey finding from 497 respondents of the situation on US universities that 'East and Southeast Asian students reported being isolated from Americans and 49% of 184 East Asian students and 64 % of students of 52 southeast expressed 'concern about relating to and befriending them'.

Except for JM, this reached extreme proportions. Thus, the participants were dissatisfied with their social interaction overall, especially when it came to being

socialized into various activities on campus or making British friends. This can be partly explained in terms of English communicational skills, in the sense that the degree of social interaction in the UK is inevitably related to one's English skills. The data from NJ and BK show clearly how communicative competence can impede socialisation into a host culture (as discussed in section 4.4.1.3.): being unable to overcome their language difficulties meant they were discouraged from interacting socially with native speakers (Heikenheimo and Shute, 1986; Perrucci and Hu, 1995; Surdam and Collins, 1984). The other participants also preferred to interact with Korean people because of language problems. The resulting minimal interaction with native speakers could not, they felt, benefit the development of their communicative competence. This may in part confirm that students who have more interaction with conational group of students tend to show less progress in learning the target language (Furnham and Erdmann, 1995; Kim, 1998; Ryan, 2005).

Situational factors and the attitude of the Korean students towards British people and culture also affected their ability to socialise into British culture. A one-year course does not offer many social activities and therefore the chances of interacting with local people are limited. This meant that the students spent most of their time on their coursework. They tended to be fairly passive and reluctant to meet British people or other international students, and certainly all the six cases showed an extreme passivity in terms of bicultural or multi cultural interaction in the final term. MK and BK both felt that British people are hard to get close to. However, JM did try, by having informal meetings with native speakers (see Table 6.12 to 6.13), although this ultimately did not contribute to developing a broader range of social contact with British friends in and outside university. This does not support the survey finding that 'students who have



more interaction tend to be more satisfied with their social interaction with British friends in and outside university' (section 4.4.1.3).

From a psychological point of view, the participants' dissatisfaction with social interaction related, in part, to their feelings of loneliness and isolation, a point that was made in the questionnaire survey (see section 4.4.1.3.). This also supports several researchers' findings about the association between international students' frustration with developing a social network with the community of the host culture and feelings of anxiety and isolation (Chen, 1999; Hull, 1978; Schram and Lauver, 1988, cited in Trice 2004). BK and MK specifically said that they avoided Korean people, as well as people from other countries, for a while and struggled with feelings of isolation. Indeed, MK reported having a strong sense of isolation, and depression, and of feeling lost in her overseas studies. In order to overcome this psychological distress, the students understandably developed a marked tendency towards a monocultural pattern of interaction with Korean people. As MK commented during the final term,

*I feel very guilty about using only Korean in the UK whenever I met Koreans. Although I am sick and tired of meeting only Korean people, I cannot avoid this recycling pattern of interaction and thus have become very passive about being socialized into British culture. Ultimately, I have failed to have active and useful social interactions with native speakers. (MK, I5)*

To sum up, the interview data give a clear answer to 'how far Korean students are concerned about developing social interaction with native speakers in the UK and how they try to overcome any problems or difficulties with social adjustment (see section 4.4.1.3). Firstly, although they expected to increase their degree of social interaction with native speakers and looked upon this as a benefit of overseas study, the

group was very dissatisfied with the breadth or amount of interaction they achieved. They developed a stronger and stronger tendency to rely on meeting Korean people as the year progressed. Alongside language limitations, their dissatisfaction with social interaction can be also explained by a lack of time and opportunities to meet native speakers. However, as the data above showed, their passive and reluctant attitude towards developing social interactions with native speakers can be seen as another main reason for their dissatisfaction; three participants (NJ, YJ and HC) made few attempts to set up informal meetings with local people, and MK and BK made none at all. JM was far more active in making social interactions with native speakers than other participants, but still could not overcome a lack of time and opportunity across the year. Consequently, the several factors made it clear that there was a limit to the extent which the six Korean students were able to develop their social interaction with native speakers. In short, all six showed a fairly high level of dissatisfaction with their social adjustment in the UK, given that they had had high expectations of interacting with native speakers, as one of their major aims of studying abroad. This partly follows Ward Bochner, and Furnham (2001)'s claim that contact with the host community rarely occurs to many international students in overseas study, which frustrates them.

### 6.3.2.3. Cultural withdrawal

ID	Have you ever experienced any cultural withdrawal?
NJ	<p>He did not have any serious loneliness or cultural problems during the course, although he sometimes felt isolated.</p> <p>Staying together with his family helped him to overcome loneliness and a sense of isolation.</p>
BK	<p>She was friendly with a classmate from Hong Kong, which helped her to avoid loneliness during the first term.</p> <p>From term 2 to the end of the course,</p> <p>1) she found that it was very hard to make close friends with other international students or make British friends, As a result, she felt isolated and tried to rely on the relationship with Korean friends.</p> <p>2) She felt very bored and had no sense of academic achievement or progress in the UK because she was not pushed to study hard to prepare for exams and it was very hard to meet British people. This made her very depressed and thus she avoided meeting people very often.</p>
YJ	<p>He stayed with his family, which helped him to avoid loneliness and a sense of isolation during the year.</p> <p>He had minimal interaction with British people, especially in class, and this made him feel isolated and he increasingly tended to avoid meeting British people from term 2.</p>
JM	<p>During the year,</p> <p>1) he kept a positive perspective about studying overseas by actively attempting to interact with the group of other international students and British people, whether or not he felt this helped him to be socialised into British society or improve his competency in English.</p> <p>2) he also had a sense of achievement about his academic progress; he felt he was quite good at adjusting to a different academic culture, although he sometimes felt isolated when he interacted with British people in the department</p>
MK	<p>Although she felt very isolated and lonely, she tried to meet people (Koreans and other international students) during the first term.</p> <p>From term 2, she felt isolated again; she studied alone and had few opportunities</p>

	<p>to interact with British people.</p> <p>Due to her lack of her English proficiency, she was very intimidated by speaking in English. Also, she was not accustomed to giving and taking turns, or making eye contact in discussion. As a result, she often stayed silent and passively tried to listen to what the others said. She was also afraid that she could not understand what was being said. Rather than actively trying to increase social interaction with British people to improve her English, she avoided meeting them or people from other countries.</p> <p>Throughout the year, she thought that British people were not open-minded and were thus hard to get close to.</p> <p>In the final term, she said that she desired very much to go back to Korea.</p>
<p><b>HC</b></p>	<p>During the year, she stayed with her family, which helped her to avoid loneliness and a sense of isolation. She felt she had previously adjusted reasonably well to staying overseas in a different city in the UK.</p> <p>From term 2 to the end of the course, she tried to take part in local activities with her family to explore British culture, even without interaction with British people. This made her develop a favourable attitude toward British culture.</p>

Table 6.13 In-depth interviews: Experience of cultural withdrawal

As Table 6.13 shows, all six participants felt isolated when it came to interacting with British people, which may in part have been caused or exacerbated by their lack of English communication skills. NJ, Y.J. and HC, who stayed with their own families, felt less isolated overall, while BK and MK reported a higher level of isolation and loneliness than the other respondents. In the case of BK, minimal interaction with British people and a struggle with an autonomous style of learning were the main factors to which she attributed her cultural withdrawal.

*I do not feel very often I am studying in the UK. I wanted to meet British people rather than Koreans or other international friends. I could not meet British people. I have met my classmate from Hong Kong, though it was difficult for me*



*to truly open my mind to her because I felt very often invisibly a distance between her and myself, which comes from different sociocultural backgrounds and insufficient language skills to completely understand each other. I just meet her to use English though.... I did not want to meet Korean friends, which made me feel guilty using Korean. This made me very lonely and depressed. Thus I avoided everyone in the first term, but later I tried to meet Korean people for the second and final terms. Nevertheless, I have still been depressed and lonely. (BK, I6)*

She also commented that she found it difficult to adjust to an autonomous learning style. She frequently mentioned that she did not have a sense of achievement in the UK and preferred a more spoon-fed learning style and an exam-oriented system similar to the one as she had experienced in Korea. This too made her feel depressed.

MK too felt isolated because she had perceived that British people were hard to approach and like BK (see above quotation), having such little interaction with British people made her feel that she was not actually in a foreign country. However, unlike BK, who had initially avoided meeting Korean people but gradually come to rely on social interaction with them, MK repeatedly interacted with Korean people from the beginning of the course, although she had expected to also interact with British people. She became increasingly isolated due to being unable to realise her expectations about being socialised into an English-speaking country where she could communicate in English and explore the culture. It consequently appears to be the case with MK and BK that the failure to generate social interactions with British people may well have affected the experience of cultural withdrawal.

In short, the interview data make it clear that cultural withdrawal for this group of Korean students was closely linked to the nature and extent of their social interaction during the year. This appears to differ from the survey findings, where the relationship

between experience of cultural withdrawal and level of passivity in social activities was not significant (see section 4.4.1.3.). The reasons underlying and affecting cultural withdrawal by Korean students is thus worth pursuing in further research studies. It was also clear that an initial unfavourable attitude toward British people could lead to a level of isolation, as was the case with MK. What is notable is that the reactions of the students to experiences of cultural withdrawal were very passive and they did not appear to make active attempts or become socialized into the British culture.

In this chapter, I have focused on the six students' backgrounds, their motivation to study in the UK, their initial worries on arrival and their social adaptation, including feelings of isolation and withdrawal during the year. Despite personal variations in their feelings or experiences with respect to each theme above, the interview data suggested key issues which might reach extreme proportions for Korean students; first, the participants highly desired to achieve the goal of improving their English communicational skills, alongside obtaining the prestige of a British higher degree and doing so in a shorter span of time than elsewhere. This underlies their high level of aspiration for interacting with many British local people and to experience various aspects of British culture.

Secondly, 'writing an academic essay' in English was one of prevailing initial worries by all the participants, which was explained in terms of their lack of confidence in and background knowledge about writing in English. They were particularly concerned about structuring an argument and strictness with regards to plagiarism. Thirdly, the students were able to accomplish much social adjustment in the UK. With

respect to interaction in their department, they were all able to overcome their passivity about contacting and interacting with their supervisors and other academic staff and showed reluctance to react to the problems they had encountered. This could be partly explained by their lack of knowledge about what the supervisory meetings were for and their concern about being polite in relation to using language and meeting the role expectations of their supervisors. They all were still accustomed to a hierarchical relationship between them and their supervisors, which affected their passivity about contacting supervisors. In particular, it was notable that all the six students said that they had a high level of uncertainty about how far they could request academic advice from their supervisors and thus their reluctance to ask for academic advice continued to the end of the course.

Added to these cultural reasons, their language problems also appeared to contribute to their passivity about interacting with their supervisors, and being responsible for the preference by NJ, YJ, and JN to email their supervisors. This passivity and reluctance continued over the year, even though their reactions to solving their problems with supervisory meetings differed across and between participants, the students tended to ask for my suggestions or advice, which also showed the cultural assumption that they relied on the senior-junior relationship deriving from Confucian values in Korean higher education.

With respect to the nature and extent of social interactions outside the department, the students were simply unable to overcome passivity in developing interaction with native speakers. They thus all tended to rely far more on a monocultural pattern of interaction to communicate with Koreans than with other international students or native speakers. Although JM and BK initially tried hard to create many

informal interactions with native speakers, the lack of opportunity and time, and other factors, such as language difficulty and a generally reluctant attitude, made this more difficult. It was also discovered that the experience of cultural withdrawal also caused their prevailing tendency to interact with Korean people in the UK and a high passivity about being socialised into British culture, as with the case of BK and MK. As a result, all the six participants were dissatisfied with the breadth and amount of interaction with native speakers and this failure to generate social interactions with British people may well have affected the overall impact of the students' study abroad. This finding, to some extent, would seem to support the view that a greater degree or breadth of interaction with native speakers can lead to a better adjustment in overseas study (Surdam and Collins, 1984; Zimmerman, 1995). The experience of cultural withdrawal (by BK and MK) and the limited improvement in communicative competence by all six participants show this. In line with this, the next section will deal with how far the students could adjust to a new academic culture and improve their English communicative competence and academic skills.



## **Chapter 7: Study two: Results and Discussion: Part 2**

### **7.1. Academic learning**

#### **7.1.1 How far the initial problems changed over the year?**

As Table 6.4 showed, the initial worries of all the participants were closely linked to successfully completing their degree programmes, which they stated as their primary goal for overseas study. In particular, they reported feeling psychologically very concerned about writing in English because they were not confident about their language skills. Also, their worries related to areas which showed marked cultural differences, such as how and when to structure an argument and how to avoid plagiarism (see Table 6.4). The data from the six participants regarding how these initial problems relating to specific academic concerns changed over the year and how far they were satisfied with their academic achievement are summarized in Table 7.1. This data was mainly collected from the interview sessions 5 and 6, focusing on the progress with and reactions to overcoming their initial worries which varies across the individuals. The subheadings across the participants in Table 7.1 represent each individual's initial worries that were previously discussed (see Table 6.4).

ID	How far had the students initial academic worries been sorted out across the year?	What attempts did they make to resolve the problems?
NJ	<p><i>(Understanding lectures)</i></p> <p>At the beginning of term 1, he reported feeling stressed out and concerned about understanding the lectures on the course.</p> <p>From the end of term 1 to the final term, he felt quite satisfied with listening to lectures (the speed was also OK) although he could not understand any of the jokes the lecturers made. As a rule, he did not have serious problems with understanding lectures.</p> <p><i>(Writing an academic essay: structuring an argument, language use, and plagiarism)</i></p> <p>He was initially concerned about all the three areas at the beginning of term 1, but he did not have serious problems, although he did not feel very satisfied with his writing skills until the end of the year.</p> <p>In term 2, he still had a problem with structuring arguments, as the feedback he received pointed out.</p> <p>In the final term, he was still not very satisfied with his academic writing, struggling with expressing his arguments in English clearly and concisely.</p>	<p><i>(Understanding lectures)</i></p> <p>1) In the first term, he prepared for lectures by reading the suggested articles.</p> <p>2) He relied on visual aids or handouts throughout the year.</p> <p><i>(Writing an academic essay: structuring an argument, language use, and plagiarism)</i></p> <p>1) He used a dictionary for vocabulary connotations. (term1)</p> <p>2) The EFL course he took helped him learn about 'hedging and clarity of expression'. (term 1)</p>
BK	<p><i>(Writing an academic essay: paraphrasing and plagiarism)</i></p> <p>She was initially stressed out about writing in English (at the beginning of term 1), but the course she took did not have a large number of assessed</p>	<p><i>(Writing an academic essay: paraphrasing and plagiarism)</i></p> <p>She read some books to understand how to avoid plagiarism. (term 1)</p> <p>She tried to read many articles and</p>

	<p>essays from term 2, so she became less concerned about it and also less motivated to improve her academic writing.</p> <p>She had a greater understanding of essay structure across the terms.</p> <p>Overall she was not satisfied with her academic writing, although it was a not serious problem.</p> <p>She was still confused about how to construct a critical argument at the end of the year.</p> <p>There were not enough assessed essays for her to practice and improve her academic writing in English.</p> <p>Originally, she had anticipated the course would be very demanding, and thus that she might be isolated among her British classmates, but in reality, the course was not as demanding as she expected.</p>	<p>samples of good writing. (term 1)</p>
<p><b>YJ</b></p>	<p><i>(Understanding lectures)</i></p> <p>He was initially concerned about listening to the lectures at the beginning of term 1, but he was able to understand them as the term went on.</p> <p>By the end of the term, he felt his listening skills had improved by about 30%.</p> <p>From term 2 to the end of the year, he felt more confident about understanding lectures, although he was still not able to understand them completely.</p>	<p>He tried to read articles relevant to the lectures at the beginning of the course.</p>

	<p><i>(Writing an academic essay : structuring an argument, plagiarism, counter-argument, and language use)</i></p> <p>He did not know how to write English academic essays at the beginning of term1.</p> <p>From term 2, he said he understood how to structure an argument, but he still did not feel confident about using formal language.</p> <p>He did not clearly understand how to give critical views and counter-arguments until the end of the year. Overall, he evaluated that he just summarized rather than presented critical views in his essays.</p>	<p><i>(Writing an academic essay : structuring an argument, plagiarism, counter-argument, and language use)</i></p> <p>He asked his supervisor to give him advice on how to write an academic essay. (term 1)</p> <p>He read many articles and other students' work as essay samples. (term 1)</p> <p>The feedback on his first essay was very useful in helping him to understand essay structure. (I2)</p>
<p><b>JM</b></p>	<p><i>(Understanding lectures)</i></p> <p>He was worried about understanding the lectures at the beginning of the first term, but did not have problems in actual practice from term 2 to the final term: the lectures were more understandable as the term went on.</p> <p><i>(Complete coursework)</i></p> <p>From term 2, he was more confident and did not have a serious problem.</p> <p><i>(Listening and speaking in class)</i></p> <p>At the beginning of term 1, he had many opportunities to present his (mathematical) answers in front of the class: he was initially very nervous and concerned that he would not understand what the other people said.</p>	<p><i>(Understanding lectures)</i></p> <p>(No specific attempt made)</p> <p><i>(Complete coursework)</i></p> <p>He often did a preparation work by reading books before the lectures from term 1 to term 3.</p> <p><i>(Listening and speaking in class)</i></p> <p>He was initially very nervous, but he attempted to actively present in class by himself from the end of the first term.</p>



	<p>From the end of term 2, he became increasingly confident about such interactive situations, and he felt that the course did not require a particularly high level of English proficiency especially as regards expressing the ideas in depth.</p>	<p>During the year, he tried to create many speaking and listening situations in his daily life.</p>
<p><b>MK</b></p>	<p><i>(Writing academic essays and asking and answering the questions in English)</i></p> <p>She was not initially confident about using English. She worried about all communicational situations, and about writing academic essays in English in the first term.</p> <p>She was not confident about reading, due to a lack of vocabulary (term 1), but she felt her vocabulary skills improved as the year progressed.</p> <p>She was very worried about writing essays at the end of the first term: she could not understand the essay titles.</p> <p>From term 2, after completing one essay assignment, she was less concerned about writing.</p> <p>Throughout the year, she remained unclear how her critical views should be presented.</p> <p>She evaluated that her own academic skills, especially her writing skills, had improved considerably over the year, but not as much as she had expected: she felt she had limited time on a one-year course to develop her academic skills.</p>	<p><i>(Several academic worries: essays, asking and answering the questions)</i></p> <p>From term 1 to term 2, she took a Cambridge Advanced (CAE) course to improve her writing skills. This helped her to understand academic style in academic writing.</p> <p>During the term 1, she tried to read many articles to improve her writing as well as her reading skills.</p> <p>In the term 2, she asked her supervisors to give her academic advice on structuring an argument and reading lists for the essays.</p>
<p><b>HC</b></p>	<p><i>(Writing an academic essay as an assessment :paraphrasing and plagiarism)</i></p> <p>During term 1, she was initially very concerned about, and had great difficulty with, paraphrasing and avoiding plagiarism.</p>	<p><i>(Writing an academic essay as an assessment :paraphrasing and plagiarism)</i></p> <p>During the term 1, departmental EFL support course helped her much to</p>

	<p>During term 2, she felt her writing skills a little improved more than in the first term.</p> <p>From term 2 to the end of the year, she was more confident about constructing argument in essays, but felt still very uncertain about paraphrasing and presenting a critical argument, and found it hard to adjust to an English writing style very different from what she was accustomed to in Korea.</p> <p>Overall, she was quite satisfied with her improvement in academic writing skills across the year (completing several essay assessments was good practice), although the improvement was not as great as she had expected.</p>	<p>understand the structure of academic writing in English.</p> <p>During the term 1 and term 2, she tried to read many articles as models for essay writing.</p>
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Table 7.1 In-depth interviews: Progress of the participants' initial academic problems

As the longitudinal data shows, the students' initial worries in relation to academic learning were reduced and to some extent resolved by the end of the course, although not by as much as they had expected. None of the subjects experienced problems so serious that they would be likely to cause them to fail or not complete their courses, but each individual was still struggling with certain specific areas. NJ commented that he still found it a challenge to express himself clearly and concisely in his essays in the final term: structuring an argument remaining a particular problem. BK also commented that constructing a critical argument was her most challenging area, but overall she felt her course was not as demanding in this respect as she had anticipated. Ultimately, she concluded that her writing skills had not improved much; the courses she took simply did not offer many chances to write academic essays.

Compared with BK, YJ was reasonably satisfied with his improvement and far more confident about writing in English, even though he still had problems writing critically in his essays. He said that it was very useful to practice academic writing in English through the many essay assessments in the course. JM became more confident about speaking and listening in English in the classroom. MK had serious initial worries about all academic areas, citing listening to lectures, speaking in the classroom, and reading articles, as well as writing academic essays. However, she found it easier to follow lectures than she had expected. Most of all, writing several assessed essays provided her with the opportunity to practice aspects of English writing, such as using formal language and adopting hedging devices. Although the Cambridge advanced English (CAE) course she took was useful to understand English academic writing styles, she was still uncertain about constructing 'critical arguments'. HC was also satisfied with the several opportunities to practice English academic essays that were given during the course and felt more confident about writing in English. She was not, however, confident about paraphrasing or writing critical arguments until the final term.

It was apparent that the participants' initial concerns about their specific academic areas did not cause any serious problems in reality as the year progressed. This contrasts starkly with their progress and adjustment with social interaction, which was an increasingly dissatisfying experience. It is also of interest to note that most of the six participants' efforts and reactions to overcoming their difficulties tended to be during the first term and increasingly diminished as the year progressed.

It is clear that compared with other areas, such as listening to lectures, or reading texts, academic writing skills remained more problematic and difficult for five of the six participants (BK, NJ, YJ, MK, HC), and specifically the ability to construct a

‘critical argument’. This implies that ‘*critical thinking*’ in English writing is one of the most challenging areas to Korean Masters’ students and they could not, they felt, overcome this difficulty by doing the tasks and assignments on a one-year programme.

## **7.1.2 Participation and interaction in a foreign academic context**

### **7.1.2.1. Seminar discussions**

The term, ‘seminar discussions’ is taken to cover seminar-style classes in which interactive discussion occurs in the class, as well as designating small-group seminar sessions with specific topics. It was anticipated that participating in seminars would be highly stressful and a serious challenge to the students, in that they would be called upon to speak in English to express their views or ideas, as well as to show evidence of listening skills when it came to discussions or debates. Their difficulty would be explainable as being a result of having poor communication skills in English and as deriving from cross-cultural differences in communicational skills between English and Korean students (see sections 2.2.2 and section 3.4.1). It was also anticipated that face would play an important role in maintaining passivity in seminar or classroom discussions (see sections 2.2.2 and 4.4.1.4). Silence, in this situation, can be seen as a ‘non- interrupting behaviour’ (Upshur, 1979). It can be interpreted as showing respect toward the teacher as an authority figure in a teacher-centred classroom and as avoidance of confrontational argument in face-to-face interaction to maintain harmony (see section 2.2.2). It was hoped that the longitudinal data from the in-depth interviews would show whether and how far these cultural and language reasons were perceived as impacting on the progress of the students’ adjustment to seminar participation in the UK.

I investigated how the students felt about participating in seminars, how far



they managed to participate actively in seminar discussions, what they perceived as challenges, and how they had reacted to them and what they had attempted to do in order to cope with them. In order to examine how far they actively participated in seminars, the students were asked to answer questions in every interview session, on discussions or debates. The interview sessions particularly in the first term focused on how far they were interested in participating in this style of activity. All the participants (except for JM) said that although they had initially felt very interested in the seminar type of class in a different academic culture, they did not actively participate in the seminar discussions. This is also supported by a qualitative research finding<sup>2</sup>, from both in-depth interviews and observations with a group of international postgraduate students at a UK university, conducted by Brown (2008): south-east Asian students including Koreans tended to avoid engaging in classroom discussions which occurred in EAP sessions, thus avoiding eye contact and rarely volunteering responses or comments unless their names are called. JM was in a just different situation: most of the seminars on his course did not give rise to discussion; instead the students presented their answers as homework and compared them with those of the other students, using a whiteboard.

The participants became increasingly reluctant and discouraged to attend or participate in seminars as the year went on, although YJ made attempts to comment and ask and thus developed a more active attitude toward the discussions than did the other people. It is worth explaining individual responses in a little more detail. I shall start with NJ. NJ was not at all confident about his English communication skills, in particular those involving non-linguistic behaviours such as turn-taking, which discouraged him from participating in discussions in seminars. He made the interesting

point that the seminar leaders seemed to believe that Asian international students would not voluntarily or actively give their opinions or ask questions, or that they disliked attempting these communicative behaviours. As a result, they seemed not to expect any Asian students present to participate in the seminar discussions. As a result, despite being initially motivated to speak in the discussions, NJ gradually became more and more passive.

BK reported that she was somewhat less concerned about losing face when discussing or debating in seminar groups, which mostly consisted of international students, than when speaking in front of a number of English native speakers. She had sympathy with other international students in class, believing that they had a similar level of English to herself. However, despite being less intimidated by communicating with other international people in the class, she was nevertheless motivated to interact in seminar discussions. She commented in the third interview that she anticipated discussing things with a greater number of British students, believing that this would stimulate her to enhance her speaking skills and contribute to understanding local accents. She was consequently very disappointed at having a high proportion of international classmates on her course and few British people.

YJ tended to be more positive and satisfied when participating in seminars than either NJ, or BK. It is of interest to note that, during the final term, he was more motivated to participate in the discussions or debates and thus attempted to express himself in English, despite his lack of spoken English skills. This can be explained by an increasing cultural adjustment in addition to his language improvement:

*I found out that the relationship between teacher and students in the classroom is more horizontal and equal than I expected. At first, I was not accustomed to*

*this relationship, which is different from the rather vertical one in Korea, and so I tried to just be polite and show respect toward the academic staff. However, I feel I became increasingly comfortable with this relationship, which encouraged me to express myself more confidently in the classroom. (YJ, 15)*

Unlike the other students, JM often took part in classes labelled 'seminars' in all three terms, but they contained no discussion and instead students presented or discussed their answers to mathematics assignments, as previously mentioned. Although little communicative interaction was involved in these seminar-type classes, he was still very hesitant to present his solutions in public; he was afraid that he would lose face if he could not understand the questions posed by his classmates. He also believed that asking questions in the middle of seminars can be rude and interrupt the class, and so he hesitated to ask questions when he could not understand the answers to the assignments (given by lecturers or the other classmates). He discovered, however, that many of the other students did ask questions in the middle of a class, which is not at all common in the Korean educational context (see section 2.3.2.1 A. a. and 4.4.1.4, Table 4.51). This cultural difference impeded his active participation in the seminars very much at the beginning of the course, but he became more confident in speaking in class and less nervous about using and listening to English from the second term. Even though he felt the seminar classes he took part in contributed to his academic success more than they improved his communication skills, he eventually decided to speak in public despite a lack of language skills.

Although MK was interested in observing seminars, she said she was not interested in actively participating in discussions in them, and was hesitant to comment or ask questions. This tendency appeared to be fairly extreme in the first term, and her

passivity only decreased a little as the year continued, even though she did try to speak in the seminar discussions from the second term. At the third interview session, she said she tried to contribute when the seminar leader asked if anyone had any questions. She said she was afraid that the leader would lose face if no one asked any questions or gave comments. It can be inferred that she intended to show respect toward the leader as an authority figure, even though she did not have any questions or comments.

Despite her passivity in seminar discussions, continuing to the final term, she discovered that participating in the seminars was useful academically, as she could experience a different academic culture, involving a different communicative style. It was also stimulating in terms of provoking her academic interest and subject knowledge in specific areas. She thus reported being quite satisfied with observing seminar discussions in multicultural settings, even though there was some limitation to the improvement in her spoken English.

Like NJ, HC was not motivated to take part in seminar discussions until the course ended, although she was very interested in them at the beginning of the course. It is also noteworthy that she was very nervous about being asked questions in seminars, and thus tried to prepare for them very thoroughly. There may be cultural reasons for this: she said that she was not comfortable being asked questions, because she experienced fear of losing face when she could not answer fluently in English.

To sum up, YJ and JM made comparatively more progress in terms of developing confidence in speaking in seminar discussions than did the other participants. They also reported having made many attempts to become involved in informal social activities with native speakers (see Tables 7.2 and 7.3). They concluded that this encouraged them to participate in classroom interaction. These responses gave a clear



answer to the question of 'whether encouraging the students to meet more people outside class might give the students the confidence to participate more actively in formal class environments' (see 4.4.1.3. A.). On the other hand, it seems to be the case that none of the participants were very satisfied with their participation in the seminar discussions, a dissatisfaction which derives from their hesitation to speak, due to both language and cultural, face-related reasons. However, despite the limitations of the British academic cultural system, all the six participants said that seminar style classes were academically useful, providing them with an opportunity to observe and be part of British (and thus cultural) aspects of learning.

#### **7.1.2.2. Presentations**

NJ gave oral presentations on a specific topic in class once at the start of the course and once more in the final term. Although he had experienced giving many presentations in his workplace, using English for subject-related presentations in the course proved very challenging. He was, for example, very embarrassed to be asked so many questions (I1 and I5). At the second presentation, he could not understand what one question was about and thus the other students had to help him by explaining what the question meant. Despite not progressing in presentation skills in English over the year, he nevertheless said he became less intimidated by using English in front of the class.

BK gave presentations three times overall across the three terms. She was not nervous about giving presentations in the class where most of the classmates were also international students. This is the opposite of what she had experienced in the USA, where she had been very nervous about, and intimidated by, speaking in a class where almost all of the classmates were English native speakers. Compared with her

experience in the USA, she was dissatisfied with the multicultural settings of interaction with many international students during her course in the UK, although there were no serious problems with giving presentations in front of the class. She said that communicational situations with many English native speakers seemed to make her try harder to practice her spoken English skills.

YJ gave presentations four times over the three terms and claimed that he succeeded in adjusting to speaking English in front of the class. Although he was very concerned and nervous about doing his first presentation in the first term (I1), he said that he was more confident about the second one (I3). He tried to prepare thoroughly whenever he needed to give a presentation and this helped him to speak more fluently. In particular, he became increasingly adjusted as the year wore on and in the final term he even admitted enjoying the question and answer sessions that followed presentations, though he still hesitated to ask questions in others' presentations even in the final term.

JM did not give any oral presentation on a specific theme during his course, and instead just explained the answers to his maths assignments in front of the class, which did not require a high degree of fluency in English. At the beginning of the first term (I1) he never tried to speak in front of the class. As his comments on seminar discussions showed (see 7.1.2.1.A), his reticence related to cultural factors of saving face, in addition to language difficulties. MK and HC had only one opportunity to give a presentation on a specific theme on the course, and thus it was hard for them to discuss whether they made any progress. They did both mention, however, that they were very concerned about being asked questions and having to give the answers in English and admitted they never made any critical comments after the presentations of other students. Once again, this can be explained by their concern for losing face as a result of

inadequate language skills.

To sum up, students did not have very many chances to practice their presentation skills in English over the year. Unsurprisingly perhaps, they were all more afraid of interacting in the discussion time after their own presentations than of giving the presentation itself: they were particularly concerned about losing face when they could not understand the questions asked by others and worried about an inability to give prompt answers to them in English.

### 7.1.2.3 Understanding lectures

Although all participants had to attend formal lectures, none said that they had had serious difficulties understanding them. Three (NJ, YJ, and JM) did report a number of initial worries though. Thus, NJ commented at the fifth interview session,

*At first, I was very worried about how far I would be able to understand the lectures because I did not think my English was good enough to comprehend them. This is an important part of my overseas study, which is directly linked to completing the course successfully. However, I do not have problems with understanding lectures, except for some jokes or anecdotes not related to the topic of the lecture. (NJ, I 5)*

This situation can be explained as follows: first, lecture-based learning is considered to be less interactive than seminar discussions, causing students' to feel an 'unwillingness to question' and leading to a lack of motivation to speak in the classroom (Willcoxon, 1998: 68). It was found that all the six participants said that they felt more comfortable with just listening to lectures than participating in seminar discussions, and preferred to be asked to interact in a small group or address the whole class. MK noted,



*I became more confident about taking lectures than participating in seminars or informal group work that expects more interaction. I am more familiar with lecture style classes, and thus felt less pressured to speak in class on my own. (MK, I2)*

In a lecture they could concentrate on note-taking and using visual aids, such as handouts, which they found very useful when they missed any points or could not understand something. This corresponds with Makepeace's (1989) more general point that international students frequently rely, to a considerable extent, on visual aids, such as handouts, to help them better understand the content of the lectures. The six participants accordingly felt less pressured in the lectures than in the seminar discussions, which were heavily weighted towards interaction.

Secondly, all the six participants said that the language that most lecturers used seemed to be standard British English without strong local accents. Furthermore, they involved a lot of discipline-specific and technical language which students repeatedly met in textbooks and articles, and with they became familiar. Thus, lectures were easier to understand than other classes and they emerged as the least demanding academic area. YJ commented in the third interview session that,

*I feel more confident about understanding lectures than in the first term. In practice, most of the language used in the lectures was quite familiar to me and repeated many times, and thus I felt I adjusted fairly fast to understanding them. (YJ, I3)*

This relative ease of understanding also relates to the speed of the lectures. YJ's familiarity with the language and the accents helped him adjust to the rate of delivery



and indeed all the participants reported increasingly adjusting to the speed of the lectures. This is similar to the research findings from Northumbria University students, which indicated that ‘international students appeared to become slightly more comfortable with the speed of lecture delivery as study level progressed (Given and Smailes, nd:6). This would seem to imply that the accumulated knowledge they acquire through lectures can help students to understand later lectures by offering a degree of predictability.

However, another finding from the same Northumbria University survey was that ‘some international students do have greater problems with pace of delivery in lectures than UK students ( $p < 0.01$ )’ (Given and Smailes, nd:6). In the present case, YJ could not understand a lecture which was too fast to follow in the first term, and he tried to sort this out by emailing the lecturer to discuss his difficulties. His case corresponds to the research finding by Brown (2008) for international graduate students’ struggle with comprehending lectures for the first semester due to lack of listening ability. Although he reported initially having problems with the fast delivery of this lecture, which made him feel frustrated, he was nevertheless familiar with the subject knowledge and technical language used. On the other hand, MK, HC, and BK all commented that the lectures on their course were given at a comprehensible speed and did not overwhelm the international students who were attending the course. In MK’s words,

*I felt that all the lecturers in the department recognised that almost of all the classmates were international students from Asian countries, and thus they tried to speak clearly and slowly to make us understand better. (MK, I 2)*

It is also worth examining the students' pattern of progress in classroom interactions, in particular, how far they were able to reduce their passivity in lectures term by term. The longitudinal data provide a clear answer to the question 'how far can Korean students adjust themselves to active participation in the classroom' (see section 4.4.1.4); they did not make much progress in voluntarily making enquiries and they kept silent in most lectures, even when they needed to speak in the classes. Although this rarely presented a problem academically, the six students continued with a quite passive attitude and behaviour in lecture style classes across one year courses, supporting the survey findings for Q35 (see section 4.4.1.4, Table 4.51) that 'the sampled students had a strong tendency to avoid asking lecturers questions'. The interviews showed that four students (NJ, BK, MK, and HC) showed a strong preference for using emails to ask the lecturer questions about their lectures, while YJ and JM mainly chose both emailing and asking after class. Only JM and YJ made several attempts to ask questions in the middle of lecture, although even they were frequently very hesitant about doing so. Thus, 'sending emails' was the most preferred action for the six students, which contrasts with the survey findings for Q35, where 47.8 % of the sample answered that 'they asked the teacher questions after class' and only 27.2% selected 'sending the lecturers emails personally if they wanted to ask a question'.

The interview data also supported the hypothesis that cultural reasons underlay their passivity in lectures and that these involved 'face'. The key factor appears to have been the wish to avoid causing both the lecturer and themselves to lose face, by interrupting the lectures (see section 2.3.2.1 and 4.4.1.4). Given and Smailes (nd) endorsed 'Cortazzi and Jin (1997: 134)'s assertion,

*International students view asking questions as demonstrating that students do not understand, which will result in the student losing face amongst his or her peer group. It also implies that the tutor did not explain the topic properly, which would be construed as disrespectful to the tutor.*

As BK also explained, in the sixth interview,

*What made me hesitate to ask questions even when necessary is that I thought that one should not interrupt the class. If the lecturer did not know the answers to my question, he or she would lose face. I also did not want to lose face in the classroom if other people and the lecturer could not understand me. I think that students' silence is more recommended in the lectures where the teacher (or lecturer) controls the classes. I feel I am still used to teacher-centred teaching and learning styles which are more common in Korea, and thus to answering questions only when necessary in the classroom. (BK, I6)*

This agrees with the Northumbria survey results which showed, '54% of international students agreed that the teacher was the most important person, as opposed to 19% of UK students', and 'significantly less ( $p < 0.05$ ) international students (36%) said that they felt comfortable expressing disagreement with the teacher than UK students (44%)' (Given and Smailes, nd:11).

This face-related concern has long constructed students' passivity in the classroom in the Korean educational context. It contrasts with the expectations of British academic settings which focus more on interactive methods of learning and thus expect the students to participate actively in lectures, and volunteer points where relevant. The interview data demonstrated that in the very limited time available the Korean Masters students had, they could not overcome the cultural mismatches between the two different academic contexts.

However, there was variation between the participants in the degree to which they adapted to the new academic cultural context, although their passivity in lectures continued over the three terms. The details of each participant's progress are summarised in Table 7.2.

<b>ID</b>	<b>Pattern of passivity in class (lectures)</b>
<b>NJ</b>	<p>Across the year he was not able to ask any questions in the middle of class at all when he did not understand points in the lecture.</p> <p>He thought it is rude to interrupt the class and so he tried to find out the answers to his questions by himself.</p> <p>During the second term, he emailed the lecturer once to ask a question.</p>
<b>BK</b>	<p>During the year, she never asked anything in the middle of a lecture throughout the whole course, and instead used emails a few times for the questions.</p> <p>She never saw other international students ask questions in the middle of a class.</p> <p>She mostly tried to rely on self-research rather than asking questions when she needed to clarify points in lectures.</p>
<b>YJ</b>	<p>At the beginning of term 1, he never tried to ask questions in the middle of or after lectures.</p> <p>From term 2, he was a bit more confident about speaking in class.</p> <p>Across the year as a whole, he hesitated many times to ask questions and instead he tried to find the solutions by himself.</p>
<b>JM</b>	<p>At the beginning of term 1, he was very nervous about speaking in English in the classroom and never tried to ask questions in the middle of a class, as that, he thought, would be rude.</p> <p>From the end of term 1, he was increasingly confident about asking questions and during term 2, did ask on a few occasions.</p> <p>In the final term, he still hesitated to ask questions in the middle of class and instead tried to visit the lecturer afterwards or use email when he had some questions.</p>
<b>MK</b>	<p>During term 1, she asked a few questions after class in the first term, but never tried to do so in the middle of lectures.</p> <p>In term 2, she a few times gave comments when the lecturer asked questions in the lectures.</p>



	Generally, she never asked anything in the middle of a class except for the time when the lecturer asked her questions.
<b>HC</b>	Across the year, she never asked questions in class, and felt very stressed when she was asked something by the lecturer in the middle of a class. She preferred attending lectures, which involved less pressure to speak in English than seminars

Table 7.2 In-depth interviews: Behaviour in lectures

It was clear that YJ made more attempts to ask questions even in the middle of a class than the other participants, as he felt more confident about speaking in the classroom. He commented that he was encouraged to ask questions when he discovered the cultural expectations in the UK universities. At the other extreme, the data from HC made it clear that her passivity lasted the whole year and she did not even attempt to get over it and permanently avoided asking questions. She just tried to acquire knowledge through listening to lectures, even though she was aware that a more interactive way of learning and teaching is common in British academic contexts, which was different from what she had experienced in Korea.

*I felt lectures are more interactive in the UK than in Korea, and thus lecturers sometimes asked questions or gave groupwork to the students. This made me quite stressed about giving any comments in English, feeling very uncomfortable when I did not have anything to say. I very often tried to avoid eye contact whenever the lecturer asked the whole class questions in the middle of lectures. (HC, I3)*

In short, the six students adjusted well to going to lectures, although three of them were initially concerned about understanding them. However, their passivity did not change very much during the course of the three terms, although there was some

variation among them. It may accordingly be concluded that attending lectures did not contribute very much to an improvement in the students' communication skills.

#### **7.1.2.4 Writing an academic essay**

Although all the participants (except for JM) initially worried about academic writing at the beginning of the first term (see Table 6.4), they said that they gradually became more confident about writing an academic essay during the course. The problematic areas they listed were paraphrasing, avoiding plagiarism, and structuring arguments that involved the appropriate use of formal English.

However, not citing writing as a serious problem does not imply that the participants were fully satisfied with their improvement in their academic writing skills, even though the level of satisfaction differed across individuals, depending on the level they initially expected in terms of academic achievement. Only YJ was satisfied with his writing skills in the final term; after an initial fear of failure in fulfilling an academic writing assessment, he received higher marks in the feedback than he had expected. Nevertheless, he concluded that he still had not mastered constructing a counter-argument or using language effectively in academic essays. HC was fairly satisfied with the improvement in her academic writing skills, although she could not adjust to arguing in academic essays using English. Except for these two students and JM, the other three subjects were dissatisfied with the improvement in writing academic essays they had made.

Their high level of dissatisfaction may have impacted on their academic achievement overall, given the fact that except for JM, writing an academic essay is a major part of the assessment on their masters' courses. Accordingly, the in-depth

interview data support the survey finding that; masters students looked rather more dissatisfied with 'academic achievement' than the other two groups, as the visual display of mean rank of each group showed: PhD (51.94) > undergraduates (51.45) > masters (46.07). (see section 4.4.2). All the six participants reported a lack of time and opportunity to practice writing academic essays in English; HC's comment is typical:

*In fact, one year was too short to improve my academic skills including academic essays. I just feel that the course had almost finished by the time I began to understand the structure of English academic essays. The situation would have been better if more time and more opportunities to write essays had been given to me. (HC, I5)*

The short-term nature of overseas learning is thus a reason why the subjects did not manage to adjust to writing an academic essay in English, along with their difficulties with the language and the expectations of a different academic context.

It is worth examining in detail what particular aspects of academic writing made the five subjects feel so dissatisfied or led them to fail to adjust during the academic year. Furthermore, it is very important to note how they reacted to the problems and how they tried to sort them out by themselves. First, in terms of the area that they found hardest to adjust to, all the six participants said that they were very dissatisfied with how to present critical views. As MK said,

*I cannot still understand how or how far I can present my critical views when arguing in essays. Generally I tend to just summarise when writing an essay, as pointed out in the feedback I got for the second assessment. I feel it's very difficult to argue critically in English academic writing. I am not accustomed to critical thinking. (MK, I4)*

In addition to difficulties with presenting a critical argument, all six students mentioned other particularly challenging areas. NJ said that he struggled with expressing his thoughts fluently in English, especially in the process of translating his ideas into in English:

*I feel that I lose some thoughts, ideas, and views when I try to translate my opinions into English. I cannot extend my thoughts when thinking in English. That is my problem as well as structuring arguments with my critical views. (NJ, I3)*

However, it is possible that NJ may have thought his problem was more serious than it was, as the feedback for his essay assessments did not suggest any serious language-related problems, although structuring arguments *was* identified as a problematic area that needed to be developed. YJ specifically mentioned having problems with the production of hedging devices and formal expressions in essays. He commented that he had been very confused about the appropriate use of modal verbs such as ‘would’, ‘could’, and ‘might’, and also found it hard to produce the level of ‘formality’ expected in UK academic essays.

HC reported that she had difficulty with paraphrasing to avoid plagiarism. She was becoming less fearful of plagiarising, but at the end of the year she still did not completely understand the ‘rules’ which would help her avoid it. Although she recognised that plagiarism is taken more seriously in the UK higher education system than at Korean Universities, she did not have time to adjust to the very different expectations surrounding plagiarism in the UK. In addition, different rhetorical patterns from those found in academic writing in Korea remained a challenge,



*What I have learned and understood in the area of writing an academic essay is quite superficial. I just understand the basic rules about how to write one. I feel unclear about it although I have practiced writing in English through five essay assessments in the course. In particular, even though I was getting more confident, I always had a fear of committing plagiarism whenever I wrote, because I had not taken this matter seriously in Korea when I did both my undergraduate and my master's course. It was quite demanding to both improve my language ability and adopt new cultural expectations to develop writing skills in the UK university course. (HC, I 6)*

With respect to how the students reacted to the problems and tried to resolve them, Table 6.16 shows that their attempts varied: NJ used a dictionary to cope with connotations in vocabulary, as well as studying EFL materials on academic writing. He also took as a professional support course, especially to help him to learn a range of formal expressions in English. BK and YJ both read articles and books as models for essay writing and tried to use them to learn the specific language used in academic documents. YJ also asked his supervisor to give him some advice on a good essay writing structure. He additionally used the feedback that he received for each essay assessment, which he found useful when diagnosing his weak points. MK took a Cambridge Advanced English course to improve her overall writing skills, which she found particularly useful in teaching her the appropriate formal language to be used in her essays. Finally, like BK, YJ, and MK, HC also spent time reading articles to try and understand the structure of written English, and attending a language support course, which made her more confident as the year progressed.

In summary, the interview data make it clear that all six participants found it hard to adjust to writing academic essays in English, having particular difficulty with 'the level of strictness of plagiarism' and 'structuring an argument'. This supports the

survey findings, where 46 % in 'the level of strictness of plagiarism' and 39.6% in 'structuring an argument' of the sample students found cultural differences (see section 4.4.1.4.). Four of the six students (NJ, YJ, MK, and HC) did try fairly actively to resolve their problems with academic writing in English and felt they obtained a degree of success. In the case of the other two participants, JM did not have assessed academic essays, and BK was more reluctant to improve her academic writing than the other four students. BK said she was very dissatisfied with understanding and improving her academic writing skills in the UK; she did not have many assessed essays to write over the year, and she refused to voluntarily learn or practice her writing skills by herself outside her assessed work. There seems an important connection here with her feelings of depression which can be considered as a cultural withdrawal (not in a clinical meaning): she felt she did not reach a high level of academic achievement, especially in academic writing in English, which made her, she said, often feel depressed (see section 6.3.2.3.).

#### **7.1.2.5. The feedback system**

In this section, I will discuss how far the feedback system in the UK affected the academic progress of the six students and thus how satisfied they were with the system during the year. Firstly, I tried to identify how far the students could understand the feedback system in the UK and if they had discovered any cultural differences between it and the system in Korea. Secondly, I wanted to find out how far they felt the feedback was useful to improve their academic skills and if there were any difficulties involved. The latter information comes from the second interview sessions; at the first interview sessions, none of them had received any feedback and thus they were not aware of any

cultural differences and could not identify the main criteria for assessment in the UK.

The data from each participant are shown in Table 7.3.

<b>ID</b>	<b>How far the feedback was useful to improve your academic skills?</b>	<b>Have you found any cultural differences?</b>
<b>NJ</b>	<p>At the end of the term 1, he received the first feedback for his practice essay; the results encouraged him with useful and numerous comments about his strengths and weaknesses.</p> <p>Across the year, he felt the feedback for each assessment was useful and constructive about improving his academic skills.</p>	<p>He found out the feedback for each essay was described with point-by-point detailed comments. This was different from the feedback just giving the grade he had received in Korea.</p>
<b>BK</b>	<p>At the end of the term 1, she received her first feedback, for her practice essay: it was not very useful to her: the comment was that she had some problems with her written English, but there were no details about the structure or other aspects.</p> <p>Across the year, she received feedback for each assessed essay, but it did not motivate her to study hard during the course.</p>	<p>She noticed that the feedback system in the UK was different from that of Korea.</p> <p>She was used to the marking system in Korea, which motivated her to study hard. In the UK, the feedback she got was more detailed with point-by-point comments, but less motivating.</p>
<b>YJ</b>	<p>Across the year, he received feedback for each essay, and felt this it was very useful: the points were consistently very critical and detailed. He found out what he needed to improve.</p>	<p>The feedback was very practical with clear criteria in the UK, while he thought feedback in Korea was formal: he did not know the marking criteria in Korea.</p>
<b>JM</b>	<p>Across the year,</p> <p>1) he was very satisfied with the feedback he received for small daily assignments, which was very useful to improve his academic skills: the feedback guided him to report the process of solving the mathematical problems, rather than</p>	<p>In Korea, he had not received clear or detailed feedback, and he thought that feedback was very formal. No help was given about the areas that he needed to improve in Korea; the grades were considered more important.</p>

	<p>simply giving the answers.</p> <p>2) he was impressed by the guarantee of anonymity in the feedback. (I3)</p> <p>He thought the feedback system in UK universities was one of its most impressive areas. (I6)</p>	
<b>MK</b>	<p>Across the year she thought that the feedback system in the UK is very systemized and clear.</p> <p>In the final term, the feedback she had for a presentation she gave was also very useful and detailed. (I6)</p>	<p>She had been given the grades for essay assessments in Korea without detailed pros and cons.</p>
<b>HC</b>	<p>Across the year the feedback reports she had received were very detailed and clear, letting her understand the strengths and weaknesses of her work.</p>	<p>She said that the feedback system was one of the best areas of academic culture when comparing Korea and the UK.</p>

Table 7.3 In-depth interviews: Satisfaction with the feedback system in the UK by the six masters' students

Before examining the reactions to the feedback received, it is important to acknowledge that many details of the feedback system are specific to the actual course or department. JM, for instance, was doing a science-related course whose criteria for assessment were different from those for non-science courses. In the case of the other five participants who were doing non-science courses, almost all of the assessments were based on academic essays, and thus the criteria are likely to have been fairly similar.

Rather than focusing on their longitudinal changes term by term, I shall focus on the students' overall feelings and experiences during the year. This decision is based on the fact that they were overall more satisfied with feedback than with any other academic area. As feedback was not a simple problematic area, there is less point to focusing on progress and change term by term.



It is firstly noteworthy that once they had experienced feedback, all of the participants noticed cultural differences in the feedback system between Korea and the UK. These included the fact that students received more detailed feedback with clear points of weakness and strength, while in Korea the marker had often just given a grade. Interestingly, BK, as noted earlier, did not adjust successfully to the new feedback system, and it did not motivate her to improve her skills. She said that she felt more motivated by the marking system in Korea, which stimulated her to study hard. Indeed, she refused to read the point-by-point comments in her feedback in the UK, so she was not able to learn from them. All the other subjects, however, showed a greater degree of satisfaction with the academic feedback system in the UK than with other academic areas. JM, for example, was very impressed by the detailed and critical points given for each of the answers he gave for his daily assignments,

*I was very happy that I was given very detailed and critical feedback on just the small pieces of work and assignments that I had to produce every day, which really motivated me to study hard. I feel that the feedback report played a crucial role in guiding the students to improve on their weaknesses, which means the feedback was really motivating. Personally I am more satisfied with this system than one where you are just marked and graded. (JM, I2)*

In short, although none of the six interviewees was initially aware of cultural differences in the feedback system, they developed a greater understanding of the different form feedback takes in the UK. This is in line with the survey findings which showed that 29.7% believed that feedback in the UK was very constructive and useful (see Table 4.54 in section 4.4.1.4). In contrast to other areas of academic culture, the feedback system in the UK did not lead to problematic cultural conflicts. Except for BK,

the students were satisfied with their feedback, and particularly with the critical presentation of both positive and negative points. They all agreed that their feedback papers contributed to their academic improvement.

#### **7.1.2.6. Learning styles in a different teaching and learning context**

##### ***A. Critical thinking***

Considering that Western academic culture places so much emphasis on ‘critical thinking’ (Borland and Pearce, 1999), this might be a serious challenge to some international students, who are not familiar with thinking or reading critically. They may have difficulty reading critically, openly putting forward a critical opinion, or giving critical arguments in their writing. For instance, in a Chinese teaching and learning context, the teacher and the textbook are ‘authoritative sources of knowledge’ (Cortazzi and Jin 1997, cited in Mclean and Ransom, 2005:55), and it is considered improper to comment critically in face-to-face interactions, or criticise in writing the authors of a published book. This can be interpreted as losing face and a challenge to the authority of the writer. Korean academic culture similarly did not seem to encourage students to develop competence in thinking critically and sharing the critical views, particularly in public, as observed in the previous Chapter (sections 2.2.2.2. and 2.3.2.1.) The in-depth interview data show to what extent the students adjusted to a different set of expectation, including taking a critical attitude towards the reading of texts, arguing, writing an academic essay, and diagnosing problematic areas. In addition, the problems of giving critical views on the course evaluation forms which are circulated after each module will be discussed.

First, the degree of confidence felt by students with regard to constructing

critical arguments in academic essays was investigated. All the participants except for JM (who did not have any academic essays on his course) said that they were challenged by how critical views could be presented, and that this remained a problem until the last term (see Table 6.24). YJ commented in the final term,

*I tried to argue critically, but the structure focused more on summarising the content. I feel like there were no critical points in the essays I wrote. The feedback on the assessed essays I received pointed out the weaknesses of my critical arguments, although they were not seriously problematic. This is a more difficult and demanding area to me than any other in academic writing. (YJ, I5)*

This response can be seen as a cultural problem, inasmuch as the practice of presenting critical views in academic essays is unfamiliar to many Korean students. As McLean and Ransom (2005: 54) suggest, they are not accustomed to ‘questioning received knowledge and reconstructing it through the writing process’, something which remains a problematic area to many international students because they are not accustomed to working in this way. HC illustrated this in a very clear fashion,

*I have been accustomed to passively accepting knowledge, and depending on the textbook. Despite some changes over time, I think I still rely on memorising knowledge rather than reflecting it in my own critical views. I have rarely practiced processing knowledge through writing critical reviews in Korea. In fact, I was not entirely sensitized to structuring critical argument in academic essays until the end of the course. (HC, I6)*

This difficulty about whether, when, and how to ‘be critical’ applies to many Asian students, as Durkin (2003) found when she studied Hong Kong students. This implies at a general level that different cultures of learning may lead to ‘misunderstanding the

concept of scholarly critical evaluation'. Students may not have the background knowledge about how to build up their critical views in academic essays, simply because they have not practiced it in their own academic context. As BK put it,

*I misunderstood critical writing as being more like creative writing before I needed to write an essay in the first term. Thus, I believed I should write something wholly presenting my own views. I am not familiar with the term 'critical' because I have not experienced showing critical views through an essay or orally; instead I just needed to summarise and memorise knowledge and information in many cases in Korea. I expected to learn a lot on the MA course, but I did not receive any guidance on how to write critically in academic essays, and did not have enough time to practice during the course. (BK, I6)*

BK's difficulties were thus compounded by the shortness of the course and a perceived lack of guidance, although she still expected to learn to 'be critical'. In the case of MK, she took a CAE course to learn general skills for academic writing, but this did not contribute very much to learning how to think or write critically.

It is also clear that, in addition to these cultural and situational reasons, a lack of language ability discouraged the students from developing critical thinking skills, as NJ noted:

*I feel like my English ability limited my critical thinking. I sometimes had no ideas in English when I tried to structure critical arguments in the essays. (NJ, I2)*

The result was that NJ attempted to write academic essays in Korean first and then translated them into English; although arguing in English would have helped him to expand his critical thinking, it was simply too time-consuming. Unfortunately, none of



the other participants mentioned language problems as the reason for their difficulties with developing their critical thinking, so it is hard for me to establish whether second language competence affected critical arguing generally across the group.

In the case of JM, his mathematics course did not require a learning style that was heavily based on critical verbal argument in English and he was not required to write academic essays as part of the course assessment. He accordingly continued to focus on memorisation learning strategies of the sort he said he had experienced in Korea. In particular, he pointed out that his low English ability also led him to rely heavily on memorisation strategies throughout his course. He relied more on 'memorising' than 'comprehending' for the exams too because otherwise he could not overcome his language problem. He did, however, admit that this did not always work, as he was not able to remember the whole of something and sometimes forgot the words of the sentences or paragraphs, as when he answered questions in English within a limited time. The case of JM implies that English ability not only impedes the writing of academic essays, but can be a more particularly serious challenge to Korean students when they need to be assessed in the limited time given for exams.

As well as critical writing, the participants also reported having difficulty with reading critically, though they did not claim it was as serious a problem as critical writing. In general, 'reading' seems rarely to be specifically taught on postgraduate courses and is not directly assessed, although it is directly linked to acquiring knowledge and building sources for good academic essays (Durkin, 2004). Furthermore, students in many East-Asian countries tend not to be very familiar with academic reading skills including extensive reading, and instead rely on their memorising skills with respect to text books or on note-taking from lectures at university level (Durkin,

2004). Together with lack of this familiarity, many international students may overlook critical reading simply because it is not officially assessed, and as a result fail to develop competence in the area (McLean and Ransom, 2005). This was supported here by the data from BK, MK and YJ: they did not deliberately work to develop their skills in reading in-depth, although the three recognised that critical reading was connected with good academic writing.

In short, none of the six participants were confident about what constitutes critical writing, and were dissatisfied with the development of their own critical writing skills. BK complained about receiving little guidance for the practice of reading critically, and considered this as her lecturer's responsibility in the fifth interview.

The question of second language reading speed and the time needed to read second language texts, especially, if one is trying to be critical, is an important one and worth expanding (McLean and Ransom, 2005). NJ, YJ, MK and HC reported having difficulty with this, as MK noted at the second interview,

*I was very frustrated by reading the English articles; I reread some parts of the text several times. I feel I took a much longer time to read and comprehend when reading English texts than English native speakers. In particular, this happened when I was faced with very difficult vocabulary or jargon. Sometimes, I feel we international students are disadvantaged due to this language difficulty. So this made it harder for me to read critically. (MK, I2)*

Thirdly, the interview data gave an answer to how far students give critical and objective comments in their evaluations of modules and teachers (see section 4.4.1.4). All six students were reluctant to show or give negative comments on module evaluation forms. YJ, for example, commented that he avoided making complaints or

pointing out weaknesses on an evaluation form, even where he was dissatisfied with the module. He believed that giving negative comments on the module would be interpreted as criticising the lecturer who taught the module, and thus would express disrespect towards the lecturer and reduce his or her authority. He said that he was concerned too that giving negative points in the module evaluation might cause the lecturer to lose face. He was also worried about confidentiality. The other participants similarly reported that their concern for the lecturer's loss of 'normative face' was the primary reason for avoiding making complaints or giving negative comments on evaluation forms. Indeed, NJ and MK reported that, regardless of their dissatisfaction with the lectures, they tried to give positive comments as tokens of gratitude toward the lecturer's efforts in preparing for the lectures, believing this to be the polite way to proceed.

Lastly, I asked about the extent to which the participants adjusted to the need to give critical comments in face-to-face interactions, particularly in seminars or other classroom discussions. All six said that they avoided giving critical views in public, based on the idea that this might lead to others' losing face. This reaction was given consistently from the first interviews to the final ones. Also, they were concerned about losing their own face if others were to criticise them in public. HC, for example, said that her passive behaviour in face-to-face debates was particularly designed to avoid loss of face by both her and others,

*Critical thinking is very important in UK higher education. However, I had a cultural clash whenever I participated in any debates or discussions in class. Actually I found it very hard to openly criticise others directly in face-to-face-situations, as this is not considered appropriate in Korea. I tried to be open to doing this at first, but found it really hard to change my attitude and*

*unconsciously avoided these situations until I had almost finished the course. (HC, I 6)*

The interview results thus again supported those of the survey findings (Q33 – see section 4.4.1.4) suggesting that Korean students tend to avoid showing their disagreement or criticisms in public and this would appear to derive from, or at least relate to, Confucian values with respect to harmony and face. It is of considerable importance to highlight the fact that the students consciously and unconsciously avoided criticism in public discourse during the whole of their academic year in the UK. The pattern of adjustment, from all six subjects, was that they started off committed to adjusting to the different cultural expectations of the UK, but became increasingly discouraged, especially in the final term. This can be explained by the fact that the final term of most Masters courses gives far less opportunity to interact in class, as the focus is on the ‘dissertation’. At this point, few lectures or seminars are provided. It seemed clear that a one-year course simply did not provide the students with enough time or opportunity to adapt to a new academic environment. As MK pointed out,

*I had little chance to interact in class during the final term, and felt more passive and intimidated when interacting with people than I did at the beginning of the first term. I felt very disappointed during the final term. (MK, I6)*

In short, showing criticism in public, such as in seminars and during other classroom interactions, remained a highly challenging area to all the Korean Masters’ students and they were ultimately unable to overcome the cultural conflicts involved in the time available.



### ***B. Learner autonomy***

The need to develop and use autonomous learning skills on a UK Master's programme was discussed in section 3.2.1, and the interviews explored how far the six Korean Masters students felt they were, in fact, able to develop autonomous and independent learning styles. It will be recalled from section 3.2.1. that learner autonomy is likely to be another problematic area for Korean students. This is based on the assumption that Korean students, like many Asian students, tend to be accustomed to cramming methods and teacher-centred approaches. It was suggested that the resulting cultural conflict can lead, in extreme cases, to cultural withdrawal, or in less acute situations to psychological anxiety, by causing a loss of pace in learning and a degraded sense of academic achievement, as well as leading ultimately to academic failure. In this respect, it is of great importance to discover how far the sample students were able to be acculturated to this learning style during their one-year course and whether it caused a serious problem to any of them. The interviews were successful in generating information about developments in learning styles across the year for all the six students.

The first important finding is that none of the students initially perceived the educational system in the UK as one that, in general, expects the students to manage and control the process of their own learning. They all expected the lecturers or supervisors to guide them explicitly, for example informing them how to find the ideas or references for their essays or dissertation in detail (BK), summarising the main points of every lecture (YJ), and providing them with very readable handouts for every lesson (HC). They also tended to focus their energy and effort on academic performances that were assessed and tended to neglect or downplay ones which were not marked. This mismatch between expectations and reality as regards the UK educational system led to

difficulties in the students being able to make a fast and smooth adaptation.

Within the general pattern of responses, there were a number of individual variations. Thus, BK struggled the whole year with trying to adapt to an independent learning style, which, in addition to having little social interaction, made her, she said, feel depressed in the everyday rather than the clinical sense. Part of her problem was boredom. This data from Table 6.13 (see section 6.3.2.3) partly describes her experiences during the second and final term.

*I got really bored and did nothing in the UK. Nobody pushed me to study hard and there were not many essays to submit or even any exams to prepare for in the UK. I felt this made me very lazy. I was not suited to this learning style (BK, I6).*

She complained about being too lazy to develop new academic skills, and in the end developed an unfavourable attitude towards a learning system that values student autonomy and the development of independent learning skills. Although she did not have a serious problem with academic work, she was not motivated to study hard, and commented,

*I just feel insecure. I don't know what I am learning now. I am always worried about what I need to do. Because I do not have any exams, I am finding it hard to study voluntarily every day. In Korea, I took many exams and received marks for them, which frequently motivated me to study more, as well as let me evaluate whether I was doing well or not, although I was often pressured to obtain good marks on every exam. It mattered whether I got high marks on the exams or other academic performances, because receiving a higher mark on the exam for a module implies greater academic achievement. However, in the UK I don't know if I am doing well or not and felt I got lost often, without any sense of achievement. Currently I do not have exams at all on the course. I wish*

*that there could be exams for the modules or more assessed coursework would be given. (BK, I5)*

This is perhaps an extreme case, in that she was more accustomed to exam-oriented learning in Korea, genuinely believing that receiving a higher mark on the exam for the module implies making a greater academic achievement.

Although BK's experiences and reactions could be accounted for, in part at least, by the principle of least effort, whereby students tend not to do something unless it is assessed, it is worth noting that this tendency led, in her case, to a sense of frustration, boredom and depression in the everyday.

In the case of the four participants NJ, YJ, MK, and HC, they said that an autonomous learning style was not suited to them either, although they did not experience serious cultural conflict over it. While they recognised that throughout the year, the system placed a high value on independent learning by students, as well as encouraging their active participation in learning situations, they admitted that they were not very successful in adapting themselves to it. HC, for example, pointed out,

*It is really hard to study by myself. I need to also manage my time and the academic resources necessary to seek out the answers and solutions for my academic work, I have a fear of this responsibility. I am very accustomed to eating just what I need, as it is the teachers alone who set the tables for each chunk of learning in Korea. (HC, I5)*

She had a strong tendency to rely on information and knowledge transmitted by the teacher, as in the expression of '*eating just what I need, as it is the teachers alone who set the tables for each chunk of learning*', in the belief that teachers always give correct answers in more teacher-centred classes in Korea.

The problem raised by the students matches closely the points by McLean and Ransom (2005:48) about what Hofstede (1986:313) called large power distance societies,

*Large power distance societies tend to have teacher-centred classrooms where the teacher is the expert; he/she is respected, and never contradicted or criticised. Students in large power-distance societies only speak when invited. High uncertainty avoidance cultures feel most uncomfortable with ambiguity and unpredictability. Students from high uncertainty avoidance cultures prefer explicit instructions, need to 'know' the 'correct' answers and expect strict timelines and rules. They are frustrated by 'choose your own topic' assessments, lecturers who do not give them the answers to the exams and the concept of 'independent learning'. (McLean and Ransom, 2005:48)*

What is important to note about the data from the questionnaire survey and particularly the interviews, is the high degree to which Korean students on one-year courses were unable to resolve the conflicts and overcome problems of organising and managing their own learning.

However, it is also important to note that problems with managing learning did not have a seriously negative impact on the six students' academic performances, judging by the feedback given for their assessed assignments, though it did cause cultural withdrawal in the case of BK.

## **7.2. Developing communicative competence in English**

As it has been claimed that 'mastery of a modern language has traditionally been perceived as the most direct educational benefit of overseas study' (Goodwin and Nacht, 1988:16), it is worth examining how language difficulty may impact on their learning in



a different educational context, and how far students can improve language ability during their overseas study.. The data from the six participants concerning their main motivation to study in the UK (see section 6.2.2. Table 6.2) showed that they were all extremely keen to improve their communicative language skills during their courses. JM, in particular, showed a stronger desire to improve his English ability than to obtain an MA degree. What can be inferred from the data is that all the students believed that learning the culture of the target language would contribute to developing communicative competence, expecting many opportunities to interact with British people.

In terms of the impact of language difficulty on their learning and surviving in a different culture, it is clear that language difficulties often present one of the major challenging areas to international students (Ferris and Tagg, 1996). In reality, many students and teachers believe that low English competence is a main factor underlying difficulties with learning as well as problems of surviving in an overseas country (Carroll, 2005). Despite their relatively high level of English proficiency in TOEFL and IELTS exams, Korean students often face language difficulties from unfamiliar expressions, colloquial phrases, discourse style, and local accents; that is to say where language is culturally-embedded in real life (Choi, 1997; Park, 2006). Although the six in-depth students all had received IELTS 6.5 (see Table 6.1), which reaches over minimum entry requirements for language proficiency generally in UK higher education (Macrae, 1997), they initially had a feeling of anxiety about using English, particularly in communicational contexts involving informal conversations with native speakers and classroom interactions. Especially in the early weeks of the programme, they thus felt very embarrassed or stressed by facing this real English which is so different from what

they have learned from the textbooks in their own country. MK reported a particularly graphic experience of communicational difficulty at the first interview session.

*It took almost two hours to buy a mobile phone in town when I arrived. Communication broke down completely between the seller and me many times. I could not understand what he meant, especially her Yorkshire accent combined with British intonation. Conversely, I felt she could not understand me, whenever I spoke. This really frustrated me. Furthermore, I am an English teacher in Korea and I felt this situation humiliated me. I realized starkly that the English I had used in Korea was broken English and my pronunciation was terrible. (MK, 11)*

This experience discouraged her from using English with local speakers and she was intimidated by having to repeat what she had said when the interlocutor said 'Pardon?'. In addition, she said she had a fear of becoming isolated, caused by miscommunication with other people in English. The four participants NJ, MK, JM, and YJ all said that they found numerous differences between what they had learned in Korea and what they needed to know when communicating in the UK, which stimulated them to develop their communicative competence. BK and HC also said they were fairly keen to learn British English at their first interviews.

The question then arises of what progress the students made over the year. Firstly, NJ diagnosed that he initially had a serious problem with speaking and listening when interacting with British people, which led him to panic about miscommunication. He said he was still unfamiliar with making direct eye contact when communicating with his supervisor or with turn-taking smoothly in classroom discussion of the end of the course. He felt his conversational skills developed gradually, but he was still limited to using short and simple sentences and had failed to learn various expressions

appropriate to social situations even until he finished the course. With respect to written English, at the beginning of the course, he also reported that he struggled with writing in English, in terms of using appropriate words and clarifying his ideas and views in English; this impeded, he thought, the development of his thinking skills. These challenging areas were not sorted out very much in the final term, but did not create any serious problems for him during the course. He reported having no serious problem with reading in English as compared with other skills. Overall, he tried harder to enhance writing skills than speaking skills, though he said that he was not satisfied with his improvement in either spoken or written English. Part of his dissatisfaction can be explained by the fact that there was a lack of opportunity and time to undertake much social interaction with native speakers.

BK did not start with serious problems when speaking in English because of her previous ESL learning in the USA, although she was not accustomed to the local accents and British expressions that she encountered in the first term. In contrast, she was fearful of writing in English. However, she felt her spoken English skills remained stagnant and improved less over the year than she had expected. She commented negatively that it was very hard to meet British people and even other native speakers from different English speaking countries. This seriously discouraged her from speaking in English from the second term onwards.

In terms of reading and writing skills, these had not impeded her academic success on the course, although she was initially concerned about her writing. However, she admitted that there were not really enough essay assignments for her to improve her English academic writing skills. In short, there was less improvement over the year in either spoken or written English proficiency than she had initially anticipated.

Thirdly, YJ reported initially having difficulties with speaking, listening, and writing skills. He felt that his writing and listening skills improved more over the year than his speaking skills: listening to lectures and writing academic essays in his course led to a substantial improvement in his listening and writing, but he was generally passive in the classroom despite attempts to speak in seminar discussions during the second and third terms. Most of all, his low level of satisfaction with his improvement in speaking can be accounted for by his minimal social interaction with native speakers or other international students. Overall, he developed basic conversational skills, but was still not confident about expressing his ideas in any depth in supervisions and thus often prepared written documents to use at the meetings by the end of the final term (see section 6.3.2.1).

JM was different in that developing his language skills, rather than the academic achievement of taking a Master's course, was his primary motivation for studying overseas. He was not, however, confident about using English in 'real' listening and speaking situations in the first term, and thus he tried to expose himself to communicational contexts through various social activities. Despite this active attempt to improve his spoken English, the social meetings with local people and the students from different cultures did not play as much of a role in developing his communicative skills as he had expected. He said that he tried to enjoy these social meetings and thus experience the culture, rather than just only focus on using them to improve his language skills. In the fifth interview, he said he believed that language improvement requires a quite long time being exposed to real communicational contexts, and one year was not enough for him to speak English fluently.

Due to the large number of exams and assignments during his course, he



became less keen to meet British people informally or through social gatherings. He was unable to overcome the tendency to meet Korean people far more frequently than British people. This was initially due to his greater level of comfort with using the Korean language and the psychological relief that it provided from the isolation of living in a different culture, but the continual use of Korean reinforced his sense of comfort, he said, from the second term.

In terms of written English, he was not required to produce much academic writing in his course, and thus had far less opportunity than the others to read and write in English. Despite this, he often tried to read local newspapers. Overall, JM had the most positive attitude of the six students toward his language improvement even though his spoken English skill was limited to expressing himself when interacting with English native speakers,

*I am quite happy with my English skills, as I have improved over the year. I am now confident about speaking to native speakers and do not feel fear. I think my English is good enough to use for international affairs if I work in a company in Korea. I have seen many people in Korea who cannot speak English at all despite very high marks on their TOIEC and other English tests. In this respect, my one-year overseas experience in British culture was really fruitful and valuable, even though I still cannot speak English fluently. (JM, 16)*

Fifth, MK had a serious problem with speaking and listening in the UK, which made her very frustrated about using English. She was initially (in term 1) interested in learning spoken English, but became more discouraged as the term continued. During the final term, she did not use English frequently, and her social life consisted of solely relying on meeting with Korean friends in the university's Korean community, as noted

earlier. She deduced that her spoken English had not improved very much and she was not fluent in her discussions with British people, even at the end of the third term.

On the other hand, MK's written English improved more than her spoken English; she had to write in English and read articles as part of her course work more often than she spoke English. She grew accustomed to the new writing styles. Overall, she was not satisfied with the improvement in her English skills, although she thought that exposing herself to an English speaking culture would considerably benefit her communicational skills.

Finally, HC reported that like MK, her spoken English ability improved less than her skills at reading and writing. Due to the speech rates that she experienced in her first term, she was unable to understand what young British people were saying. She felt very stressed about speaking in English during the group discussions and admitted that she could not often comprehend what native speakers said.

As was the case with the other subjects, the lack of social interaction with native speakers emerged as a main factor in making her dissatisfied with her improvement in spoken English. She did not have much time to participate in social activities where she could have interacted with native speakers, because she tried to have more time with her children. However, she attempted to meet British people through a local Church, and visited her friends in a different city, although the latter did not really contribute to the improvement in her spoken English. The conversations she had with the British people in the Church or in a different city were limited to general things that happened in daily life, and thus she was not able to refine her English with colloquial expressions.

On the other hand, HC focused far more on academic reading and writing,

which was inevitably closely linked to academic achievement on her course and her writing skills accordingly improved, although she was initially very concerned about them (see Table 6.4).

To sum up, all six participants were less satisfied with the improvement in their spoken English, especially for communicative purposes, than with the improvement in their written English, although there was variation in the pattern of development and the degree of progress made. This general lack of improvement in spoken English can be explained by the students' low level of social interaction with native speakers and their passivity in enhancing their spoken English skills, instead placing more emphasis and effort on written English skills for the course assessments. This may be partly supported by first, Gudykunst's (1998) assertion that developing social networks in the host community, which can naturally expose the international students to the authentic language and cultural resources, may ensure target language enhancement. Also, many international students are more likely to invest a greater amount of time in reading and writing, which constitutes most coursework, than in verbal communication skills, (Baker et al., 1991). It is perhaps inevitable that, being on an intensive one-year course, they could not avoid an imbalance between improving both their spoken and written English.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The study involved in-depth interviews and classroom observations with approximately 150 international postgraduate students at a university in the south of England over one year academic course (2008).



## **Chapter 8: Conclusions and suggestions for further study**

### **8.1 Introduction**

This Chapter summarizes both the methodological issues and the main findings of the questionnaire-based survey and the in-depth interviews. It firstly (in section 8.2) reviews the major points of interest as regards the methodologies, ranging from the preparatory work to the in-depth interviews. In the findings part (section 8.3), the main findings from both the questionnaire-based survey and the in-depth interviews are summarized and integrated into a theme-based structure, with an attempt to establish how far the interviews supported, or contrasted with, the survey. In this process, I shall attempt to examine how far it has been possible to answer the two general research questions '*What is particularly problematic to Korean students?*' and '*To what extent were the students able to adjust to a new environment?*'. Finally, a range of implications are suggested, the main limitations of the study are noted and directions for further research are proposed.

### **8.2. Methodology: methodological issues**

#### **8.2.1. Preliminary interviews**

As the difficulties faced by Korean students in the UK were largely unknown, I decided to conduct a nationwide questionnaire survey as the first part of the research. It aimed at gaining a broad overview of the cultural experiences and learning of Korean students who were currently following undergraduate, masters and PhD programmes at UK universities.

Prior to conducting the survey, I carried out a series of semi-structured preliminary interviews in Korean with twelve Korean students on either undergraduate

or postgraduate courses at a university in the north of England using a semi-structured format (see Table 3.1, section 3.2). I took notes in Korean during the interviews, having had to abandon tape-recording for reasons of panic and unfamiliarity by the interviewees. In order to enhance the accuracy of the data, I summarised back to the interviewees what I had understood to be the key points of the discussion at the end of each session.

The data from the twelve interviewees highlighted problems in three areas in particular, all of which seemed to relate to cultural differences between practices in Korea and the UK. These were (1) the relation between students and their supervisors, (2) writing academic essays - and specifically constructing an appropriate argument and avoiding plagiarism - and (3) the nature and extent of the feedback provided.

### **8.2.2. The questionnaire-based survey**

The questionnaire-based survey looked at three different student groups (undergraduate, masters, and PhD) and asked; 1) Where did students' main problems lie in relation to specific cultural factors?, and 2) Which group of students had the greatest difficulties in the UK?

A draft questionnaire was constructed, based on data from the preliminary interviews, findings from the literature and my own experience. It was piloted three times (ie. until no further changes seemed needed). The final version comprised 42 questions and took approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. In order to improve ease of response and to allow students on vacation out of the UK to reply, a web-based version was used to deliver the questionnaire, with an explanatory email request to participate sent to each potential respondent.

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. This represented a sample of about 8% to 10% of the HESA figure for 2003, of 1684 Korean students enrolled in UK universities. As discussed in Chapter 4, however, this figure of 1684 needs to be treated with some caution and for present purposes should be seen as a conservative estimate.

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.

In order to avoid non-response due to problems of my being unfamiliar to respondents, or of my not adopting acceptable face and politeness strategies, potential respondents were approached indirectly. 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 survey results showed that undergraduate students seemed to have fewest problems and that the masters students seemed to experience slightly more difficulties than the doctoral students. Specifically, the masters students reported a lower level of social interaction with native speakers of English, a lower degree of satisfaction about this and less confidence about their pragmatic competence in English (see section 4.4.1.3. B). As a result, it was decided to focus on masters students for further in-depth study.

### **8.2.3 The in-depth longitudinal interviews**

In order to explore difficulties in detail, as well as to see whether and how students adapted to their study environment and overcome their problems, a small group of six Korean masters students at a northern British university was monitored across the academic year. The longitudinal study was intended to observe the participants' progress as regards perceived academic success, language improvement, and social integration into a new environment. To track the pace of their adjustment, starting from their initial worries to their overall evaluation at the end of the course, the study involved six individual interviews with each participant across the three terms and the summer vacation (see Appendix VII).

With regard to sampling the students, I created the sampling frame by contacting the representative of the Korean society at the university, but as only 8 masters students, including just one science student, had enrolled, the resulting sample was inevitably biased towards non-science subjects.

Toyoshima's 'structured conversation' method (Conteh & Toyoshima, 2005; Toyoshima, 2007) which involved 'more naturalistic conversations within the overall structure' (Toyoshima, 2007:120) was adopted and developed. I modified and extended the method to fit the situation, applying it to postgraduates rather than undergraduates, while maintaining the assumption that the researcher should share culture, L1 and academic background with the participants (Toyoshima emphasised that she had gone to the same university and had many of the participants' experiences).

At the level of collecting data through the 'structured conversation' method, I had intended to do a pilot as a trial interview, but was not able to do so for several practical reasons; a lack of students appropriate to the pilot interviews before new MA



students' arrived at York, and the impossibility of creating in advance a definitive, fixed set of interview questions for use across all participants and sessions. A compromise solution was to use the first week's interview sessions as a pilot; the result of the first session with NJ showed few procedural problems apart from the matter of duration of the interview. I accordingly reduced the length of the later interviews to between 45 minutes and one hour. I continued to monitor the interviews throughout the year for methodological impact.

The 'structured conversation' method allowed a 'data triangulation' approach to be used. The three types of data I used were 1) the participants' responses in the interviews, 2) information from their emails or informal talk on the phone, and 3) informal conversational meetings with groups involving the sample students. I initially intended to ask the students to write a diary about their experiences, feelings, and changes to show me for the next interview, but in the event I felt this was impossible, because of a sense of courtesy about not imposing on them and a strong impression that they would not agree to do the work. As an alternative, I asked them to email or phone me about specific experiences between interview sessions, and this proved to be fairly effective in developing the integrated approach. I also participated in any informal meetings the Korean society had where any of the participants were involved and created periodic informal meetings with them. This helped to elicit rich information in more natural environments, although the fact that it proved impossible to set up extra meetings with two of them (NJ and YJ) had the downside of creating a degree of imbalance between the participants.

#### **8.2.4. How far cultural factors affected the research itself**

Although one of the aims of the research was to investigate how cultural factors such as face and hierarchy affected Korean students' adjustment to their university, both factors had considerable impact on the methodological process. First, the use of Korean in both preliminary and in-depth interviews can be partly justified in terms of a concern for politeness, and not just the fact that it was easier to communicate in Korean. This derives from the cultural assumption that using Korean is a polite way of showing respect towards a Korean interlocutor, and the Korean language has devices like honorific endings that allow one to indicate social factors like age, and intimacy in social interactions in a precise way (Media Daum, 2006) see section 3.2). Koreans accordingly tend to use Korean with each other, particularly in cases where the interlocutor is older or of a higher social status, even if they can speak English fluently.

The choice of language was thus designed to increase the flow of information in two ways. On the one hand, it reduced the chances of students panicking at the thought of exposing their poor English and on the other hand, I hoped it would create an environment where the older students in particular would feel they could ask questions.

Secondly, 'face' may have affected the respondents' reactions to the pilot study. The younger students (see subject A, C, G, and H in Table 3.3 in section 3.3) did not give any critical comments or make any negative points about the questionnaire in the Think Aloud discussions in the first pilot sessions. Rather, they showed a distinct preference for indirectness by writing their comments on their questionnaire sheet. They seemed to avoid directly showing criticism in face-to-face interaction with older people (Lee, 2006); I attributed this to the assumption that negative criticism may cause the other person to lose face. The overall result was that there were fewer comments from

the younger students.

Thirdly, in the questionnaire survey, I employed face saving and hierarchy respecting strategies to show respect toward the authority of the representatives of the Korean communities of the UK universities. In order to recruit respondents, I began by individually contacting the representatives of the Korean communities of the 12 selected universities, in order to ask them to endorse and forward my emails with the on-line address of the survey (see section 4.2).

Fourthly, the relationship between me and the participants as 'senior' and 'junior' impacted on carrying out the in-depth interviews; I was periodically asked to play a role of advisor when they had problems such as experiencing cultural withdrawal (MK) or arranging supervision meetings (HC). This tendency became more frequent as the relationship between us developed across the year. This can be partly explained by the tendency to rely on the tied relationship between the senior (sunbae) as an experienced person and the junior (hubae) when the latter wants to obtain information on academic issues. This cultural convention is a hierarchical system, based on being connected with the same university or department in Korean higher education (see section 2.2.1). My role as an experienced senior encouraged the participants to talk about their problems or experiences, and this seems to have been a major factor in keeping our discussions productive across the year. Inputting personal experiences is seen by Toyoshima (2005) as a key part of structured conversation method (see section 5.5.2), but it takes on a much less artificial dimension when researching Korean students, as it fits the pattern of culturally expected behavior.

There were inevitably two downsides to my periodically taking on a consultant role. The first is that it lengthened some of the interview sessions to around 2 hours (I

tried to counter this by locating any advice after a 40 to 60 minute interview proper); the second is that my advice may at times have affected the very behavior in was trying to study. I tried to limit the amount of advice I gave, but ultimately I took the view that this was a cultural price that had to be paid if a productive relationship was to be maintained across a whole academic year.

Similar to the case with the in-depth interviews above, this sort of tied relationship between myself and the respondents appeared in the process of administering the survey; I made use of a connection with a representative who had previously graduated from the University of York ahead of me. My justification was that such a device is standardly used, even expected, by Koreans (see section 4.2).

Finally, politeness was used to aid validation work. When interviewing the students older than me in the in-depth interviews, I tried to avoid checking their responses in the middle of their talk. This was based on my concern to save their face, as stopping in the middle of comments would have been rude. Also, I tended to use more indirect skills using polite language devices to confirm their answers (see examples in section 5.5.5).

## **8.3 Key research findings**

### **8.3.1. Social integration into a new environment**

#### ***8.3.1.1. The limited level of social interaction in the UK***

The survey findings showed a very limited amount or breadth of social interaction with native English speakers in the UK. In general, Korean students in the UK were very dissatisfied with the extent of their informal interaction with British friends (Table 4.6 to 4.11). Most of their social interaction occurred in just a few contexts, namely with



academic staff or friends in college or on campus (see Table 4.14). This implies that they found it more difficult to be socialized into British society than to adjust to other areas such as academic learning, or interaction with academic staff.

### ***8.3.1.2 Correlation with other issues***

The survey also gave an indication of how far this breadth of interaction with native speakers, or rather lack of it, correlated with other areas of UK life. Firstly, the significant correlation between breadth of meeting native speakers and participation in class (see Table 4.16) showed that the students who were more active in class were more likely to meet more groups of native speakers. The degree of interaction with native speakers was also linked to participation in seminars; the students who reported a higher degree of interaction with native speakers were more likely to adjust to seminar discussions in the UK, involving culture-related areas of communication such as turn-taking and eye contact. These results would seem to be in line with the Interaction Hypothesis of second language acquisition (Long, 1996; Mackey, 1999), namely that extensive interaction with native speakers can contribute to improving English communicational skills.

The level of interaction was also correlated positively with the degree of having a favourable attitude towards British culture (see Table 4.18 in section 4.4.1.3.). This may suggest that students who have broader interaction with NS groups through various social activities would have more favourable attitudes towards British culture at a general level. However, it was discovered that the degree of interaction with native speakers was not always associated with students' cultural attitudes (see Table 4.26 in section 4.4.1.3).

Furthermore, both breadth and degree of interaction were likely to contribute to satisfaction with other areas of UK life; the breadth of interaction appears to have had an impact on the level of satisfaction with academic achievement, with respect to both spoken English and written English, and the number of British friends. The degree of interaction was associated with the degree of satisfaction with 'improvement in spoken English', 'number of British friends', and 'interaction with academic staff', which are communication-related aspects of overseas life. Consequently, it seems reasonable to conclude that in general students who had more frequent and closer interaction with native speakers were more likely to be satisfied with other areas of overseas learning in the UK.

### ***8.3.1.3 Struggling with pressures towards monoculture-biased interaction and its impact on other issues***

The questionnaire survey was only able to indicate Korean students' dissatisfaction with their social interaction with native speakers in the UK at a very general level, but the in-depth study was able to investigate the nature and extent of the six students' social interaction in a much more detailed way. The findings contributed to answering the primary research question of 'how far Korean students are concerned about developing social interaction with native speakers in the UK and how they try to overcome any problems or difficulties with social adjustment'.

Although the six students varied in their patterns of social interaction (see Table 6.12 in section 6.3.2.2.), they all nevertheless tended to rely more heavily on a monocultural pattern of interactions with Korean students than on cross-cultural interactions with other international students or native speakers. This tendency was fairly extreme for five of the students, though less so for JM who was the most active

among the participants about being socialized into British society. Although they all initially made attempts to increase interaction with native speakers - for example, BK tried to talk with people from other countries and avoid meeting Korean people and JM tried hard to create informal meetings with British friends, these attempts gradually diminished for all the six in-depth interview students.

It may have been the case that students' lack of communicative competence contributed to their passivity about developing social interaction with native speakers on and off campus, as was clearly the case with NJ and BK. This explanation would be in line with the significant level of association found in the survey between interaction with native speakers and communicational skills (see 4.4.1.3). A second possible reason involves the Korean students' attitudes toward British people and culture, as reflected in the survey results, which showed a significant level of correlation between interaction and the degree of favourable attitude toward British culture (see section 4.4.1.3.A). Both BK and MK felt quite strongly that British people were not friendly.

On the one hand, both students experienced psychological distress, such as feelings of loneliness and isolation in the foreign culture, which only increased the tendency towards a monocultural-pattern of interaction with other Koreans. On the other hand, MK and BK's limited social interactions with British people may well have led to their experience of cultural withdrawal; an interrelationship between limited social contact with native speakers in the host culture and senses of anxiety, depression, and alienation has been found in several other studies (e.g. Chen, 1999; Hull, 1978; Schram & Lauver, 1988). This is not, however, compatible with the survey results, which did *not* show cultural withdrawal as associated with being socialized into British society

(see section 4.4.1.3.A). There is no obvious explanation for this inconsistency and further research into the topic is needed.

Finally, a simple lack of time and opportunity on a one-year course may have also contributed to the students' passivity about developing social interaction with native speakers; this conclusion is partly supported by the survey results which showed a positive association between length of stay and amount of interaction (see Table 4.48 in section 4.4.1.3).

The survey found that of the three groups, masters students were the least satisfied with their interaction with native speakers. However, while the in-depth interviews found similar levels of expectation and dissatisfaction, they revealed that (a) some students tried harder than others to integrate and (b) the causes of the dissatisfaction were not straightforward and multiple factors were involved. The interview data nevertheless supported the survey finding that social adjustment was an important aspect of studying abroad and impacted on a range of other areas.

### **8.3.2. Adjustment to the supervisory system in the UK**

The survey made it clear that the UK supervision system had proved to be a challenging area for many respondents and that the reasons were largely, though not entirely, cultural (see Table 4.51). The in-depth study lent further support to this. Firstly, it is important to recognize that none of the six students initially had much background knowledge of supervisory systems or comprehended what supervisory meetings were for. This initially caused a degree of the reluctance to contact their supervisors. The important point is that this incomprehension and hesitance persisted for most of them to the final term, caused by cultural reasons rather than language problems.



From a cultural perspective, it seems clear that cultural factors like 'face' and hierarchy' affected students' reluctance to contact and interact with their supervisors. Firstly, they all showed a strong concern for politeness when it came to using language and requesting their supervisors' academic advice. They were often hesitant to contact their supervisors, fearing that this would disturb them or cause them to lose face if they could not help them. This concern for politeness was initially fairly extreme in the case of three of the students; NJ, HC and YJ.

Ultimately, the six students were unable to fully overcome the culture-related concern for authority and hierarchy in the relationship with their supervisors that they had been accustomed to in Korea (see section 2.3.2.1.). This was in line with the survey findings for 54% of the respondents and the results of the preliminary interviews. 48 survey respondents replied to the open-ended question that the relationship between students and supervisors or other academic staff in Britain is quite horizontal and equal and thus students are more able to freely express their opinions. This contrasted, they said, with the situation in Korean higher education, where the authority of the supervisor and other academic staff in a hierarchical system is highly valued.

Secondly, although all six in-depth interview students developed a greater understanding, as the year progressed, of how much and what sort of academic advice they could request, they said they nevertheless remained confused about the topic and reluctant to ask for help. One result was that YJ and HC tended to prefer to discuss supervisory matters with me instead (see section 6.3.2.1).

Interestingly, the six Korean students showed a slightly different tendency from the Asian international students in Prasad and Mannes' (2004) study, who expected their supervisors to care for them like parents. The Korean students in this study did *not*

generally expect this sort of role, either at the start of the year or at the end.

In addition to these cultural reasons, the students' lack of English skills also contributed to their passive and reluctant attitude toward communicating verbally with their supervisors, although it did not appear to cause serious problems in the sense that this did not lead to any failure in completing their degree courses for all the six students. All the participants agreed that they had a lack of confidence in speaking to their supervisor. NJ, YJ, and JM tried to resolve this by emailing to ask questions or request academic advice.

In the end, these cultural factors more than language difficulties reinforced a year-long passivity about interaction with their supervisors, though again, practices varied and YJ and JM were more active about meeting supervisors than the other four students.

In short, all six students seemed to be dissatisfied with the interaction with their supervisors, despite personal variations. This continued dissatisfaction may suggest that a one-year course is simply not enough to allow many Korean students to adjust to the very different cultural expectations involved in UK supervision meetings.

### **8.3.3. Passivity in classroom interaction (lectures and seminars)**

The survey results showed a fairly high degree of passive behaviour in the classroom by Korean students in the UK. In answer to Q31, 55.4% of the 92 respondents ticked 'active participation in just a few seminars' (see table 4.50), and 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, who preferred to ask the teacher questions 'after

class', and the 27.2% who asked 'by sending emails' (Q35, see table 4.51). A reluctance to ask the teacher questions in the middle of a class is perhaps more understandable and it is unsurprising that only 17% of the sample students reported doing so.

The results from the in-depth study generally supported the survey findings, but revealed more details about how the students reacted and adapted to UK classroom situations. Firstly, in the area of seminar discussions, five of the students (excluding JM, who had a slightly different style of seminars in his course which did not involve much discussion) seemed to feel highly pressured to participate actively. They also felt that taking part in seminars was academically quite useful to obtain information and knowledge, based on other people's views and research, but they nevertheless tended to show increasing passivity and reluctance about interacting in seminars as the year progressed. Their level of dissatisfaction with interaction in seminar discussions remained low.

The data suggested that this passivity may have involved face-related concerns, together with a lack of English communicative competence in listening and speaking. Despite her poor communicational skills, MK, for example, tried to speak a few times so as not to lose the seminar leader's face when he or she asked the whole class a question. Face-related concerns appeared extreme in the case of HC, who was particularly concerned about being asked questions in seminars in case she could not understand them and express herself in English.

Although the passivity seemed to persist across the year, the pattern and degree of passivity differed between the participants; NJ, HC, and BK were not motivated at all to participate in seminar discussions, while YJ and JM tried harder to produce a degree of participation, despite their language difficulties. JM showed more confidence about

expressing himself in the second than the first term, when he discovered many other students were active about asking questions. Inasmuch as YJ and JM also made more attempts than the others to increase social interaction with native speakers, both participants' cases lend support to the survey finding of a positive association between the degree of social interaction with native speakers and active participation in classroom interactions (see section 4.4.1.3. A.).

With regard to lectures, the six in-depth interview students reported that they all preferred lectures to seminars, as there was less pressure to speak in lectures. They also said that they had few serious problems understanding lectures, even though NJ and YJ were initially worried about them and had some difficulty with speed of delivery in the first term, as did YJ.

Despite their adjustment to, and higher satisfaction with, listening to lectures, the six students nevertheless seemed not to overcome their passivity in lectures throughout the one-year course. They reported being reluctant about voluntarily asking questions even when they needed to do so, and thus generally would stick to remaining silent in the lectures across the whole year. This again lent support to the survey results from the Q35 which showed the sample students' strong tendency to avoid asking questions in lectures (see Table 4.51 in section 4.4.1.4.).

The pattern of and progress in classroom interaction varied across the participants; NJ, BK, MK, and IIC had a strong preference for using emails to ask the lecturer questions about their lectures, whereas YJ and JM chose both emailing and asking after class. It is interesting to compare these results with the supervision responses; YJ and JM preferred not to ask supervisors questions, but were happier to ask their lecturers. This might support the conclusion that supervisions were ultimately



more of a challenge than lectures.

Despite their frequent hesitation to do it, only JM and YJ made several attempts to ask questions in the middle of a lecture, while HC remained totally passive throughout the whole year's classes. The six students showed a particular preference for 'sending emails', which slightly differs from the survey findings for Q35, where 47.8 % of the sample agreed that 'they asked the teacher questions after class' and only 27.2% agreed that 'they sent the lecturers emails personally if they wanted to ask a question'.

The main reason the six students gave for passivity in lectures was again face; they all said they did not want to interrupt the lectures. This reflects the idea that questioning in the middle of a class can often be considered as an interrupting behaviour reflecting a face-related concern for the teacher's authority in the Korean education context (see section 2.2.2). This may have thus caused a cultural conflict in the British educational context where students are more encouraged to interact in the classroom. This also partly supports Ballard and Clanchy (1991:10)' view that Asian learners' passivity in classroom discussion mainly comes from their different cultural norms in the area of "cultures of learning", in terms of a respect toward the teacher and an courtesy about not interrupting the classes with unnecessary questions, apart from their limited language proficiency.

However, their passive behaviour can not be always attributed to Confucian beliefs and traditions; not only were other influences operating, such as a lack of language ability or of motivation, but the six students seemed to have very different personalities and this might have been a contributory factor. Unfortunately the in-depth interviews did not collect systematic data about the impact of personality on attitude or behaviour. A more psychometric study would be needed.

Too much attribution of their passivity to cultural influences deriving from Confucianism may often lead to stereotyping Asian learners including Korean students as passive learners, as several previous studies have done (Biggs, 1996; Baker, 1997; Channell, 1990; Cortazzi and Jin, 1997). Nevertheless, the in-depth interview finding that the six students' passivity persisted and even increased as the year progressed implies that active interaction in the classroom remained a very challenging area for Korean masters' students throughout their one-year course.

#### **8.3.4 Frustration with developing English communicative competence**

The data from the six in-depth interview participants showed a high level of expectation about enhancing their English communicational skills in a British cultural context, in addition to the desire to obtain a master's degree in the UK (see Table 6.2.), which supported the hypothesis that language improvement was an important factor in motivating Korean students to study overseas (see section 2.3.1.). They believed that they would have many opportunities to expose themselves to English-speaking culture, and that this would considerably benefit their communicational skills.

In the event, the interview data suggested that they were not satisfied with developing their communicative competence overall and the dissatisfaction was particularly related to improvements in speaking and listening rather than in reading or writing. The first reason for this was associated with the students' low level of social interaction with native speakers. As both survey and in-depth interview data showed, they seemed to be dissatisfied with social interaction with native speakers in the UK in terms of both its amount and its extent. Furthermore, the interview data from the six students suggested an interdependent relationship between social interaction and

communicative competence; failure to develop social interaction with native speakers on and off campus seemed to lead to dissatisfaction with improvement in spoken English ability, while poor spoken English skills in turn appeared to limit their social interaction with native speakers. Interaction with native speakers was not the only factor involved; the students also struggled with passivity in classroom interaction in seminars and lectures, and this did not, they felt, contribute to developing their communicational skills.

The second reason derives from situational factors; the students tended to focus more throughout the year on academic performance which involved reading articles or texts and writing academic essays or reports, and this tendency increased as the year progressed. The bulk of their exposure appears to have been to written rather than spoken English, so it is unsurprising that they felt they made so few gains orally.

Going back to the difficulties with oral skills, all six students said that they often experienced miscommunication caused by local accents and colloquial expressions when interacting with British people. These communicational problems made them lose confidence about communicating in English in classroom discussions or with British friends on and off campus, as in the case of MK and HC. All the six students said they were not satisfied with the improvement in their oral English skills, even though their communicational problems did not lead to a failure in completing their courses at MA level. All the six showed initially active reactions overcoming their difficulties in listening and speaking, but there was a limitation on the pattern of their progress; their motivation and attempts to improve communicational skills through social activities or English language media, such as TV or newspapers, decreased progressively over the year.

### **8.3.5. Academic achievement and challenges with writing academic essays**

In contrast to the decreasing social interaction and dissatisfaction with improving their communicative competence in English, the six in-depth interview students reported that their initial academic worries involving understanding lectures, reading texts in English, and writing academic essays reduced as the year progressed. They made it clear that their initial concerns about these three topics did not, in fact, seriously affect gaining their masters degrees. Of the three, writing academically in English was nevertheless the most challenging area, particularly with respect to culture-related problems, a finding which reflected the survey results; a high proportion of the respondents reported discovering cultural differences in the two areas of 'the strictness in referencing' in relation to plagiarism (46.8%) and 'structuring arguments'(39.6%).

These findings relate to two sets of different cultural conventions. Firstly, the differing values placed on 'copying' in collectivistic and individualistic cultural contexts may have led to problems for Korean students in the UK who were not familiar with the strict ban on plagiarism (see section 2.3.2.1.). The second difference is concerned with different communication styles and different rhetorical patterns in written and spoken contexts (see section 2.3.2.2.1.). Korean students, being more familiar with indirect approaches to discourse (Ambady et al., 1996; Holtgarves, 1997, cited in Sanchez-Burks and Lee; Nisbett, Zhao, and Koo, 2003), have repeatedly been found to have difficulty with a direct approach to arguing in writing, using a topic sentence followed by supporting ideas, which tends to be expected in English academic writing (Cortazzi and Jin, 1997; Windle, 2000; see section 2.3.2.2.1).

In short, the five students except for JM (whose course did not involve many academic essay assessments) said that they had difficulties due to their unfamiliarity



with academic writing, together with a lack of written English skills. Although they felt that their difficulties did not lead to serious problems with assessed written assignments, 'constructing critical arguments' still remained the most challenging area to them.

### **8.3.6 Challenges with a different learning style and other issues**

The finding that constructing a critical argument in a written text remained a very difficult area for the five students indicates that they had problems adapting to critical thinking when it came to reading or writing. However, the problem went beyond reading and writing, as all participants including JM also reported that even at the end of the year they still had a strong tendency to avoid giving critical (in the sense of negative) comments in public. This reflects the fact that in Korea, the students may have relied more on rote-learning in teacher-centred lectures and thus were not accustomed to expressing criticism in face-to-face interactions (see sections 2.2.2.2. and 2.3.2.1.) This represents a clear mismatch with the expectations of western academic culture where critical thinking involving both positive and negative evaluations is highly valued. It is also important to recognise that other factors can influence the development of students' critical thinking (Kintgen-Andrews, 1988; Tsui, 1998a; Whitmire, 1998), but none of the comments from the six students, however, provided an answer to the question of how far language difficulty affected their arguing critically in writing.

All six students commented on their difficulty with critical reading, even though they said again that it did not cause them serious problems. BK specifically complained about a lack of guidance for 'critical reading' from the department. It was nevertheless clear that none of the six students made much of an effort to improve their critical reading skills because they were not assessed, which reflects McLean and

Ransom's (2005) finding that Asian students generally neglected critical reading.

From the point of view of oral skills, the in-depth interview data showed that all six participants seemed unable to overcome both their reluctance to show criticism openly in face-to-face interaction, reflecting the survey answers to Q33 (see section 4.4.1.4.), and the six students' high passivity in seminar discussions and lectures. As suggested earlier, both difficulties may derive in part from a cultural desire to maintain 'harmony and agreement'. As well as this cultural reason, the six students reported that they had difficulty in expressing themselves in English in public, especially when it came to clarifying their ideas or views, though it was hard to establish how far lack of their language proficiency contributed to their passivity in expressing criticism in class.

In addition to critical thinking, the data from the in-depth interviews suggested that autonomous learning was another challenging area to Korean students, which reflected the findings from the preliminary interviews (see section 3.2.1). The six students repeatedly said that they were fairly dissatisfied with adjusting to a learning style which placed a high value on learner autonomy. In particular, BK said she felt that this learning style did not motivate her to study hard in the UK, and led to a feeling of loss, boredom, and depression.

The interview data showed that the students' difficulty with adjustment to an autonomous learning style can be partly accounted for by cultural conflicts with the different expectations of Korean educational contexts, where they had become more accustomed to an exam-oriented, cramming, and teacher-centered approach. It is clear that it was very hard for the Korean students to overcome the challenges of organizing their own pace of learning in the space of a single academic year.

In contrast with other areas, the six Korean students showed a fairly high

degree of satisfaction with the feedback system in the UK, which they recognized as being very different from what they had experienced. This corresponded to the survey findings, where just 29.7% of the respondents agreed that the feedback system in the UK was more useful than that in Korea and helped them to improve their academic performance (see section. 4.4.1.4 Table 4.54). This positive reaction by the in-depth interview students came from those on both science and non-science courses, despite differences in the nature and extent of the feedback that they had received.

What five of the students cited, as being particularly helpful to their academic development was receiving detailed feedback outlining their assignments' weaknesses and strengths. This was quite different from the feedback system they were used to, which involved just a grade with very few detailed points. Interestingly, BK commented that a feedback system with detailed points about her essays did not motivate her to study harder. It seemed clear again from the six case studies, that BK was the most extreme case showing a higher dissatisfaction with the feedback system, the need to adopt an autonomous learning style, and social interaction with native speakers. The combination appears to have induced far more of a cultural withdrawal compared with the other participants.

#### **8.4 Conclusions and implications**

The main findings discussed above have several implications. Firstly, the data make it clear that many Korean students especially those on masters' courses felt that they had not been socialized into British society in the UK. They showed a greater degree of dissatisfaction with developing social interaction with native speakers than with other areas of life, especially when compared with their feelings about academic achievement

in relation to obtaining their degree. Korean students seemed to find it very hard to avoid relying on monoculture-based interactions with Korean people, and the interview data clearly showed such interactions increasing across the year, irrespective of the degree of enthusiasm for integration shown at the start of the year in term 1.

Most of all, it is important to note that the students' failure to adjust to the new cultural environment seemed to be strongly associated with a range of aspects of overseas life; in particular, it was connected with experience of cultural withdrawal and frustration with developing communicative competence in English. This connects with recent research on the role of identity in second language acquisition. Isabel-García (2006, cited in Block 2007: 872) argues that developing social interaction in the target language communities can facilitate learners' smooth transition to a new identity by helping them to raise 'intercultural sensitivity' and have a more open attitude toward the host culture away from a sense of 'ethnocentrism'. This implies that social network with native speakers can play a crucial role in integrating language learner and the target language community, which may contribute to the establishment of second language learner identity. In the case of the six interview students, the failure to develop social networks with native speakers in a studying abroad context led to increasing social distance' from the communities of practice in English, which may have impeded their acculturation into the target language society and their second language improvement (Schumann, 1976). The in-depth participants, as a result, seemed to fail to develop their second language learner identity in studying abroad context and they thus gave impression that they considered themselves to be poor second language learners through the one-year course.

However, the interesting point was that the students' failure to develop their



identities as successful English learners in the study abroad context did not present them from obtaining their masters degrees, although unfortunately, none of the six gave the answer for how far a loss of identity as second language learner has affected academic progress at MA level. There is a need for more research on how and how far second language learners' identity is related to academic performances on degree programmes at MA or other levels.

The responses to the questionnaire survey made it clear that some degree of integration into the host community was felt to be an important aspect of studying abroad by many of the students. However, the in-depth interviews showed that this was not aided by a strong and persistent reluctance - though not by all students, it is true - to develop interactions with native speakers both on and off campus. There would seem to be implications for both sides; Korean students need to be more open and try harder, but universities, departments, and possibly Korean Societies need to do more to encourage cross-cultural interaction.

Thirdly, at a more institutional level, a lack of language skills and low confidence about using English do appear to account for part of students' difficulties with learning and with socialization into the new culture, but it is hard to ignore the fact that the Korean students in both studies had a fairly high level of concern about politeness in relation to face and hierarchy. This tendency appeared to relate particularly to their passivity with respect to the classroom interactions, in seminars and lectures, and as well as interactions with their supervisor and other academic staff. One reason for seeing politeness as a key factor here is the fact that all six in-depth interview students continued all year to be hesitant about giving critical (in the sense of negative) views in face-to-face interactions. Similarly, they remained reluctant to contact their

supervisors and ask them for academic advice, even when necessary. Their solutions to problems with supervisory meetings tended to be in general indirect and passive. They showed a strong tendency to rely on advice and information from me periodically. This could be in part interpreted as simply preferring to ask for advice from someone who is familiar and easily approachable, but this also needs to be seen as reflecting the seniority culture in Korean higher education (see section 5.5.5). BK and MK often mentioned that I was their 'senior' student as an experienced person when they asked questions. It would be worth further investigating precisely how far the junior-senior relationship affects Korean students' adjustment to British educational contexts more generally.

Finally, the results of the longitudinal study suggest that the progress of the students' adaptation to UK social and academic culture seemed to be slow. Their attempts or reactions to overcome their difficulties remained static or decreased over the year, even when they had initially had quite an active and positive attitude towards adjusting to the different culture. Although the students seemed to develop a greater understanding of cultural differences as the year progressed, they remained largely unable to overcome cultural conflicts. This implies that a one-year course overseas learning does not guarantee successful adjustment to the host culture or socialization into it through a degree of interaction with local people or academic colleagues or staff. I suggested above that both students and departments need to be more proactive in fostering cross-cultural interaction, but one solution might be for Korean Societies to organize short culture-based preessional courses, where 'senior' students talk about how to overcome interactional problems.

### **8.5. Study limitations and suggestions for further research**

The data from the longitudinal study showed a static or decreasing pattern in the students' rate of perceived progress in social adaptation and improvement in communicative competence. However, the in-depth sample was limited to MA students, who tend to have a shorter length of stay in the UK than other groups like PhD or undergraduate students. This leaves open the strong possibility that the pattern or degree of progress may differ depending on length of stay. Certainly the undergraduate respondents in the questionnaire-based survey reported fewer problems with social adjustment. However, doing a PhD is often a more isolated task than doing a first degree, and the responses from the PhD students were closer to those from the masters students. An in-depth longitudinal study of Korean doctoral students would therefore be well worth doing.

A second limitation of the present study is that it is likely that a range of other factors, such as aspects of personality, personal history or experiences, and departmental or course-related circumstances affected the data from studies one and two in unknown ways. It is for example perfectly possible that I have exaggerated the impact of cultural factors on the difficulty and challenges of living and studying in the UK. Similarly, one needs to be very cautious about generalizing the tendencies, patterns, and attitudes of the two small samples to the whole Korean student body in the UK.

Thirdly, one important aim of the two studies was to investigate specifically problematic areas for Korean students, rather than the whole Confucian heritage (CHC) group of students, in attempt to avoid the stereotyping of cultural issues across an apparently homogeneous cultural group. However, the fact that only Korean students were sampled meant that it was not possible to establish if Koreans demonstrated

particular behaviours or attitudes to a greater (or lesser) degree than other Asian students, except by comparing my results with those of previous comparative studies. It would thus be useful to take the key findings from this study and research them from a comparative point of view.

Fourthly, my studies were intended ultimately to help academic staff who are native speakers of English and teach Korean students in the UK to understand the problems and challenges faced by Korean students during their overseas study. However, this ideally requires us to have some knowledge of the feelings about and perspectives on Korean students that UK staff have, for example, about classroom interaction, or supervision meetings. Although some information on this emerged from the research data - NK, for example, mentioned that academic staff in his course did not seem to expect Korean students to give comments in seminars - it is based only on the students' perspectives. I originally planned to conduct a small-scale study with supervisors who were in charge of Korean students, but practical reasons made this impossible. Consequently, further study on the views and feelings about Korean students by academic staff who have experienced teaching Korean students in the UK is needed. This would be useful to investigate how far they have perceived the cultural differences involved and understand challenges faced by Korean learners. In addition to academic staff, it would be useful to investigate what attitudes towards Korean students (or indeed other Asian students in the UK) British students hold; how far they are favorable or open, or unfriendly or exclusive. This would go some way towards exploring what underlay BK and MK's strong belief that British people are hard to get close to.

Despite these four limitations, the findings from both study 1 and 2 do add to our knowledge about language and cultural issues faced by Korean students in the UK,



and can hopefully improve our understanding of their needs, expectations, and difficulties during their overseas study. Lastly, both studies have highlighted important methodological issues in research on Korean students. Firstly, cultural factors of face and hierarchy did not just relate to the behaviour studied, but crucially affected both sampling and data collection processes - most of the face-concern strategies I employed produced a positive effect (see section 4.2) – so future studies really need to build cultural factors into their methodology. Secondly, the ‘structured conversation’ method I adapted from Conteh & Toyoshima (2005) and Toyoshima (2007) for the in-depth interviews worked well with postgraduates, with students of both sexes and in situations where the interviewee may be more experienced but is nevertheless younger than some of the respondents.

## **Appendix I: Preliminary Interviews: The questions (translation)**

### **1. Language and academic background of participants**

- 1) Which programmes did you take at in university in Korea (BA/ Masters, PhD)?
- 2) How long have you been in the UK?
- 3) Have you ever taken ESL courses in the UK?
- 4) Have you ever stayed in any other English-speaking country to learn English or take a University programme?
- 5) What are you currently doing at the University?

### **2. Learning in different academic contexts**

- 6) If you have noticed any differences in supervisory meetings regarding supervision systems or other issues, including the student-supervisor relationship, between the two different countries, what are they?

Have the differences proved problematic to your academic achievement?

To what degree do you think you are adjusting yourself to supervisory meetings in the UK?

- 7) If you have noticed any differences in academic writing between two different countries, what are they?

Have the differences proved problematic to your academic achievement?

To what degree do you think you are adjusting yourself to writing academic essays in the UK?

- 8) If you have noticed any differences in markers' feedback on academic

performance (or the feedback system) between two different countries, what are they?

How have the differences affected your academic achievement?

To what degree do you think you are adjusting yourself to feedback system in the UK?

### **3. Additional aspects of cultural learning**

9) From a comparative point of view, what do you think are the main differences between the two cultural contexts? Think about any things you have found shocking, surprising, or impressive relating to the ways of thinking, living or behaving in the UK.

This can include educational contexts.

10) (Only to the interviewees who have homestay experience in any English-countries)

How far do you think your homestay experience helped you to understand cultural differences and learn English?

## Appendix II: Response rate from the sample universities

<b>The sample Universities</b>	<b>Percentage of respondents ( N= 124 )</b>
London universities	27%
Oxford	17%
Cambridge	13%
Surrey	9%
Newcastle	7%
York	7%
Lancaster	5%
Other universities (Bristol, Sheffield, Leeds, Liverpool, and Wales)	15%



### **Appendix III: The survey rubric**

**Research project title: How far do cultural factors affect learning English by Korean adult learners.**

This survey forms part of my PhD for the University of York examining cultural aspects of learning English by Korean adults.

The survey is anonymous, so you will never be identified by name and your answers will not be shown to your supervisor or department.

**You may answer items in Korean although the questions are in English.**

It would be greatly appreciated if you would answer the questions as honestly as possible.

Thank you very much indeed for helping with the survey. Your answers will be very valuable.

Please, return to

Ju Hyun Back

The Department of Educational Studies

The University of York

Address: Block A1 Wentworth College, YO10 5NG

If you are interested in the result of the survey, please email me at [jb256@york.ac.uk](mailto:jb256@york.ac.uk) in September 2005 for a short summary.

## Appendix IV: The survey questionnaire: The first version

How far do cultural facts affect learning English by Korean adult learners?

### A. Personal background

1. Gender: Male / Female

2. Year of birth:

3. Which university are you currently at?

Please, write the name of the university in the UK you are at.

University of \_\_\_\_\_ Dept. of \_\_\_\_\_

4. What courses or programs are you taking? Please circle where relevant.

ESL (English as a second language) course

Foundation course

Undergraduate

Postgraduate (Masters/ PhD /other)

5. What sort of test have you taken with respect to English requirements?

IELTS

TOEFL

Other

Please write down your score on the test ( \_\_\_\_\_ ).

\* I do apologize for asking this, but it is really important and would really help us.

6. What are you studying in the UK? Please write down the title of course that you are currently attending. \_\_\_\_\_

7. What was your major in your first degree in Korea?

\_\_\_\_\_

8. What did you do in Korea before coming to the UK? (Job/ Education)

\_\_\_\_\_

9. How long have you been in the UK?

\_\_\_\_\_ year(s), \_\_\_\_\_ month(s)

**B. Cultural learning in overseas study**

10. Have you studied in an English speaking country other than the UK?

Yes / No

If yes,

10.1. Where? \_\_\_\_\_

10.2. How long? \_\_\_\_\_

10.3. What did you study? \_\_\_\_\_

10.4. What aspects of the way of living or values are different from those in the UK? Please give some examples in detail based on your experience:

---

---

10.5. Do you have any family or close relatives in the UK? Yes/No

10.6. Do you have any children who go to school in the UK? Yes/ No

10.7 If yes, do you meet *the school parents of other school children*? Yes/ No

Add difficulties with language or cultural differences in interacting with parents, teachers, other children, and in understanding documentation from school.

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11. Have you ever studied English in Korea (other than as a secondary school subject)? Yes / No

If yes, please choose as many as are relevant: from whom, and what aspects of language were emphasized?

- From a non-native (Korean) instructor:

Grammar and reading comprehension

Test preparation courses such as TOEFL, TOEIC, IELTS, or GRE

Conversation courses

Listening and speaking

- From an English- speaking native speaker:

Conversation courses

Grammar and reading comprehension

Test preparation courses such as TOEFL, TOEIC, IELTS, or GRE

Listening and speaking

-Self-study

With ESL materials: general

Internet: English newspaper or journals

Internet: listening practice

Internet-chat in English with people from different countries

Other \_\_\_\_\_

12. Why did you choose the UK to achieve your goal?

---

---

12.1. How far are you toward achieving your goal?

1  
very close

2

3

4

5

a very long way

13. Have you ever experienced living as a homestay with an English-speaking family in the UK or other English-speaking countries? Yes/ No

If yes,

13.1. How many homestays have you had? \_\_\_\_\_

13.2. How often did you talk to your last homestay family about your daily life,



including cultural aspects of life?

- Almost never
- Less than 1 hour a day
- 1 – 2 hours a day
- More than 2 hours a day

13.3. Did you experience cultural differences in family customs with the homestay family? Please, choose as many as are relevant.

- Wedding customs: what the bride or groom prepare for their wedding
- Roles within a family: who does what.
- Respect toward family member's personal life (individual vs. collective values)
- The way of taking care of and disciplining children

13.4. For any item that you chose, how did this differ from your experience in Korea?

---

14. During your stay in the UK, how far do you think that becoming aware of cultural differences or correspondences between the UK and Korea helped you to develop conversational skills in English ?

1	2	3	4	5
No at all				enormously

**C. Cultural adjustment**

15. Which native speakers do you interact with in the course of a typical week?

Please check as many as are relevant.

- Lecturers/ Academic staff
  - Catering staff
  - Friends in college/courses
  - Friends outside college
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
-

16. Do you participate in any organised social activities with native speakers of English in the UK? Yes/ No

16.1. If yes, which? Please check the things that you take part in.

- Leisure Clubs (e.g. Dancing, sports)
- Volunteer work such as working for disabled or elder people, or counselling
- Study group
- Part time job (such as serving at 'party' or seminar lunch, working at university library)

Please write the part time job that you are doing.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- Religious group
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_

17. To what extent are you satisfied with the following aspects of your life in the UK? Choose the rating which best describes your feeling for each of the items below:

		Very dissatisfied				Very satisfied
17.1 Academic achievement		1	2	3	4	5
17.2 Improvement in English skills	Written English	1	2	3	4	5
	Spoken English	1	2	3	4	5
17.3 Number of with British friends		1	2	3	4	5
17.4 Interaction with academic staff		1	2	3	4	5

18. What are the advantages to you of studying in the UK (English-speaking country)?

Please put 1 (the most important)– 5 in the box to your level of importance.

18.1  Learning the living English in a contact of native-speakers

18.2  Learning British culture and raising cultural or intercultural awareness

18.3  Increasing confidence in speaking with native speakers

18.4  Developing idiomaticity and knowledge of colloquial conversational expressions

18.5  Having more opportunities to experience British mass media such as magazines newspapers, and TV

18.6  Other

---

19. Have you developed a more favourable attitude towards the target (British) culture since coming to the UK?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all				Very much

20. Did you experience any culture shock when you arrived first? Yes / No  
If yes, Please comment on the following

20.1 What did you feel?

---

20.2 How did you act?

---

20.3 How long did it last?

---

21. Have you ever experienced any *withdrawal*? Yes/No

21.1. If yes, please choose as many as are relevant

- Only seeing people from your own culture
- Actively avoiding British people
- Avoiding everyone including Koreans

22. Have you ever experienced hostility or harassment from host nationals while you have been in the UK? Yes/ No

22.1 If yes, do you think this has affected your view of the British? Yes/ No  
 Comment what happened when.

---



---

D. Cultural learning and communicative competence in language learning

23. What are the most difficult areas in your learning of English? Check all that you feel particularly difficult.

- The appropriate use of vocabulary
- Understanding local accents
- The comprehension of slang or idioms in colloquial speech
- The appropriate use of gestures and body language
- Understanding 'exclamations' that are addressed to you
- Reading text books
- Listening to lectures (fairly formal language)
- Using grammar
- Understanding intonation and accent
- Adjustment to intercultural communication styles, such as how to give your opinion and respond to others in discussion
- Avoiding '*word for word translation in both spoken and written English - English words in Korean sentences*'
- Using appropriate strategies for politeness, and knowing when and how to apologize in English
- Talking to native speakers
- Writing academic essays
- Writing other texts like letters (e.g. to school)
- Other \_\_\_\_\_



24. Have you asked any questions in a lecture since October 2004 (the first term of the year)? Yes/ No

24.1. If yes, approximately how many questions have you asked during the lecture or immediately afterwards? \_\_\_\_\_

24.2. If you have not spontaneously asked questions when you needed to know something in the lectures, why not?

---

---

25. How confident are you about your knowledge of how to participate in the different conversational activities such as

25.1. How to respond to a compliment in the British cultural context

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all				very much

25.2. How to express disagreement or refusal in the British cultural context

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all				very much

25.3 How to ask a question in the British cultural context

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all				very much

Cultural learning in different areas in the UK

*Leisure activities*

26. How often do you go to the cinema and how many hours a day of leisure time do you spend on TV programmes and computer activities?

		How often / how many hours		
26.1 Cinema	<input type="checkbox"/> Less than once a month	<input type="checkbox"/> Once a month	<input type="checkbox"/> Once a week	
26.2 TV	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 hours a day	<input type="checkbox"/> 1-2 hours a day	<input type="checkbox"/> More than 2 hours a day	
26. Computer activities in English	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 hours a day	<input type="checkbox"/> 1-2 hours a day	<input type="checkbox"/> More than 2 hours a day	

27. Do you watch English movies? Yes/ No

27.1 If yes, why? Please choose as many as relevant

- For fun
- To learn many useful English expressions in real world
- To develop listening skills
- Other

28. Have you ever noticed any difference in humour between British and Korean in films? Yes/ No

28.1 If yes, how different are the British and Korean senses of humours?

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29. How many hours do you spend on the following and how useful are they in improving your English?

29.1 Movies      *Hours a week:*  
(Cinema/TV/ DVD)    0   less than 1 hour   1-2   2- 4   4- 6   more than 6



29.6 Children's books *Hours a week:*

0 less than 1 hour 1-2 2- 4 4- 6 more than 6

*Useful in learning:* 1 2 3 4 5  
Not at all extremely  
useful

29.7 Literature *Hours a week:*

(Fairy tales, classic novels) 0 less than 1 hour 1-2 2- 4 4- 6 more than 6

*Useful in learning:* 1 2 3 4 5  
Not at all extremely  
useful

29.8 Sitcoms

*Hours a week:*

0 less than 1 hour 1-2 2- 4 4- 6 more than 6

*Useful in learning:* 1 2 3 4 5  
Not at all extremely  
useful



***Seminars room and lectures***

30. How much time per week do you spend discussing things (formally+informally) with native speakers?

- None
- Less than 2 hours
- 2 hours a week
- 4 hours a week
- 6 hours a week
- More than 6 hours a week

31. Do you actively take part in the discussions with native speakers in seminars?

- Not at all
- In a few seminars
- In most seminars
- In all seminars

32. How considerate to you are the native speakers when you participate in any discussions with native speakers?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all				extremely considerate

33. Do you normally avoid expressing strong arguments in seminar discussions?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all				extremely considerate

34. Do you normally avoid suggesting your ideas to the whole class or a large group?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all				extremely considerate

35. Do you tend to ask the teacher a question?

- After class
- In the middle of class
- By sending email
- Never

36. How much do you like each of the following teaching techniques?

If you do not understand a particular technique, please just write 'not understand' and do not ring 1-5.

36.1. Reading an assigned article before the class and discussing it with classmates

1	2	3	4	5
dislike				like
very much				very much

36.2. Giving summary handouts

1	2	3	4	5
dislike				like
very much				very much

36.3 Giving many opportunities to make individual or group oral presentations

1	2	3	4	5
dislike				like
very much				very much

36.4. Writing summaries

1	2	3	4	5
dislike				like
very much				very much

36.5 Reviewing the important parts of the lecture at the end of a class

1	2	3	4	5
dislike				like
very much				very much

36.6 Giving regular tests

1	2	3	4	5
dislike				like
very much				very much

***Supervision, academic writing and feedback***

37. Have you noticed any differences between supervision in the UK and supervision in Korea? Yes/no

37.1. If so, what are they? Have they been particularly problematic in any way for you? Please, write your opinion in terms of *the relationship between supervisors and students, duration or content*

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38. In writing academic assignments, have you found any cultural differences between British and Korean traditions and expectations? Yes/No

If so, what are they ?

38.1 Referencing

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38.2 How far are they problematic for you? (Did you have any difficulties adjusting to the British way)

1	2	3	4	5
Not a problem				a very serious problem

38.3 Structuring an argument

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---

38.4 How far are they problematic for you?

1	2	3	4	5
Not a problem				a very serious problem

38.5 The meaning of technical terms

---

---

38.6 How far are they problematic for you?

1	2	3	4	5
Not a problem				a very serious problem



38.7 Other

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39. In feedback about academic performance such as assessed academic writing for marker, have you noticed any cultural differences between how to give feedback or comment in Korea and in the UK?                      Yes/ No

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39.1 If yes, what are they? Have they been particularly problematic for you?

\* If you have any other comments on any aspects of the way of living or values different from those in Korea that you have ever found or experienced during your stay in the UK, please write them down

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**Thank you very much for your kind attention.**

## Appendix V: Survey questionnaire: The final version

**How far do cultural factors affect learning English by Korean adult learners?**

### A. Personal background

1. Gender: Male / Female (Please circle your answer)
2. Year of birth: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Which university are you currently at?  
Please, write the name of the university in the UK you are at.  
University of \_\_\_\_\_  
Dept. of \_\_\_\_\_  
The title of course (e.g. Biomechanics) \_\_\_\_\_
4. What courses or programs are you taking? (Please tick your answer).
  - ESL (English as a second language) course
  - Foundation course
  - Undergraduate
  - Postgraduate -Masters
  - Postgraduate- PhD
5. Which test have you taken with respect to English requirements? (Please tick your answer).
  - TOEFL
  - IELTS
  - Other
6. Please write down your overall score on the test ( \_\_\_\_\_ )\*.  
**\*I do apologize for asking this, but it is really important and would really help us.**
7. What was your major in your first degree in Korea?  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What did you do in Korea before coming to the UK? (Job/ Education)  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. How long have you been in the UK?  
\_\_\_\_\_ year(s), \_\_\_\_\_ month(s)
10. Have you ever studied English in Korea (other than as a secondary school subject)?  
Yes / No (Please Circle)
11. If yes, please tick all that are relevant: from whom, and what aspects of language were emphasized?

*From a non-native (Korean) instructor:*

- Test preparation courses such as TOEFL, TOEIC, IELTS, or GRE
- Conversation courses
- Listening and speaking
- Grammar and reading comprehension

*From an English-speaking native speaker:*

- Conversation courses
- Grammar and reading comprehension
- Test preparation courses such as TOEFL, TOEIC, IELTS, or GRE
- Listening and speaking

Self-study

- With ESL materials: general
- Internet: English newspaper or journals
- Internet: listening practice
- Internet-chat in English with people from different countries
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**B. Overseas study**

12. Have you studied in an English speaking country other than the UK? .

Yes / No (Please circle your answer)

13. If yes,

Where? \_\_\_\_\_

How long? \_\_\_\_\_

What did you study? \_\_\_\_\_

14. Have you ever experienced living as a homestay with an English speaking family in the UK or other English-speaking countries? Yes/ No (Please circle)

If yes,

15. How many homestays have you had? \_\_\_\_\_

16. How often did you talk to your last homestay family about your daily life, including cultural aspects of life?

- Almost never
- Less than 1 hour a day
- 1 – 2 hours a day
- More than 2 hours a day

17. Did you experience cultural differences in family customs with the homestay family?

Please tick as many as are relevant.

- Roles within a family: who does what.
- Wedding customs: what the bride or groom prepares for their wedding
- Respect toward family member's personal life (individual vs. collective values)
- The way of taking care of and disciplining children
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

18. From each item that you chose, can you say how this differed from your experience in Korea?

(위의 보기중 선택한 것 중에서 한국과는 어떻게 다른지 비교해서 설명해 주십시오)

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19. During your stay in the UK, how far do you think that becoming aware of cultural differences or correspondences between the UK and Korea helped you to develop conversational skills in English? (영국에서 경험하는 문화적 차이들이나 공통점들을 이해하는 것이 실질적인 영어conversation 실력을 향상 시키는데 얼마나 도움이 된다고 생각 합니까:) Please circle your answer.

1
2
3
4
5

Not at all enormously

**C. Cultural adjustment**

20. Which native speakers do you interact with in the course of a typical week? (영국 유학 생활에서 자주 또는 정기적으로 만나는 English native speakers 은 누구인지 있는 데로 고르시오)

Please check as many as are relevant.

- Lecturers/ Academic staff (e.g. supervisors)
- Catering staff
- Friends in college (accommodation)/courses
- Friends outside college
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

21. If you participate in any organised social activities with native speakers of English in the UK, which things do you take part in? Please tick all the things that you take part in.



- Leisure Clubs (e.g. Dancing, sports)
- Volunteer work such as working for disabled or elder people, or counselling
- Study group
- Part time job (such as serving at 'party' or seminar lunch, working at university library)

\*Please write the part time job that you are doing.

- 
- Religious group
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
- 

22. To what extent are you satisfied with the following aspects of your life in the UK? Circle the rating that best describes your feeling for each of the items below:

*Academic achievement*

very dissatisfied					very satisfied
1	2	3	4	5	

*Improvement in English skills:*

*Written English:*

very dissatisfied					very satisfied
1	2	3	4	5	

*Spoken English:*

very dissatisfied					very satisfied
1	2	3	4	5	

*Number of British friends:*

very dissatisfied					very satisfied
1	2	3	4	5	

*Interaction with academic staff*

very dissatisfied					very satisfied
1	2	3	4	5	

23. Have you developed a more favourable attitude toward target (British) culture since coming to the UK? (Please circle)

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Not at all

very much

24. Have you ever experienced any *withdrawal* (문화적 변화에 잘 적응 하지 못하고 새로운 문화적환경 (British Culture) 으로부터 이탈 하거나 도피하려는 데서 나타나는 행위들)? Yes/No (please circle)

25. If yes, please choose as many as are relevant.

- Only seeing people from your own culture.

- Actively avoiding British people.
- Avoiding everyone including Koreans
- Desperately wanting to go back to Korea (seriously home sick)
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**D. Cultural learning and communicative competence in language learning**

26. How confident are you about your knowledge of how to participate in the different conversational activities such as

26a. How to respond to a compliment from a native speaker in the UK (영국 문화를 공유하는 사람들과의 원활한 interaction을 위해 다른 사람의 칭찬에 반응 할 때 그 나라 문화적 관례에 맞게 얼마나 자연스럽게 행동하고 표현하는 지를 생각해 보십시오)

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all				very much

26b. How to express disagreement or refusal to a native speaker in the UK context (Can you directly refuse the other's offer if you don not want to accept it?)

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all				very much

26c. How to make a request to a native speaker in the UK (부탁 하거나 요청하는 데 있어 그 사람의 사회적 지위나 권력, 친한정도를 얼마나 배제 할 수 있는가)

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all				very much

27. What are the most difficult areas in your learning of English? Tick **all** that you feel are particularly **difficult**

- The appropriate use of vocabulary
- Understanding local accents
- The comprehension of slang or idioms in colloquial speech
- The appropriate use of gestures and body language
- Understanding 'exclamations'(감탄하는 표현들) that are addressed to you
- Reading text books
- Listening to lectures (fairly formal language)
- Understanding intonation and accent Using grammar
- Adjustment to intercultural communication styles, such as how to give your opinion and respond to others in discussion

- Avoiding 'word for word translation in both spoken and written English - English words in Korean sentences'(의미에 의한 해석이 아니라 단어 하나하나에 의한 해석 즉 흔히 broken English or 'Konglish' 라 불리는 한국식 영어표현)
- Using appropriate strategies for politeness, and knowing when and how to apologize in English
- Talking to native speakers
- Writing academic essays
- Writing other texts like letters (e.g. compliant letters/ other sorts of letters to school)
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**E. Cultural learning in different areas in the UK**

*Leisure activities*

28. How many hours do you spend on the following & 29. How useful are they in improving your English?

Movies (Cinema/TV/ DVD):

hours a week (approx):	0	1	2	3	4	5 or more hours
useful for learning :	1	2	3	4	5	
	not at all			extremely useful		

Newspapers (including on-line newspaper)

hours a week:	0	less than 1 hour	1-2	2- 4	4- 6	more than 6
useful in learning :	1	2	3	4	5	
	not at all			extremely useful		

TV programmes (Sitcoms/ News / Soap operas and other entertainment)

hours a week:	0	less than 1 hour	1-2	2- 4	4- 6	more than 6
useful in learning :	1	2	3	4	5	
	not at all			extremely useful		

*Seminars and lectures*

30. How much time per week do you spend discussing things (formally+informally) with native speakers?

- None
- Less than 2 hours
- 2 hours a week
- 4 hours a week
- 6 hours a week
- More than 6 hours a week



31. Do you actively take part in the discussions with native speakers in seminars?

- Not at all
- In a few seminars
- In most seminars
- In all seminars

32. How considerate to you are the native speakers when you participate in any discussions with native speakers? (토론에 참여 하는 native 들은 다른 문화적, 언어적 background 을 가진 당신을 어느정도로 배려 해 주는지에 대한 경험을 생각해 보십시오)

1                          2                          3                          4                          5

Not at all

extremely considerate

33. Do you normally avoid expressing strong arguments in seminar discussions?

1                          2                          3                          4                          5

Not at all

always

34. Do you normally avoid suggesting your ideas to the whole class or a large group?

1                          2                          3                          4                          5

Not at all

always

35. Do you usually tend to ask the teacher questions?

- After class
- In the middle of class
- By sending email
- Never

*Supervision, academic writing and feedback*

36. *In Interaction with supervisors or lecturers* (지도 교수와의 교류)

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

- The relationship between supervisors and students (Open, horizontal, equal relationship vs. hierarchical (relating to teacher's authority), vertical 과 연관 시켜 생각해 보세요)
- Students rights to request academic advice when they need it
- The duration of supervision
- The content of supervision
- System of supervision

37. What are the differences between the items you chose above in the UK and in Korea?

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38. *In Writing academic essays*

If you have found any differences between British and Korean traditions and expectations, what do they relate to? (Tick all that are relevant)

The level of strictness in referencing (idea의 origin을 밝히는 데 있어서의 중요성, 표절에 대한 인식)

Structuring an argument (어떤 주제에 관해 argue을 하는데 있어 구조적, 혹은 전개방법적 차이)

Using some technical terms (전공에서 쓰여지는 용어의 의미가 사회적 문화적 context 따라 달라져서 다른 의미를 가질 수 있게 되는 것- 흔히 한국문헌을 참조해서 쓸 때 이런 문제가 발생하여 용어의 글자 그대로를 영어로 번역해서 쓰기 어려움)

39. What are the differences between the items you chose above in the UK and in Korea?

40. *Marker's feedback, comment, or mark on academic performance (such as essays or reports)*

If you found any differences between how to give feedback, comment or marks, what do they relate to?

The level of usefulness of feedback or comment to improve your academic performance

The guarantee of the anonymity or fairness in assessment (채점자의 주관적 감정이나 선입견의 배제 정도: e.g. anonymous or non-anonymous marking/ the level of punctuality in deadline for academic essays )

The overall content of feedback (which points are mainly assessed)

41. What are the differences between the items you chose above in the UK and in Korea?

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42. If you have any other comment on **any aspects of the way of living or values different from those in Korea** that you have ever found or experienced during your stay in the UK, please write them down. (e.g. cultural differences in living customs, family customs, educational systems, different views on sociocultural phenomena)

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**Thank you very much for your kind attention.  
I do realise how long this must have taken you.  
BUT it will really help my research.**

If you would like to contact me about anything about the questionnaire, remember that you can email me on [jb256@york.ac.uk](mailto:jb256@york.ac.uk)

## **Appendix VI: Interview agreement form**

**Research Project Title: How far do cultural factors affect learning English  
by Korean adult learners?**

Ju Hyun Back  
Research Student  
The Department of Educational Studies  
University of York

### **DISCLAIMER**

I agree that the information noted by the researcher agrees with the information I gave in my interview. I also agree that the information given in the interview may be used in Ju Hyun Back's dissertation for the University of York, in publications or presentations arising from the interviews, and for training materials deriving from the research. I hereby renounce any claim to copyright as the author of the information.

### **NOTE**

It is hereby guaranteed that you will never be identified by name in any of the above texts or presentations, without prior specific agreement in writing.

Signed..... Name.....

Date.....

**Appendix VII: Time frame for study 2 (In-depth interviews)**

Subject NJ		
I 1	Term 1 Oct 21.	2005 (week 2)
I 2	Term 1 Dec 18	2005 (week 10)
I 3	Term 2 Jan 17	2006 (week 2)
I 4	Term 2 Mar 15	2006 (week 9)
I 5	Term 3 May 3	2006 (week 2)
I 6	Summer vacation Oct 2, 2006	

Table VII.1 Time frame of NJ's interview sessions

Subject BK		
I 1	Term 1 Oct 21	2005 ( week 2)
I 2	Term 1 Dec 11	2005 (week 10)
I 3	Term 2 Jan 20	2006 (week 2)
I 4	Term 2 Mar 9	2006( week 9)
I 5	Term 3 May 1	2006( week 2)
I 6	Term 3 Sept 24	2006 (week10)

Table VII.2 Time frame of BK's interview sessions



Subject YJ		
I 1	Term 1 Oct 20	2005 (week 2)
I 2	Term 1 Dec 12	2005 (week 10)
I 3	Term 2 Jan 20,	2006 (week 2)
I 4	Term 2 Mar 8,	2006 (week 9)
I 5	Term 3 May 15	2006 (week 2)
I 6	Oct 4, 2006	

Table VII.3 Time frame of YJ's interview sessions

Subject JM		
I 1	Term 1 Oct 22	2005 (week 2)
I 2	Term 1 Dec 14	2005 (week 10)
I 3	Term 2 Jan 20	2006 (week 2)
I 4	Term 2 Mar 9	2006 (week 9)
I 5	Term 3 May 1	2006 (week 2)
I 6	Oct 4, 2006	

Table VII. 4 Time frame of JM 's interview sessions

Subject MK		
I 1	Term 1 Oct 23	2005 (week 2)
I 2	Term 1 Dec 20	2005 (week 10)
I 3	Term 2 Jan 17	2006 (week 2)
I 4	Term 2 Mar 17	2006 (week 10)
I 5	Term 3 Apr 30	2006 (week 2)
I 6	Term3 Sept 20	2006 (week 10)

Table VII.5 Time frame of MK's interview sessions

Subject HC		
I 1	Term 1 Oct 21	2005 (week 2)
I 2	Term 1 Dec 4	2005 (week 9)
I 3	Term 2 Jan 22	2006 (week 3)
I 4	Term 2 Mar 24	2006 (week 10)
I 5	Term 3 Apr 28	2006 (week 2)
I 6	Term 3 Sept 25	2006 (week 10)

Table VII.6 Time frame of HC's interview sessions

## **Appendix VIII: The in-depth interview questions: The first sessions**

In the first interviews, the initial questions are to probe problems or difficulties that the Korean students have early in the course, based on the information from my previous research (the preliminary interviews and the survey). All are open-ended questions, and translated from Korean.

### ***1. Background questions***

- About their personal information

1.1. What university programme have you experienced in Korea?

1.2. What motivated you to study in the UK?

### ***2. Overall feeling questions***

2.1 What was your first impression of British cultural things (aspects of behaviour, habit, and food, life style/ values or beliefs, and so on) on your arrival?

- Good things? or Bad things?

2.2. Are you being proactive or insecure? (If you feel worried about the academic work for the year, what exactly makes you feel worried and what are you trying to do about it?)

### ***3. Experience & knowledge questions***

Problems or difficulties on arrival (in three parts)

#### **A. Social interaction with department staff**

*(a. registering)*

3.1 Have you experienced any problems with registering?

- Please tell me what they are

- How did you react to the problems?

- Have you had any challenges talking to and understanding admin staff when you have any inquiries?

- Have you had any challenges to understanding documentation?

*(b. supervision)*

3.2 Do you understand what 'supervision' in UK universities is?

Describe how you understand it.

3.3 Have you had your first supervision?

3.4 Do you have any difficulties contacting your supervisor ?

Have you had any experience of hesitating to ask a question or requesting academic advice when you need it

3.5 Have you experienced any problems with talking to your supervisors or any other academic staff? If yes, what particularly are they?

## **B. Social interaction with people outside the department**

3.6 Have you joined any student societies?

If yes, what are they?

What do you think the advantages of joining them?

If no, explain why..

Are you trying to join any of them?

3.7 Do you have difficulties interacting socially with British friends either in your accommodation, colleges or the department? Please explain why.

## **C. Academic work**

3.8 Have you read the handbook about the course you are taking?

If yes, did you have any difficulties understanding it? What are they?

3.9 Are you confident or worried about writing academic essays in English?

- Structuring an argument

- Referencing ...

- Language usage ...

If you do not hand in essays for academic assessment, what aspects particularly are you worried about?

3.10 Did you participate in the department reception at the beginning of this term? (e.g. introductory meeting)

- Was the meeting useful?

- Was it useful for you to feel activated about your university life?

3.11 Are you really active about taking part in the seminars or receptions in the department?

(Are you trying to participate in as many seminars or meetings as possible?)

3.12 How do you feel about preparing for or taking part in seminars?

- Are you stressed, under pressure, or worried? Why?

- How are you try to solve this?



- Are you positive and motivated about seminars?

3.13 Have you experienced any challenges when participating in seminar discussions?

- Understanding what the other people say
- Expressing your opinions /ideas confidently
- Understanding how to argue in the discussion

3.14 Do you understand the feedback system in the UK universities?

- e.g. Marking systems or
- e.g. Criteria for assessment,

4. In overall, would you like mention any things that have shocked, surprised, confused or frustrated you since your arrival in the UK? Please describe them.

## **Appendix IX: The in-depth interview questions: The 5th interview sessions**

### **1. Overall feeling questions:**

1.1. Have there been changes in your impressions of *British culture* between your first arrival and now (almost the end of the academic year)? (e.g. aspects of behaviour, and food, life style/ values or beliefs, and so on) If there any changes, can you explain them?

1.2 If you were worried about the aspects of academic work for the year (especially worries you reported at the first interview),

- how do you feel now about them ?
- What did you try to do about them during the terms?
- Was it useful?
- Do you feel more confident about doing academic work now than at your last interview?

### **2. Experience and knowledge questions**

#### **A. In social interaction with department staff**

##### *(Supervision)*

2.1 Have you met your supervisor for your dissertation?

- How satisfied are you with supervision for dissertation?: contacting Supervisor, receiving guidance on dissertation , and so on. Was it useful for you to plan your dissertation?
- Do you expect supervisors to give you specific advice for each step? if so, how far are you satisfied with what you have received?
- If you are not satisfied, have you talked about this matter with academic staff, and asked directly for help? If not, why not? (Implicit /explicit styles of communication)

2.2 How far do you feel the your communication skills in interactions with your supervisor are improving?

- Are you becoming more confident?
- If you still have some problems in this area, how have you reacted to them?

-And are you trying to do something to cope with them?

## **B. Social interaction with people outside the department**

2.3 Are you still part of not joining any student societies?

-Are you trying to create any chances to talk with native speakers in any other ways? If so, what are they?

2.4 If you are belong to a student society with English native speakers (as reported in the previous interview), are you satisfied with your interaction with the native people?

- How far do you feel it has improved with your communication skills (listening / speaking and so on).

2.5 Do you have more/ less informally interaction with native speaking friends in college or the department now than at the beginning of the term?

- If do you have less, why?

2.6 Did you participate in the department reception at the last week of the term (if there was one)?

- Did you interacted much with people?

## **C. Academic part**

2.7 Do you feel more confident about the problematic areas that you previously reported?

- e.g. Structuring an argument (rhetorical organization)

- e.g. Plagiarism

- e.g. Language usage

2.8 What aspects of writing essays do you still find particularly difficult?

- What did you do to improve your academic writing skills?

- Do you feel your writing skills are improving?

2.9 Are you more or less active about taking part in the seminars in the department at the end of term 3?

2.10 Are you still very stressed, under pressure, or worried in seminar discussions or when preparing for them?

-Do you feel your communication skills for discussion are improving?

- what did you try to do in order to cope with the difficulties you mentioned at the previous interview?

2.11 How would you feel if you faces Korean students when giving a presentation in class?

- Have you been in this position?
  - Would you be/ Are you more nervous?
  - If so, why would you / do you feel that?
- 2.12 Have you had any cultural conflicts with respect to leaning styles/approaches since the last interview or over the year ?
- If so, what are they and how do you react to them?
- 2.13 Have you found ever received the feedback for any work from / since the last interview session?
- If you have got it, was it useful for you to develop your academic skills for your future work?
- 2.14. Have you filled out the form asking for an evaluation of your teachers or your peers?
- Would you give any negative comments on the form when you (Critical comments) if you think you want or need?

### ***3. Overall evaluation (for the final (6<sup>th</sup>) sessions)***

- 3.1 Overall, what aspects of your life in the UK are you (dis)satisfied with? (Learning English/ living in the UK/ socializing with people, completing degree course )
- 3.2 Have you sorted out the problems or difficulties you had in the first term?  
And how far did you do ?



## **Appendix X: A sample Transcription of an in-depth interview**

Participant: HC (Female)

Session: the first interview

Date: 21<sup>st</sup> Oct. 2005

Time: 12: 30 pm to 2:10 pm.

(Before the tape-recording, I explained the aim, and general theme of the interviews roughly and asked her several questions about personal information, such as her course, academic experience in Korea and other details).

(Key: I= interviewer, P= participant)

I: First, really thank you very much for your participation in this interview.

As I said to you before on the phone, just be relaxed and give me your answers saying what you felt and experienced honestly. As I also confirmed, your name will not be identified at all so don't worry about this matter.

P: OK, no problem (with a smile)... it's my pleasure to participate in your work. I think your PhD topic is really interesting and is very relevant to our life here.

I: Thank you,.. I will start with the first question, um... can you tell me what motivated you to come to the UK? Did you have any specific reasons?

P: I .. umm... (pause) most of all, really wanted to learn how to express myself in English like native speakers. I think English education as a foreign language in Korea should be more focused on 'communicative language teaching'. So we teachers need to focus on developing students' communicative competence rather than an exam-oriented teaching methods, emphasizing reading and writing skills. As an English teacher, I am very enthusiastic about learning how to implement an interactive approach in the Korean teaching and learning context by taking this TESOL course, and want to improve my communication skills through a lot of interactions with native speakers in the UK. In addition, I am expecting to experience British culture with my family who are staying with me in the UK now.

P: Thank you for your long answer ha ha.( laughs). That' s all that made you come to the UK? If you have any particular reason for coming to the UK for a masters course, can you tell me about that?

P: Most of all, the prestige of the UK universities was one of the main reasons to choose UK higher education. It would look better on my resumé when I need to get a job in Korea. When I chose the university, I placed the importance on the status of the university in the ranking system for all the UK universities.

I: I see... Did you have any first impression about British culture or people that you remember now? As you said that you arrived here one year ago and had stayed in a different city, can you say anything that made an impression on you, or surprised you, in terms of tradition, values, life styles or food in the UK ?

P: Many things seemed to be different .... um... I found that systems on the whole are very slow as compared to those in Korea. As you know, everything is so fast in Korea, is that right you think? I need to be very patient in the UK

I: Yes. I agree. I felt the same as you ... I felt that in Korea doing things quickly is very important, but here people seem not to be very sensitive about waiting.

P: Ah, something just struck me. I noticed that 'charity shops' here are very common. This made a big impression on me. In fact, I was not accustomed to buying things in charity shops. I would have thought about what other people think of me using this sort of second-hand things.

I: I sometimes use a charity shop - it is cost effective and good to spend money on charity work.

P: But I found that it was very hard to make friends with British people. They do not seem to be open to becoming friends with people from different countries like me. It is really hard to get close to them.

I: OK. So you feel like that about British people.

Let's move on to the next question.. have you experienced anything that was a surprise or shock since your arrival?

P = I was very nervous about communicating with the administration staff in the university. I could not understand some words, so I was very embarrassed at the time.

I = So how did you cope with the problems?

P = I just repeated 'pardon? But I was slightly worried in case the staff weren't pleased with this. Actually I am not confident about understanding their English accents or expressions in many cases, particularly less confident when interacting on the phone.

I = Have you had any difficulties to understanding documentation?

P : (pause) Not yet.

I: I see . So you did have communication problems which made you feel embarrassed.? What makes you the most worried now? Are they academic matters or others like communication problems?

P= I am worried about everything. Um... anxiety about English, and so on. ....but, I feel most concerned about writing academic essays, which I think can strongly affect my completing the MA course successfully, as the modules comprise several essay assessments. I am really really worried ... (a sigh) ... I have not written any essay assignments yet, and this has made me more insecure about writing an academic essay.

I = You mean academic writing is of the most concern to you now. All right I will ask for details later and move to the next theme...

P = OK.

I = Do you understand what the 'supervision' in the UK universities is?

P= No, I have no idea.



I : Have you had your first supervision?

P: Yes once. But I still don't know what the supervision meetings are for.

I : have you ever contacted your supervisor?

P : No

I: Didn't you want to? Or can you tell me if you have any particular reason?

P: I wanted to ask several questions, but I was not sure whether I could do so or not. I am not clear what sorts of questions are acceptable in supervisory sessions. I am also wondering what I need to prepare for the next supervisory meetings and when I could contact her. I am very uncertain about all these things.

I: I remember that you did a masters course in Korea. Can you tell me what the supervision meetings were like there?

P: I did not have any regular supervision sessions in Korea when I did my master's course, although it depends on the department. During the course in Korea, I always felt a psychological distance between my supervisor and me, which discouraged me from contacting him, even though I needed to discuss my dissertation with him. During the course in Korea, in many cases, I contacted my seniors more often than my supervisor; they were mostly on the PhD courses, when I needed to discuss things and request academic advice

I: I see. Do you also feel a psychological distance with your supervisor here? Has this made you hesitant to contact her ?

P: Sure.. She was quite friendly at the first meeting, but I keep thinking she is very much on authority figure, so tried to be polite ... this can be, to some extent, because I am moer of an old generation student (with a big smile). The younger generation students would be different these days.

I: This may be... but I understand how you feel about meeting your supervisor. I also



was very concerned about being polite at the beginning of the MA course here. Like you, I am more accustomed to a rather hierarchical relationship between teacher and students. Did you experience any communication problems when you met your supervisor?

P: I remember.. Not really ...because we did not talk a lot.

(after some hesitation)

Ah. Can I ask you a question? I think you have a lot of experience here. (smile)

I: Sure.

P: Do you think it is Ok if I email her to ask several questions, (showing the paper with the questions). I am concerned that I would bother her.

I: I think it is OK. Don't worry.

P: All right, I will try today. Thank you!

I: My pleasure, ask me at any time you need help.

Can you tell me if you've joined any student societies?

P: No, I really want to, but it is hard to join clubs or social activities with native speakers or other international students because I need to spend time with my children and husband after class. It's a pity! I feel like that I am losing a lot of opportunities to interact with British friends on campus. I believe that it is a great benefit to learn English and explore the host culture through interaction with local students.

I: Oh, I see.... the situation is that you don't have even friends in accommodation because you're living in a house with your family. Have you tried to meet up with native speakers formally or informally on and off campus? If so what did you do?

P: Yes. I sometimes meet the parents whose children are my son's classmates at the primary school.

I: Does it help to improve your communication skills?

P: Not really yet, but it's better than nothing! Ha ha.. (laughs)

I: Yes.. Do you have difficulty with actively talking to them or other British native friends in your department?

P: Well... I don't have problems with the parents. They tend to speak slowly and in most cases, so far we just talk about things to do with our children for a short time. However, I can't understand what young British students from my department say. They speak too fast!! Particularly, when I am discussing in a group, I have more difficulty communicating in English. I also often miss my 'turn' to speak.

I: How did you react when you could not understand what others said in English?

P: I just pretended to understand it.

I: Can you tell me why?

P: I did not want to the conversation to break down.

I: I see. What do you do to improve your English communicational skills?

P: I watch TV with my children. I enjoy the 'Simpsons' with them and try not to miss the BBC news after dinner at home, which is quite useful for improving my listening ability.

I: OK.. what about speaking skill?

P: As I told you, I hoped to have many opportunities to socially interact with native speakers here, which I believe it is a best way of improving speaking skills, but I don't think that I would make this often. I am not sure yet.

I: um m.. Let's talk about more next session. I will move on to the questions about your academic life. Have you read the handbook about the course you are taking?

P: Yes.

I: Did you have any difficulties understanding it?

P: No.

I: At the beginning of the interview, you said you are very concerned about writing academic essays. What particularly are you worried about? Or what do you think what is particularly problematic for you?. If I give an example like 'structuring an argument' or 'language use.. and so on....

P: The most difficult area I feel is 'paraphrasing' in English. I realize that I need to read more English texts to improve the skill. Also, as I take the departmental language support course, I have discovered that it is really important to structure an argument in English academic writing, but I am not sure about how to construct arguments in the essays yet.

I: I felt the same. When I started my MA degree course here, I was also very worried about how to write academic essays, particularly structuring an argument. I had not experienced writing academic essays in English before coming to the UK.

P: You did? Really? But in my case I am not sure whether I can improve my writing skills or not. Do you think I can successfully complete the course, because I know nothing about academic essays in the UK? (sigh)

I: Course you can! You can do well. Just keep working on it.

P: Are you sure? Ha ha (laugh)

I: Yes !

OK let's move on to the next question.

Did you go to the department reception at the beginning of this term, like an introductory meeting ?

P: Yes, I try to participate in all the departmental activities.



I: Did you go to the departmental introductory meeting at the beginning of this term?

P :Yes

I: Was the meeting interesting?

P: It was less interesting than I expected.

I = Did it help you to start to engage more actively in university life?

P = I expected that I would get to know some of my course mates, but I don't remember who they were, because actually there were so many students on the course. The meeting was not very useful for helping create chances to meet up with other course mates socially.

I: You mean it was not as useful to create any social meetings as you expected. Are you going to join any other social activities if they are ?

P: Um I will think about it.

I: Are you really active in taking part in the seminars in the department?

P: Yes, I try to participate in all the departmental seminars.

I: How do you feel about preparing for and taking part in seminars? I mean are you stressed, under pressure, or worried?

P: Um.. I am stressed about preparing for the seminars. If I don't prepare for the seminars, such as reading the articles relevant to the seminar topic, I feel very insecure about participating in the seminar.

I: So you always try to prepare for the seminars every time?

P: Yes. Actually I am very interested in taking seminars. It is of great interest to



experience an aspect of academic culture in the UK. It was a remarkable new experience seeing the students in class freely debate with each other. In the case of British students or other European students, they freely give any negative comments in face-to-face interaction, and this really shocked me. I don't even want to think about giving critical comments in the seminar discussions.

I: So you cannot actively take part in the seminar discussions? This is problematic for you?

P: Yes. Although I think I can give some comments on some issues in the seminar discussions, I am always hesitant to offer my opinions.

I: Can you tell me why? Because of a lack of confidence in expressing yourself in English?

P: Yes, but not for language reasons; I am concerned that I would interrupt the discussions when I asked a question which was not be appropriate to the issues debated in the context. I mean I tend to care about what others think of me.

I: So have you tried to ask any questions?

P: Not yet.

I: Have you experienced any other challenges when participating in seminars?

P: As I said, I am not confident about expressing myself in English in public.

I: I see. Let me ask about feedback. Do you understand the feedback system in the UK universities?

P: Not at all.

I: Haven't you received any feedback on your assessments?

P: No, I haven't.

I: I will ask the final question now. Please give me any comments about your experiences or feelings in relation to culture and language issues that you had since arrival. If you do not have anything, never mind.

P: Let me think... although I am just at the beginning of the new academic year, I feel that it's very difficult to have any social interactions with British students.

I haven't talked to any British students socially on campus yet. It is really hard to meet them unless I join a club. I feel like it's not easy to join any friendship groups with native speakers here. In addition, I don't think I have enough time to participate in social events. As term goes on, I need to keep up with academic assignments and spend spare time with my family. From my personal experience of campus culture, I have also found that the relationship between juniors and seniors in the UK is not considered very important. In Korea, I was very active in going to social events involving the senior-junior relationship on campus.

I: I understand. I hope that you enjoy your life on campus here and be, most of all, confident about doing anything here. Thank you very much for your participation today. I will call you to set the time for the next session. Good luck with your work.

P : Thank you.

**Appendix XI: Categorizing data across participant, themes and sessions (sample sheet)**

Key themes	Interaction with supervisor					
Sessions participants	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th
NJ						
BK						
YJ						
JM						
MK						
HC						

## **Appendix XII: A sample of request for the questionnaire-based survey (Translation)**

Hello,

I would like to introduce myself.

I intended to phone you to explain my request and other details about the questionnaire survey, but I did not know your contact details. So I really apologise to you for only introducing myself and making a request through this email.

As the representative of the Korean society at the University of York, I am a PhD student in the Department of Educational Studies, researching cultural and language issues of Korean students at UK universities.

I would like to invite you to participate in a survey, which is a main part of my PhD thesis. It focuses on all Korean students who are currently enrolled on either undergraduate or postgraduate programmes, and who have at least 2 semesters' experience of a university course in Korea.

I apologise again for the request, as I am concerned that I might inconvenience you at a busy time. All your answers in the survey would be invaluable contributions to my PhD study. It would be very much appreciated if you would answer honestly (- anonymity is guaranteed). The online survey address follows.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.

<http://FreeOnlineSurveys.com/rendersurvey.asp?id=98919>

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