

Examining South Korean University Students' Interactions with International Students

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Abstract: This mixed method case study examines South Korean university students' social and academic interactions with international students. Data included a closed-ended survey, an open-ended survey, and a focus group. The participants comprised university students studying at a mid-sized university in central South Korea. Results indicate that students generally feel indifferent about interacting with international students and stated that communication barriers and lack of contributions by international students on assignments lead to less interaction. Moreover, quantitative data reveals a lack of interest in interacting with international students. To improve interaction, students recommended providing more opportunities to communicate in the classroom and taking intercultural communication classes to increase understanding of diverse cultures. Additionally, students recommended sharing dorm rooms with international students, creating more social activities for interaction, and developing language, culture, and mentoring programs. Various practical and theoretical implications are discussed to help improve social and academic interactions and increase intercultural communication on campus.

Keywords: Integration, University Students, Social and Academic Interaction, Intercultural Communication, Cross-cultural Communication

1. Introduction

The number of international students studying at South Korean universities has increased dramatically in recent years. Additionally, universities should be a marketplace of ideas and expose students to various classes beyond what is required for their chosen field (Lee & Yoo, 2020) That is why having international students in South Korea can provide many advantages. There are various push and pull factors which influence students in their decision to come to Korea (Jon, Lee, & Byun, 2014; Lee, 2017). In 2000, there were 3,963 international students studying in South Korea, but this number skyrocketed to 160,165 in 2019 (Korean Educational Statistics Service, 2019). In 2004, the South Korean government implemented the Study Korea Project, which promoted increased international student enrollment in South Korean universities (Byun & Kim, 2010). There have been additional initiatives to internationalize South Korean universities including the Global Korea Scholarship Program for international students (Jon, Lee, & Byun, 2014). Moreover, South Korean universities are striving to increase diversity to advance in global rankings (Lee, Choo, & Ko, 2016). The decreasing birth rate in recent decades has led to a drop in the number of university-aged students in South Korea (Lee, 2013). In the past, Asian students often chose to study in English-speaking countries for higher education, but many are now attracted to neighboring countries like South Korea (Jon, Lee, & Byun, 2014). In addition, many international students have sought higher education in South Korea for practicality and a relatively low cost of living (Lee, 2017; Lee, Jon, & Byun, 2017).

China yields the bulk of international students with approximately 60% studying in South Korean universities, which is followed by a significant number of students from France, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Mongolia, Taiwan, the United States, Uzbekistan, Taiwan, and Vietnam, (Nam, 2018). Although international students attending South Korean universities have reported benefits from their experiences, others describe difficulties integrating into the education system and struggles with being accepted by their South Korean peers (Lee, Jon, & Byun, 2017). For example, Chinese students in South Korean universities reported feeling unwelcome, disliked, and even discriminated against (Lee, Jon, & Byun, 2017). International students in South Korea have also reported that students from western countries tend to be treated better (Jon & Jang, 2012). Moreover, some indicated that Korean students prefer international students from western countries and even harbored negative stereotypes of Chinese people. These negative feelings also lead to a lack of meaningful interaction which can negatively impact the integration experience. According to Lee, Jon, & Byun (2017), “International students’ perceptions, whether verified or not, may still negatively affect their experiences, including their transition and engagement” (p. 152). Merely putting diverse students together does not always lead to effective engagement (Wessel, 2009). In early 2020, the novel coronavirus spread rapidly causing widespread problems that impacted daily life in many countries. Unfortunately, racial groups, especially Asians, became victims of hate crimes and other discriminatory actions (Tavernise & Oppel, 2020). Universities must ensure that all students are protected and must actively put measures in place to improve intercultural communication, integration, and academic and social interaction among various student groups on campus.

The purpose of this case study was to examine South Korean university students’ academic and social interactions with international students. Another aim of this study was to get input on how interactions between international and domestic university students could be improved in South Korea. Although studies have examined the integration experiences of international students in South Korea (e.g. Lee, Cho, & Kim, 2014; Lee, Choo, & Ko, 2016; Lee, Jon, & Byun, 2017), there is a paucity of research on South Korean university students’ perceptions of international students. The following research questions were used to guide the study:

1. How do South Korean university students describe their interactions with international students?
2. How do South Korean university students perceive their interactions with international students?
3. What recommendations do South Korean university students have to improve their interactions with international students?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Integration and Interaction

Integration can be defined as an “intentional process to create community, by encouraging domestic and international students to engage with each other in ongoing interaction, characterized by mutual respect, responsibility, action, and commitment” (Young et al., 2014). Universities must take on an active role in ensuring that domestic and international students are engaged in meaningful interactions to foster successful integration. Research indicates that merely bringing domestic and international students together does not necessarily lead to meaningful interactions (Amos & Rehorst, 2018; Leask, 2009; Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2018). According to the British Council (2014), simply having a diverse student body does not mean the education or even the campus is global in nature. What comes as an essential part of a global education is the inclusion of international students in communities and classes. Integration of all students is an elemental factor in the expanding concept of internationalisation. (p. 4). For successful integration to occur, domestic and international students must meaningfully interact (Spencer-Oatey, Dauber, & Williams, 2014). Although some international students have reported feeling satisfied with their social integration experiences in South Korea, many have had myriad difficulties adjusting to life in South Korea (Lee, Cho, & Kim, 2014; Lee, Jon, & Byun, 2017). Research (e.g. Lan & Kim, 2011; Ock, 2016) has also reported that international students lack Korean

language proficiency, which inhibits their ability to effectively interact with peers. Furthermore, many university classes are conducted in English in South Korea, and some Chinese students lack the language proficiency needed to succeed in these courses (Jon, Lee, & Byun, 2014). Jon, Lee, and Byun (2014) also found that some students felt that English was “overemphasized” in South Korean universities. English as Medium of Instruction courses are prevalent in South Korean universities. Chinese students especially have reported many difficulties in terms of social life and communication with peers in South Korea (Chung, Lei, & Sim, 2010), necessitating a greater focus being placed on improved social integration resources and support systems.

The social integration challenges of international students are not exclusive to South Korean universities. These challenges are well documented internationally (e.g. Barron, 2008; Mesidor & Sly, 2016; Spencer-Oatey, Dauber, Jing, & Lifei, 2017). International students face internal and institutional barriers that inhibit their interactions with domestic students (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2015). From an internal standpoint, some international students prefer to interact with people from their own culture, and they may avoid engaging in extracurricular activities. Furthermore, they may not be proficient in the domestic language and cultural customs (Arkoudis & Baik, 2014), which is sometimes evident in the South Korean context.

On an institutional level, events that promote understanding of diversity on campus may primarily attract international rather than domestic students. International students have also reported that domestic peers are apprehensive or too shy to reach out to students from diverse backgrounds. These factors, both internal and institutional, can potentially hinder interactions between domestic and international students. Unfortunately, domestic students may feel apathetic about international classmates or may not have interest in interacting with them (Ward, 2006; Wright & Schartner, 2013). Other studies (e.g. Grayson, 2008; Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010) have discussed the lack of interactions between domestic and international students. Lack of meaningful interaction negatively impacts successful integration in society and within universities; thus, universities must take on an active role in ensuring that domestic and international students are given ample opportunities to meaningfully interact (Spencer-Oatey, Dauber, & Williams, 2014).

There are also enabling factors that promote interaction between domestic and international students including having professors who endeavor to create an inclusive learning environment and encourage interaction among diverse groups of students (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2015). Deardoff (2009) emphasizes that interactions should be done “intentionally” and recommends conversation groups, language programs, friendship activities, as well as more innovative methods such as volunteering with domestic students and participating in service trips to promote meaningful interactions (p. 215). International students have also reported that being invited to parties, events, and other activities by domestic students, helped to promote more inclusivity and interaction (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2015). For successful integration and interaction to take place, it is important to create a learning environment centered on cross-cultural communication. Universities must strive to create a collaborative learning environment, which stresses the “co-construction of new knowledge and more collaborative ways of working and thinking” (Ryan, 2011, p. 642). International and domestic students both play a key role in ensuring effective integration and social interaction. Furthermore, international students should be able to retain aspects of their own culture and not be expected to fully assimilate into the culture of their host countries.

2.2 Berry’s Model of Mutual Adjustment

Berry’s model of mutual adjustment promotes cross-cultural communication between domestic and international students by emphasizing social interaction and a shared understanding of cultural differences (Berry, 1997). According to Spencer-Oatey, Dauber, & Williams, 2014, “If both international and domestic students are equally committed to increasing their intercultural competence and the institution is seen to fully endorse this transformation, we will be much better placed to promote meaningful and sustained dialogue between all nationalities on our campuses, leading to personal development and growth” (p. 6). International students may want to maintain their native culture while engaging in activities and communication with domestic students. This model contrasts with the model of assimilation, which emphasizes full participation in the domestic community while abandoning the native culture. It is certainly critical for international students to adjust to life in their host culture (Rivas,

Hale, & Burke, 2019), but it is also vital for domestic students to learn about the experiences of international students (Spencer-Oatey, Dauber, & Williams, 2014).

Unfortunately, measures to improve intercultural communication on campus are generally not evaluated. Universities should foster a greater sense of community and respect and understanding of diverse cultures and groups through a mutual approach that highlights cross-cultural communication and understanding of diversity. Successful integration should largely encourage intercultural growth and deeper understanding and respect for diverse groups on campus and should include both domestic and international students. Merely recruiting international students without a concrete plan for academic and social interaction and integration will lead to many challenges inside and outside of the classroom.

3. Methodology

This case study was carried out at a mid-sized, South Korean university in Chungbuk Province, South Korea, in the fall semester of 2019. According to Merriam (2009), case studies involve “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 7). Case studies often utilize mixed methods to provide more holistic insight into the case being explored (Creswell, 2009). Using purposive and convenience sampling, data were collected through an open-ended survey, closed-ended survey, and a focus group. Participants comprised 43 (22 male and 21 female) South Korean undergraduate students who were fluent in English based on TOEIC test results and classroom speaking tests that were measured using the IELTS speaking proficiency band descriptors. Students signed an informed consent form prior to completing the survey. The students were majoring in English language and culture, except for one who was a fairytale and media contents major. Nineteen of the students had a double major. These majors include education (n=1), tariffs and logistics (n=2), international trade (n=7), police science (n=2), business administration (n=5), computer science (n=1), and mechatronics and electronic engineering (n=1). Among the participants, 15 stated that they could hold a conversation in a language besides Korean or English, 26 stated that they had studied a language besides Korean or English, and 19 had lived or studied in another country. A significant number of participants have some degree of multicultural experience through studying other languages or living abroad. Participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identities.

Quantitative data included a survey that examined South Korean university students’ interactions with international students. The survey instrument (see Appendix) was a modified version of Ward, Masgoret, Newton, and Crabbe’s (2005) survey on domestic students’ interactions with international students as well as domestic students’ perceptions of international students in New Zealand. The survey was adapted to ensure that the questions focused on the South Korean university context and learning culture. The survey included questions pertaining to background information, cultural inclusiveness in the classroom, perceptions of international students, and attitudes toward international students (Ward et al., 2005). Table 1 describes the survey categories and provides reliability coefficients. Individual categories followed the same Likert scale range and wording as the original survey by Ward et al. (2005), however, part 6 was further parsed into two subcomponents to compare actual interactions with desired interactions.

The closed-ended survey was administered first. To gain more insight into the holistic experiences and perceptions of South Korean university students, an open-ended survey was given, and a focus group was conducted. Eleven of the 43 participants completed the closed-ended survey and participated in the focus group. The focus group participants completed the open-ended survey prior to the focus group so that they could have time to think about their responses. The closed-ended survey questions included 1) How would you describe your experiences interacting with international students?, 2) What recommendations do you have to improve interactions between South Korean and international students in the classroom?, and 3) What recommendations do you have to improve interactions between South Korean and international students on campus? Additional questions were asked during the focus group to expand more on the students’ responses and to obtain more details regarding their experiences and perceptions.

Table 1 Description of survey categories			
	Category Name	Scale	α
Part 1	Demographic Information	-	N/A
Part 2	Academic Assistance by University	SD (1) to SA (5)	.78
Part 3	Academic Assistance by Local Students	Never (1) to Often (4)	.79
Part 4	Intercultural Activities	Never (1) to Often (4)	.79
Part 5	Barriers	None (1) to Very much (5)	.72
Part 6a	Actual Contact	Never (1) to Often (4)	.59
Part 6b	Desired Contact	Never (1) to Often (4)	.75
Part 7	Opinion about International Student Population	Low (1) to High (5)	N/A
Part 8	Opinion about International Student: Favorability	Low (1) to High (100)	N/A
Part 9	Willingness to Interact	SD (1) to SA (5)	.76
<i>Note:</i> Strongly Disagree, SD; Strongly Agree, SA.			

Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic coding. The researchers examined key themes and significant statements that were made by the participants (Creswell, 2009). The researchers first conducted a preliminary analysis of the data and made memos of key ideas, concepts, and quotes (Creswell, 2009). Next, coding was conducted by dividing these key ideas, concepts, and quotes into categories. These categories were arranged into units, which represent the five dominant themes discussed in the results. A peer reviewer was used to help improve trustworthiness. Member checking was used with three focus group participants.

Quantitative data were analyzed using IBM SPSS software package (version 24.0). First, mean score analysis was used to describe student-to-student interaction variables (parts two to nine). Next, a series of univariate analyses were carried out to compare the interaction variables with demographic variables to identify points of significance. A paired-samples *t*-test was used to analyze the difference between actual and desired interaction with international students (i.e., Part 6A and 6B). Two independent *t*-tests were conducted to measure the significance between favorability scores. The first was with students who have (or have not) studied abroad, and the second was with students who have (or do not have) a second major.

4. Results

4.1 Feelings about International Students

4.1.1 Feeling Indifferent or Neutral

A dominant qualitative theme that emerged is that most students reported feeling neutral or indifferent about international students. Among the 11 focus group participants, eight (Ji Eun, Ji Yong, Ho Jin, Se Hoon, Min Ji, Ji Min, Su Ji, and Ji Su) made statements indicating that they have neutral or indifferent views. Various statements can be made to support this. For example, according to Ji Eun, a female, English language/business administration major, "I would say that my interactions have been neutral. I don't think there are really any good or bad points. I only have close international friends from the U.S." Another student, Ji Yong, a male, English language major, reiterated this point by stating, "My feelings aren't good or bad. I just talk to international students in English communication classes." Ho Jin a female, English language/business administration major, stated that although the idea of interacting with international students sounds fun and could be a good way to learn about other cultures, she is just too busy and has several part-time jobs. She said, "Of course it sounds fun to hang out with international students, but I am so busy and have a hard time keeping up with everything I need to do. If I had more time, I would like to spend more time with them, but that isn't reality." One student, Se Hoon, a male,

English language major, stated that he did not have any experience interacting with international students and had neutral views about interacting with them. These statements indicate that most of the focus group participants have neutral or indifferent views of international students, with some students providing justification for their responses.

4.1.2 Having Positive Views

Three students mentioned having positive views of international students and provided several examples of their interactions. According to Yu Na, a female, English language/international trade major, “When I met my Taiwanese friends, it was awkward the first time, but they really love Korean culture. We were to become friends easily. They always asked me about Korean language and culture.” Jae Hoon, a male, English language/computer science major said, “I hang out with international students twice a week. I like hanging out with them. I think it depends on someone’s personality. I want to hang out with good people who have good personalities.” He also indicated that his views of international students are neutral, but he has positive views about the few international friends he has. Ji Eun added, “I hang out with international students every day. One of my good friends is Chinese and we take several classes together.” Although most students had neutral feelings about interacting with international students, these three focus group participants provided ample details about the positive interactions and friendships they developed with international students.

4.1.3 Communication Barriers

Another major theme that emerged from the data is that Korean students experienced barriers when communicating with Chinese students. Six focus group participants, Su Ji, Min Ji, Ji Min, Ji Su, Se Hoon, and Ho Jin, indicated that it was difficult to converse with international students because many are not proficient in Korean, and three students, Su Ji, Min Ji, and Ho Jin, mentioned that a lot of international students are also not proficient in English. For example, Ji Min, a female English language/police science major stated, “In my communication class, a Chinese student was not good at Korean and English, so we couldn’t communicate.” According to Su Ji, a female English language major. “It’s really fun to talk to foreigners, but it’s often difficult to communicate.” Min Ji, a female English language/mechatronics and electronic engineering major, expanded on this by stating, “My thoughts are neutral, but I have a hard time talking to international students because many cannot speak Korean well and don’t know about Korean culture.” The lack of Korean and English language proficiency can make it difficult to promote successful mutual integration on campus. Communication is the foundation of interaction, thus making it difficult to encourage meaningful engagement between local and international students. Although most focus group participants did not discuss this, several of them provided concrete examples of communication barriers during class discussions, group assignments and presentations, and even outside of the classroom.

4.1.4 Lack of Contributions on Assignments

Four students, Jae Hoon, Ji Min, Su Ji, and Ho Jin, indicated that sometimes they have negative views of international students who may not always be actively engaged in class assignments and group projects. Examples provided included international students not being involved in group presentations or only preparing a little or not at all. In addition, during oral group presentations, some international students struggled to effectively communicate in English and Korean. Lack of communication in either English or Korean frustrated and angered some students who were penalized by low scores in group work because of their international classmates’ performance. According to Jae Hoon, “My Chinese friend has passion in her study, but most international classmates don’t contribute to group projects.” Ji Min also expanded on this by stating, “Some international students are really good, but I have heard many stories about international students not helping with group presentations. Some of them are lazy and don’t come to class or even try. Some of them are just having a hard time because they cannot speak Korean or English.” Additionally, two of the students, Ho Jin and Su Ji, stated that the lack of contributions could be attributed to communication barriers since some of the international students are not fluent in Korean and English. Language barriers and lack of English and Korean proficiency led to some assignment and presentation problems since students could not effectively communicate.

Additionally, some international students were accused of being lazy and did not have the desire to learn and work hard in class.

4.1.5 Research Question 2

Survey analysis was used to better understand how South Korean students perceive their interactions with international students. Table 2 displays mean scores for parts two to nine from the survey. Academic assistance by the university revealed a mean score of 4.10 (SD = .59), indicating most students agreed or strongly agreed that their university was conducive to the needs of international students. Students reported the highest agreement to item 6 (M = 4.30, SD = 0.46) from part 2 (i.e. my classmates are accepting of cultural difference). In slight contradiction to the academic support within the classroom, academic assistance by local students produced a mean score of 1.89 (SD = 0.54), within the never to rarely range. Top-down institution-led support appears to be established, however, bottom-up student-led support is lacking.

Low frequency of student-led interaction is further evident by the means score of 1.62 (SD = 0.54) from the Intercultural Activities category. Students reported to never or rarely share notes, work in groups, do assignments, or interact outside of class with international students.

Part 5 measured possible challenges that act as barriers to interactions with international students. While activity-based interactions were low, there seem to be few barriers (M = 2.57, SD = .82) preventing interactions from occurring which is in line with previous research (Ward et al., 2005). All items within this category fell below the median value of three, indicating that few international students (P5 item 1), different interest (P5 item 2), language barriers (P5 items 3 and 4), lack of interest (P5 item 5), and cultural differences (P5 item 6) were not the reasons for low levels of interactions.

Part 6 provides a potential explanation to low interaction rates among international and local students. Students reported a desire to interact with international students (P6B items 2 and 4) at a higher level than actual interactions (P6A items 1 and 3, M = 2.26, SD = 0.84), with a mean difference of 0.55. A paired samples *t*-test was carried out and the difference was statistically significant; $t(43) = 4.092, p = .002$. While the desire was greater than the actual interactions, both were found in the rare (2) to sometimes (3) range, indicating only some desire and little actual interaction with international students.

Table 2 Descriptive statistics for survey categories

		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Skew	Kurtosis
P2	Academic Assistance by University	4.10	0.59	-0.30	-0.39
P3	Academic Assistance by Local Students	1.89	0.54	-0.33	-0.58
P4	Intercultural Activities	1.62	0.54	0.50	-0.72
P5	Barriers	2.57	0.82	-0.22	-0.34
P6A	Actual Contact	2.26	0.84	0.39	-0.49
P6B	Desired Contact	2.81	0.87	-0.20	-0.77
P7	Opinion of International Student Population	3.05	0.72	0.73	1.18
P8	Opinion of International Students: Favorability	71.03	21.94	-0.35	-0.25
P9	Willingness to Interact	3.60	0.78	0.20	-0.75

Note. P2, Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5); P3 and P4, Never (1) to Often (4); P5, Not at all (1) to Very much (5); P6, Never (1) to Often (5); P7 and P8, single item; P9, Not at all (1) to Very much (5).

Parts 7 and 8 were single item scales that measured perceptions concerning the international population and favorability towards international students. Overall, students reported that the current population level was appropriate for their country (M = 3.05, SD 0.75). Table 3 breaks down the population beliefs according to the percentage of students. On a favorability scale from 0 (not favorable

at all) to 100 (extremely favorable), opinions of international students was rated at 71.03 (SD = 21.94), much lower than the 87.3 out of a 100 reported by Ward et al.'s (2005) group of 534 secondary and university students.

Much to low	12%
Too low	9.3%
About right	60.5%
Too high	11.6%
Much too high	4.65%

For part 8 (i.e., favorability towards international students), an independent *t*-test identified a significant difference in the favorability scores for students who studied abroad (M = 60.5, SD = 18.7, n = 19) and those who have not (M = 79.3, SD = 20.8, n = 24); $t(41) = 3.07$, $p = .003$, indicating studying overseas influenced how these students perceived international students. Students who have only studied in South Korea reported scores more in line with previous research (Ward et al., 2005) while those who have experienced education in different countries reported to hold more negative views towards international students. A second independent *t*-test identified a significant difference in the favorability scores for students with second majors (M = 78.68, SD = 19.4, n = 19) and ones without second majors (M = 67.2, SD = 18.6); $t(41) = 2.117$, $p = .04$.

The final category measured the willingness to interact with international students resulting in a mean score of 3.60 (SD = 0.78), indicating students would be inclined to engage in activities with international students. This moderately high mean score of inclinations was in contrast to their actual interactions reported in part 4 and part 6A.

4.1.6 Research Question 3

Two primary recommendations were made regarding classroom improvements including providing more opportunities for communication between international and South Korean students and taking intercultural communication classes. Five students in the focus group, Ji Eun, Ji Su, Yu Na, Ho Jin, and Min Ji, discussed the importance of providing more opportunities for communication between international and South Korean students in classes. In addition, three students, Ji Eun, Ji Su, and Yu Na, stated that professors should take on a more active role in promoting interaction between international and South Korean students. For example, Ji Eun said, "Professors need to do more to improve interactions, but I have also seen some professors who really care about international students. Professors also need to include more group activities to get to know international students more." This was echoed by Ji Su, a male English language major who said, "I think it is hard to approach foreigners. I think we need more active help from professors." Yu Na mentioned the importance of increasing communication in English classes, where students generally have more opportunities to converse. She said, "I know some Chinese students, but they come to theoretical classes. If they attend an English communication class, we can interact more than before." These five focus group participants discussed the importance of giving Korean and international students more opportunities to interact in the classroom, and three mentioned the need for having support from professors to achieve this.

Four students in the focus group, Ho Jin, Ji Min, Ji Eun, and Se Hoon, discussed the importance of taking intercultural communication classes, which the university presently offers. According to Ji Min, "We need more classes on intercultural communication." Another student, Ho Jin stated, "Intercultural communication was my favorite class because we could bring in international students to the class. And we had a lot of conversations. We had Q & A time and could really study more about other cultures deeply, and it was so much better than just doing PPTs or reading from a book. Most of my classes just have Korean students, so bringing in different students from other countries can be a good way to learn about other cultures."

Ho Jin also stated that although the university has intercultural communication classes, only students with certain majors such as English take these classes.

There were a wide range of recommendations for improving interactions between South Korean and international students outside of the classroom including sharing dorm rooms, creating more clubs and activities for interaction, and developing language, culture, and mentoring programs. The most common response discussed by five students, Sun Im, Ho Jin, Jae Hoon, Ji Eun, and Su Ji, was having international roommates in the dormitory. Four students, Sun Im, Min Ji, Jae Hoon, and Su Ji, indicated the importance of creating clubs and activities (including traveling, free talking time, field trips, and homestay experience with a domestic student) to promote interaction. According to Sun Im, a female, English language/international trade major, “Korean students and international students should make a club to have fun activities, travel, language exchange, and just have fun.” She also stated, “We need to make students’ groups, share dorms, and have regular free talking time.” Three students, Min Ji, Ji Eun, and Jae Hoon, discussed the need to have language and culture exchange programs, while two students, Min Ji and Jae Hoon, mentioned having better mentor/mentee programs. According to Ji Eun, “Korean university students can be used to teach international students Korean.” Jae Hoon added,

“We need the university to only enroll students who have a passion to study and can speak Korean. They also need to provide opportunities for more interactions. There also should be more language exchange programs. The university can give volunteer points to the students who help and teach the international students. They can also mentor”.

Minji also provided several suggestions. She stated,

“We need a better mentor/mentee program. There is one, but I don’t think it is effective. Too many international students are not taking their studies seriously and some leave the university. We should also have events such as food contests and sharing information about other students’ cultures”.

The focus group participants provided a wide range of recommendations to improve interactions in the classroom and on campus between international and domestic students.

5. Discussion

Overall, there was a general attitude of indifference toward international students, and this was further evident through revelations by most focus group participants of neutral feelings about interacting with international students. The quantitative results also indicate that students rarely engage in activities with classmates, and only some want interaction. This aligns with other research (e.g. Ward, 2006; Wright & Schartner, 2013), which found that domestic students lacked interest in interacting with international students. Ward (2006) also reported that students believe the university should play a role in improving interactions between international and domestic students. Focus group participants emphasized the need for having professors take on an increased role in improving interactions in the classroom. They also discussed communication barriers, since some international students are not fluent in Korean and English. Additionally, several students mentioned that some international students do not contribute to class assignments, which can further impede interactions between domestic and international students. This coincides with Korean research (Lan & Kim, 2011; Ock, 2016), which highlights the integration challenges of international students, including language barriers and lack of classroom engagement.

There were various recommendations made to improve interaction inside and outside of the classroom. Quantitative data indicated that regardless of the few barriers that prevented interaction with international students, most Korean students were still not interacting with them. To facilitate communication, students recommended having more opportunities to communicate with international students in the classroom and taking more intercultural communication classes. Students in the focus group also mentioned having difficulty finding opportunities to interact with international students in the classroom. Improving interaction can be demanding though because of diverse backgrounds and cultures (Arkoudis & Baik, 2014). Language barriers can also be problematic in promoting interaction

between domestic and international students. Unfortunately, many local universities in South Korea are in financial distress and rely heavily on international students (Chung, 2016). According to Chung (2016), "Education experts point out that colleges and universities have resorted to recruiting as many Chinese students as possible in their blind pursuit of money, without having proper programs to cater to their needs and provide quality education" (para. 2). Although South Korean universities are facing severe financial problems, especially in light of the coronavirus and a decrease in international student enrollment, they have to ensure that the students who are recruited meet basic educational standards, including Korean and English language proficiency. Educators and administrators must create curriculum and a learning culture which promotes intercultural communication and increases genuine interactions between diverse students (Baik, 2013). Quantitative data indicated most students agreed or strongly agreed that their university supports the needs of international students; however, it would be interesting to examine if international students have the same perceptions.

Some students reported having difficulties getting international students to contribute on assignments. Quantitative data also indicated that there is little academic interaction between international and Korean students. This aligns with Leask's (2009) study, which stated that university faculty at an Australian university had difficulties getting international and domestic students to work on class assignments together. Local students were "not prepared to engage with international students in or out of the classroom" (p. 207). Leask (2009) also emphasizes the need for a campus environment and culture that obviously motivates and rewards interaction between international and home students in and out of the classroom. This means that a range of people across institutions need to engage with the internationalisation agenda over time to improve interactions between home and international students (p. 205)

Universities need to provide more formal and informal opportunities for international and domestic students to participate in meaningful interactions (Quaye, 2012; Rivas, Hale, & Burke, 2019). Arkoudis and Baik (2014) recommend that universities implement interaction initiatives that include 1) planning, 2) creating environments for interaction, 3) supporting interaction, 4) engaging with subject knowledge, 5) developing reflexive processes, and 6) fostering communities of learning. Without proactively implementing measures to promote meaningful interactions and successful integration, many classrooms will continue with the status quo.

Students discussed the importance of taking intercultural communication classes to learn more about diverse cultures and people. Berry's (1997) model of mutual adjustment can be used as a framework to promote mutual adjustment and intercultural communication. Domestic students can also benefit immensely through meaningful interactions with international students, especially by improving their intercultural awareness (Arkoudis et al., 2013) and developing more empathy (Australian Education International, 2010). In addition, cross-curricular initiatives among departments, educators, and administrators are needed to ensure that international students are successfully integrating into the university (Rivas, Hale, & Burke, 2019). According to the CBIE (2015), "In this era of rapid globalization, cross-cultural proficiency is a competency which is of universal benefit in both an economic and social sense and should be considered an essential skill in the pedagogical approach" (p. 7). An additional recommendation made by the CBIE (2015) is to promote group work between international and domestic students and give students authentic opportunities to engage in activities and discussions with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, it is critical to "access the cultural knowledge and perspective of international students" (CBIE, 2015, p. 8). There are many potential benefits of intercultural exchange including learning about diverse viewpoints, gaining knowledge that is beneficial for the global workplace, improving language skills, and increasing overall integration (Arkoudis et al., 2013). In addition to taking intercultural communication classes that are already available, universities should also ensure that the general course curriculum is internationalized and examines global issues and diverse viewpoints (Arkoudis & Baik, 2014).

Recommendations made for improving communication outside of the classroom include sharing dorm rooms, creating more clubs and activities for interaction, and developing language, culture, and mentoring programs. Students discussed the importance of creating more activities to support social interaction between domestic and international students, which aligns with recommendations in the report by the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) (2015). Although these recommendations can lead to more meaningful interactions, it is also critical that these activities do not simply help the international student adjust better to the domestic culture. There should be meaningful

cultural exchange involved in these activities, especially considering that many universities are striving to improve intercultural communication and global awareness (Arkoudis & Baik, 2014).

6. Conclusion

Scholarly research focuses on the role of the international student in adapting to the domestic university culture and does not thoroughly explore interactions between international and domestic students (Smart, Volet, & Ang, 2000). Gaining more insight into the domestic students' perspectives and interactions with international students provides much needed knowledge on the challenges of integration (Arkoudis & Baik, 2014; Dunne, 2009). Research question one found that 11 local students felt neutral or indifferent toward international students, while three had favorable views. Furthermore, students mentioned that there were major communication barriers when interacting with international students. University courses are conducted in Korean and English. Local students indicated that it is difficult to communicate with international students. This can make it difficult to complete course assignments and group presentations that require collaboration. Furthermore, four students mentioned that foreign students do not always contribute to assignments. This may be attributed to communication barriers or lack of motivation. It is imperative for domestic students to also be cross-culturally efficient and knowledgeable about other cultures (Leask, 2009). South Korea will likely continue to be a popular choice for international students, especially those coming from neighboring countries.

Research question two centered on quantitative findings. Notable responses include a low frequency of student-led interaction and only some desire to interact with foreign students. However, students indicated overall that they were inclined to engage in activities with international students. Perhaps if more meaningful activities and opportunities arise, they may be more likely to interact with international peers. It is critical that universities focus on creating "bridges of tolerance and respect for other cultures" (Kramsch, 2002, p. 272). Simply merging domestic and international students together on campus does not often result in valuable engagement between them, nor does it improve cross-cultural communication skills (Leask, 2009). There must be a concrete plan in place that promotes mutual adjustment between local and international students and fosters a community of support and intercultural communication.

Finally, research question three provided insight into recommendations for the future. Students indicated the need to provide more opportunities for communication between international and local students and also to encourage students to take intercultural communication classes. A culturally responsive university provides opportunities for students from varying backgrounds to interact with one another and learn about different backgrounds and experiences (Leask, 2009). Getting input from both domestic and international students will also be beneficial. Moreover, Choudaha (2016) emphasizes that universities should stop using international students for purely financial gain and not providing any substantive programs on campus to improve international student integration. Some international students may be ill prepared for the challenges that they will face in South Korean university, especially if they are not proficient in English and Korean. Although South Korean universities may be facing dire financial problems, they still must be careful and selective in choosing foreign applicants. Meaningful integration and interaction will not take place if students cannot effectively communicate.

This study adds to the body of literature by providing qualitative and quantitative data that provides more insight into South Korean university students' interactions with international students. Moreover, it provides recommendations to help foster better communication between South Korean and international university students. Universities must implement effective plans to improve intercultural communication among students of diverse cultural backgrounds (Leask, 2009). Furthermore, it is critical to regularly examine the efficiency of any campus interventions that are made to promote better engagement between international and domestic students. If positive change is going to occur within the university, effective engagement between domestic and international students inside and outside of the classroom should be taking place. Administrators and educators must also ensure that they are endeavoring to create a culturally responsive and inclusive learning environment to meet the needs of diverse learners and to also ensure that the campus promotes mutual adjustment of domestic and international students through cross-cultural communication activities and shared understanding.

This study is limited to a small sample size from only one university. In addition, the study was conducted in English, which is not the native language of the students. The results of the study cannot

be generalized to all South Korean universities. Future research should include a wider range of participants from different universities. This study was conducted in the semester prior to the novel coronavirus pandemic, which has vastly impacted many education systems around the world. It will also be valuable to explore how this pandemic has impacted student interactions. It would also be interesting to further explore the perceptions of students who have studied overseas versus those who have not. Studies can also examine domestic students' motivations for interacting with international students.

7. References

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8. Appendix

<i>Complete Survey with Mean Score and Standard Deviation Results</i>			
Category with Items		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Academic Assistance by University		4.10	0.59
P2Q1	My professors encourage contact between international and local students.	4.02	1.01
P2Q2	My professors make special efforts to help international students.	4.09	0.89
P2Q3	Cultural differences are respected in my university.	3.98	0.91
P2Q4	My professors understand the problems of international students.	4.19	0.85
P2Q5	In my classes there is the opportunity for students to learn about different cultures.	4.12	0.98
P2Q6	My classmates are accepting of cultural differences.	4.30	0.46
P2Q7	Students from different cultural groups work well with each other in my classes.	4.00	1.07
		1.89	0.54
Academic Assistance by Local Students			
P3Q1	Proof-reading their writing for English or Korean language mistakes	2.05	0.84
P3Q2	Explaining class material they might have missed	1.84	0.78
P3Q3	Explaining assignment questions	2.05	0.82
P3Q4	Helping them use the library	1.86	0.71
P3Q5	Preparing oral presentations	1.77	0.75
P3Q6	Helping with other homework	1.79	0.80
		1.62	0.54
Intercultural Activities			
P4Q1	Spending time together during holidays	1.53	0.85
P4Q2	Interacting during free time outside of class	1.58	0.79
P4Q3	Doing group assignments	1.88	0.76
P4Q4	Working in a study group	1.47	0.63
P4Q5	Doing assignment revision	1.60	0.76
P4Q6	Sharing class notes	1.51	0.77
		2.57	0.82
Barriers			
P5Q2	Few international students where I study	2.53	1.03
P5Q3	Different interests	2.77	1.21
P5Q4	My difficulties understanding their Korean or English	2.58	1.07
P5Q5	Their difficulties understanding my Korean or English	2.53	1.14
P5Q6	Their lack of interest in interacting with Korean students	2.42	1.10
		2.26	0.84
Actual Contact			

P6Q1	I interact with international students in my academic activities (e.g. studying, in classes, etc.)	2.16	0.87
P6Q3	I interact with international students in social activities (e.g. spending time with friends, sports, eating out, etc.)	2.35	1.11
Desired Contact		2.81	0.87
P6Q2	I would like to interact with international students in my academic activities (e.g. studying, in classes, etc.)	2.77	0.97
P6Q4	I would like to interact with international students in my social activities (e.g. spending time with friends, sports, eating out, etc.)	2.86	0.97
Opinion about International Student Population		3.05	0.72
P7	There are over 160,000 international students in South Korea. Do you think this number is...?		
Opinion about International Student: Favorability		71.03	21.94
P8	Below is a thermometer to indicate your overall attitude toward international students. 0 represents not at all favorable (good) and 100 represents extremely favorable (good). Please mark a line on the thermometer which best indicates your personal attitude:		
Willingness to Interact		3.60	0.78
P9Q1	I would be glad to interact with international students during the school holidays.	3.65	1.09
P9Q2	I am not willing to get to know international students.	2.33	1.21
P9Q3	I would be glad to do group assignments with international students.	3.58	1.07
P9Q4	I would not be interested in establishing close friendships with international students.	2.40	1.31
P9Q5	I would be willing to do assignment revision with international students.	3.35	0.95
P9Q10	I would be glad to interact with international students during free time outside of classes.	3.74	1.00
<p><i>Note.</i> P2, Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5); P3 and P4, Never (1) to Often (4); P5, Not at all (1) to Very much (5); P6, Never (1) to Often (5); P9, Not at all (1) to Very much (5); P7 and P8, single item.</p>			