FIRE: Forum for International Research in Education
Vol. 6, Iss. 3, 2020, pp. 58-82

SEOUL DESTINATION: A MIXED-METHODS STUDY ON THE PULL FACTORS OF INBOUND EXCHANGE STUDENTS AT A KOREAN UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

The number of international students studying in the Republic of Korea has increased tremendously over the last 20 years, marking a change in regional student mobility trends. While most international degree students tend to originate in countries in Asia, signifying regionalization versus internationalization, exchange students are diverse by nationality/ region. This concurrent nested mixed-methods study sought to investigate the pull factors of a Korean university among exchange students. 564 students completed an electronic questionnaire and through on campus interviews. Quantitative results suggested that exchange students found characteristics about Korea attractive (e.g., K-pop) as well as wanting international and/or cross-cultural experiences, to be the most appealing. 10 students participated in interviews, and findings showed that students became interested in Korea by exposure to popular media, as well as wanting a diverse, international study environment. The implications of these findings are discussed in terms of university inbound program promotion/marketing and program design/development for short-term mobility, along with areas for future research.

Keywords: Korea, internationalization, exchange students, student mobility, pull factors

Introduction

International student mobility patterns have markedly changed over the past few decades, and this shift is particularly notable in Asia (Chan, 2012). Although international student mobility has often been viewed with movement from East to West (D. Kim et al., 2018; S. Lee, 2017; S. Park, 2019) or South to North (Habib et al., 2014), the emergence of

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new educational players on the global higher education landscape has started changing long established mobility paradigms. Students from western countries have now begun going to Asia, and intra-region mobility within Asia itself has expanded as well (Ahmad & Buchanan, 2016; S. Lee, 2017). The Republic of Korea (hereafter Korea) stands out as a notable case of such dramatic changes in international student enrollment (Jon, 2009; T. Kim, 2011; S. Lee, 2017).

Korea "has grown the fastest in terms of attracting international students for tertiary education, increasing from 3,963 in 2000 to 86,878 in 2012, approximately 43 times greater in slightly more than a decade" (S. Lee, 2017, p. 171). In 2016, the number of international students was reported at over 100,000 (Bae & Song, 2017). In April 2018, Korea's National Institute for International Education (NIIE) annual report indicated that the number of international students was 142,205 (NIIE, n.d.). As of December 2019, Higher Education in Korea (n.d.) reported Fall 2019 semester enrollment alone at 111,858 students nationwide. The Korean government's internationalization policies and strategies have played key roles in achieving this growth. These promotional/accessibility policies and strategies are summarized below in no particular order:

- modifying/lowering entrance standards for international students (Byun & M. Kim, 2011; S. Lee, 2017; S. Park, 2019);
- increasing recruitment targets, especially amid the declining national birth rate and shortfalls in domestic student enrollment (Alemu & Cordier, 2017; T. Kim, 2011; B. Kim & Torres, 2008);
- increasing the number of classes available in English as a common academic language (Byun & M. Kim, 2011; Chun et al., 2017);
- the introduction of various programs such as Brain Korea 21, Study Korea, and the World Class University project (Byun et al., 2013; Green, 2015; T. Kim, 2017);
- the co-development and funding of regional multilateral student mobility programs such as the Collective Action for Mobility Program of University Students in Asia (CAMPUS Asia) as well as University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP) (Hou et al., 2017);
- the investment in a transnational/regional education hub in Songdo, Incheon (IGC, n.d.; Jon et al, 2014);
- funding of international student scholarships, chiefly the Global Korea Scholarship (GKS) and the Korean Government Scholarship Program (KGSP) (Krechetnikov & Pestereva, 2017; Study in Korea, 2019).

Given the increase in foreign student enrollment over the last 20 years from just a few thousand students to now over 140,000 (Bae & Song, 2017; S. Lee, 2017), it is clear that these policies and strategies have had considerable success, although these efforts are not without their own drawbacks, controversies, or unintended consequences such as the use of university performance indicators (e.g., number of classes taught in English, publication output) chiefly imported from the West (Byun et al., 2013; T. Kim, 2011, 2017; S. Park, 2019) but is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, the net result of these efforts has been a noticeable change in the demographic makeup of the average university campus (S. Park, 2019).

Internationalization or Regionalization?

A more detailed look at campus demographics reveals that students' countries of origin are disproportionately (in descending order) from China, Vietnam, Mongolia, and Japan (Krechetnikov & Pestereva, 2017; S. Lee, 2017). Nationwide, internationalization efforts thus far have resulted in a broader regionalization versus a proportionally multinational student body (Byun & M. Kim, 2011; Jon et al., 2014; S. Park, 2019). Where this trend can notably differ is among inbound student exchanges. However, this subtype of international student and/or program has been overlooked in research in Korea. While there are some studies which include exchange students in varying capacities, prior research (e.g., Alemu & Cordier, 2017; Jon et al., 2014; S. Lee, 2017; J. Lee et al., 2017; S. Park, 2019) has primarily focused on the majority population of degree-seeking international students and the factors that foster long-term mobility (i.e., degree students) rather than short-term (i.e., academic exchange). Thus, this study, through the theoretical lens of push-pull theory (Altbach, 2015), investigated the factors that attract students to conduct short term exchanges in Korea.

Literature Review

The distinction between "international students" and other potential classifications of face-to-face (and even distance) students has often been unclear in the academic literature (Kozmützky & Putty, 2016; Madge et al., 2015; Rensimer, 2016; Stewart, 2019). While there are numerous ways to achieve cross-border education by conventional movement, where students move to the location of the university (Beech, 2015) or transnational education where agents of the university move to the location of the students (Francois, 2016), exchange students' mobility is characterized by temporary/short term sojourns and credit mobility (DeLoach et al., 2019; Perez-Encinas & Ammigan, 2016). On the one hand, traditional reciprocal academic exchanges are enabled via bilateral and/or multilateral consortium agreements (e.g., ERASMUS, CONASEP, UMAP, CAMPUS Asia), whereas non-reciprocal academic exchanges enroll tuition paying exchange students directly and are often termed "study abroad" (or visiting students in Korea). This is done through a private agency partner at our university (see Asia Exchange, n.d.). On the other, non-reciprocal non-academic exchanges are characterized by students who typically study in intensive non-credit language programs such as ESL/EFL, or in Korea's case, Korean as a foreign language (see Center for Korean Language and Culture [CKLC], n.d.; Jon et al., 2014).

Moving past the typological diversity, the presence of international/exchange students on campus, as well as international faculty (T. Kim, 2017), has generally fostered a positive experience for local students (Jon, 2009). Both international and exchange students have consistently reported being satisfied with their educational sojourns (S. Lee, 2017), yet short-term exchange students do not necessarily share the same pull factors as other student groups (e.g., degree students, non-credit language course students).

Diverse Pull Factors

The growth of educational migrants highlights the push-pull model of international mobility, where students may be pressured to seek education abroad by adverse conditions in their home countries (i.e., pushed) or, conversely, attracted (i.e., pulled) by incentives (e.g., scholarships) or benefits (e.g., degree prestige, research opportunities) (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Both forces can, of course, act simultaneously. Moreover, the model is not without its own limitations, such as not accounting for the personal attributes or socioeconomic contexts of individual students (Li & Bray, 2007). Nevertheless,

students engaged in long-term mobility may choose to develop expertise in the history of a nation "on site," or for personal ones like experiencing what life is like elsewhere in the world (DeLoach et al., 2019; Jon et al., 2014; Nilsson, 2015). They may also find a sociocultural similarity (Jamaludin et al., 2018; S. Lee, 2017; Wilkins et al., 2012) or religious compatibility (Lam et al., 2011) with a potential host country appealing.

Students engaged in short-term mobility, however, may find interesting tourist destinations for sightseeing/travel (Ahmad & Buchanan, 2016; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), or better known/convenient urban locations, more appealing (Lesjak et al., 2015; Van Mol & Ekamper, 2016). Yet, when it comes to understanding why exchange students from Europe, North America, South America, etc., choose to temporarily study in Korea, there is an absence in the literature base, as this phenomenon is relatively new (S. Lee, 2017).

Exchange Student Research in the Korean Context: Limited Availability

In the case of Korea, there are a few studies to date (e.g., Ahmad & Buchanan, 2016; S. Lee, 2017; S. Park, 2019) that have explored the push-pull factors of international degree students due to Korea's comparatively new(er) presence on the global eduscape. There are fewer studies, however, specifically on inbound exchange students, or these students may be mixed in under the label "international" despite being typologically distinct (Rensimer, 2016; Stewart, 2019). Factors for Korean universities that have been documented in the literature thus far include low/different entrance standards for degree-seeking students from China (S. Lee, 2017), classes being offered in English (Byun & M. Kim, 2011), satisfaction related to socio-cultural similarity for students in Asia (Alemu & Cordier, 2017), relatively affordable tuition (Byun & M. Kim, 2011), and proximity to one's home country for students from Asia (Ahmad & Buchanan, 2016). Moreover, Korean universities tend to admit international students (particularly from China) for different reasons based on the local campus' geographic location (S. Park, 2019). Thus, there is a gap in the literature in regard to inbound exchange students (i.e., short-term mobility) in Korea that this study sought to address.

The Current Study

Hankuk University of Foreign Studies

The capital, Seoul, is home to the main campus of Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (HUFS) which was established in 1954. The university's second campus, the Global Campus, is located about 40 km south in Yongin City and was constructed in the 1980s. HUFS is a unique university in Korea since its primary focus is the study of foreign languages as well as international and area studies. The campuses have been visited by various world leaders, the highest profile of which to date is former U.S. President Barack Obama in March 2012 (and for whom an auditorium is named at the Seoul campus). As of 2019, university enrollment was around 20,000 students (17,300 undergraduate/3,300 graduate) (HUFS, n.d.). The international undergraduate student body was the fifth largest in Korea at approximately 2600 students (Higher Education in Korea, n.d.).

While the international degree-seeking student population represents at least 110 nationalities (HUFS, n.d.), the enrollment is disproportionately regional by nationality like other universities (see Krechetnikov & Pestereva, 2017; S. Lee, 2017) with roughly 1800 Chinese undergraduate students alone (Higher Education in Korea, n.d.). By contrast, however, HUFS' inbound exchange student body is significantly more diverse by nationality and disproportionately from outside of East Asia (see Figure 1). Moreover, such students are engaged in short- rather than long-term mobility. The motivations and pull factors between

these two groups are not necessarily the same. Thus, this un(der)-represented diversity/student type was the target population for this study.

Key Research Objectives

Since prior studies in Korea have predominantly focused on majority (i.e., Chinese/Asian) degree seeking students, this purpose of this study was to describe the pull factors that inbound exchange students have for studying in Korea, as well as at the particular host university. As such, the study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What factors do exchange students find appealing about studying in Korea?
RQ2: What factors influence exchange students to choose their host-institution?
a. What factors influence exchange students to choose their host institution when they have multiple local choices?

Methodology

A mixed-methods concurrent nested design was chosen for this study since it would be "collecting and converging (or integrating) different kinds of data bearing on the same phenomenon" (Creswell, 2015, p. 538), and specifically where "one of the methods dominates whilst the other one is embedded, or nested, in it" (Kroll & Neri, 2009, p. 44). A key characteristic of this design is that "priority is given to the primary data collection approach with less emphasis placed on the nested" component (Terrell, 2012, p. 270). The primary focus of this paper was to investigate the pull factors that exchange students found appealing about studying in Korea quantitatively. The nested qualitative component would also investigate those factors, as well as complement the questionnaire's *Institutional Pull Factor* dimension, which was narrower in scope as the study's second research question and its sub question.

The Main Quantitative Component

The quantitative component consisted of a 38-item electronic questionnaire (distributed via email). This questionnaire included eight demographic questions, while the remainder asked the degree to which exchange students agreed with statements representing what they considered appealing about Korea, what motivated them to pursue a study abroad experience, what influences there were from their social networks, and the appealing characteristics/qualities of the host university.

The Nested Qualitative Component

Yin (2014) defined the case study as "an empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon (e.g., a "case"), set within its real-world context" (p. 18). Moreover, case studies address descriptive and exploratory questions (Yin, 2012). The "case" in this study was defined as the inbound component of the university's student exchange program, with the unit of analysis and observation being individual students. This researcher took the interpretive, constructivist epistemological view that "the findings are a construct produced by the interaction between the interpreter and the interpreted as situated in society. Knowledge of the observed is constructed rather than discovered" (Levers, 2013, p. 4).

Questionnaire Participants and Sampling

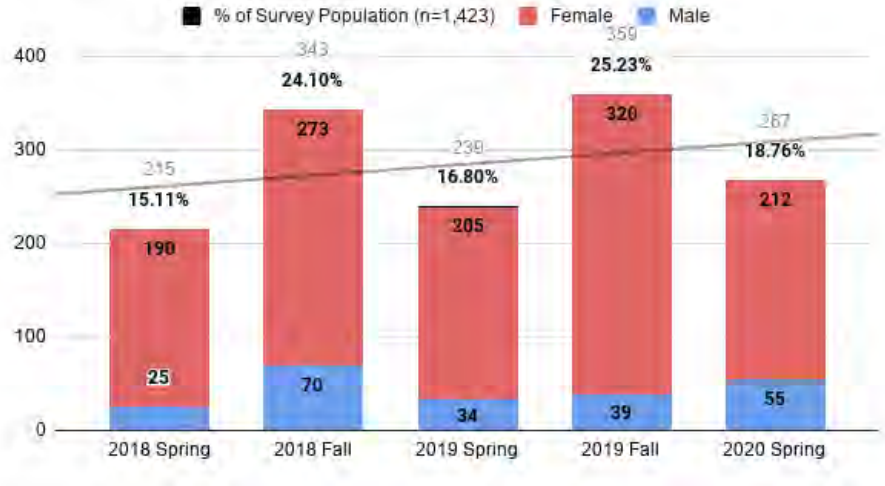
The two most recent years (5 semesters) of exchange students (i.e., from official MOUs/consortium agreements) who were enrolled for exchange periods lasting from 4, 6,

10, or 12 months were sampled. The goal was to obtain a relatively current snapshot of student perceptions, but it also needed to account for the inherent variability in exchange periods, as there would be some degree of enrollment overlap with students who entered in Fall of 2018 through Summer 2019, students who entered in Spring of 2019 studying through February 2020, and new incoming exchange students for Spring 2020. Moreover, exchange students often extend and shorten their stays for unpredictable reasons, such as personal/family issues or the desire to study further at the host institution, or in response to social and political events in the home/host country.

The total enrollment of both new and continuing exchange students each semester ranges from 300-500 students at HUFS. Figure 1 shows the enrollment numbers of new inbound exchange students from our internal database by semester, as well as the relative proportions of male/female students. The cyclical increase of inbound exchange students during fall semesters is a typical enrollment trend year over year due to the start of the school year in Korea being in early March, whereas for many other countries, late summer (i.e., August or September) is when the academic year begins, and when students often conduct their exchanges. The gender asymmetry is similar in the ERASMUS exchange consortium (see Böttcher et al., 2016) and other international educations programs such as in the United Arab Emirates (see Ahmad & Buchanan, 2016).

Figure 1.

New Exchange Student Enrollment Semester by Semester



A visualized portrait of the relative proportion of exchange students by country of origin from Spring 2018 through Spring 2020 is presented in Figure 2 (the larger the circle represents the larger number of students from the country as determined by home university enrollment), with a detailed outline in Appendix A. To quickly summarize, for the five semesters of exchange students in this study's survey population, approximately 78% (n=1,109) were from home universities outside of East Asia, which contrasts sharply with international degree-seeking students in Korea.

Nested Qualitative Participants and Sampling

It can be hard to predict when there are "enough" participants in case studies (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006), thus the qualitative component was guided by purposeful sampling to maximize variation along a particular dimension (nationality in this case) (Creswell, 2013,

2015) and saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015), as too many cases can present redundant information or simply be unwieldy (Merriam, 2009). The purpose of this component sought to gain insight into why the host destination was chosen in general, as well as when other potential MOUs exist at any given student's home university. To address the main aspect of the second research question, students were invited to share more specific details of what they found appealing about studying in Korea and the university to complement data from the questionnaire. To address the subcomponent of the second research question, three students from a Swedish university (who were present on campus at the time) were recruited to gain insight into why HUFS was ultimately selected over their other Korean universities, since their home university has MOUs with two additional institutions in Korea, one of which is Seoul National University, the number one ranked university in the country.

Figure 2.
Visualization of Partner University Distribution by Nation for Spring 2018-2020

Validation Strategies and Trustworthiness

Questionnaire

Relevant literature was reviewed on international student destination choice and the forces that drive it (e.g., Ahmad & Buchanan, 2016; Ahmad et al., 2016; S. Lee, 2017; Li & Bray, 2007; Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe, 2008; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; S. Park, 2019; Wilkins et al., 2012). Pull-items from the literature were then compiled and narrowed based on applicability/relevance to the Korean context through discussions with colleagues in the Office of International Affairs and the Office of International Admissions and Management. For example, religious compatibility was not included since Korea is a secular nation.

The survey was written in both English/Korean and the researcher had the survey items reviewed by five bilingual colleagues and piloted the questionnaire in a private social media group managed by the department. 50 students participated as a formative evaluation for wording, clarity, and to point out any discrepancies or errors (Bennett & Nair, 2010; Burford et al., 2009). Items were revised for clarity where indicated by students/colleagues,

which ensured the content validity of the questionnaire (Archer, 2008; Edwards et al., 2009). This process resulted in 30 items for inclusion, which was considered a reasonable amount students would be willing to complete. The length of time needed to complete the survey was documented (about five minutes) and advertised to promote participation (Sinkowitz-Cochran, 2013; Trouteaud, 2014; Waclawski, 2012).

Semi-structured Interviews

Interviews were held on campus during the day. Each interview followed a protocol for uniformity and systematicity prior to, during, and after the interview. Field notes were kept, as well as an audit trail, that documented when and where raw data was collected, including interview and analysis notes, as well as chronicling the sequence in which categories, themes, definitions, and relationships were developed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Results

Data Collection

Prior to advertising the study, institutional policy for IRB review was followed and, once approval was granted, advertising and recruiting efforts began. Notice of the questionnaire and interview opportunity was emailed to students two weeks in advance of the data collection period in order to generate awareness, provide information about its purpose, share the principal investigator's contact information, etc. No incentives were offered for participation in either data collection component.

The quantitative data collection period was one month (over the winter holiday in Korea), and reminder emails were automated at various intervals to non-respondents/ incomplete responses by cross referencing the non- and incomplete responses with a mailing list database (Waclawski, 2012). To participate, students were required to review an informed consent page (as per IRB compliance) and submit an "agree" response to continue. Interviews for the qualitative portion of the study were conducted starting from the end of the Fall 2019 semester until the end of the Summer 2020 session, and similarly required an informed consent form to be signed prior to participation.

Data Analysis

Respondent Characteristics

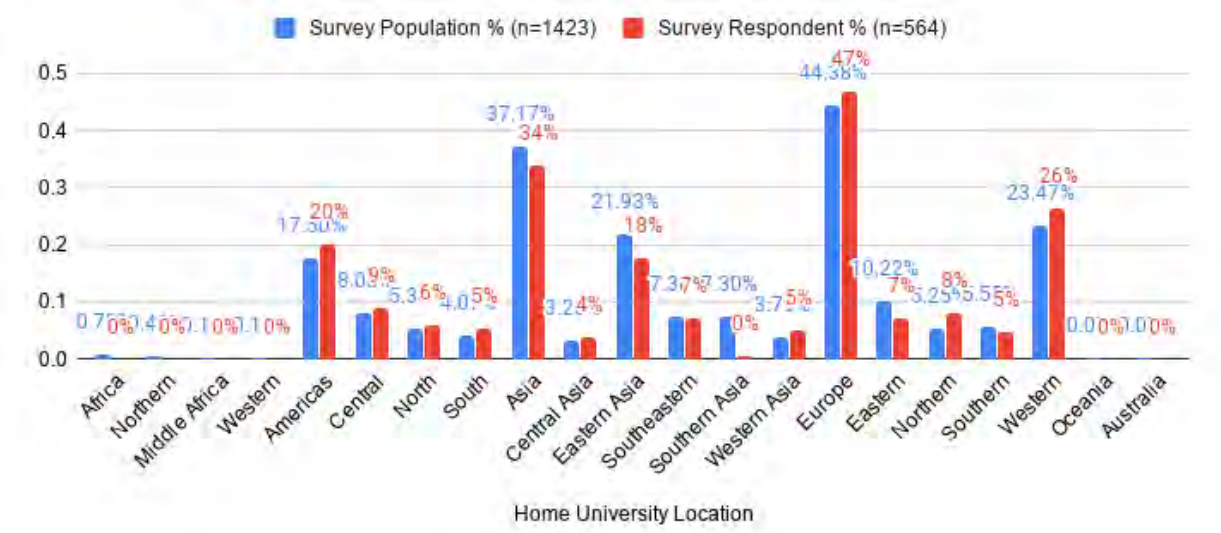
The survey population resulted in 1406 valid email addresses (17 invalid/bounced). When examining survey email unsubscribers (9), "no" participation responses (29), and incomplete responses (35), total complete participants were 564 for a 40% complete response rate. To briefly summarize, the sample was globally diverse, with 24 nations (out of 55) representing roughly 88% of all respondents (see Appendix B for a detailed overview). The typical profile of the survey respondents (which is consistent with our internal data) can be summarized as being female (83%), at the undergraduate level of study (67%), located at the Seoul campus (95%), for 4-6 months (75%). The age of respondents ranged from 18-34, with a mean age of 22.18. As for students' home universities' regions of origin, the population and respondent percentages were representative of the target population as a whole with the largest differences being around 3-4%. Southern Asian respondents were the exception at 7%.

Pull Factor Results

Students were asked to rate the pull factor statements on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) in order to indicate how much they felt each statement represented their perceptions, motivations, experiences, etc. The mean and standard

deviation (SD) for each item, as well as a dimension score (the average of all items in each dimension), were calculated in SPSS and are presented in Table 1. Item mean scores are presented in ranked order from highest to lowest within their respective categories.

Figure 3.



Home University Location Comparison

Nested Qualitative Results

Semi-structured interviews were conducted at the Seoul campus from the end of the Fall 2019 through the end of the Summer 2020 semester. Since the interviews were relatively simple (three main questions and several sub questions), they typically lasted about 15 to 25 minutes. Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics of participants.

Table 1.

Exchange Student Pull Factor Agreement Survey Results

Dimensions/Factors	M	SD
Appeal of Korea	***4.00***	***.439***
There are many interesting attractions to see in my free time.	4.52	.701
I am interested in Korean culture and lifestyle.	4.52	.686
Korea is a safe and convenient country to live.	4.46	.639
I want to learn Korean/improve Korean language skills.	4.39	.941
Korea has a good reputation.	4.12	.691
Korea is well situated for international/domestic travel.	4.06	.836
It is easy to get a student visa.	3.77	.911
Korea has strong ties to my home country.	3.53	.908

Dimensions/Factors	M	SD
I am interested in K-pop/Hallyu.	3.45	1.211
Korea is an affordable place to live.	3.21	1.012
Experiential Motivations	***4.64***	***.484***
I want to see new places and have new cultural experiences.	4.76	.500
I want to experience a new/different culture.	4.71	.534
I want to experience a new/different lifestyle.	4.64	.609
I want to meet new people from different countries.	4.61	.629
I want to have new educational experiences.	4.53	.667
Social Network Influences	***3.14***	***.848***
My professor(s) recommended studying in Korea.	3.28	1.104
My friend(s) also planned to study in Korea.	3.23	1.242
My friend(s) recommended studying in Korea.	3.23	1.140
My school advisor/counselor(s) recommend studying in Korea.	3.21	1.084
My family member(s) recommended studying in Korea	2.78	1.062
Institutional Appeal	***3.72***	***.534***
There are many student support services.	4.06	.882
The university has a good reputation for its educational programs.	4.02	.733
The university has a prestigious reputation.	3.92	.761
The university has high quality professors/faculty.	3.91	.812
The university offers classes that are not available in my home university.	3.87	1.012
It is easy to get admitted as an exchange student.	3.82	.803
There are many different types of classes/programs that I can take.	3.63	1.052
The classes I want/need to take available in English.	3.50	1.082
The university's ranking is important to me.	3.29	1.081
There are many scholarships/financial support available to me.	3.20	1.114

Note: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree, M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation

Table 2.
Interview Participant Overview

Gender	Age	Country of Citizenship	Home University Location	Exchange Duration (months)	Level/Type of Study
F	26	China*	Sweden	12	Certificate
F	23	Sweden	Sweden	12	Undergraduate
F	22	Sweden	Sweden	12	Certificate
F	22	United States	United States	4	Undergraduate
M	24	Mexico	Mexico	12	Undergraduate
M	23	Mexico	Mexico	4	Undergraduate
F	22	Turkey	Turkey	4	Undergraduate
F	22	Brazil	Brazil	4	Undergraduate
F	25	Colombia	Colombia	4	Undergraduate
F	22	France	France	4	Undergraduate

Note: Certificate refers to completing an Intensive Korean Language Program (see CKLC, n.d.) which is non-credit Korean language program.
*Participant 1 is a permanent resident of Sweden.

The interview data was analyzed for themes by "identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Transcripts were coded for individual ideas and then similar ideas were grouped together to create categories. Relevant categories were grouped to create themes which represented important and patterned responses in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Participants also member-checked the summaries of their respective interviews so that they could "judge the accuracy and credibility of the account" (Creswell, 2013, p. 252) in order to prevent any misinterpretations or missing yet relevant information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The case study portion was guide by data saturation, and Fusch and Ness (2015) have simply suggested that researchers need to be "explicit regarding how data saturation is reached" (p. 1413).

As transcripts were coded in Nvivo, the frequency of codes was recorded. Homogenous groups may present relatively similar information and enable saturation more quickly (Guest et al., 2006). Interview participants, though diverse nationally, were fairly homogenous demographically (e.g., age, study level, study length, student type, gender, etc.). Saturation was considered to have occurred at interview 6 when no new major codes emerged. Ultimately, three major themes emerged from the data: 1) attraction to Korea by exposure to Korean media, thus wanting to experience life there via academic exchange; 2) the transformation/maturing of a casual interest into a robust academic/professional pursuit; and 3) desire for an international atmosphere at the host university.

Discussion

The Strongest Pull Factors for Exchange Students

The survey data presented two dimensions where students were generally in "strong" agreement with the pull factors they were asked about: the appeal of Korea (M=4.00, SD=.439) and being motivated by wanting various cross-cultural experiences (M=4.64, SD=.439). Top items included being interested in Korean culture and lifestyle (M=4.52, SD=.686), viewing Korea as a safe exchange destination (M=4.46, SD=.639), having desirable attractions (M=4.52, SD=.701), as well as the desire to learn/improve Korean language skills (M=4.39, SD=.941). These pull factors were also reflected in the interview participant profiles as Participant 1 (China, 26, F) and 2 (Sweden, 23, F) were Korean majors.

Students agreed that there were many student support options available to them (M= 4.06, SD=.882). Even Participant 1 (China, 26, F) spoke very highly of the International Student Organization (ISO), explaining that "in Sweden we don't we don't have some, like dongari (Korean word for school club), and that's why, like I could have like a lot of opportunities to meet Korean friends and to talk in Korean" which other local universities may not necessarily have due to having less international/exchange students. While studying Korean language in Korea is logical and not revolutionary, students did not necessarily find institutional pull factors to be a significant driving force behind their attraction to studying in country.

This is likely a logical extension of the differences between students who are engaged in long- or short-term mobility. For example, prior research has shown that international degree students have been attracted to Korean universities by lower/different entrance standards (S. Lee, 2017) which are not applicable to short-term exchange students who are not technically enrolled at the host-university. This is at least one plausible explanation for the elevated relevance of new international and cross-cultural experiences (M=4.64, SD=.439) by contrast, and consistent with exchange students in other regions of the world whose programs focus on promoting intercultural awareness, personal development, open-mindedness, etc. (see Böttcher et al., 2016).

Ambivalent Exchange Pull Factors

Influences from student social networks (M=3.14, SD=.848) and appeal of the Korean host institution (M=3.72, SD=.534) were somewhat ambivalent overall as dimensions, though items in the social network dimension display rather large variations. For example, one of the interviewees, Participant 1 (China, 26, F), explained how an instructor's recommendation ended up being very influential in her decision to attend HUFS and is discussed in more detail in a later section. Similarly, host institution pull factors were generally less relevant across the board such as school ranking (M=3.29, SD=.848). As noted previously, this is likely due to the difference in mobility type (short vs long). However, the common thread of K-pop from the interviews and potentially high agreement with K-pop and/or Korean culture as a pull factor from the questionnaire (M=3.45, SD=1.211) presented a case for its strong influence in unexpected ways.

The K-pop Confluence

Although there was a relatively large SD (1.211) compared to other items, students agreed that K-pop/Hallyu was a relevant pull factor. Participant 1 (China, 26, F) noted how "when I was a child, so I started to watching, like Korean dramas and, like maybe watching, like reading the Korean books as well", or Participant 2 (Sweden, 23, F) who was "interested in like K-pop for like seven years," and Participant 3 (Sweden, 22, F) who "since I was quite

young, I found like K-pop, K-drama, and then got into the (Korean) politics, the culture." Participant 8 (Brazil, 22, F) similarly expressed the influence of Korean media as "K-pop and then Korean dramas and then I started to, like, reading books about Korea, and just amazing, fascinated."

The root cause of the decision to conduct exchanges in Korea for some students may simply be a confluence of timing, the emergence of Korean media on the world stage over the last 10-20 years, and their adolescence or coming of age. Participant 7 (Turkey, 22, F) was also influenced by K-pop, but as a secondary factor. She originally was exposed to Korea via a YouTube channel from a pair of English teachers who had been vlogging about their experiences while living and working, which subsequently sparked her interest in popular Korean media. Other studies have noted that Korean media often acts as the primary motivation for deciding to learn Korean (A. Lee & Jeon, 2019). Fraschini and Caruso (2019) have also argued that the impetus to learn Korean is "rooted in exposure to popular Korean culture and a consequent sense of belonging to an imagined Korean speakers' community" (p. 3). However, not all people around the world with an interest in K-pop can or will go on to conduct academic exchanges in Korea, let alone pursue the language as an academic pursuit in varying capacities. At least for some, other driving forces seem to be present, creating a positive feedback loop that evolves into a more substantive pursuit.

Transformation of Casual Interest into Mature Pursuit

What stands out from the qualitative data is that students' interest, stemming from entertainment media, has eventually transformed into a more serious academic pursuit in the form of college majors, perceived career benefits, formal language study, and the realization of studying abroad. Participant 3 (Sweden, 22, F) summed this theme up well, explaining that her interest in K-pop turned into following "Korean news and especially now with the politics, what's going on (tension with North Korea)….so when I had the opportunity to do an exchange, I was like, it's Korea where I'm going." Participant 2 (Sweden, 23, F) elaborated on her trajectory, highlighting how cycle of decisions that kept building towards eventually studying in Korea:

> There's a Korean school in, in Stockholm, where they mainly teach, are supposed to teach Korean children who have immigrated or have one parent who is Swedish or one parent who is Korean, but after the K-pop boom and everything, they started accepting just people, any person. So that's where I started learning Korean for two years, and then two years at university and then one and a half years in Korea.

Participant 1 (China, 26, F) and 2 (Sweden, 23, F) also decided to become Korean majors at university, and thus took advantage of the ability to do an exchange in Korea. Both ultimately passed the TOPIK exam (the Korean government's official test of language proficiency) with a six, the highest level. Recent empirical research has found that foreign-language interest and studying abroad in non-English speaking countries (particularly for longer durations) has positive effects on outcomes such as intercultural or global awareness (DeLoach et al., 2019), which are both important factors for, and a result of, academic exchanges.

While the questionnaire highlighted the most appealing pull factors overall, students' home universities can often have more than one partner institution in a given country, providing them with multiple destination choices. The three Swedish university participants

provided a unique perspective into this secondary question related more narrowly to the questionnaire's institutional appeal section, since their home university has two bilateral MOUs with other universities in Korea, most notably Seoul National University (SNU), the number one ranked institution in the country. Participant 1 (China, 26, F) noted how the recommendation from a professor in the Korean department ultimately directed her to choose HUFS over the other two, however the survey results did not reflect such a strong perception on this particular item overall, although the variance was high (M=3.28, SD=1.104).

> Before I chose HUFS I was like thinking about which one SNU (Seoul National University) or HUFS, because you know like everyone saying in Korea, SKY (Seoul National University, Korea University, Yonsei University), it's the top one, something like that. But my teacher, like my professor in Sweden, she was, you know, she recommends me more to come to HUFS. And actually, I think I really did like that, I really did a good choice because like, yeah. So, here is, like, they have a very international, like ambience.

Participant 2 (Sweden, 23, F) discussed how a deciding factor for her was both the perceived rigor of the academic program, and the number of classes available that would satisfy her degree requirements in her home university. She explained that:

> I chose HUFS as my first choice because, first of all, the Korean education which was what I wanted, really good Korean, it seemed really serious and very kind of elaborate and advanced compared to the other schools, and the other schools, for example, didn't even have that many Korean (language) courses. I couldn't even collect all my points (degree credits). My friend went to Seoul National University, and she said that she had a problem with having all of her credits because they had the intensive Korean courses as well, but she also had to take multiple other courses about Korea in order to get all her points where I just needed my Korean courses (at HUFS).

The survey results regarding a wide variety of classes being available do not necessarily reflect this sentiment (M=3.63, SD=1.052). This researcher posits, however, that for Korean language classes, or for exchange students proficient in Korean (i.e., Participant 1 and 2), the agreement may be on the higher end, whereas for students taking regular subject matter classes taught in English it may be the opposite (especially for certain majors with limited availability of/access to classes).

Participant 3 (Sweden, 22, F) also described how clear information and perceived program quality was instrumental in her decision: "when I looked into the websites, some of them were really difficult to understand, yeah so like, some of the information that I found seemed… just like that this was a program that has been going on for quite a while, and in my mind, then, that felt like, oh well it's like they know how to do this. They're not trying something new." General agreement with the perception of quality or credibility was reflected to some degree in the survey results regarding the host institution's reputation (M=4.02, SD=.733).

Environmental characteristics of the host institution and its academic offerings (i.e., international ambiance, availability of classes/ability to meet credit load requirements, perceived quality) were influential in narrowing down the choice of host university to a sole destination. For other students who did not have additional choices available, they expressed

appealing environmental factors to be the most salient. For example, Participant 4 (United States, F, 22) "looked into it (the university) to see from foreign students, their perspective how the school treated them. How like actual Koreans treated the foreigners, how they, like foreigners, treat each other all that sort of stuff. And I found the overall atmosphere to be pretty amicable."

Participant 6 (Mexico, 23, M), Participant 7 (Turkey, 22, F), and Participant 8 (Brazil, 22, F) were also strongly attracted to the international nature of studying at HUFS. due its relatively diverse student body in Korea. Participant 7 (Turkey, 22, F) shared that "I want to make friends as well. To me, understanding other people, understanding their culture, being friends. I mean, (it) is important in a way to understand the world and how it works." Similarly, Participant 6 (Mexico, 23, M) noted how he "was really excited about meeting other people, just foreign students, and Koreans as well. And just seeing how classes are in Korea in such a faraway place from home, you know." Participant 5 (Mexico, 24, M) described the international atmosphere in terms of academics as being particularly attractive, explaining that "I enrolled to do international theories classes. So, most of these classes were going to take place among many other international students, so I thought it was going to be one of the best opportunity for me to learn about different perspectives depending on which country (students were from)."

Implications

The primary quantitative and nested qualitative findings suggest that new international and cross-cultural experiences are highly attractive for exchange students in Korea, and short-term mobility more broadly. Such experiences are likely more attractive for exchange students due to the difference in mobility (i.e., short vs long) type, and reflected in prior exchange student pull factor research (see Ahmad et al., 2016; Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe, 2008; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). The popularity of contemporary Korean entertainment media (i.e., K-pop, K-dramas, Hallyu, etc.) has dramatically increased exposure of Korea's national image and brand to diverse peoples around the world which can serve as a primary motivation for deciding to learn Korean, and subsequently wanting to study in Korean. However, this motivation understates the potential for a casual interest to transform into a robust, mature one. This is evidenced by interview participants' decisions to move beyond K-pop and K-dramas and into Korea/Korean-related academic paths and careers. In that same vein, the secondary qualitative findings also revealed an interesting nuance between ambivalent institutional pull factors at large which were less important to short-term exchange students, yet the importance of perceived quality and diverse program offerings at an individual level, as noted by Participant 2 (Sweden, 23, F) and 3 (Sweden, 22, F).

Local universities may benefit from reviewing/improving their explanatory/ marketing material and differentiating it for short-term exchange students. This relatively simple and logical implication may very well be the deciding factor for choosing a given host institution over other local ones, and matters given Korea's declining local birth rate and local universities' reliance on international students to make up enrollment and revenue shortfalls (Alemu & Cordier, 2017; T. Kim, 2011; B. Kim & Torres, 2008; Krechetnikov & Pestereva, 2017). Even if exchange students do not pay tuition, they do contribute to university revenue streams by staying in dormitories and patronizing university establishments (e.g., cafeterias, cafes, bookshops, etc.). Moreover, pursuing fee-paying study abroad revenue streams (vs tuition-free exchange) is another complementary strategy to offset these population-related obstacles.

Local inbound exchange programs may also want to promote/focus on the experiences that students can have while studying at their institution, versus institutional rankings or prestige. These characteristics may be more relevant to students engaged in long-term mobility, since exchange students' degrees will ultimately be awarded from their home universities. Further, thoughtful and deliberate programming to provide cross-cultural experiences may go a long way when integrated into the exchange student experience such as International Student Organizations as they merge on-campus integration strategies with the types of experiences that students desire to have, especially when exchange periods are fairly short compared to degree-seeking students. Exchange students may not have the time to develop relationships or to invest in the activities that foster the intercultural aspects of student exchanges due to the limited time available (DeLoach et al., 2019). Additionally, other national governments might consider mimicking a "K-pop Model" by investing in the promotion of their popular entertainment media as a strategy to attract future exchange students, as has been in the case in Korea.

Conclusion

The reasons that attract exchange students to study in Korea are diverse, but there are certain items that stand out more than others. The findings of this study suggest that experiential pull factors, in addition to finding various destination attributes about Korea appealing, to be the most salient and relevant. However, the influence of popular media is arguably somewhat unique when compared to other pull factor research (e.g., Ahmad & Buchanan, 2016; Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe, 2008; Mazzarrol & Soutar, 2002). Moreover, since exchange students can have multiple potential host university choices in Korea by means of their home universities' MOUs, local universities should be cognizant of the fact that accessible information (i.e., clear, robust, detailed, credible) may be the difference between choosing one institution over another.

Further, programs that are designed especially around the short-term mobility pull factors can also be instrumental in greater attraction of potential exchange and fee-paying study abroad students, since the findings suggest that the institution's brand may be more applicable to long-term mobility students. This nuance is important, as Korean universities continue to experience enrollment and revenue shortfalls due to the nation's declining birthrate among the local population and increasingly reliance on foreign students to offset both. More effectively targeting of both short- and long-term mobility student types would no doubt be valuable in navigating demographic changes that affect are adversely affecting universities.

Limitations

One of the delimitations of the study is its survey population being limited to exchange students via bilateral and multilateral MOUs, whereas other types of short-term visiting students (i.e., fee-paying visiting students, language-center students) were excluded to keep the sample uniform typologically similar. Moreover, this researcher did not explore whether there were statistical differences by nationality or region of origin, as these variables are ultimately crude proxies for complex sociocultural/behavioral dimensions. These aspects need more rigorous isolation to be meaningful; thus, this is thought of as a delimitation and worth further research. Other limitations include the survey being a non-validated instrument and self-administered; respondents may have presented a more agreeable or favorable image in their responses. The 40% response rate is better than average for web-

administered surveys (see Fosnacht et al., 2017), but can nonetheless be considered a limitation.

The population was drawn from a single institution, which is similar to only a handful of other large, metropolitan universities with large "international" and/or exchange student populations. Additionally, the nature of the qualitative data makes these complementary findings highly contextual and specific, in addition to being comprised of 10 cases that were nationally diverse. Students' views may not necessarily transfer to other contexts or exchange students from other national/cultural backgrounds, or if their home universities do not have other "choices" in Korea. Both push and pull factors to some degree are capturing a particular moment in time, as these external forces are generated by a dynamic world. While certain items may be relevant now, they may not always be. Appropriate consideration should be given to "when" as well as to the "who", "what", and "where" of the findings.

Future Research

As a relatively nascent context of study, there are numerous possibilities for further research in Korea among exchange students. As an extension of this study, a multi-institution sample or nationwide study would yield a better picture of the phenomenon overall. Similarly, robust qualitative studies or equally weighted mixed-methods studies would provide more evidence and insight into the push-pull factors of short-term study abroad participants. Quantitative approaches exploring differences between nationalities, cultural dimensions, gender, etc., would yield refined insight for targeted differentiation of educational programs, curricula, marketing/promotional materials, staff/faculty recruiting, etc., based on inferences from statistics. Similarly, using other short-term student groups (fee-paying study abroad, language center) may yield insight into motivational differences.

In terms of research methods, sequential mixed-methods designs would be able to investigate unexpected findings (such as the lesser influence from social network or host university pull factors in this case) that arise during the first stage of data collection. Since the exchange student lifecycle is relatively short, with the most common exchange periods being from 4-6 months, pre-arrival and arrival interventions along with student satisfaction could also be investigated. In short, researchers in international education and in the realm of inbound exchange programs (and other short-term programs) in Korea have many opportunities for research, as the nation continues to attract students from around the world.

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Appendix A

Distribution of Survey Population by Home University Region and Country

Home University Region/Country	% of Population (n=1423)	% of Respondents (n=564)
Africa	**.70%**	**0%**
Northern Africa	***.42%***	***0%***
Algeria	.07%	0%
Morocco	.21%	0%
Eritrea	.07%	0%
Reunion	.07%	0%
Middle Africa	***.14%***	***0%***
Chad	.07%	0%
Congo	.07%	0%
Western Africa	***.14%***	***0%***
Côte d'Ivoire	.14%	0%
Americas	**17.5%**	**20.1%**
Central America	***8.08%***	***9.0%***
Mexico	8.08%	9.0%
Northern America	***5.34%***	***5.9%***
Canada	1.47%	1.6%
United States	3.86%	4.3%
South America	***4.07%***	***5.2%***
Bolivia	.07%	0%
Brazil	3.09%	4.1%
Colombia	.70%	.70%
Peru	.07%	.2%
Venezuela	.14%	0%
Asia	**37.17%**	**33.39%**
Central Asia	***3.23%***	***3.9%***
Kazakhstan	2.74%	3.4%
Uzbekistan	.49%	.5%
Eastern Asia	***21.93%***	***17.5%***
China	7.52%	8.0%
Hong Kong	.35%	0%
Japan	9.42%	6.0%
Mongolia	1.48%	.7%
Republic of Korea[2]	.70%	0%
Taiwan	2.46%	2.8%
Southeastern Asia	***7.30%***	***7.0%***
Brunei Darussalam	1.68%	1.6%
Indonesia	.70%	.70%
Malaysia	.14%	.14%
Myanmar	.07%	0%
Philippines	1.12%	1.4%
Singapore	1.96%	2%

[2] South Korean nationals who are living abroad (i.e., residents of other nations) as "overseas" Koreans (see Shin & Moon, 2019) who attended HUFS as exchange students, as well as Korean nationals who have gone abroad to attend university and attended HUFS via official exchange programs

Thailand	.56%	.7%
Vietnam	1.05%	.4 %
Southern Asia	***.91%***	***.4%***
India	.35%	.0%
Iran	.56%	.4%
Western Asia	***3.79%***	***5.1%***
Azerbaijan	.84%	1.4%
Georgia	.14%	0%
Iraq	.07%	0%
Jordan	.14%	0%
Turkey	2.59%	3.7
Europe	**44.38%**	**46.7%**
Eastern Europe	***10.22%***	***7.2%***
Belarus	.14%	.2%
Bulgaria	.14%	0%
Czechia	1.05%	1.8%
Hungary	.28%	0%
Poland	3.79%	2.5%
Romania	.07%	0%
Russia	3.92%	2.3%
Slovakia	.21%	.2%
Ukraine	.63%	.2%
Northern Europe	***5.25%***	***8 %***
Denmark	.91	1.4%
Finland	.56%	.7%
Ireland	.14%	.4%
Latvia	.14%	.4%
Lithuania	.42%	.2%
Norway	.49%	.4%
Sweden	1.47%	2.7%
United Kingdom	1.19%	1.8%
Southern Europe	***5.55%***	***4.8%***
Croatia	.07%	0%
Greece	.14%	0 %
Italy	1.33%	.7%
North Macedonia	.21%	.2%
Portugal	.42%	.4%
Serbia	.07%	.0%
Slovenia	.42%	.5%
Spain	3.30%	3.0%
Western Europe	***23.47%***	***26.4%***
Austria	.77%	1.1 %
Belgium	1.12%	1.2%
France	9.41%	11.21%
Germany	10.75%	11.3%
Netherlands	1.40%	1.60%
Oceania	**.07%**	**0%**
Australia	.07%	0%
Total	100%	100%

Appendix B

Survey Respondent Nationality

Region/Nationality	Frequency	Percentage (n=564)
Africa	***2***	***.4%***
Northern Africa	***1***	***.2%***
Algeria	1	.2%
Southern Africa	***1***	***.2%***
Botswana	1	.2%
Americas	**111**	**19.7%**
Carribean	***2***	***.4%***
Grenada	1	.2%
Saint Kitts and Nevis	1	.2%
Central America	***52***	***9.2%***
Mexico	52	9.2%
Northern America	***29***	***5.1%***
Canada	9	1.6%
United States	20	3.5%
Southern America	***28***	***5.3%***
Argentina	1	.2%
Brazil	21	3.7%
Colombia	4	.7%
Peru	1	.2%
Venezuela	1	.2%
Asia	**195**	**34.5%**
Central Asia	***22***	***3.9%***
Kazakhstan	19	3.4%
Uzbekistan	3	.5%
Eastern Asia	***99***	***17.5%***
China	46	8.2%
Japan	34	6.0%
Mongolia	4	.7%
Taiwan	15	2.7%
Southern Asia	***2***	***.4%***
Iran	2	.4%
Southeastern Asia	***42***	***7.5%***
Brunei	10	1.8%
Indonesia	5	.9%
Philippines	9	1.6%
Singapore	11	2.0%
Thailand	4	.7%
Vietnam	3	.5%
Western Asia	***32***	***5.67%***
Azerbaijan	7	1.2%
Turkey	24	4.3%
Yemen	1	.2%

Europe	**248**	**43.97%**
Eastern Europe	***45***	***7.97%***
Belarus	1	.2%
Czechia	7	1.2%
Poland	17	3.0%
Romania	1	.2%
Russia	15	2.7%
Slovakia	2	.4%
Ukraine	2	.4%
Northern Europe	***36***	***6.38%***
Denmark	8	1.4%
Finland	4	.7%
Ireland	1	.2%
Latvia	2	.4%
Lithuania	1	.2%
Norway	2	.4%
Sweden	13	2.3%
United Kingdom	7	1.2%
Southern Europe	***27***	***4.78%***
Croatia	1	.2%
Greece	1	.2%
Italy	3	.5%
North Macedonia	1	.2%
Portugal	2	.4%
Slovenia	2	.4%
Spain	17	3.0%
Western Europe	***140***	***24.8%***
Belgium	8	1.4%
France	63	11.2%
Germany	61	10.8%
Netherlands	8	1.4%
Total	564	100%

About the Author

William H. Stewart, EdD, is an Inbound Exchange Student program manager at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul, Korea. He completed a doctorate in Educational Technology (with a focus on distance education) from Boise State University. He has worked primarily in international and transnational education in both K-12 and higher education. His research interests are how distance education and transnational communities intersect, as well as student mobility and emerging trends in international education.