

## **Korean Children's Perception of English Language Acquisition and Cultural Adaptation in Australia\***

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Recently, the number of students to choose to study in Australia has been increasing significantly. The purpose of this study is to examine how Korean primary school children perceive their own English language learning and cultural adaptation in Australia. A questionnaire survey was conducted with 34 Korean children aged 8-13 who were attending primary schools in Brisbane, Queensland. The study results show that they made diverse efforts to learn English language and culture in Australia, such as making English-speaking friends, watching TV/video/DVD, reading English books, and studying with a foreign tutor. Their English listening and writing abilities were thought to be improved most, followed by speaking, reading and cultural understanding after studying in Australia. The subjects were mostly satisfied with their study and life in Australia but they had difficulties with communicating in English, homesickness, foods, weather, insects, and discrimination. In particular, they had problems with understanding classes conducted all in English and participating in the classroom activities due to their low level of English ability and understanding of Australian classroom culture. The findings of this study have pedagogical implications for educators both in Australia and Korea.

[English language acquisition/cultural adaptation]

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Though the majority of the Korean people invest tremendous amount of time, efforts, and money to their children's English education, their expectations are not thought to be met due to the status of English in Korean context and the limitations caused by the educational and social

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\* The earlier version of this paper was presented in Park (2007, June).

situations in Korea (Lee, 2005). Accordingly, the mistrust and dissatisfaction of the public education have been exacerbated and the public faith in native speaker and English-speaking countries has grown so strong that it has led to a burgeoning of private English language teaching/learning businesses in Korea and a huge outflow of children and dollars to the English-speaking countries. According to the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MOE) (2007), the number of Korean students studying abroad has been steadily increasing during the recent years as shown in Table 1.

**TABLE 1**  
**The Changes in the Number of the Students Studying Abroad**

Years	Elementary	Middle School	High School	Total
2002	3,464	3,301	3,361	10,132
2003	4,052	3,674	2,772	10,498
2004	6,276	5,568	4,602	16,446
2005	8,148	6,670	5,582	20,400
2006	13,814	9,246	6,451	29,511

It was reported that U.S.A. was the top choice of these students, followed by China, Southeast Asian countries, Canada, and Australia in 2006. After some years of studying and living in these countries, some students returned home to Korea. The MOE report also shows the changes in the number of the returnee students as shown in Table 2.

**TABLE 2**  
**The Changes in the Number of the Students Returning Home**

Years	Elementary	Middle School	High School	Total
2002	5,351	1,803	1,201	8,355
2003	7,471	3,006	1,721	12,198
2004	9,676	3,097	2,190	14,963
2005	7,309	3,950	2,327	13,586
2006	10,536	4,851	2,975	18,362

It was found out that the length of these students' stay in foreign countries varied, less than 2 years (70.5%), 2 to 3 years (12.8%), 3 to 5 (9.8%), and longer than 5 years (6.9%). Now we are facing a new set of issues and concerns with regard to these returnee students: how to help them overcome 'reverse culture shock', if any, and facilitate their successful life in Korean schools and society; and how to fill the gap between the students with and without overseas experience or resolve the issues related to the 'English divide.'

Recently, English immersion programs or English villages have been discussed as alternatives to study abroad and some of them have actually been implemented. It is expected that these programs and facilities provide the Korean learners of English with sufficient English language input and exposure to the English language learning experience, lessen the financial burden of the parents, and reinforce the international competitiveness. Some studies examined the effectiveness of short-term English immersion programs and found out some positive results as well as the detrimental factors. Very little research, however, has been done on English villages. More thorough studies should be done on this recent innovation in order to provide solid theoretical foundation and empirical data to prove its effectiveness.<sup>1</sup>

The same situation applies to Korean students' studying abroad. It seems that anecdotal success stories, myths and fallacies rather than empirical research findings have led to a constant increase in the number of students to go to foreign countries, resulting in a lot of socio-economic and educational problems including Korea's educational service deficit and family split. It is high time to conduct more studies to understand more precisely what these students go through as they are immersed in English language and culture, in order to provide individuals and institutions with reliable and valid resources. Based on this information, more accurate decisions can be made for the success of their children's education and more importantly, their lives.

The number of students to choose to study in Australia has been increasing significantly for the recent years. The number of returnee students also shows a constant increase. The purpose of the present study is threefold: To explore what the Korean children experience in their home and social settings, and school setting in Australia; To examine the Korean students' perception of English language acquisition and their cultural adaptation in Australia; and to make suggestions for better educating Korean learners of English both in Australia and Korea. The research questions addressed in this study are as follows:

1. What do the Korean children experience in their home and social settings, and school setting in Australia?
2. How do Korean children in Australia perceive their English language acquisition in Australia?
3. How do Korean children in Australia perceive their cultural adaptation in Australia?
4. What needs to be done to better educate Korean learners of English both in Australia and Korea?

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to Park (2006) for a detailed discussion of English immersion programs in Korea.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Australian Education International (AEI) Market Indicator Data 2006, the total number of international students enrolled in Australian English Language Institutes and elementary, secondary, tertiary educational institutions in Jan. 2006 was 190,571 and the Korean students (14,751) ranked the third after China (47,557) and India (18,547). The number of Korean students in Australia has been increasing from 10,106 in 2002, 10,550 in 2003, 11,901 in 2004, 12,555 in 2005, and 14,751 in 2006.

A lot of research reported the reasons given by Asian students for choosing Australia (Andressen, 1993; Bureau of Industry Economics (BIE), 1989; Gan, 1989; Harris & Jarrett, 1990; Leslie, 1989; Purdy, 1992; Smart & Ang, 1992; Sthal et al., 1993; Williams, 1989). Nesdale, Simkin, Sang, Burke, & Fraser (1995) summarized them as follows:

1. A desire for a more stable social, political and economic environment;
2. The opportunity for entrance into a desired area of study in a recognized institution of quality;
3. The attainment of a qualification from an internationally recognized English language institution;
4. The attainment of a qualification leading to suitable employment;
5. The support of relatives and friends in a new country;
6. The benefits of studying and living in a different culture;
7. The climatic and social attractions of Australian (p. 9).

Studies were conducted to identify the difficulties the overseas students face in Australia and five issues appeared to be mentioned most frequently: language and cultural adjustment, finances, accommodation, academic or course matters, and homesickness and loneliness (Burke, 1989; Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET), 1987; Radford et al., 1984). Racial discrimination or racism appear insignificant when included as factors in multiple-choice questionnaires but larger in open-ended responses. Language issues have received most systematic attention. (Bradley & Bradley, 1984, cited in Jones, 1989).

Burke (1989) summarized difficulties commonly experienced by overseas students as follows: 1) Cultural adjustment: This involves getting used to the new country and culture (different way of life, customs, and values), as well as dealing with the sense of loss (missing family, friends, familiar food and places). These issues are usually referred to by the term 'culture shock'; 2) Finances and accommodations; 3) Living independently: coping with personal finances, shopping, cooking, managing their own affairs without the customary support of parents and family; 4) Language and

communication: reading and writing in English, participating in classroom discussion, asking questions of staff all produce particular difficulty; 5) Study-related concerns: Differences in the style and traditions of learning between Western and Asian countries frequently cause difficulty. They find it difficult to master critical analysis, patterns of argument and principles of relevance. Important cultural differences in the way in which the ideas of authorities such as lecturers or published works are regarded may inadvertently lead a student to commit 'plagiarism'; 6) Being different: This refers both to experiences of racial intolerance and the relatively low level of contact that overseas students have with Australians.

Radford, Ongkili, and Toyoizumi (1984) carefully considered a wide range of pre-departure issues, meeting Australian government bureaucratic requirements, securing accurate and pertinent information about courses of study in Australia, and identifying the most beneficial ways of preparing for study and life in Australia before departure. Brash (1989) raised the following questions: "What are the best methods of assisting students, whose previous learning has taken place in a system based on a predominantly authoritarian approach to knowledge? How can they be assisted to adapt the skeptical, analytical and critical approaches essential success in the Australian system" (p. 67)?

A few studies have explored Korean students studying in English immersion environment. Choi (1997) explored intercultural experiences that 139 Korean students in Australian universities had, focusing on their difficulties communicating interculturally in academic settings. The three identified problem areas included difficulties in language, styles of teaching and learning, and relationships with peers and teachers: 1) Difficulties in language resulted from Korean students' main exposure to a form of American English, English tests in Korea which neglect speaking and listening skills, the style of English-teaching in Korea, and misunderstandings arisen from differences in cultural expectations; 2) Cultural differences in education and problems in techniques of adjustment to the Australian educational conventions contributed to Korean students' study difficulties. They include lecturers' unclear and quick speech, frequent use of Australian/English idioms, unfamiliar abbreviations, acronyms and proper names, unclear questions and requirements and lack of materials, different research methods, Korean students' lack of training in critical judgment, and unfamiliarity with tutorial/seminar discussion; 3) Korean students experienced difficulty in forming and developing close relationship with their Australian peers and teachers mainly due to their language limitations and culturally different perceptions and expectations of relationship.

In order to reduce misperceptions of Korean students by Australian teachers and to enhance these students' learning experiences in Australia, she suggested strategies and support programs to be directed by institutions, teachers, and students and claimed that they need to be implemented simultaneously and continuously across all three sectors. It

was recommended that, first, language accommodation should be made by Australian teachers while Korean students need to improve their language competence. Second, both teachers and students need to be aware of culturally different classroom conventions. Third, expectations of relationships need to be well managed and accommodated by agreement from both Koreans and Australians, in order to build a better relationship between them. Last, Korean students need to be provided with support systems and programs, assistance and encouragement for their life and study in Australia.

In a similar vein, Armitage (1999) suggested the following as the major factors affecting the adjustment of Korean university students studying in an Australian English language center:

1. Moving from a monocultural to a multicultural society;
2. Moving from a Confucian based patrilineal, vertically structured and formal society to a horizontally structured and fairly informal society;
3. Moving from a family centered and group oriented society to an individual centered society;
4. Moving from an authoritarian teacher-centered Confucian based education system to the student centered participative Australian education system;
5. A lack of preparation by Korean students, prior to departing Korea (pp. 2-3).

Other studies focused on cultural adaptation of young Korean students studying in New Zealand and the United States. Kim, Choi, and Lee (2006) examined the life of 139 Korean elementary and secondary students studying in New Zealand and reported that the majority of the students were well adjusted to a new school life, whereas they had some psychological discomfort and problems with interpersonal relations. The major difficulties were with their language, communicating in English, and cross-cultural differences. Most of them, however, favored studying overseas and chose early and late elementary school years as the optimal time to start overseas study. On the other hand, Lee (2005) portrayed a dismal life of young Korean students in U.S.A. The major difficulties the students faced were language barrier and cultural differences which resulted in their frustration, maladjustment and even led them to take on the wrong track of their lives. He claimed that the Korean students would never get away from their label of 'unassimilable foreigners' (Kibria, 2002, p. 106, cited in Lee, 2005) even when these students manage to survive in their school and social life in America. Returning home in Korea would not guarantee their success, either, as they will feel alienated or belonging nowhere, neither in Korea nor in the States. He demanded a prompt change and improvement of Korean educational system and social structure to be made, by which

Korean people are not driven out to abroad for better education and life.

Kim (2006) explored how secondary Korean ESL students perceived English culture instruction in Korea and their cross-cultural adjustments in the United States. The students reported that the culture instruction they had in Korea was not enough and not very helpful in adjusting to the target culture. It was recommended that the goals of culture instruction should be redefined and the cultural contents and assessment tools need to be re-examined to enhance students' cultural competence. On the other hand, Jung (2006) found that "the implementation of language policy for the elementary English program in Korea constantly involves the conflicts between the desire for English proficiency and the fear of English dominance on local cultures and local identities, which resulted in the production of local context-dominated English textbooks. It contrasted with the students' desire to learn foreign culture through English education and that, in this context, whether English can become an additional language, which co-exists in harmony with the local culture and language, is likely to be an on-going issue in planning language policy for English education in Korea" (p. 25).

Unlike studies on the issues of intercultural experiences, however, little research can be found about the issues of Korean primary school children's English language acquisition in English immersion environment such as Australia and their own perception of this area. It is, therefore, a valuable endeavour to explore it in this study along with the issues of cultural adaptation.

### III. RESEARCH METHOD

#### 1. Subjects

Thirty four Korean children participated in the questionnaire survey. They were based in Brisbane and its suburbs, Queensland, Australia<sup>2</sup>. Those who were born in Australia and those who stayed in Australia longer than 5 years were excluded in this study.

As Table 3 shows, 41.2 percent were girls (n=20) and 58.8 percent were boys (n=14). Their age ranged from 8 to 13, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade to 7<sup>th</sup> grade in elementary schools. Only nine children were the grade that corresponds to their age and twenty three of them were one or two grade lower than their age level due to their low English ability<sup>3</sup>. Two of them

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<sup>2</sup> Brisbane is the capital and most populous city of the Australian state of Queensland, covered under the jurisdiction of Education Queensland regarding public primary and high schools. Primary schools in Brisbane include grades 1 through 7 for children aged between 6 and 12.

<sup>3</sup> It is a sensitive issue for children what grade level they are placed in. It was observed and told by some mothers that those children whose grade level was lower than their peers went through

were attending an English language institute, a preparatory program in order to transfer to a primary school later. When this study was conducted in December 2006, their length of stay in Australia varied but the majority was the recent arrivals, showing less than a year (47.1%), 1-2 years (35.3), 2-3 years (5.9%), 3-4 years (2.9), and 4-5 years (8.8%).

**TABLE 3**  
**Subjects' Demographic Data (N=34)**

	Gender			Grade level in Australia					Length of stay in Australia				
	Male	Female	N/A	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>	1/2-1yr	1-2yr	2-3yr	3-4 yr	4-5yr
N	14	20	2	8	7	7	5	5	16	12	2	1	3
%	41.2	58.8	5.9	23.5	20.6	20.6	14.7	14.7	47.1	35.3	5.9	2.9	8.8

Concerning their language abilities, 11.8 percent reported that their English ability was better than Korean ability whereas 52.9% said their Korean ability was better than English ability. 35.3% said their Korean and English abilities were about the same.

## 2. Instrument and Data Collection

A questionnaire was developed in four different parts: First, the subjects' demographic information was taken. Question items included gender, age and grade, length of stay in Australia, interest and confidence in English skills, motivation to come to Australia, purpose of coming to Australia, and pre-departure English studies; The second part focused on their home and social life in Australia. The question items were about where to stay, who to stay with, languages to be used at home, school, and church, friends, social gatherings, degree of satisfaction with the life in Australia, their plans and wishes for further stay in Australia, and difficulties and challenges of studying and living in Australia; The third part was concerned with their school life in Australia. It was asked if they had attended any English language institute before they started their studies in a primary school and if so, how helpful it was. The question items also included the major features of ESL classes and regular classes in the primary school, major differences of primary school in Australia and Korea; The last part of the questionnaire was about their English language acquisition and cultural adaptation: The choice of their name and the reasons, difficulties and challenges of studying in English immersion environment, their cultural adaptation efforts, effectiveness of studying in Australia, and the influence of living in Australia on their cultural identity. In developing the question items, the author referred to the previous studies on the Korean students studying in Australia (Armitage,

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some mental discomfort and depression.



1999; Choi, 1997). The questionnaire was written both in Korean and English and the subjects were asked to choose the one in the language that they were most comfortable with. All the subjects except 4 chose the Korean version.

The data was collected through various networks and contacts but mostly through the three local Korean churches, including the one the researcher attended.<sup>4</sup> 11 children and their mothers, who attended the researcher's church were contacted directly and told about the purpose of the study and how to complete the questionnaire by the researcher. The children finished the questionnaire at home with their parents<sup>5</sup>. For the children who attended two other churches, the two adult members of the churches were instructed by the researcher about the survey and administered it in their Sunday school class.

## IV. RESULTS

### 1. Interest and Confidence in English

Table 4 shows the result of the subjects' interest and confidence in English abilities and pre-departure English language studies.

**TABLE 4**  
**Interest and Confidence in English, and Pre-departure English Studies**

Question Items		Scales (%)		
		Very much	A little	Not so much
Interest in English		67.6	23.5	8.8
Pre-departure English Language Studies		26.5	41.2	29.4
Confidence in English	Speaking	32.4	55.9	8.8
	Listening	47.1	41.2	8.8
	Reading	52.9	38.2	8.8
	Writing	35.3	52.9	8.8

<sup>4</sup> The present study was conducted while the author had her sabbatical year at the University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia in 2006. I would like to acknowledge all the student participants and their parents for their help and support for this study.

<sup>5</sup> I originally planned to include student journal writing and student/parent interviews for data collection in addition to the questionnaire but the student journals I collected was not enough both in quantity and quality. However, I built a close relationship with some mothers by teaching them English and serving frequently as an interpreter for their children's school and their household matters. I had frequent personal communications with them and could get some significant and valuable data from them, which were included in the discussion in this paper.

The majority of the students said they were interested in English. Not many of them said, however, that they studied English hard before they came to Australia. They reported that they were confident in English reading most, followed by listening, writing and speaking.

Table 5 shows their motivation and purpose of studying in Australia.

**TABLE 5**  
**Motivation and Purpose of Studying in Australia**

Question Items		Percent (%)
Motivation (more than one)	Myself	35.3
	My parents	73.5
	My teacher	2.9
	Other	11.8
Purpose	English language studies	23.5
	School education	38.2
	Sports training	5.9
	Immigration	20.6
	Other	8.8

The students came to Australia mostly by their parents' recommendation and decision. 5.3 % said it was their own decision. The purposes of their coming to Australia included school education, learning English, immigration, and golf training.

## 2. Home and Social Life in Australia

Table 6 shows the types of the students' residence, who they live with and which language they use in three different contexts, home, school, and church.

Most of the students lived in their home with their mothers, or Korean home stay host families. Only a few students lived with foreigners. Korean was dominantly used in home and church contexts, while English was used more frequently in school contexts. It was not only because of their language abilities but also because of their home, school, and church environments.

Concerning their social network, 23.5% replied that they had more Korean friends than foreign friends whereas 73.5% had more foreign friends than Korean ones. The ethnic group of their foreign friends shows that 85.3% were Anglo-Saxon followed by Asian and other 2.9% respectively. 26.5% of the respondents also said that they frequently hung out with their foreign friends outside of school, whereas 55.9% did infrequently and 14.7% seldom did.

Overall, 67.7% students said they were very much satisfied with their life in Australia and 26.5% and 2.9% said they were satisfied a little and very little respectively. 29.4% were supposed to live in Australia for good, 11.8% to stay until they finish college, 20.6% to stay until they finish the school they were attending, and 17.6% to stay until they finish the grade they were in. However, more students wanted to stay in Australia longer than they were supposed to: 41.2% wanted to stay in Australia for good, 23.5% to stay until they finish college, 11.8% each to stay until the present school and grade they were in. On the other hand, 11.8% wanted to go back home in Korea immediately.

**TABLE 6**  
**Where to Live, Who to Live with, and Language Uses**

Question Items		Percent (%)	
Where to live	My home	76.5	
	Homestay	17.6	
	School Dorm	2.9	
	No answer	2.9	
Who to live	Koreans	91.2	
	Foreigners	5.8	
	No answer	2.9	
Language uses	Home	Korean>English	58.8
		Korean<English	8.8
		Korean=English	29.4
		No answer	2.9
	School	Korean>English	2.9
		Korean<English	82.4
		Korean=English	2.9
		No answer	11.8
	Church	Korean>English	70.6
		Korean<English	2.9
		Korean=English	11.8
		No answer	14.7

In terms of cultural adaptation in Australia, 29.4% replied that it was very difficult, 47.1% a little difficult, and 23.5% not so difficult. The biggest difficulty was with communication in English, followed by homesickness, missing friends and family in particular, foods, weather and insects, and discrimination in order.

### 3. School Life in Australia

Not many students (23.5%, n=8) attended an English language school or institute in Australia before they started their studies in a primary school. The length of their English studies ranged from 4 months to one and a half years. The number of the Korean classmates they had varied from 1 to 6. Table 7 shows their thoughts on the English language studies in Australia.

**TABLE 7**  
**English Language Studies in Australia (n=8)**

Question Items	Yes (%)	No (%)
The lessons were interesting and helpful.	100	0
The class size was appropriate.	66.7	33.3
The Korean students were helpful for my English learning.	75	25
The foreign students were helpful for my English learning.	87.5	12.5
The teachers were friendly and good.	100	0
The level of the lesson was appropriate for me.	62.5	37.5
The school facilities and equipment were good.	87.5	12.5
I like the institute or the school.	87.5	12.5

They were mostly satisfied with the language schools, particularly about the teachers and the lessons but some thought the lessons were too easy.

The respondents were attending a primary school in the grades 3-7. Twenty six students out of thirty four took ESL classes in a primary school and 88.5% considered it as useful for their English learning. Table 8 shows their thoughts on the ESL class more in detail.

**TABLE 8**  
**ESL Class in a Primary School (n=26)**

Question Items	Yes (%)	No (%)
The lessons were interesting and helpful.	73.1	26.9
The class size was appropriate.	77.3	22.7
The Korean students were helpful for my English learning.	38.1	61.9
The foreign students were helpful for my English learning.	65.2	34.8
The teachers were friendly and good.	100	0
The level of the lesson was appropriate for me.	83.3	16.7
The school facilities and equipment were good.	87.5	12.5
I like the institute or the school.	79.2	12.5

Overall, ESL classes in primary schools were considered as alright but it was found out that some students with higher English abilities did not want to attend the ESL classes. They rather wanted to stay in the regular classes and study with 'Australian' students, not with other international students in the ESL class.

**TABLE 9**  
**Regular Classes in a Primary School (n=24)**

Question Items	Yes (%)	No (%)
The lessons were interesting and helpful.	92	8
The class size was appropriate	90.9	9.1
The Korean students were helpful for my English learning.	42.1	57.9
The foreign students were helpful for my English learning.	96	4
The teachers were friendly and good.	95.8	4.2
The English level of the lesson was appropriate for me.	75	25
The school facilities and equipment were good.	91.7	8.3
I like the institute or the school.	91.7	8.3

The primary school classes were thought to be interesting and helpful mostly but due to their low English language abilities, they had some difficulties. They were highly satisfied with the school facilities and other equipment but had many complaints about the school computers, as most of the Korean students were used to using a high-speed, state-of-the-art computers back in Korea.

**TABLE 10**  
**Good Things about Australian School Compared to Korean School**

Question Items	Yes (%)	No (%)
In Australian schools,		
teachers are friendlier.	76.5	23.5
there is no or less competition among the students.	58.8	41.2
the school facilities are better.	58.8	41.2
the classes are more fun.	67.6	32.4
there is no or less homework.	76.5	23.5
there are no or less tests.	64.7	35.3
there are no or less concerns with the grades.	55.9	44.1
there are more fun events and activities.	88.2	11.8
there is a morning tea break.	82.4	17.6
there is no or less regulation on the student behavior or conduct.	73.5	26.5

Compared to Korean schools, Australian primary schools were thought to be better because teachers were friendlier, classes were more fun, and there were more fun events and activities. School morning tea was also a reason for them to like the schools. However, some children thought that the competition among the students and concerns with the grades were as strong as those in Korea. The school facilities were also perceived to be not so much better than those in Korea.

**TABLE 11**  
**Difficulties with Studying in Australian School**

Question Items	Yes (%)	No (%)
It is hard to make friends.	17.6	82.4
It is hard to interact with the teachers.	23.5	76.5
It is hard to actively participate in the school activities or events.	38.2	61.8
It is hard to understand the classes conducted in English only.	41.2	58.8
The homework or the tests are difficult.	20.6	79.4

Most Korean students seemed to manage school life well in Australian schools, without many difficulties with interacting with other students and teachers and doing homework. They, however, were found out to have more difficulties with understanding classes conducted all in English and with participating in the school activities and classes.

#### 4. English Language Acquisition and Cultural Adaptation

Concerning with their name choice, 82.4% were found out to use Korean name at home but only 14.7% used Korean name at school, whereas English name was used at home and school by 17.6% and 82.4% respectively. Korean name was chosen to be used because they are Koreans (47.1%), their Korean names are easy enough for foreigners to pronounce so that there was no need to have an English name (8.8%), without any particular reason (8.8%), they feel better with their Korean name (3.3%), and they did not want to bother to think of an English name (3.3%). The English name was chosen to be used for the following reasons: It is easier for the foreigners to say (61.8%); It is only natural because they are in Australia (9%); It sounds nicer (8.8%); The school required to have an English name (8%)<sup>6</sup>; The same name was used in Korea as well (2.9%); and other (2.9%).

<sup>6</sup> Some children reported that some Australian teachers did not try hard enough to say or remember their Korean names and just called them 'you' or asked their names repeatedly, which

**TABLE 12**  
**Difficulties with Studying in English Only**

Question Items	Yes (%)	No (%)
Understanding Australian English (Sounds, vocabulary, etc.)	32.4	67.6
Talking with the teachers or the students	23.5	76.5
Making an oral presentation	55.9	44.1
Expressing my own opinion in a debate	55.9	44.1
Understanding the reading texts	44.1	55.9
Writing on the given topics	50.0	50.0
Cultural differences (e.g. eye contact, raising hands for the questions)	23.5	76.5

Australian English caused some difficulties as the Korean students were more familiar with American English. However, most difficulties were in making an oral presentation, speaking in a debate, and writing on the given topics.

Table 13 shows what the Korean students do when they have something they do not understand during the class.

**TABLE 13**  
**How to deal with the Difficulties during the Class**

Question Items	Yes (%)	No (%)
I ask Korean friends	8.8	91.2
I ask any friends (who are around)	55.9	44.1
I ask the teacher.	76.5	23.5
I look up the (electronic) dictionary.	32.4	67.6
I just ignore them.	17.6	82.4

Most of them sought out some help and many of them chose their teachers to help them. However, some of them did not ask for any help but tried to resolve the difficulties by themselves, by using the dictionary or just ignoring them.

They were also asked what they did in order to learn English language and culture better in Australia. Table 14 shows the results.

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embarrassed and humiliated them a lot. Such behavior was also perceived as an implicit demand for these children to have an English name.

**TABLE 14**  
**What They Did to Learn English Language and Culture Better**

Question Items	Yes (%)	No (%)
I did not do anything special.	14.7	85.3
I read books in English.	67.6	32.4
I watched TV/Video/DVD in English.	70.6	29.4
I made English-speaking friends.	82.4	17.6
I had some English lessons from a Korean tutor.	23.5	76.5
I had some English lessons from a foreign tutor.	47.1	52.9
I took some lessons from a Korean instructor at some English language institute.	8.8	91.2
I took some lessons from a foreign instructor at some English language institute.	14.7	85.3
I participated in activities hosted by Australian churches or other organizations.	14.7	85.3
Other	2.9	97.1

It was shown that making English-speaking friends, watching TV/video/DVD, and reading English books were done by the largest number of the respondents as a way of learning English language and culture. Studying with a foreign tutor was another way of improving their English abilities.

26.5 % of the respondents participated in after school activities and they replied that those activities were helpful for them to learn English language and culture a lot (30%), a little (40%), and not so much (30%). After school activities included taking piano lesson, swimming, attending English language classes, and participating in after school care program where they spent their time mostly playing with other children and doing their homework with some help from the program staff.

**TABLE 15**  
**Effects of Studying in Australia on English Language Acquisition**

Question Items	Scales (%)		
	Very much	A little	Not so much
My English speaking ability was improved.	79.4	14.7	5.9
My English listening ability was improved.	88.2	11.8	0
My English reading ability was improved.	73.5	26.5	0
My English writing ability was improved.	88.2	11.8	0
My cultural understanding was improved.	52.9	35.3	8.8

Table 15 shows that after studying and living in Australia, most of the students



thought their English abilities had been improved, particularly in listening and writing. Their understanding of Australian culture, however, was not thought to be improved as much as their English language abilities.

Table 16 summarizes the children's thoughts on learning English.

**TABLE 16**  
**Thoughts on Learning English**

Question Items	Yes (%)	No (%)
We should study English harder before we come to Australia.	85.2	14.8
We should come earlier, at younger age.	40.0	60.0
We should come to English-speaking countries like Australia.	75.9	24.1
If we study hard, we can learn English in Korea as well as in Australia.	79.2	20.8

It was found that many children thought that better English preparation is needed prior to their departure. More children thought that it is a must to come to an English-speaking country in order to learn English but they did not agree that they should come earlier. They also showed that what affects their English learning is how hard they study, not where they study.

As shown in Table 17, it was found that 47.1% of the children thought that as a result of living and studying in Australia, they became very different from people in Korea and more similar to Australian people in terms of their language skills, culture, and their way of thinking, whereas 41.2% said they became a little different but still more similar to Korean people in Korea. 11.8% replied that they have not changed much and so they were about the same as the Korean people in Korea.

**TABLE 17**  
**The Effects of Studying and Living in Australia on Language and Cultural Identity**

Question Items	%
<i>My studying and living in Australia have made my language skill, culture, and way of thinking become</i>	
very different from people in Korea and more similar to Australian people.	47.1
a little different from people in Korea.	41.2
not so much different from people in Korea.	11.8

Finally, Table 18 reveals that 97.1% thought that their learning experience in Australia would be very much useful and beneficial when they returned to Korea and 2.9% said it would be only a little beneficial. None of them denied the usefulness and benefits of the experiences they had in Australia for their life back in Korea.

**TABLE 18**  
**The Usefulness of Australian Experiences for Life Back in Korea**

Question Items	%
<i>When I return to Korea, what I have learned in Australia will be good and beneficial.</i>	
Very much	97.2
A little	2.9
Not so much	0.0

## V. DISCUSSIONS

### 1. Home and Social Life in Australia

The results indicated that the Korean subjects in this study mostly lived with their mothers, parents, and Korean homestay hosts, or at the school dorm. They attended Korean church and their family associated with other Koreans more frequently than with foreigners. They spoke Korean mostly at home and church, and English at school. Although they had difficulties with communicating in English, homesickness, foods, weather, insects, and discrimination, the Korean children were mostly satisfied with their life in Australia. Living with their own family and attending Korean church seemed to help the Korean children feel safe and stable studying and living in Australia. It also seemed to result in a high degree of satisfaction with their life in Australia overall. In this regard, speaking Korean language and practicing Korean culture is not necessarily a debilitating factor for learning English but is a facilitating factor as it provides them with a sense of being connected with other people and psychological security.

Problems can occur, however, when they interact exclusively with other Koreans, without taking any risks such as talking to native speakers or any other intercultural experiences. The students reported that they did not socialize with foreign friends outside of school very frequently, even though they said they had more foreign friends than Korean friends. It seems to lie in the two facts: First, most of the schools in Brisbane have only a small number of Korean students in each class, which makes the

Korean children interact and make friends with foreign classmates more frequently than other Korean children; Second and more importantly, social events and activities for children in Australia involves lots of procedure and arrangements to be made through much communication among the participants, which requires higher level of English abilities and cultural understanding. More often than not, some financial resources are also required. Those children and their parents who do not have them cannot get access to these opportunities. Unless they are determined to overcome this difficulty by confronting the possibly uncomfortable and embarrassing situations, they end up with being stuck with other Korean people, which eventually will not enable them to achieve their goal, hampering their growth in English proficiency and cross-cultural experiences. Further, it should be noted that this is how groups and networks are formed and built, with information and support being shared and exchanged among the same socio-economic or educational class. This example illustrates how an 'English divide' can be formed among the Korean people in Australia.

## 2. School Life in Australia

The Korean children's school life in Australia has some significant features. According to the subjects, the international college they attended before they transferred to a primary school did not fully prepare them to get adjusted to a mainstream class. Easy and low level preparatory programs can help the learners have successful learning experience and stimulate them for further studies. However, the big gap in the curriculum level and contents between the preparatory program and the regular class in the primary school can cause them frustration and confusion. The issues of continuity between the two programs should be examined in order to set proper level of educational goal and instructional methods. The ESL classes in a primary school were thought to be alright but the withdrawal type of ESL classes was considered as not very effective both for the children's language acquisition and their affective development. The children thought being pulled out from their mainstream class and putting into an 'international group' humiliated them and kept them away from their native English-speaking classmates. More integrated ESL classes need to be implemented and more effective teaching and learning methods for these classes should be developed.

The Korean children favored teachers and schools in Australia because of their friendliness and a diverse fun events and activities, whereas they named corporal punishment and heavy study load as the worst things of the Korean school life. They did not have many difficulties with interacting with students and teachers. However, they did have difficulties with understanding classes conducted all in English and participating actively in the class activities such as school debate. These difficulties seem to be

attributed to three different factors: First, as suggested in Saville-Troike (1984), their low English proficiency level is a major problem but more importantly, their academic English abilities. She stated that “social language skills is a desirable but insufficient goal for English teaching” (p. 217) and suggested placing more emphasis on vocabulary learning and less on grammar and pronunciation for academic success. Primary English education in Korea focuses on basic interpersonal communication but not much on cognitive-academic language ability, which may result in the problem the Korean students abroad are suffering now and those in Korea will suffer sooner or later; Second, difficulties are due to Korean students’ lack of understanding of Australian classroom culture. Ballard and Clanchy (1984) claimed that “an unexpected but very important problem [students meet when they go abroad to study] is the need to change habits of thinking, studying and learning to suit the demands of the foreign education system” (p. 7). Korean children’s lack of training to develop critical thinking can be a possible influencing factor as well; Last, as Choi (1997) pointed out, problems are due to “their Australian teachers’ and peers’ lack of understanding of these difficulties the Korean children have in the educational context” (p. 279). When some difficulties occurred, many of them sought out help from others, mostly from teachers during the class, whereas some of them just ignored them in order to avoid embarrassment or to save their face. Australian teachers should be able to identify the problems and difficulties that their foreign students express verbally and non-verbally, and to provide them with proper assistance and encouragement.

### 3. English Language Acquisition and Cultural Adaptation

The results showed that the Korean children used Korean names at home and English names at school mostly. For those who used their Korean names at school, keeping Korean name was supposed to show their pride in their identity but often it brought in frustrations and humiliations when their names were mispronounced or they were not called on at all by their Australian teachers or peers. Some reported that their schools required them to have an English name and even without such regulation, Australian teachers’ lack of understanding or support for keeping their Korean ethnic name was considered as an implicit force to change their name into an English name.

In order to learn English language and culture in Australia, they made efforts in a diverse way, participating in different programs to improve their skills and abilities of languages, sports, and music. It should be noted that all these extracurricular activities are available to only those who can get access to the information and afford them financially. As mentioned earlier, the level of information resources and finance of the

family also seems to serve for forming and building networks and eventually creating an 'English divide' among the Korean people in Australia.

It was found out that their English listening and writing abilities were improved most, followed by speaking, reading and cultural understanding after studying in Australia, whereas they reported that they were most confident in reading skill. The reason why their cultural understanding was not improved as much as their language skills seems to lie in the fact that their home and social life was dominantly dependent on other Koreans. Most of the subjects' families seemed to associate with other Korean people more frequently than with foreigners by attending Korean church and doing social activities with other Koreans. It was also observed that those children whose parents have a higher level of English and financial abilities have the more active social network with foreign friends. A balance should be stricken between securing mental safety by associating with people who share the same language and cultural background and acquiring the target culture by exploring new relationship with a diverse language and cultural group.

Many children thought that English should be studied harder prior to coming to Australia and it is good to come to an English-speaking country in order to learn English. They also thought, however, that they can learn English anywhere even in Korea if only they work hard. They perceived that their English language and culture acquisition in Australia changed their linguistic and cultural identity more or less. They also believed that their learning experience in Australia is valuable and useful for their studies back in Korea. However, some students who stayed in Australia for longer years expressed their fears and concerns with returning home and particularly to Korean schools, where they expect to have a lot of stress and pressure from their peer, study load, and their parents' expectation for their success in school and career. These students need re-adjustment education program and support system which provide them with information on the current issues and concerns in Korean schools and society, and how to deal with them.

## **VI. CONCLUSIONS AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS**

The present study has explored Korean children's perception of their English language acquisition and cultural adaptation in Australia. It has been discussed in the areas of (1) home and social life; (2) school life; and (3) English language acquisition and cultural adaptation. The difficulties identified by Korean primary school children in Australia are mostly similar to those mentioned in the studies on the overseas students (Armitage, 1999; Burke, 1989; Choi, 1997; Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET), 1987; Radford et al., 1984), including communicating in English, cultural differences, and homesickness. They seem to be attributed to their lack of English

communicative competence, not only the interpersonal language skill but also academic proficiency, and lack of understanding of Australian school culture. Australian teachers' and peers' lack of understanding of Korean students and their culture also resulted in the difficulties the Korean children have. There are a few differences such as difficulties with foods, weather, insects, which may result from the fact that the subjects of this study are much younger than those of other studies.

The findings of this study have the following pedagogical implications for educators both in Australia and Korea:

First, living with their Korean family was found out to be a key factor of Korean children's high degree of satisfaction with their life in Australia. Young children should not be sent to a foreign country by themselves. Being thrown to a linguistically and culturally unfamiliar place alone can jeopardize their physical and mental health as much as their academic achievement. In case of those children living without their family in a foreign country, a systematic care should be given by Korean guardians or institutions such as churches. Otherwise, the children's life can turn out to be very dismal as shown in Lee (2005).

Second, international colleges or English preparatory programs in Australia were perceived to be too easy for some Korean children. Therefore, the continuity of the educational level should be carefully examined and adjusted for their smooth transition from the preparatory program into the mainstream educational programs in Australian schools.

Third, in order to enhance Korean children's understanding of Australian school culture and contexts, international colleges or ESL classes in primary schools need to incorporate the cultural component to teach Korean children. Further, teachers and administrators in Australian schools need to understand Korean students' behaviors inside and outside of the classroom and the underpinning Korean culture, in order to facilitate their successful school life in Australia.

Fourth, pre-departure and on-site preparation is very important. The difficulties the children reported that they had can be more or less alleviated by having pre-knowledge and proper preparation. Good study habits and strategies along with appropriate level of English proficiency for communication in both social and academic settings should be equipped prior to and during their study in foreign countries. The parents or guardians' English proficiency and cross-cultural understanding also seem to be one of the most influencing factors of the children's success in studying and living abroad, providing them with psychological safety as well as practical assistance needed for both their school work and their social life.

Fifth, Korean children use their English name mostly for the purpose of accommodating foreigners including their Australian teachers and peers. Some schools

were even found out to require the children to have an English name. It can be said that they deprive the children's right to keep their original identity for the sake of someone else's convenience. As much as the Korean children need to learn and appreciate Australian culture, the Australian school and society should learn and appreciate Korean culture. Such a practice as requiring foreign students to have an English name should not be implicitly or explicitly forced.

Sixth, useful and efficient support system and educational programs need to be developed in Korea for those returnee students and their Korean teachers in the following areas: (1) Proper tests and evaluation tools should be developed in order to assess their Korean-English language proficiency and academic level, and to place them in an appropriate grade; (2) The discrepancy between the level and the contents of curriculum in two countries should be examined and necessary help should be given for the children to be re-adjusted to Korean school setting; (3) Programs and support systems should be able to minimize their reverse culture shock and maximize their study and life experience in Australia for facilitating their studies in Korean school; (4) Proper teacher education programs also need to be developed and implemented in order for them to serve professionally in the areas of testing, teaching, and supporting these students.

Last, as Choi (1997) suggested, educational and support strategies and programs discussed above should be directed and offered by all the individuals and institutions involved with these students' education both in Australia and Korea.

This study has limitations in terms of the number and characteristics of the informants. The results of this study may not be applied to those Korean children who do not live with their family or do not attend the Korean church, let alone to those in different parts of Australia and in other foreign countries. I hope this study serve as a basis for further studies to probe into a better understanding of children's foreign language acquisition and cultural adaptation in general and of Korean children in particular. Also, I hope this research help educators and administrators both in Korea and Australia to better understand each other and educate Korean students more effectively and successfully.

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**Examples in: English**

**Applicable Languages: English**

**Applicable Levels: Elementary**

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