

Foreign student life experience in Korea after COVID-19

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Abstract

This study was a phenomenological qualitative research that analyzed the experiences of Korean students studying in Korea after the COVID-19 incident. Participants in this study consisted of 22 international students aged 20 to 40 attending the International Exchange Center at C University. The interview period was from September 10, 2020 to October 10, 2020. Giogi qualitative research method was used to analyze vivid experiences of international students. As a result of the analysis, 26 semantic units, 7 subcomponents were derived. The description of the general structure sentence of phenomenology was a description of the meaning of experience from the perspective of participants, and the context and structure descriptions were integrated. The results of this study showed that: The students who came to Korea to study were concerned about Korea in various ways, but they had to adjust to unexpected changes in education methods, anxious about the unexpected COVID-19 disaster. Participants chose to study in Korea based on existing information, so they felt anxiety, regret, fear, and frustration over sudden changes, but taking online classes helped them learn repeatedly and voluntarily became an experience that suited their learning speed. As commuting time has decreased, they were more opportunities to make money in Korea also. Based on the results of this study, the following is suggested: First, the government should establish systematic online infection prevention measures for international students who have poor Korean language skills in preparation for unexpected disasters. Second, non-face-to-face teaching methods should be prepared with the same weight in the face-to-face teaching methods that have been carried out so far in preparation for unexpected disasters.

Keywords: An international student in Korea, Experience change after COVID-19, Phenomenological research.

1. INTRODUCTION

Recently, Korean universities have been striving to improve their competitiveness through internationalization, which has been closely related to the government's policy to attract foreign students, as well as to increase interest in studying in Korea due to the "Korean Wave," including Korea's economic growth in the early 2000s and the improvement of its international image [1]. According to the Ministry of Education, the number of foreign students who entered the country increased 12.6% (17,960) year-on-year to 160,165 as of April 2019, nearly doubling from 84,891 in 2014 [2]. However, according to the results of the '2020 Education Basic Statistics' survey released by the Ministry of Education and the Korea Educational Development Institute, a total of 153,695 foreign students from Korea's higher education institutions this year,

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down 6,470 (4%) from the previous year. The ratio of foreign students in each country is 43.6% (67,030 students) of the total number of Chinese students studying abroad, next came Vietnam with 24.9% (38,337), Mongolia with 4.5% (6,842), Japan with 2.1% (3,174), and the United States with 1.2% (1,827), mainly Asian countries with high rates of international students [1]. Another reason for the decline was the fact that the number of foreign students studying abroad, which had been on the rise, reached 800,000 this year due to the spread of anti-Chinese sentiment with Corona 19 [3]. It seems that it was not easy to cross the border due to the global trend of COVID-19, and the government also encouraged foreign students not to enter Korea after the first COVID-19 was reported in Wuhan on January 20, 2020. It can be predicted that overseas students who have already entered Korea will experience a variety of different difficulties than before.

So far, the first reason Chinese students chose to study in Korea is that they chose to study in Korea as their next choice because it is difficult to enter prestigious universities in their own countries. In other words, studying in Korea is not a shift as a global elite, but rather a second chance to supplement the failure of admission in the country with a foreign degree. The motivation for studying in Korea is closely related to the socio-cultural environment in Asia, where the enthusiasm for education is high and universities are ranking. In particular, China and Vietnam are known to be very competitive in entering universities due to their high enthusiasm for education among Asian countries. Therefore, it can be seen that the decision to study in Korea was made as a strategic choice to supplement it through a "foreign degree" in the event of a setback in entering a university in the country or difficulty in entering a prestigious university that one wants. The second reason for studying in Korea tended to mean a kind of 'foreign life and cultural experience' in addition to obtaining a degree. In other words, it can be seen that it is largely meant as an opportunity for cultural contact to experience various international cultures firsthand. The third reason for studying in Korea was that studying in Korea was not their final option, but rather a stop-and-go nature, which was meant as a stage of global migration. In other words, some people want to get a job in their home country after finishing a degree in Korea, but they have plans to study in Europe or the United States. The future career plan for these students is that they dream of moving to another society by taking Korea as a stepping stone, not a final and decisive place to study abroad [1]. In the case of Vietnamese students studying abroad, the motivation for studying abroad was personal interest due to the influence of the Korean Wave, career development for successful employment in their home country with Korean diplomas, and social reasons influenced by their parents, teachers, and friends. According to the study on university life adaptation of Korean students with Chinese nationality [4], the index of international student life adaptation is relatively high, followed by emotional and cultural adaptation and social adaptation. Of course, students in northern China report that students in the southern part of China have a higher adaptive index than those in the southern part of the country, although the longer period of studying abroad has a higher index of adaptation. As such, the level of adaptation varies depending on local cultural characteristics in the same country, so it can be predicted that there will be more unique characteristics in different countries. In addition, communication problems experienced in other countries are sufficiently predictable and can lead to conflicts over poor communication problems, with studies by HY Min and others raising the issue that most universities show a negative perception of the internationalization of universities [5], focusing on the lack of communication and conflict between Korean university and foreign students.

Universities are making various efforts to improve their competitiveness through internationalization, but such conflicts between cultures and communication are something to be considered in depth. Furthermore, as the recent COVID-19 disaster has brought about potential emotional problems among countries, the educational environment of universities is introducing new teaching methods such as infection prevention and non-face-to-face classes, it is urgent to take preemptive measures to solve the problem. Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to carry out qualitative research to address the existing problems of international students and the additional educational environment. What motivated international students to choose Korea as a country they want to study in, who influenced their decision to study in Korea, what will they do after studying in Korea, what is the difference in their daily lives studying in Korea that has changed to COVID-19, and what changes are face-to-face classes and non-face-to-face classes?

2. METHODS

2.1 Participants

Most of the foreign students surveyed were 22 students who completed language training at their school for more than a year and enrolled in the main course. Some of them were recognized for their language skills, so they were admitted directly from other universities or overseas without going through the Korean language center of their school. Students who responded to the survey were students who lived in Korea for more than a year, and some students took a semester off in 2020 or attended online classes in their home country because they had no visa problems. Non-probability samples were used to find participants who could provide a lot of insight into the phenomenon in the selection of study participants [6]. In other words, cases of students aged 20 to 40 attending the International Exchange Center of C University were selected to explore specific aspects of the phenomenon in detail, and people who could actively participate in interviews were selected to select people who would provide a lot of information on the subject. The specific criteria of the participants in this study were as follows: First, participants in the study selected students from various countries, including Uzbekistan, China, Vietnam, and others, as participants in the study. Second, various research participants were organized to fully reveal their thoughts on their experiences in studying in Korea based on prior studies such as motivation for deciding to study in Korea, those who influenced their decision to study in Korea, plans after graduating from Korean universities [1], and living in Korea turned into COVID-19, face-to-face classes, non-face-to-face classes, and their own changes. Third, after explaining the purpose of the research on this study, it was limited to those who could understand it and actively speak frankly about their life experiences. Fourth, through this research process, it was selected as a participant who was confirmed to have a belief that this study was helpful for growth in the participants' life journey. Fifth, this study was conducted on 20-40-year-old Korean students who promised to write abbreviations for things that might be difficult because of the disclosure of their personal lives, and expressed their willingness to participate in the study. The participants' demographic characteristics of the participants in this study are as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants' Characteristics

No	Gender	Age	Nationality	YOSA	Major	Type
1	Male	24	Uzbekistan	3	International culture	Undergraduate
2	Male	23	China	2	Korean Language	Undergraduate
3	Male	20	China	1	Korean Language	Undergraduate
4	Male	21	China	2	Korean Language	Undergraduate
5	Female	24	China	2	Korean Language	Undergraduate
6	Female	23	China	2	International study	Undergraduate
7	Female	22	China	3 & half	International study	Undergraduate
8	Male	20	China	1	Korean Language	Undergraduate
9	Male	22	Vietnam	1	Korean Language	Undergraduate
10	Male	28	Vietnam	3	International study	Undergraduate
11	Female	20	Kazakhstan	3	Management	Undergraduate
12	Female	23	Indonesia	3 & half	Medicine management	Undergraduate
13	Female	28	Vietnam	7	International culture	Graduate
14	Female	26	Vietnam	7	International culture	Graduate
15	Female	20	China	1	International study	Undergraduate

16	Male	23	China	2	International study	Undergraduate
17	Female	23	China	1	International study	Undergraduate
18	Female	22	China	1	International study	Undergraduate
19	Female	21	China	1	International study	Undergraduate
20	Male	22	Uzbekistan	3	International study	Undergraduate
21	Female	37	Kazakhstan	2	International culture	Graduate
22	Female	25	China	4	International culture	Graduate

YOSA : Year of Study abroad

2.2 Data Collection

For the preparation and process of the interview conducted in this study, the researchers planned the research plan by referring to the research papers on how international students think about their lives, asked for the cooperation of professors who have worked as professors at the International Exchange Center of C University for more than 10 years, and interviewed students who are currently studying in Korea by revealing their voluntary participation in the research. The process of filling out the interview questionnaire used for the interview in this study is as follows. The motivation for deciding to study in Korea[7-9], the person who influenced the decision to study in Korea[10,11], the plan to study in Korea[12-13] after studying in Korea[14], the face-to-face classes, the non-face-to-face classes, and his/her own changes[15-16], and the open in-depth interviews consist of three consecutive structures: 'the factors determining study abroad', 'the experience that influenced his/her life', and 'the meaning of experience'[17]. The interviews were conducted three times for each participant from September 10, 2020 to October 10, 2020 and it took an average of more than three hours per session, and all of the interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants. The interview process centered on semi-structured questionnaires made by researchers. After the first and second interviews, it was confirmed that there was no difference from what was stated to the study participants, and any insufficient or questionable questions were confirmed and supplemented through additional questions. In addition, a research journal was prepared that included on-site notes that recorded the human characteristics of study participants, feelings of verbal and non-verbal expressions and behaviors observed during interviews, what researchers should be aware of, and data needed for analysis.

2.3. Data Analysis

Giorgi's method of research consists of 'total recognition', 'identification of units of significance', 'transformation into academic terms of significance' and 'integration into structure'. Accordingly, this study conducted the following analyses in context: 1. In order to get the feeling from the data, the subject's technique was read over and over again. 2. The ambiguous part of the technical statement asked the participant again to confirm the exact meaning. 3. A unit of technology expressing participants' own experiences was identified, literally, in terms of the same meaning, although the expression form or vocabulary were different. 4. The themes that represent the vivid experience of participants at each unit have been identified. 5. The central meaning of the subject's experience was identified in the researcher's language to clarify the subject. 6. The central meaning was integrated into a situated structural description of the meaning of the experience from the perspective of the participants. 7. Context and structural technical statements are integrated to create a general structural description of the experience from the perspective of the entire participant.

As above, the data collection and analysis process were conducted at the same time, underlining the areas where the meaning of the research participants' experience is well revealed, and asking questions again where there are different technical contents between the meanings of the experiences.

This process was repeated to derive semantic units. As a result, 132 semantic units were derived from 22 study participants. The components were derived based on these semantic units and the correlations between the different components were analyzed and incorporated into the structure of experience, except for the units that were duplicated or deviated from the structure. As a result, the experience of studying in Korea after the COVID-19 disaster was integrated into a structure consisting of seven components and 32 subcomponents. In the process of analyzing these data, the researchers repeated the process of returning to raw data and verifying and supplementing the process of deriving semantic units at each analysis with a phenomenological reduction posture. For this study, the researchers of this study prepared their ability as a phenomenological researcher by participating in workshops related to qualitative research and prepared the foundation for qualitative research through a doctoral thesis in content analysis. In addition, when it was necessary to increase the validity of the statement during the data analysis process, the study participants were asked again to confirm that the interpretation was correct, the relationship between the components was confirmed with the participants, and the process work was shared. Furthermore, two nursing professors who received PhDs through qualitative research were requested for re-analysis to ensure the validity of the analysis.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Foreign student life experience in Korea after COVID-19

Following the Corona 19 incident derived in accordance with Giorgi's phenomenological analysis procedure, the meaning of foreign student life in Korea consists of seven components and 32 subcomponents (Table 2). The description of the general structure sentence of phenomenology is a description of the meaning of experience from the perspective of participants, and the context and structure descriptions are integrated. The results of this study showed that: The students who came to Korea to study were concerned about Korea in various ways, but they were anxious about the unexpected COVID-19 disaster, and had to adapt to the changes in the unexpected way of teaching. Participants were feeling anxious because they were not studying in Korea based on existing information, and felt regret, fear, and frustration about unfamiliar situations, but having online classes helped them learn repeatedly and became an experience to meet the speed of learning autonomously. Especially, as the time to commute to school decreased, there were more opportunities to make money in Korea.

Table 2. Foreign student life experience in Korea after COVID-19

Situational and Structural Descriptions	Components (7)	Semantic Units (26)
Decided to study abroad as an advantage of studying in Korea	Good information about Korea	Opportunity Advantage to get a job A wide-sighted opportunity
	A good feeling about Korea culture	Helping in developed future Experienced opinion A good feeling about life in Korea
	Ensuring a better future from learning Korean	Guide employment Want to do international trade Graduate school entrance

		Want to be an interpreter
		Want to get a job at an airline
		Hope to open an exchange beauty salon in Korea
Instability arising from unexpected disasters.	Concern with COVID-19	Hoping to get a job at a Korean company
	Unexpected change due to COVID-19	Regret, Fear, boredom, giving up Not familiar, Frustration Worry
differences in adaptation to unexpected changes in teaching methods	Adaptation to changes in learning style	Out of focus, Repetitive learning, Less risk of catching COVID-19, Can adjust class speed
	Difficulties caused by a change in the way classes were expected	Adjustable time, Efficient, Challenges Burdened, boredom, Wake up late, Less effective class, Unable to talk to friends

3.2 Typical descriptions

3.2.1. Motivation for deciding to study in Korea

I think students who studied abroad had many job opportunities.

I think it is simple to get a job after studying in Korea.

I think studying in Korea will improve my educational background and develop more than now.

I want to do international trade after graduation.

I think Korean is good for future hobbies and jobs.

I had a good feeling about Korean culture through dramas and so on.

3.2.2. A plan after studying abroad

I'd like to get a job as a guide who can use Korean.

I hope to go to graduate school.

I want to do international trade.

I want to be a Korean teacher.

I want to be an interpreter.

I hope to get a job in a Korean company.

I hope to get a job in marketing related to Korea.

I'd like to get a job at an airline.

I hope to open an exchange beauty salon in Korea.

3.2.3. Post COVID-19 change

I often stay at home.

I'm sorry I can't go home.

*I'm afraid I'm not going out.
I'm also having a meal ordered.
It's free.
I can't get used to it.
I hope the previous class will recover.
I gave up traveling.
Everything became uncomfortable.
School activities are gone.
I'm worried there might be a lot of people with corona.*

3.2.4. Thinking about non-face-to-face classes

*Face-to-face classes are better, non-face-to-face classes can't concentrate
Being able to take online classes again is an advantage.
I think it's freer and more efficient.
Face-to-face classes are too fast.
Non-face-to-face classes are very convenient and can be taken in my free time depending on my situation.
I was able to improve my understanding through repetitive learning.
I can adjust the speed of the class depending on the situation.
There is no need to wake up early in the morning.
I have a lot of assignments.
I can't even talk to my friends.
I'm dissatisfied with all the classes I've taken before.*

4. Conclusion

In terms of university competitiveness, Korean universities have made great efforts to attract foreign students.

As a result, the number of international students increased rapidly, but the recent COVID-19 disaster in China prevented international students from entering the country as a precaution against infection. The university had been preparing for the arrival of international students as scheduled, but the sharp decline in international students also dealt a heavy economic blow, but the bigger problem is that face-to-face classes have become difficult. Universities, which have been conducting face-to-face classes, were not only unprepared for non-face-to-face classes but also worried about how to conduct non-face-to-face classes for international students who have poor language skills. Also, students who came to Korea came here relying on a lot of information about Korea, and figuring out how they experience life in Korea, which is different from existing information, has become an urgent task for universities to accommodate them. Thus, the researchers started the study to analyze the vivid experiences of international students who came to Korea. According to an analysis using the Giorgi phenomenology method to analyze the vivid experiences of experienced people, most of the Korean students were from Asian countries. Most of them came to secure a better future by learning Korean. Also, by studying in Korea, it was for the purpose of making money during non-school hours. This information relied on the experiences of people who had studied in Korea before or had experience in Korea in their families, but the recent unexpected COVID-19 disaster brought a new welcome to the Korean experience. COVID-19 was a major change in isolation at home due to infectious diseases, and taking non-face-to-face classes for international students was another major change. They wanted to come to other cultures to experience Korean culture, but it was difficult to travel freely, and they could see that infectious diseases experienced in other countries other than their home countries were a major source of anxiety. However, the university did not seem to have done anything to reduce their anxiety about infectious diseases. However, it seems that they tried to prevent infection as much as possible by conducting online classes to prevent infection. However, there was a part of the online class that was held suddenly and repeated the previous class. However, most international

students do not excel in Korean, so they also prefer the effects of repetitive learning. In addition, due to the characteristics of students studying in underdeveloped countries, online classes served as an opportunity to earn money by saving time commuting to and from school.

Based on the results of this study, we would like to propose the following: First, the government should establish systematic online infection prevention measures for international students who have poor Korean language skills in preparation for unexpected disasters. Second, non-face-to-face teaching methods should be prepared with the same weight in the face-to-face teaching methods that have been carried out so far in preparation for unexpected disasters.

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