Exploring Korean Early Study Abroad Students' Perceptions on Their Experiences During Their Adaptation Period in the United States

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ABSTRACT

Korea’s intense quest for globalization, combined with rapid growth in economic development, has caused the number of young students (secondary school age and younger) leaving Korea for overseas study to rise steadily in recent years. This phenomenon of young Korean students studying overseas is termed jogi yuhak, which can be directly translated as Early Study Abroad (ESA). The phenomenon of ESA has stirred both interests and concerns to Korean society for more than a decade. At the same time, American schools are beginning to see more of these ESA students in their classrooms, as a result of the United States being the preferred destination country for more than one-third of the ESA students in Korea. Although the growing presence of ESA students in school classrooms has begun to attract increasing attention from educators and researchers in the United States, there are no clear statistics investigating the numbers of ESA students in the United States, and that most school officials are even unaware of the trend. The qualitative phenomenological study was used to explore the lived experiences of Korean ESA students in the United States in relation to their adaption to their new environment, as well as the factors that they perceive to help or challenge them in attaining successful adaption. Ten Korean Early Study Abroad (KESA) students attending schools in the Washington Metropolitan region were recruited for this study, and face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather information regarding experiences and perceptions of KESA students in the United
Findings show that most KESA students feel that having friends, participating in extracurricular activities and maintaining contacts with their families and friends in Korea using social media and instant messaging helped them as they made the transition into American culture. Students also indicated that the language barrier, being away from family, not owning a car, difficulty keeping in touch with old friends, cultural differences and racism are the most serious challenges for them during their adaptation period. This research documents the unique challenges faced by KESA students and provide a helpful guideline for counselors and educators working with ESA students from Korea, as well as indicate the directions that should be pursued by further research.
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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

The rapid increase in young Korean Early Study Abroad (KESA) students in recent years and the growing presence of these KESA students in American school classrooms, added to the lack of information about these students, created the need for this research study to explore the experiences of KESA students through their own voices. Ten KESA students from the Washington Metropolitan region were recruited and interviewed to provide insights regarding their experiences and perceptions of their life in the United States. According to the results, most KESA students feel that having friends, participating in extracurricular activities and maintaining contacts with their families and friends in Korea using social media and instant messaging helped them during their adaptation period, whereas they claimed the language barrier, being away from family, not owning a car, difficulty keeping in touch with old friends, cultural differences and racism as the most serious challenges. This research sheds light on KESA students’ experiences and yields a valuable guideline for counselors and educators in the United States when working with ESA students from Korea.
Dedication

I dedicate this work to my loving wife, Janet, my four beloved children, Tiffany, Peter, Hannah, and Joanna, my mom and dad, my parents-in-laws, and most importantly, to all my past and current students who have been the biggest source of motivation and passion in my life.
Acknowledgement

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Last but not least, I would like to thank all my past and current students for being the source of my passion and love in my life. In return, I hope and pray that my work gives them motivation, and supports their own hopes that they too can persevere and reach their dreams one day.
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Chapter One: Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore Korean Early Study Abroad (KESA) students’ perception of their experiences of living in a foreign country without their parents’ accompaniment. Specifically, the purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of KESA students in the United States in relation to their adaptation to their new environment, as well as the factors that they perceive to help or challenge them in attaining successful adaptation to a new environment. The outcome of this study is expected to provide new insights and knowledge for counseling professionals, whose direct encounters with KESA students have been increasing in recent years. The research design for this study was a qualitative phenomenology to illustrate the phenomenon under examination. The focus of the study was on the experiences of KESA students. These students are living in the Washington Metropolitan area and attending a private day school. At the time of this study, the students in this group are those studying in grades 9 to 12 of secondary school.

This chapter contains an overview of the background and the context that frames the study, as well as the problem statement, the statement of purpose, and the accompanying research questions, followed by the research approach and the researcher’s assumptions. The chapter also includes a discussion of the rationale and significance of the study and definitions of the key terminology used.

Background and Context

Korea’s intense quest for globalization, combined with rapid growth in economic development, has caused the number of young students (secondary school age and younger) leaving Korea for overseas study to rise steadily in recent years (National Youth
Policy Institute, 2009). This phenomenon of young Korean students studying overseas is termed *jogi yuhak*, which can be directly translated as Early Study Abroad. The phenomenon of ESA has stirred both interests and concerns to Korean society for more than a decade (Cho, 2006; Korean Educational Development Institute, 2006). At the same time, schools in the United States are beginning to see more of these ESA students in their classrooms, as a result of the United States being the preferred destination country for more than one-third of KESA students (Ministry of Education & Human Resources Development, 2006). Although the growing presence of ESA students in school classrooms has begun to attract increasing attention from educators and researchers in the United States, Ly (2008) claims that there are no clear statistics investigating the numbers of ESA students in the United States, and that most school officials are even unaware of the trend.

One of the more obvious concerns for these young students, as they are forced to acculturate themselves to the new culture without parental support, is their psychological and social well-being. According to Sumie Okazaki, an associate professor of applied psychology at New York University, high levels of depression, distress, and worry have been reported about these students (Zagier, 2012). One study reported alarming issues of these ESA students’ delays in psychosocial and academic development (Park, 2007). Such studies indicated that young ESA students go through high levels of distress and anxiety during the acculturation process (Chung, 1994; Park, 2007). After performing studies on ESA students from different Asian countries, Tsong & Liu (2009) expressed concerns over ESA students feeling lonely and homesick, often combined with a sense of accelerated independence, which may put these children at risk of addictions (i.e.,
substance abuse and gambling), and of developing depression and antisocial behaviors. Ly (2008) interviewed a KESA student who has been studying abroad since age 14. During the interview, the student admitted that he went through rough times, crying at times in a school office because of the language barrier and his feelings of loneliness. The student also indicated that there were others who had more difficult problems. In the same article, Sunny Jeong, director of the Korean Cultural Center on the campus of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, acknowledges that KESA students go through experiences of culture shock, and they are not really cared for by the educational system in the United States. Jeong also points out that KESA students suffer from depression and go through instances when they do not feel that they belong to any social group (Ly, 2008). Overall, the instance of various forms of distress accompanying the period of acculturation seems to be commonly identified among ESA students, indicating a general pattern.

ESA students’ journey as they adapt to their new cultural surroundings can be challenging academically, socially, and emotionally. These challenges can present themselves both in and outside of school. As previously mentioned, several studies have been conducted to understand the possible challenges faced by ESA students (Ly, 2008; Sun, 2014). However, as Ly (2008) pointed out, these studies have generally not yet resulted in the implementation of systematic support in the United States to facilitate these ESA students’ successful adaptation to the new environment.

It appears that many young ESA students have a sense of being thrown into the new surroundings with only a vague understanding or expectation of the acculturation process, meaning they are not fully prepared for the complexity of the challenges of
adapting to the new culture. In particular, they lack familiarity with the educational system in the United States, and are unprepared for the need to suddenly adapt (Ly, 2008; Sun, 2014; Tsong & Liu 2009). Both parents of ESA students and the ESA students themselves frequently lack the necessary knowledge and information for a safe and successful ESA experience (Sun, 2014). As a result, the risk of challenges and problems facing the young children continues to increase, in parallel with the popularity of ESA. Though one can speculate what kind of knowledge, information, and preparation would be necessary for enriching the ESA students’ experiences, few studies provide perspectives regarding what it takes to help these young ESA students’ experiences to be more positive, stable, and healthy and to mitigate their risk of academic and social challenges such as depression, loneliness, and antisocial behaviors. Therefore, this study seeks to shed light on the lived experiences of KESA students as they make adjustments to the new environment, as well as to determine the factors that they perceive to be helpful or challenging in their experiences. It is this problem that this study seeks to address.

Problem Statement

Previous researchers indicate that there is a significant concern for ESA students’ emotional and social well-being as they go through the adaptation process in a foreign country without accompaniment of their parents. Hence, despite students’ initial ambition and hopes of successfully adjusting to their new surroundings, and despite their significant investment in time and money, these children may continue to experience challenges emotionally, socially, and academically. Contrary to these concerns for ESA students’ existing challenges, there is little information as to what factors are necessary to
help ESA children, specifically KESA students, overcome these challenges and risks, and complete their studies as healthy and stable study abroad participants.

**Statement of Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the lived experiences of KESA students in the United States in relation to their adaptation to their new environment, as well as the factors that they perceive to help or challenge them in the process of adaptation to the new environment. The researcher will focus on ten KESA students. Researchers have shown that 10 to 20 participants are usually enough to reach data saturation point (Mason, 2010). Through having a better understanding of how ESA students perceive their lived experiences, of what they see as the main contributors of their emotional, social, and academic hardships, and of what factors, based on their lived experiences, were helpful and not helpful in their adaptation to their new environment, it is anticipated that more informed and practical decisions can be made by prospective and current KESA students and by their parents before and during their stays. In addition, schools in the United States can be better informed about the possibilities for providing adequate support to these young children, in order to enhance their chances of having more positive and stable experiences.

To provide insights into the problem, the overarching research question of the study is: what are the perceptions of KESA students about their experiences of adjusting to a new environment? Based on this overarching research question, the following specific research questions will be addressed:

1. What factors do children perceive to be helpful when they are adjusting to a new environment as KESA students in the United States?
2. What factors do children perceive to be challenges when they are adjusting to a new environment as KESA students in the United States?

Research Approach

With the approval of the university’s institutional review board, the researcher studied the experiences and perceptions of KESA children currently living in the Washington Metropolitan area. These students are currently in grades 9 to 12 of secondary school. This study is a qualitative phenomenological research design.

For the primary method of data collection, in-depth face-to-face interviews were used with the participants, and the information gathered from the interviews was used to form the basis of the overall findings of this study. To help with participants’ comfort level during the interview, the researcher asked questions in either Korean or English, with possible switching between languages based on the preference of the participant. The participants were allowed to respond either in Korean or English as well. The participants’ names were replaced with pseudonyms in order to protect the privacy of each individual child, and all interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English. The researcher analyzed the data by carefully reviewing students’ narratives individually, then comparing them with one another. Based on the data generated from this process, coding categories and common themes were developed, and data analysis was conducted guided by the study’s conceptual framework. The specific data analysis for this study was Moustakas’ (1994) seven-step analysis for phenomenology based on van Kaam (1966).
The Researcher

I was previously employed as a school counselor in a public school setting and am currently working as a private educational consultant for international students from Korea. I also have personal experience of going through the adaptation and acculturation process as a young student in the United States, though I was accompanied by my parents. Hence, I bring my own perspective and practical experiences to the inquiry process as a working professional in dealing with ESA students. Based on my own personal and professional experience, I feel adequately equipped with both knowledge and understanding of the environmental context.

However, I admit that, as much as my own personal experience can work as an asset in providing valuable insights during the research process, it could also serve as a burden by potentially adding to bias in the design of the study and in the interpretation of findings. For this reason, I made my assumptions explicit at the outset of the study. I am also committed to continuing my critical self-reflection in order to monitor my own subjective perspectives and biases through bracketing (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Bracketing is the attempt to separate the phenomenon, analyze it, and suspend previously held assumptions about the phenomenon while analyzing the data from the research participants (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Bracketing will be done by keeping a journal, having ongoing discussions with other professional colleagues and my advisor in order to seek their input and feedback throughout the research process. In addition, “member checks” were used to ensure that my own biases did not influence how participants’ perspectives are portrayed.
Assumptions

Based on my own personal experience as an immigrant who came to the United States as a teenage high school student, and upon my professional background as a public school counselor and as a private educational consultant working directly with study abroad students from Korea, several assumptions were made regarding this study. First and foremost, for the majority of KESA children, there is insufficient information provided before their arrival in the country about what to expect for their life as ESA students. Many Korean parents acquire services provided by private educational agencies in Korea during the initial admission process. However, these services focus mainly on helping students gain admissions to schools in the United States, and often ignore the importance of providing necessary information or guidance to properly prepare prospective students before their departure. For this reason, many young KESA children will begin their ESA lives feeling unprepared, or underprepared at the least. This assumption is based on my personal experience of working as an education consultant for various private agencies in Korea which serve prospective ESA students.

Secondly, many KESA children are assumed to be at risk of facing emotional, social, and academic challenges during their adaptation period and even beyond. However, due to their lack of knowledge or the unfamiliarity of the available support system in school settings in the United States, many children are not able to effectively utilize such support services. Without having direct parental support, and not knowing where to go for help or support, there is a heightened risk of these children feeling lost and isolated, and of their experiencing academic difficulties. This assumption is based on
my personal experience of working with KESA students in both public and private school settings as a school counselor and academic advisor.

Thirdly, it is assumed that many education personnel of schools in the United States, including teachers, administrators, and counselors, do not possess sufficient awareness and knowledge of the background of the ESA phenomenon and of ESA students to provide necessary support during ESA students’ adaptation process. This assumption is made based on my personal experience of working with school personnel in both public and private schools in the United States when dealing with ESA students.

Fourth and finally, it is assumed that if ESA students are provided with proper and detailed preparation for their journey before their departure from Korea and upon their arrival in the United States before they start their ESA experiences, their ESA experiences will be more positive and stable, emotionally, socially, and academically. Such preparation can include educational orientation on basic culture of the United States and its’ education system, information on accessing support and help when needed in and outside of schools, and an adequate education program to enhance their language skills. This assumption is made based on the premise that better preparation is likely to be a predictor of future success for any endeavor.

**Rationale and Significance of the Study**

The rationale for this study commences from my desire to explore practical and realistic ways to help ESA students to have more positive and successful experiences emotionally, socially, and academically, as they lead their lives without the accompaniment of their parents. I also wish to provide information to educational and counseling professionals in order to enhance their understanding of ESA students, so that
these professionals can provide practical and necessary support to ESA students in their work settings. I believe that education professionals’ increased understanding of the ESA phenomenon and of its students’ perspectives on strategies for improving their experiences will benefit both parties.

Definitions of Key Terminology

**ESA**-An acronym for Early Study Abroad. This term refers to the practice of studying abroad, instead of enrolling at domestic schools, among elementary, middle, and high school age students. It is usually reserved for students whose study abroad program has a duration of longer than six months, and this is the definition to which this study adheres (Kim & Okazaki, 2014).

**Jogi yuhak**-Korean terminology that is directly translated into English as “early study abroad” (Bae, 2013).

**Parachute kids**-An alternate term used to portray minor students traveling and settling abroad alone without the accompaniment of their parents (Sun, 2014).

Document Organization

This document is composed of five chapters. Chapter One, Introduction, includes background and context information, the problem statement, the statement of purpose and research questions, the research approach, my personal assumptions, and background information. This chapter also contains the rationale and significance of the study, and definitions of key terminology. Chapter Two, Literature Review, includes reviews and discussions of the literature on the perspective of education in Korea, historical and philosophical background of Korean education, possible causes of Korea’s emphasis on English education, and the ESA phenomenon in Korea. Chapter Three, Methodology,
contains the rationale for qualitative research design, rationale for phenomenological methodology, research sample and information needed to conduct the study, overview of research design, data collection methods, and methods for data analysis and synthesis. Chapter Three also includes ethical considerations related to the study in question, the limitations of the study, and a chapter summary. Chapter Four, Analysis of Data and Presentation of Findings, includes an analysis of the data collected and a presentation of the findings in narrative format. Chapter Five, Summary or Synthesis of Findings, includes interpretation and implications of findings.
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Scope

For almost two decades, Korea has seen the social phenomenon of young Korean students, ranging from their elementary to high school years, traveling overseas to study abroad without the accompaniment of their parents. According to a study by the Korean government’s Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, the number of students leaving Korea at an early age for the purpose of studying overseas has risen steadily, from 3,274 students (0.04% of the total student population in Korea) leaving in 1997 to 10,498 students (0.13%) in 2003 (Cho, 2006; Korean Educational Development Institute, 2006). The exodus of young Korean students through jogi yuhak, directly translated as “Early Study Abroad” (ESA) in English, has become a source of both interest and concern to Korean society in general, as well as to the country’s educators and lawmakers. Aside from the term “Early Study Abroad,” different terms, such as “parachute kids” or “Pre-College Study Abroad” have been used to describe the minor-aged children who are living abroad by themselves to attend schools in foreign countries. The term “parachute kids” is used to portray children being “dropped off” by their parents in a foreign country and left to acculturate on their own (Popadiuk, 2010), whereas the term “Pre-College Study Abroad” is used to distinguish between the group in question and the more commonly known population of college students studying abroad (Kang & Abelmann, 2011).

To avoid confusion, the term “ESA” will be used throughout this research. The destination countries for Korean ESA students have been expanding from the United States and Canada (originally the most popular locations) to countries such as Philippines.
and Singapore that are less expensive. For the purpose of this study, only ESA students who are residing in the United States will be examined. This chapter will describe the literature research, discussion of the literature, synthesis and summary of the literature, and research direction. The discussion of the literature includes brief information on the cultural and historical background of Korean education, possible causes of Korea’s emphasis on English education, along with the cause for the phenomenon of the current status or trend of studying outside Korea, and issues related to students who have been studying abroad without their parents accompanying them.

**Literature Search and Review Process**

Literature for this study was identified via EBSCOHost, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, Google, Google Korea, Google Scholar, Naver, and Daum. Key search terms included: *cultural and historical background of Korean education, possible cause of Korea’s emphasis on English education*, along with the *cause of the phenomenon of Early Study Abroad, the current trend of young children studying outside Korea*, and *possible influence on psychosocial development of ESA students or parachute kids from Asian countries*.

Of the research literatures discovered through publicly available sources, many texts dealt with topics related to Korean education, Korean people’s enthusiasm towards English education, and the current status of Korean children studying overseas in Western countries. However, few qualitative studies have focused on the actual perception and experiences of the young ESA children in the United States.
Perspective of Education in Korea

To understand the phenomenon of ESA, it is imperative to begin the process with an understanding of Korean education. Understanding the historical, cultural, and philosophical perspectives provides a context for the foundation that has inspired the ESA phenomenon in Korea.

Historical and Philosophical Background of Korean Education

Education in Korea has evolved through enduring philosophical and societal beliefs deeply rooted in Confucianism and social class trends over the course of at least 5,000 years (Pinar, 2003).

Three Kingdoms Period (57 BCE – 935 AD)

The history of formal schooling in Korea begins in the Three Kingdoms period. Under the Three Kingdoms, the first public educational institution, the National Confucian Academy, was created in 372 in Koguryo. This institution promulgated Confucian ethics in its teachings. At the beginning of the Shilla period, one of the Three Kingdoms, a training system for young members of the aristocracy was created. This eventually developed into Hwarangdo, a public semi-official social educational system (Park, 1991). According to Park, the teachings of both the National Confucian Academy and Hwarangdo were grounded in Confucianism and Buddhism, which dominated the culture of ancient Korea and significantly affected educational institutions (Tu & Ikeda, 2011).

Koryo Period (918-1392)

Even after the Three Kingdoms were absorbed into the Koryo kingdom, Confucianism continued its significant role in education. Though Koryo adopted
Buddhism as its main religion, the educational system continued to place its main emphasis on teaching Confucian ideals and precepts (Park, 1991). In the early thirteenth century, following a constantly shifting balance of power between the native population in Korea and the Mongols, the rise of social class distinctions developed along with the progressively independent Korean society. Initially, these divisions were primarily dependent on military involvement, but following the fall of military rule and of the monarchial families that reigned during this time, social class began to be determined by economic prominence. This could be achieved through owning land, by being involved in the military (as previously), or by being part of a new scholarly class, known as the Sadaebu, which represented learned bureaucrats (Lee, Wagner, & Schultz, 1984). It was this class of people that resisted occupation by Japan in the late 1300s by opposing the new Buddhist establishment, and which gave rise to a new economic order, overtaking the prior Koryo Dynasty.

**Chosun Dynasty (1392-1897)**

The Chosun Dynasty emerged, accompanied by a Neo-Confucian establishment that set education and family as primary concerns of the society (Lee, et al., 1984). Neo-Confucianism had been introduced under the latter stages of the Koryo. It built upon Confucian philosophy by explaining the good and the bad sides of human nature (Lee, 2010). High-quality, widely-available education was a Neo-Confucian ideal (Kalton, 1988), and Neo-Confucianism assumed that good education led to good government and a good society. It was believed that the quality of education could be precisely measured by a set of national examinations (Schubert, 1986). The goal of these national examinations was to choose government officials on the unbiased basis of academic
ability (Tu & Ikeda, 2011), and as a result, achievement in these national exams led to social prestige (Lee, 2010). Chosun education was similar to modern Korean education in that both Chosun education and modern Korean education emphasize readying students for national exams (Lee, 2010), and in both systems, education offers a way to gain power (Tu & Ikeda, 2011). The learned men arbitrated society, which made the value placed on education high (Tu & Ikeda, 2011). This focus on education has shaped Korean education. Because of the philosophical and governmental driving forces of early Korean education, at this point the study of technical subjects was seen as secondary to concentration on ethics, philosophy, and other humanities (Pinar, 2003) and technical exams for professionals were less esteemed (Lee, 2010).

**Early Modernization (1897-1910)**

In the early modern era, Korea in general strongly supported Western institutions, even though some Koreans showed resistance and were committed to preserving traditional ways. The development of the *Silhak* showed the impact of Western culture (Korean Overseas Information Service, 1979). *Silhak*, or practical school of learning, means a pragmatic study of economics, politics, and natural sciences (Tu & Ikeda, 2011). A few Koreans transmitted the influence of *Silhak* from one generation to the next and researched Western studies (Korean Overseas Information Service, 1979). However, efforts to reform education were not organized until 1894, when the activities of the few Korean scholars who had traveled abroad and the attempts of American missionaries led to new patterns of education. As various degrees of Japanese domination continued until after World War II, Koreans gained independence just as the society was starting to accept that industrialization was unavoidable (Wielemans & Chan, 1992). It was then
that Korea developed a fully integrated and modern education system (Altbach & Umakoshi, 2004). The society’s embrace of a quickly globalizing world economy resulted in the Westernization of both academic and business practices in Korea (Wielemans & Chan, 1992).

**The Confucian Perspective**

As mentioned in previous sections, the traditional educational values of Korean society have been deeply influenced by the Confucian belief that regards education as the most important means for perfecting man. It was believed that only those who learned the most should be put in position to govern the country and society (Kim-Renaud, Grinker, & Larsen, 2004). Since the later periods of Korean dynasties, such as the Koryo (918-1392 AD) and the Chosun (1392-1910), Korean society has been heavily affected by the Chinese Confucian ideology; subsequently, governments adopted the Chinese examination system, which provided a direct path into public office for the “suitable” upper class of educated men. Furthermore, Confucianism has been the most influential philosophy in shaping the familial system in Korea, in that the main focus is on family (Park & Cho, 1995). The government facilitated the growth in emphasis on education, but the responsibility of attaining this education is placed on the family. As stated by Park and Cho, “family cohesion and continuity are taken as the foundation for sustaining the human community and the state” (p.1), and evidence of the continued influence of Confucianism on modern Korean society still exists through emphasis on universal marriage and childbearing. In this way, a synthesis of family values and academic standards has resulted in a Korean family structure that pursues both cohesion and education that can fulfill self-sufficiency. Thus, through the influence of Confucianism,
the Korean family propelled Korean education into modernity, granting latter-day applications to ancient beliefs, and resulting in families that are seeking the most effective education for their children, even if doing so requires emigration and a temporary severance of the family structure.

**The Causes of Korea’s Emphasis on English Education**

**Education Enthusiasm**

To understand the root of the education enthusiasm (sometimes called “education fever”) in Korea, it is important to examine its historical and societal factors. Under the Chosun Dynasty, in conformity with Neo-Confucianism, the exam system and the schools connected with it were available to all, except those belonging to low-class groups excluded from the exam system, such as slaves, butchers, and children of concubines. The schools and exams were a way of gaining power, and the concept of an elite group whose right to power was confirmed through educational accomplishment was a tenet of Korean culture (Park, 2007).

In pre-modern Korea, which spanned from the 1400s to 1800, education preoccupied the minds of the people as a result of Confucian ideology and the use of examinations as a social selection device. Also, during this era, formal learning was valued as one’s path to public office and as a means of achieving personal moral perfection (Kim-Renaud, et al., 2004).

Since the late 1890s, modern Korea has experienced an extraordinary educational transformation. Thirty-five years of Japanese rule, from 1910 to 1945, played a major role in this transformation and determined Korea’s intense emphasis on schooling. During Japan’s occupation of Korea, Japanese colonial officials stressed the significance
of schooling to Koreans (Seth, 2004). However, the objective of education under Japanese colonial administration was to assimilate Koreans and enforce social subjugation. To fulfill this objective, Koreans were relegated to attending subordinate schools and were strongly restricted from secondary education (Sorensen, 1994). The limited access to higher education and the fierce competition thwarted many Korean families. This stifling of educational attainment under Japanese rule played a significant role in creating Korea’s enthusiasm for education, prompting many Koreans to enroll in schools during the post-liberation years (Park, 2007). The educational development in schools and the accompanying increase in school enrollment influenced the literacy rate (Chun & Choi, 2006), which showed a dramatic increase from 22% in 1945 (Sorensen, 1994) to a rate of nearly 100% by the year 2000 (Kim-Renaud, et al., & Larsen, 2004). The number of students in secondary schools doubled between 1945 and 1947. Elementary enrollment ratios passed 90% in 1964, middle school enrollment ratios passed 90% percent in 1979, and high school enrollment ratios recently passed 90% (Sorensen, 1994).

The rate of high school graduates going on to higher education increased from 40% in the early 1990s to almost 84% in 2008, and 93% of Korean parents reported that they expect their children to go to college (The Economist, 2013). According to Sorensen (1994), because Korea’s selective college admission system heavily depends on students’ results on the competitive entrance examination, universities are ranked on a monotonic scale. Students who graduate from top tier universities are ranked in social prestige for the rest of their lives, according to the ranking of the university from which they graduated. This stratification extends to personal life, impacting people’s prospects of
future employment, and even marriage. Sorensen also points out that the heavy influence of the college entrance examination on Korean students’ lives can begin as early as middle school years, due to the view that sound preparation during middle school will result in academic success during high school, leading to admission to highly ranked universities. This trend has created a number of social issues, such as an overemphasis on examination preparation, the high cost of education driven by private tutoring and cram schools, concerns over inequalities in educational opportunity as costs rise, overcrowded classrooms, and pedagogy based on rote memorization rather than on individual creativity (Seth, 2004). Seth (2004) also highlighted that the importance placed on education and college entrance exam scores had been associated with the belief that Korea’s schooling is inadequate to meet the needs of a modernizing nation because of the perceived lack of ability to gain the needed English language skills from Korean schooling.

**English Fever**

Korea’s national emphasis on the acquisition of English language skills, often characterized as “English fever,” stems from multiple sources. In addition to the historical and philosophical background of Korea’s enthusiasm towards education in general (as outlined in the previous section), economic globalization and governmental policy changes to evaluation and curricula have both played a major role in the phenomenon of today’s “English fever” in Korea.

**Globalization in Korea and English Education.** Modern society is becoming increasingly globalized; nations and economies are more interdependent. Such developments are affecting the daily lives of people in Korea. According to Osler and
Vincent (2002), the term “globalization” refers not only to the level of world trade and the “virtual economy” or electronic flow of capital, but also to labor and production, information, ecology, legal and administrative systems, culture and civil society. After liberation from Japanese rule, the Korean government continued its attempt to develop its economy through industrialization and active interaction with the Western world. However, the momentum of this globalization attempt reached its peak between the late 1980s and the late 1990s. According to Demick (2002), the 1986 Asian games and the 1988 Seoul Olympic games made South Korea aware of the increased need for globalization, and the Korean financial crisis of 1997 made Koreans realize how necessary English was to the process of globalization.

All of these events drove Koreans to develop an increased focus on oral proficiency in English. Until this point, Korea’s English education had depended heavily on rote memorization of vocabulary, and on learning grammar in order to perform English-Korean and Korean-English translations in preparation for examinations. The events of the 1980s and 1990s led the Korean people to realize the importance and necessity of acquiring English skills, not simply as an academic exercise, but as a vital tool in the further development of Korea within a globalized society. Crystal (1997) emphasized the critical role of English in modern society by pointing out that English is central to technological and political development, and is critical for access to knowledge. It is the main language of global discussions of education and international relations. According to Crystal, in 1995, more than 90% of the scientific papers in computer science and linguistics were written in English, and about 80% of the world’s electronically stored information is in English as well. With Korea’s increased
communication and contact with Western societies, acquisition of English language skills was recognized not as a mere luxury for selected few, but as an absolute necessity for the general population in order to achieve advancements in all fields, including business, technology, and academia. In keeping up with this growing recognition of the importance of English skills acquisition, recent surveys indicate that many major Korean companies and their managers consistently prefer to make new hires who have proficiency in English (Ihm, 2007). According to Ihm, this preference for new workers with English proficiency has driven Korean students and parents to put vast amounts of time and money toward developing English skills from early ages.

**Government policy changes and English education.** In response to the growing arguments that English education is more efficient to satisfy the needs of a global society, the Korean government added an English listening section to its college entrance examination in January 1991. This decision signaled the beginning of Korean parents’ concerted efforts to enhance their children’s English listening skills in better preparation for the revised college entrance examination. Korean parents’ newly-developed zeal for communicative English education continued to build in 1994, when the Korean government revised the college entrance examination still further by reducing questions that focused on students’ knowledge of grammar, and by adding more conversation-related questions (Park, 2009, p.52).

In 1991, the Korean government announced its plan that, by 1995, English would be taught in all elementary school grades (*Segye Ilbo*, 1991). These government policy changes propelled a movement known as “English fever,” a term mentioned repeatedly by media. These changes have also stimulated the development of a new industry known
as young-uh kyoyuk sanup, or the “English education industry” (Park, 2009). The English education industry includes all extracurricular lessons outside of school instruction, such as private cram schools, private tutoring, and English camps, both domestic and abroad. The estimated amount of money spent annually on English education grew from $10 billion in 2000 (Cho, 2006) to $15 billion in 2005 (Jeon, 2006). As of 2013, it was reported that there were over 17,000 private English academies (hagwons) throughout South Korea. It was also estimated that there is roughly one academy for every 3,000 people nationwide. From 2005 to 2009, the growth rate of the English education industry was 20.5%, and the total sales of English language academies increased annually by 26.1%. The EF Education First survey result shows that the average South Korean student has been exposed to nearly 20,000 hours of English education from kindergarten through college years (Asia-Pacific Global Research Group, 2013).

Ineffectiveness of English education in Korea. As mentioned in previous sections, the educational concentration on English in Korea is largely due to globalization and the need for Korean graduates to be compatible with other economically influential countries, most of which conduct their businesses primarily in English. To meet this need for globalization, the Korean government has made repeated changes to its educational policy in an attempt to raise the level of English proficiency of its students, beginning at young ages. However, despite devoting vast resources to accomplishing this objective, the outcome has not been satisfying. Instead, the evidence shows clear deficiencies in the Korean education system’s effort to provide effective English language instruction opportunities, particularly in view of the level of emphasis that Korean society puts on
the need to become more proficient in English (Ihm, 2007). Despite the fact that in 2004 and 2005 Korea spent three times as much money on English education as its neighboring country, Japan, the average TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) scores for South Korean students ranked 93rd out of 147 countries (Park, 2009). In addition, according to the EF Education First’s English Proficiency Index survey of 60 countries throughout the world, South Korea ranked 24th, only two rankings above Japan (26th) and not many more above China (34th) (Asia-Pacific Global Research Group, 2013). Experts have pointed out that this unsatisfactory outcome could be the result of Korea’s traditional English education methods. These focus on increasing test-taking abilities by teaching grammatical rules and rote memorization of vocabulary, rather than emphasizing actual application of conversational English in daily life (Asia-Pacific Global Research Group, 2013).

In any event, it is clear that there is a “high-cost and low-efficiency” pattern in the English education of Korean students (Chun & Choi, 2006). This realization has caused both government and parents to become concerned that, because of students’ lack of ability to effectively communicate in English, they are losing the competitive edge in the globalized market (Seth, 2004). In order to improve the quality and effectiveness of English education in Korea, many experts argued for more emphasis on increasing the communicative language teaching method in place of the traditional grammar/translation method (Chun, 1992). Many Korean people have come to believe that the best way to enhance their communicative English skills is to learn from native speakers of English (Lee & Chang, 2006) through English-only instructions (Chun, 1993; Yum, 1993). This belief motivated many universities to begin offering lectures in English regardless of
subject area, in order to help students improve their English skills (Jung, 1990). Similarly, elementary schools began to recommend that teachers teach English only in English, even though not many teachers were prepared to undertake such a challenging task (Oh, 1996). Unfortunately, these ambitious efforts to provide English-only instruction without first securing enough native English-speaking teachers created more side effects than originally anticipated. These side effects included students’ loss of interest in course content due to limited understanding of their instruction, increased stress on teachers due to the pressure of having to teach materials in their second language, and decreased communication between teachers and students (Kim, 2006). Kim (2006) argued that, regardless of these side effects, many academic institutes in Korea continue to promote English-only instruction policies in their schools.

In order to strengthen its’ English education by attracting more native speakers of English to teach English in Korea, in 1995 the Korean government initiated the program known as EPIK (English Program In Korea) (Kwon, 2000). Through the EPIK program, native English-speaking professional teachers were recruited to help improve Korean students’ communicative English abilities, as well as to enhance students’ opportunities to gain cultural knowledge of the English-speaking world in preparation for the globalization of Korea. English teachers from the EPIK program were recruited from English-speaking countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, and they were mainly hired to teach in elementary, middle, and high schools. In addition, the Korean government also started the TaLK (Teach and Learn in Korea) program to recruit college students (enrolled in
their third year or higher) from the same seven English-speaking countries to teach English to elementary school students in rural areas of Korea.

In 2005, the Korean Ministry of Education announced a “Five Year Plan for English Education Revitalization,” which included a “one native English-speaking teacher per school policy” (Heo & Mann, 2015). Despite these passionate efforts to enhance English education through hiring native speakers of English as teachers, finding such teachers with legitimate qualifications and backgrounds was found to be a very challenging task for the Korean government. Private and public schools at elementary and secondary level, as well as colleges and universities all had difficulties in hiring native speakers of English who could satisfy minimum requirements (Lee & Chang, 2006). In order to meet the government’s ambitious goal of a “one native English-speaking teacher per school policy,” it was projected that the government would have to hire at least 10,000 native speakers of English. However, it was reported that only 1,950 native speakers of English were hired to teach English in Korea in 2006 (Lee, 2006).

In addition to hiring more native speakers of English as teachers, provincial governments in Korea made huge investments to build “English villages,” or English-only towns to provide an English-only environment to their students. Since the first English village opened its doors in August of 2004 near Seoul, many more similar English immersion villages were built in different parts of Korea, and a great number of native speakers of English were hired as villagers (Kim, 2004).

Even with all the aforementioned government policy changes and other attempts to provide better English education to students from both public and private sides, many Korean parents are still not satisfied with the English education in Korea, and believe that
the best way for their children to learn English is to go abroad to English speaking countries where they can truly immerse themselves in English-only environments (Park, 2009). In order to compensate for the ineffective English education in Korea, and to address the desire for globalization, the exodus began of young Korean students to Western countries, mainly the United States, in search of access to better English education.

**Early Study Abroad**

During his presentation for the 26th Annual Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI) Education Policy Forum, Kim (2005) defined Early Study Abroad, a direct translation from the Korean term jogi yuhak, as the “practice of studying abroad, instead of enrolling at domestic schools, among elementary, middle, and high school age students for a period of longer than six months.” An alternate term, “parachute kids,” also has been used to portray minor-aged students traveling and settling abroad alone without the accompaniment of their parents (Lee, 2014). ESA students or “parachute kids” are different from the traditional definition of international students in that their ages range from 8 to 18, whereas traditional international students are adult students in higher education, undergraduate or beyond, studying overseas (Kang & Abelmann, 2011). Ly (2008) also referred to ESA students as individuals engaging in a study abroad experience early in their development age. ESA children live under various living arrangements while they study in the United States, such as living in dormitories at boarding schools, living with a relative, with parents’ friends, or with an unrelated host family (Chiang-Hom, 2004). Regardless of students’ living arrangements or their age upon their arrival, researchers consistently find that the main reason why parents send
their young adolescent children overseas is to provide better educational opportunities (Choi, 1996; Newman & Newman, 2009; Orellana, Thorne, Chee, & Lam, 2001; Zhou, 1998).

The Volume of Korea’s Early Study Abroad

As Korea’s economic development and quest for globalization continue, the number of ESA students has increased rapidly (National Youth Policy Institute, 2009). According to the Educational Statistics Data Base, the number of ESA students grew from 2,259 in 1995 to 27,668 in 2007, an astonishing twelvefold increase (Korean Educational Development Institute, 2008). Despite the high cost to send children overseas for study abroad, Korean parents’ desire for ESA for their children has become a growing social phenomenon in Korea. According to a survey, more than 30 percent of Korean parents indicated that they are willing to send their children abroad for study if the circumstances permit (Kim, 2005).
As illustrated in Figure 1, the overall number of students who left Korea to study abroad rose from 13,302 in 1980 to 133,249 in 1997 and to 216,867 in 2008 (Korean Educational Development Institute, 2008). According to Table 1, the number of ESA students in elementary, middle, and high schools rose from 2,259 in 1995 to 27,668 in 2007, which shows a steady increase despite Korea’s economic downturn during the period. Considering the fact that studying abroad before the age of fifteen is still illegal in Korea, the actual number of students who went abroad to study is assumed to be higher than the report indicates (Korean Educational Development Institute, 2008).
Table 1

Annual Number of Early Study Abroad Students Reported

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>95</th>
<th>96</th>
<th>97</th>
<th>98</th>
<th>99</th>
<th>00</th>
<th>01</th>
<th>02</th>
<th>03</th>
<th>04</th>
<th>05</th>
<th>06</th>
<th>07</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of ESA Students</td>
<td>2,259</td>
<td>3,573</td>
<td>3,274</td>
<td>1,562</td>
<td>1,839</td>
<td>4,397</td>
<td>7,944</td>
<td>10,132</td>
<td>10,480</td>
<td>16,446</td>
<td>20,400</td>
<td>28,650</td>
<td>27,668</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate of Increase(%) Compared to Previous Year</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>58.2</td>
<td>-8.4</td>
<td>-52.3</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>139.1</td>
<td>80.7</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>-3.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Korean Educational Development Institute (2008). Educational Statistics Data Base

Table 2 illustrates the rapid increase of ESA among elementary school students in comparison to ESA students enrolled in secondary schools. In 1995, the number of elementary school students who went abroad to study overseas was only 235. However, this number continued to grow annually and the number grew to 2,107 in 2001. It is also interesting to note that until 2000, more high school students left the country to study overseas than did students enrolled in elementary or middle school. However, this trend began to reverse, and by 2002, more elementary school students than middle and high school students left for ESA. According to the Table 2, in year 2007, elementary school students for ESA recorded the highest number at 12,341, which accounted for a startling 44.6% of the total ESA students, compared to 9,201 (33.3%) middle school students and 6,162 high school students (22.1%).
Table 2

Annual Early Study Abroad Report by School Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Elementary</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>235 (10.4%)</td>
<td>1,200 (53.1%)</td>
<td>824 (36.5%)</td>
<td>2,259 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>341 (9.5%)</td>
<td>1,743 (48.8%)</td>
<td>1,489 (41.7%)</td>
<td>3,573 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>241 (7.4%)</td>
<td>978 (29.9%)</td>
<td>2,055 (62.7%)</td>
<td>3,274 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>212 (13.6%)</td>
<td>473 (30.3%)</td>
<td>877 (56.1%)</td>
<td>1,562 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>432 (23.5%)</td>
<td>709 (38.6%)</td>
<td>698 (37.9%)</td>
<td>1,839 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>705 (16.0%)</td>
<td>1,799 (40.9%)</td>
<td>1,893 (43.1%)</td>
<td>4,397 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>2,107 (26.5%)</td>
<td>3,171 (32.6%)</td>
<td>2,666 (33.5%)</td>
<td>7,944 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>3,464 (34.2%)</td>
<td>3,301 (32.6%)</td>
<td>3,367 (33.2%)</td>
<td>10,132 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>4,052 (38.6%)</td>
<td>3,674 (35.0%)</td>
<td>2,772 (26.4%)</td>
<td>10,498 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>6,276 (38.2%)</td>
<td>5,568 (33.8%)</td>
<td>4,602 (28.0%)</td>
<td>16,446 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>8,148 (39.9%)</td>
<td>6,670 (32.7%)</td>
<td>5,582 (27.4%)</td>
<td>20,400 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>13,814 (46.8%)</td>
<td>9,246 (31.3%)</td>
<td>6,451 (21.9%)</td>
<td>29,511 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>12,341 (44.6%)</td>
<td>9,201 (33.3%)</td>
<td>6,126 (22.1%)</td>
<td>27,668 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Korean Educational Development Institute (2008). Educational Statistics Data Base

The fact that the number of ESA students showed drastic decrease between 1997 and 1998, the period of Korea’s greatest economic downturn, indicates the economic influence as one of the important factors of the Early Study Abroad trend.

In any event, it is clear that increasing numbers of young Korean students are going abroad to study overseas to attain better English education and better education in general. The figures shown in Table 2 only includes the number of students who left the country without the accompaniment of their parents, and thus it must reflect an even higher total number of ESA students going abroad to study under other arrangements. The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2006) estimated in its report that the total number of Early Study Abroad students, from elementary to high school, exceeded 35,000 during the school year of 2005-2006 alone. This total does not include the countless numbers of students who went abroad to participate in camps and short-term language training programs during summer or winter breaks.
Table 3 shows the steady increase of elementary school age students going abroad to study, but it is still more surprising that not only has the trend of young students going overseas without parental accompaniment (termed “Pure Early Study Abroad”) been on a steady increase, but also it actually exceeded the number of students who were accompanied by their parents. The number of “Pure Early Study Abroad” students has increased by a factor of 11.5, from 705 in the 2000-2001 academic year to 8,148 in the 2005-2006 academic year. By contrast, the number of “Accompanied Early Study Abroad” students has begun to decrease, from 6,514 in the 2003-2004 academic year to 5,617 in the 2005-2006 academic year. The total numbers of Pure Early Study Abroad students exceeded the numbers of both Accompanied Early Study Abroad students and Emigration students by the school year 2004. This means that most young children from Korea, from elementary school age to high school age, who are studying thousands of miles away from home are living with no other family members or with a single parent. Needless to say, this phenomenon has created a social concern in Korea, but the number of ESA students has nonetheless been increasing every year and the average age of the students has been decreasing (Choi, 2005).

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Pure</th>
<th>Accompanied</th>
<th>Emigration</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>705</td>
<td>3,959</td>
<td>5,976</td>
<td>10,640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>2,107</td>
<td>4,660</td>
<td>7,453</td>
<td>14,220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>3,464</td>
<td>5,646</td>
<td>6,551</td>
<td>15,661</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>4,052</td>
<td>6,514</td>
<td>5,698</td>
<td>16,264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>6,276</td>
<td>6,119</td>
<td>4,909</td>
<td>17,304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>8,148</td>
<td>5,617</td>
<td>4,156</td>
<td>17,921</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Adapted from the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2006)
Problems of Early Study Abroad Students

The growing phenomenon of young students leaving their parents and families for Early Study Abroad in recent years has become a social concern in Korea (Kim, 2005). In response to the rapid increase of ESA students from Korea in recent years, there have been growing, yet still small, attempts to research and understand the experiences of the children participating in Early Study Abroad. There have been studies, which are relevant to this current research, expressing concerns about delays in these young students’ psychosocial, linguistic, and academic development as a direct result of living away from their parents and families as ESA students (Chung, 1994; Kuo & Roysircar, 2006; Park, 2007; Tsong & Liu, 2009). Such studies were performed not only to investigate Korean students, but also children who come from other Asian countries, such
as China and Taiwan. According to these studies, ESA students indicate that they experience high levels of stress during their acculturation process (Chung, 1994; Kuo & Roysircar, 2006; Tsong & Liu, 2009).

One comparative study focused on Chinese students who were born in the United States, Taiwanese students who came to the United States with parents, and Taiwanese students who came unaccompanied by any family members through Early Study Abroad, and the results showed that the Pure Early Study Abroad Taiwanese students had a higher level of distress and anxiety than the other two groups (Chung, 1994). According to other studies of “parachute kids” from different Asian countries, ESA children acknowledged that they feel a sense of accelerated independence, as well as feelings of loneliness and homesickness (Chung, 1994; Tsong & Liu, 2009). Tsong & Liu (2009) discussed the concept of parachute kids and astronaut families through existing literature. Parachute kids are those who were sent to other countries (e.g., United States) by their parents unaccompanied to pursue a perceived higher quality of education (Tsong & Liu, 2009). On the other hand, astronaut families are those with one parent who stay in the country of origin (e.g., Korea) while the rest of the family stays in the United States (Tsong & Liu, 2009). Tsong & Liu (2009) warned that if ESA children are not provided with proper support and supervision during their stays overseas, there is a risk of students getting involved in substance abuse, gambling, and developing depression and antisocial behaviors.

However, reactions by Korean parents to these reports have been surprisingly marginal, in that parents have largely adopted the perspective that the risk of these developmental detriments is a necessary evil in pursuit of the optimization of their
children’s academic development. Despite concerns that their children could be faced with the aforementioned risks, Korean parents continue sending their young children abroad, believing that mastery of English skills and Western lifestyles would secure a successful adult status for their children’s future in Korea (Park, 2009).

Song (2012) conducted an ethnographic case study for one year regarding two study abroad South Korean families. Song explored their language socialization practices in their home, specifically how the parents’ (e.g., mothers’) future plans of their returning to South Korea had influenced their home language socialization practices. The data from interviews and participant observations revealed each family's unique negotiation of multiple memberships among communities they left behind, local ones, and ones they hoped to become part of in the future, which led to their divergent practices and attitudes toward different languages in their home.

In another study, Kang and Abelmann (2011) explored the education exodus of pre-college Korean students from Korea to the United States in order to consider how South Korean parents are managing the considerable social pressure to globalize their children. Kang and Abelmann (2011) highlighted that the success of studying abroad is dependent on the technical preparation of the students at home, their pre-existing character, and parental assets. It was highlighted that the modern notion of early study abroad is understood not as a discrete education field abroad, but instead an extension of South Korea’s highly stratified and competitive education market. Moreover, Kang and Abelmann (2011) stated that since studying abroad has been prominent in Korean society, the problem of the students as they stay in the foreign country has been gradually recognized and addressed.
**Summary**

The literature presented in this review has shown information on the cultural and historical background of Korean education, Korean people’s enthusiasm towards education, possible causes of Korea’s emphasis on English education along with the cause for the phenomenon of Early Study Abroad, the current status or trend of young children studying overseas from Korea, and possible issues and concerns related to ESA students who come without accompaniment of their parents or family members.

There has been a significant rise in ESA students coming to the United States in recent years. A historical overview of education in Korea has illustrated Korean culture’s emphasis upon self-enrichment through education, and its further concentration on academics due to their capacity to enable social advancement. Beginning in the late 1300s with the rise of the Chosun Dynasty, Koreans shifted their focus from the military elite as imposed by the invading Mongolians, and moved towards a concentration on learning. This shift was motivated by the rise of the educated upper class, and was supplemented with Eastern religious philosophies, mainly Confucianism. After liberation from Japanese rule and a brief occupation by the United States, Korea realized a need to integrate itself into the rapidly growing global economy. With this realization, Korea began to incorporate more academic subjects into the national curriculum, and the competition among students to attain higher education continued to grow. After hosting major international events such as 1986 Asian games and 1988 Olympics, and going through 1997-1998 Asian financial crisis, Korea’s strong desire for globalization and drive to acquire the communicative English skills necessary to the globalization effort reached its peak. As a result, the phenomenon of Early Study Abroad, jogi yuhak, was
born and has continued to grow each year. Reasons outlined for the emergence of the Early Study Abroad were mainly due to concerns with language: in order to successfully compete in and integrate into today’s global economy, one must be able to speak fluent English. Throughout all studies, this was the sustaining primary rationale for Early Study Abroad—to place children in an environment of true English language immersion in order to improve their English skills.

Although the possible risks and concerns of the Early Study Abroad phenomenon were explored in the literature, very few of the reviewed texts provide perspectives of young Korean Early Study Abroad children in particular. As a result, the particular circumstances that they may encounter due to their unique situation have likely been overlooked by the literature. There may be serious implications to the mental and emotional states of ESA students due to the circumstances they are placed in, such as enduring the culture shock of a foreign country, being forced to live independently at an early age, and being lonely and homesick due to being separated from their parents and extended family members. These effects may cause negative influences on children’s mental and social development.

In this study, the researcher intends to explore the implications of the Early Study Abroad experience for young adolescents who are participating in the Early Study Abroad in the United States. A qualitative, phenomenological study will be conducted through personal interviews. It will focus on investigating the perceptions and experiences of the young Korean adolescents involved in Early Study Abroad who come to the United States alone without the accompaniment of their parents or other family members.
Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Korean Early Study Abroad students in the United States in relation to their adaptation to their new environment, as well as the factors that they perceive to help or challenge them in attaining successful adaptation to a new environment. The problem that aligned with this purpose is that there is little information as to what factors are necessary to help KESA children overcome these challenges and risks, and complete their studies as healthy and stable study abroad participants. To address this purpose, a qualitative phenomenological research design was used for this study.

To provide insights into the problem, the overarching research question of the study was: what are the perceptions of KESA students about their experiences of adjusting to a new environment? Based on this overarching research question, the following specific research questions were addressed:

1. What factors do children perceive were helpful when they were adjusting to a new environment as KESA students in the United States?

2. What factors do children perceive to challenge them when they were adjusting to a new environment as KESA students in the United States?

Research Design

Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

The purpose of this study was to examine and explore the experiences of KESA students and their perceptions of what they feel would be necessary to make their experience more positive in the most meaningful way possible. To complete this study,
qualitative research design was utilized. The qualitative method was appropriate for this study because it is used among researchers who are to understand and make sense of the perceptions or experiences of individuals or social groups regarding a certain phenomenon within the context of their culture, history, socioeconomic status, and community or organizational dynamics (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010; Polit & Beck, 2010; Silverman, 2011). It is also designed to be used in instances in which “little is known about the problem” (Creswell, 2005, p. 25). The primary goal of qualitative research is concerned with investigating the lived experiences of participants in the study, in order to determine the factors that contribute to the development of their ideas or opinions. In this case, the phenomenon of interest is the adjustment or adaptation of KESA students in the United States to their new environment.

Qualitative methodology is advantageous because readers gain access to rich data, especially when data-gathering is performed through interviews (Moretti et al., 2011). In a qualitative study, participants’ narratives are analyzed in order to derive meaning (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) and researchers attempt to describe and understand the ways that people give meaning to their own behavior (Patton, 2001). According to Patton, qualitative research “uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings such as real world settings where the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomena of interest” (p. 4). Such objectives of qualitative methods are in contrast with those of quantitative research methods, where the emphasis is on testing hypothetical generalizations (Hoepfl, 1997) and measuring and analyzing causal relationship between variables (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Dissimilar to quantitative studies, qualitative methodological research is used to facilitate the in-depth
exploration of a particular phenomenon within its uncontrolled environment (Mitchell & Jolley, 2012). It was the researcher’s contention that the objectives of quantitative methods were unlikely to generate the rich data necessary to address the proposed research purposes, and thus, they were not suitable for this study. Instead, the emphasis that qualitative methods place on discovery and description, and its objectives of extracting and interpreting the meaning of experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1998) made the qualitative methodology the most appropriate for the current study.

Rationale for Phenomenological Methodology

The research design for this study is qualitative phenomenology. It is the appropriate research design because it focuses on the in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of participants, which is the goal of this proposed study (Moustakas, 1994). Other qualitative research designs were also considered for this study; however, they were inappropriate for this study because the purposes of the other research designs (e.g., grounded theory, and narrative research) were not aligned with the problem, purpose, and research questions for this proposed study (Urquhart, Lehmann, & Myers, 2010; Wiles, Crow, & Pain, 2011). Specifically, this proposed study does not involve the following: (a) generation of theory, which is needed in a grounded theory design (Urquhart et al., 2010), and (b) chronological or storied event as data, which is used in narrative studies (Wiles et al., 2011). On the other hand, a phenomenological research design was the appropriate approach for this study because the purpose and research questions for this study were focused on in-depth exploration of perceptions of a social group and the lived experiences of its members (Moustakas, 1994).
The phenomenological design allows a researcher to investigate the experiences of individuals and obtain comprehensive descriptions that portray the essences of the experience (Rubin & Siegler, 2004). Phenomenology has been used by researchers for years to gain the essential meaning of a lived experience. Patton (2001) claimed that using a phenomenological research design allows for the exploration of how human beings make sense of their experience and then transform these experiences into consciousness. Moreover, the phenomenological approach can provide a deeper understanding of participants’ perceptions about a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994), thus making it appropriate for this proposed study.

In this chapter, the details of this proposed methodology and research design will be provided. The focus will be on describing the research methodology employed for this study. The major sections of this chapter are: (a) role of the researcher, (b) methodology, (c) instrumentation, (d) procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection, (e) data analysis plan, and (f) ethical procedures. A summary will be provided at the end of the chapter. Specific discussions involve the rationale for research approach, description of the research sample, information needed to conduct the study, overview of research design, data collection methods, and methods for data analysis and synthesis. The chapter also contains ethical considerations related to the study, limitation of the study, and a brief summary of the chapter.

**Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher in this qualitative research study is to be the central research instrument for data gathering and analysis by being the interviewer and analyst (Carlson, 2010; Silverman, 2011). As an instrument of data gathering (e.g., interviewer),
the researcher will conduct the interviews with the participating KESA students to gather information about their perceptions regarding the phenomenon of focus in this proposed study. The researcher also made interpretations and analyzed the perceptions of these students regarding the phenomenon of focus on the study. To avoid any potential for being biased as the interviewer, the researcher was guided by the interview protocol (Appendix G). Moreover, before collecting any data for the study, the researcher identified his personal expectations, point of view, and possible biases in relation to the phenomenon being studied. This process of identifying expectations was important so that I was conscious to avoid any hasty conclusion or generalization based on my personal biases while performing data gathering and analysis without enough proof in actual data to support these conclusions (Friga & Chapas, 2008; Tufford & Newman, 2012). Among these expectations were the following: (a) that language barrier is a major issue that challenges KESA students; (b) that parents play an important role in the success of KESA students; and (c) that peers may have a positive or negative influence on the success of KESA students.

To ensure that the researcher reduces bias during the course of data gathering and analysis, bracketing was also used, as well as the concept of intellectual honesty to maintain authenticity of the research (Friga & Chapas, 2008). Bracketing was necessary to help maintain the focus of the research and not interject personal opinions into the research process, specifically the data collection and analysis (Tufford & Newman, 2012). In the bracketing process, researchers acknowledge their previous experience, attitudes, and beliefs, but try to set them aside for the duration of the study to see the object of study anew (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Hence, for this study, bracketing was
performed through acknowledging the researcher’s previous experiences, attitudes, and beliefs in relation to the topic of the study, in order to have a list of reference as to what must be avoided or set aside to prevent any bias. Moreover, I asked my dissertation committee to serve as auditors to assess and evaluate the results of the study. This provided additional trustworthiness to the results of the study.

Furthermore, following the interview guide, the researcher conducted the semi-structured interviews while being flexible in asking the necessary questions and simultaneously maintaining the focus on the purpose of the study. Intellectual honesty, which requires the researcher to avoid allowing personal beliefs to interfere with data collection and analysis, was the goal (Friga & Chapas, 2008). Moreover, no information was purposefully omitted or altered, which was certified through member checking (Carlson, 2010; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), wherein the researcher shared transcripts and initial interpretations with participants to ask for their feedback regarding accuracy of transcription and interpretation.

**Methodology**

The population involved in the study was the group of KESA students who are studying in the United States, specifically in the Washington Metropolitan area. This chosen population was the target population of the study because people from this group have the knowledge or experiences needed to provide the necessary perceptions in order to address the problem and purpose of the study within the context of the phenomenon being investigated. The number of ESA students in the United States has reached more than 880,000 (Open Doors, 2014). Korea is said to be one of the top three nationalities of ESA in the United States, with about 35,000 in number (Open Doors, 2014).
From the population of KESA students attending schools located in Northern Virginia and Southern Maryland in the United States, a sample was obtained. The inclusion criteria for the sample in this study were KESA students in this locality, who at present: (a) are enrolled in 9th grade – 12th grade in secondary school level, (b) have been studying in the United States for at least one year but not more than three years (so that they have enough experience but are still able to recall and discuss their adjustment phase), (c) attend general education classes, (d) attend private day schools that are legally allowed to receive international students, and (e) are able to speak and understand the English or Korean languages. The researcher had a list of schools in the metropolitan area of Washington that admit international students from overseas. Those who were excluded from participation were those who fell within at least one of the following criteria: (a) students with difficulty in talking, (b) students who had experience of living in the United States prior to their ESA studies. The inclusion and exclusion criteria was used to filter participants by adding this to the information session to relay the criteria to the students (Appendix E). It was then assumed that only those who satisfied the criteria pursued participation in the study.

When setting the sample sizes for qualitative studies, researchers are said to be dependent on the data saturation point. Research showed that the sample size for qualitative studies ranges from 10 to 20 participants as being sufficient to achieve data saturation (Mason, 2010). Meanwhile, Beck (2009) noted in his guidelines that a sample size ranges from six to 25. For this purpose, ten participants who fall within the boundaries of the inclusion criteria were the sample size for this proposed study.
Participants were selected by using purposive sampling, which was the selection of samples based on a specific set of characteristics needed for the study (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Participants who have been selected purposefully are said to be more willing to participate and are more likely to contribute to the richness of the data for a given study (Barratt, Choi, & Li, 2011). Moreover, purposive sampling is a sampling technique commonly used for qualitative studies that focus on the inclusion and exclusion criteria for their samples (Barratt et al., 2011). Based on the research questions of this study, a homogeneous purposive sampling was performed because the questions require that in-depth information be gathered from a specific group or sample (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). The homogeneous sample’s common characteristics were based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

To facilitate purposive sampling, potential participants were recruited by asking permission from schools that issue I-20, a certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant (F-1) Student Status, by the United States Department of Homeland Security to accept international students from overseas to conduct the information session in their facility (Appendix A). Once permission had been obtained, the school’s high school administration was asked to invite willing KESA students to an information session that I conducted regarding the background of the study (Appendix B). Only willing participants attended the information session; thus, it was not mandatory. In this brief session, the researcher discussed the background and significance of the study, and the relevance of gathering data from potential participants. Moreover, the context of their participation was discussed, such as potential risks, benefits, and confidentiality measures. With the approval of the Institutional Review Board, only student assent was
acquired for their participation. All who attended the information meeting were given copies of informed assent for the students, as well as a brief description of the study, written both in English and Korean (Appendix C and Appendix D).

If students agreed to participate, they were asked to sign the assent forms. Students were allowed to sign the original assent forms and submit their forms to a designated box placed in an administrator’s office for the researcher to pick up on an agreed later date. Moreover, the students also indicated in their assent forms their preferred time to conduct the interviews. The researcher then individually contacted participating students via e-mail to notify students of their finalized interview schedule.

**Instrumentation**

The main instrument used for this study was a semi-structured interview guide or protocol, which contained the guide questions for the interviews. Using the semi-structured interview facilitated flexibility in the manner of interviewing, which meant that the researcher as the interviewer could ask follow-up questions, provided that they were aligned with and relevant to the questions in the interview guide. The researcher used the interview guide as the basis for the questions that were asked of the participants. The contents of the interview guide included questions that directly addressed a corresponding research question, based on information gathered from the literature review.

The questions in the interview guide were reviewed by a panel of experts in the field of qualitative interviewing, in international students, and cross-cultural adjustment. These experts were the dissertation committee for the researcher. The committee reviewed the objective of the content of the interview guide in terms of the development
of the questions included in the protocol. The committee also reviewed the objectiveness of the questions based on the manner by which the interview questions were written, worded, and framed. The committee was asked to review the appropriateness of the questions to address the research questions of the study. Moreover, the committee reviewed the correctness of the structure or wording of the questions. After the panel and IRB review, there was a pilot study of the questions using one interviewee. This pilot study was the basis for making modifications and ensuring that the questions yielded the information needed for the study.

**Data Collection Methods**

Interviews were conducted in an enclosed area, such as empty classrooms or study rooms in the school library, designated by the school. The interview location provided a quiet, comfortable, and private location for both the interviewer and interviewee. Prior to starting the interview, participants were greeted, and the researcher gave a brief description of what would happen during the interview so that the participant could have an idea of what to expect. The contents of the informed assent were also reviewed briefly to ensure that each participant recalled its major contents. In addition, the researcher explained to the interviewees that they were allowed to respond in either English or Korean.

Each interview was audio-recorded, which was made known to the participants through the informed assent form. Each of the research questions had at least one corresponding interview question in the interview guide. The corresponding interview questions were used to address and answer the different research questions. During the interview, an interview guide was used, which contained individual and topic-based
questions to address the research questions of the study. Using this flexible framework enabled the researcher to explore the topic at hand by asking questions in whatever order seems appropriate for each participant. Each interview was expected to last for about 60 minutes, but varied depending on the flow of conversation between the researcher (interviewer) and the participants. Completing all ten interviews took four weeks.

**Data Analysis Plan**

Data was analyzed using Moustakas’ (1994) prescribed method for analyzing phenomenology based on the initial method of van Kaam. However, prior to actual analysis, data was first organized and prepared for analysis. As part of data preparation, transcripts were generated for each interview. The researcher served as transcriber as well. Since all interviews were performed in Korean language, the transcribed versions were translated into English language by the researcher. Moreover, for each transcript, the participant’s assigned pseudonym was written so that the researcher could know which transcript belonged to a specific participant. Any other identifiers were masked to aid in confidentiality. In order to ensure credibility of the transcript, the researcher performed member checking (Carlson, 2010; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this process, the researcher gave copies of transcript to the respective participants for them to review and validate for correctness of these transcripts. The participants had the opportunity to clarify and discuss any mismatch between their understanding and the intended meaning. Participants were also asked if there were any phrases that needed to be restated for clarity.

In phenomenology, van Kaam (1966), and Colaizzi (1978) provided methods for data analysis. In spite of the method used, phenomenologists would agree that the
importance of phenomenological inquiry is to understand the lived experiences of the phenomenon being studied. The purpose of phenomenology is to elicit understanding. For this study, the analysis was based on Moustakas’ analysis for phenomenology based on the procedures of van Kaam (1966) and Colaizzi (1978).

Moustakas (1994) developed a seven-step analysis for phenomenology. The first phase is listing and preliminary grouping. In this phase, every expression that is relevant to the experience was listed through horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994). In horizontalization, the researcher as the analyst developed a list of non-repetitive and non-overlapping significant statements. The second phase is reduction and elimination. In this phase, the researcher assessed each expression and evaluated them based on two criteria: (a) is the expression related to the experience that is a necessary constituent for understanding the experience, and (b) can it be abstracted and labeled to make it belong to the horizon of the experience? Those that cannot satisfy these criteria will be eliminated. The third phase is clustering and thematizing. In this phase, the invariant constituents were clustered into themes. The fourth phase is the final identification of invariant constituents. In this phase, the themes were finalized, determining if the invariant constituents and corresponding themes were (a) expressed explicitly and (b) compatible with each other. Those that did not comply with the criteria are irrelevant to the research and were eliminated. The fifth phase involves using the finalized invariant constituents and themes and providing individual textural description for each. The sixth phase involves development of individual structural description based on the individual textural description. The final phase involves development of meanings and essences for each textural-structural description (Moustakas, 1994).
The researcher also shared interpretations and conclusions with participants to gather their feedback and impressions once before finalizing the analysis. Ensuring that the transcripts are accurate, based on review of participants, is specifically important. Findings of this study were validated with the respondents. The researcher collected and presented detailed descriptive data along with the direct answers from participants. All the data collected was kept in their original form to prevent distortion. For transferability, the focus was on ensuring that the study may be applicable to other Korean ESA students attending schools in different parts of the country from the group used by the researcher in the original study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Hence, attaining transferability was also achieved by providing in-depth and detailed descriptions of the phenomena under investigation to allow readers to have a proper understanding of it. A study that has transferability is one that allows comparison to determine if the findings are transferrable to other KESA students in other parts of the United States (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Finally, to ensure dependability, the research methods, context and participant information were given in detail. This will assist future researchers with repeating the work and assessing the extent to which appropriate research practices have been followed.

**Ethical Procedures**

To acquire approval for conducting the qualitative data gathering for this proposed study, an ethics application was required by the researcher’s university. To attain the approval from the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher explained the research objective, questions, and process and consent of the participants. Upon obtaining the required approval, the researcher conducted the interviews.
Confidentiality is an important issue that must be addressed when human participants are used in research. Participants’ confidentiality was ensured with deletion of any identifying information and the use of pseudonyms in place of any identifying information that were deleted. All data was reported either in the aggregate or using these pseudonyms. This information was relayed to the participants through the informed consent.

All data related to the study including assent forms, identifying information, the recorded interviews, and the interview transcripts, were all kept inside the researcher’s home in a locked water and fire proof safe in the private office of the researcher. All electronic files were password-protected in the personal computer of the researcher. Only the researcher, the researcher’s dissertation chair, and dissertation committee members were able to review the interview data. The files will be kept in a private safe in the home office of the researcher for five years after the study concludes, and then they will be destroyed. The data will be destroyed through burning, breaking or shredding physical documentation, and through permanent deletion for any data existing on any computer devices.

Finally, participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and participants were provided with informed assent material prior to beginning. This information was also included in the informed assent. There were no added benefits incurred for participating in the study. However, for participants who had difficulty in adjustment, recalling the experience may have been challenging. Hence, they were reminded that they may decide not to answer anything that may make them feel upset or uncomfortable. Specifically, even in the event that participants have already consented to participate, they still had the
option to discontinue their participation in the study at any time, without incurring any consequences on their part.

Summary

In summary, this chapter included the detailed discussion of the different aspects of the qualitative methodology and phenomenological research design chosen for this study. Qualitative methodology and phenomenological research design were justified to be appropriate for this study based on their alignment with the purpose of the study, which was to explore how Korean ESA students in the United States perceive their adaptation to their new environment, as well as the factors that they perceive to help or challenge them in attaining successful adaption.

In the discussion of the methods to be used for this study as stipulated in this chapter, the target population included Korean ESA students in the Washington Metropolitan area. The specific sample included those who are (a) enrolled in secondary school level, 9th grade to 12th grade, (b) have been studying for one to three years as an ESA student in the metropolitan area of Washington in the United States, (c) general education student, (d) enrolled in a school that is legally allowed to receive international students, and (e) understand and speak English or Korean languages. Ten participants with the mentioned characteristics were recruited through purposive sampling.

For data gathering, semi-structured interviews were conducted based on interview protocols. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because of flexibility especially when asking questions to the participants. Member checking and bracketing were performed for data credibility and validity. Data was analyzed using Moustakas’
(1994) seven-step analysis for phenomenology. Informed assents were obtained from the participating students.
Chapter Four: Results of the Study

Previous research has indicated that there should be a significant concern for Early Study Abroad (ESA) students’ emotional and social well-being as they go through the adaptation process in a foreign country without accompaniment of their parents. Despite students’ initial ambitions and hopes of successfully adjusting to their new surroundings, and despite their (and their parents’) significant investment in time and money, these children may continue to experience challenges emotionally, socially, and academically. Even in the face of these concerns for ESA students’ existing challenges, however, there is little information available as to what factors are necessary to help ESA children, specifically Korean ESA (KESA) students, overcome these challenges and risks, and complete their studies as healthy and stable study abroad participants. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of KESA students in the United States in relation to their adaptation to their new environment, as well as the factors that they perceive to help or challenge them in the process of adaptation to the new environment.

Having a better understanding of how KESA students perceive their lived experiences, of what they see as the main contributors of their emotional, social, and academic hardships, and of what factors – based on students’ lived experiences – were helpful and not helpful in their adaptation to their new environment, can lead to more informed and practical decisions by prospective and current KESA students and by their parents before and during their stays. In addition, schools in the United States may be better informed about the possibilities for providing adequate support to these young children, in order to enhance their chances of having more positive and stable
experiences. To provide insights into the problem, the overarching research question of the study is: what are the perceptions of KESA students about their experiences of adjusting to a new environment? Based on this overarching research question, the following specific research questions were addressed:

1. What factors do children perceive to be helpful when they are adjusting to a new environment as KESA students in the United States?
2. What factors do children perceive to be challenges when they are adjusting to a new environment as KESA students in the United States?

Following this introduction to the chapter, demographic information of the sample will be provided in the second section. The third section will include a discussion of the data collection process, describing how the data were gathered, and how the process described in the previous chapter was executed. The fourth section will provide the step-by-step data analysis process, detailing the analysis guided by the modified van Kaam method recommended by Moustakas (1994). The fifth section will include the evidence of trustworthiness, in which the methods of increasing the credibility of the study will be provided. The sixth section will provide the presentation of findings. The findings will be organized according to themes addressing the research questions. Excerpts from the interview transcripts will be included to provide support on the findings. Finally, a summary of the chapter will be provided prior to moving to the discussion of the results in Chapter 5.

**Demographics**

Ten KESA students from Northern Virginia and Southern Maryland, United States were selected as participants in this study. The participants were selected through
purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (a) are enrolled in 9th grade – 12th grade in secondary school level, (b) have been studying in the United States for at least one year but not more than three years (so that they have enough experience but are still able to recall and discuss their adjustment phase), (c) attend general education classes, (d) attend private day schools that are legally allowed to receive international students, and (e) are able to speak and understand the English or Korean languages. KESA students who (a) had difficulty in talking, and (b) had experience of living in the United States prior to their ESA studies were excluded from the study.

Table 1 provides a profile of the participants. The participants were assigned random pseudonyms from S1 to S10 for confidentiality. The age range of the participants was 15-18, with an average of 16.6 years. Two of the participants were in the 9th grade, three were in the 10th, four in the 11th grade, and one in the 12th grade. Among the ten participants, nine were female. The average number of years that the participants stayed in the United States as a KESA student was 2.21 years. All of the participants were living with a host family during the time of their studies.
Table 4

Demographic Information of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Current Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years in US as International Student</th>
<th>Living Situation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Host family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Host family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>Host family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Host family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Host family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Host family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Host family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Host family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Host family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>Host family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection

The data collection method commenced as described in the previous chapter. The main instrument for this study was a semi-structured interview and the interviews were conducted in an enclosed area, including empty classrooms or at students’ host family homes. Prior to starting the interview, participants were greeted, and the researcher gave a brief description of what will happen during the interview so that the participant will have an idea of what to expect. The contents of the informed assent were also reviewed briefly to ensure that each participant recalled its major contents. In addition, the researcher explained to the interviewees that they would be allowed to respond in either
English or Korean, which all ten subjects decided to respond in Korean. Each interview was audio-recorded, which was made known to the participants through the informed assent form, and lasted for about 40 to 60 minutes.

**Data Analysis**

In this section, the data analysis method following the van Kaam method of phenomenological analysis (Moustakas, 1994) will be discussed. Sample quotes and excerpts from the data are used to describe the steps involved in the data analysis method. The researcher used NVivo to aid with data analysis. NVivo is a computer software that qualitative researchers use to aid in data analysis. Using NVivo the researcher created a project to compile all the data to a single file. Ten interview transcripts and ten demographic survey files were imported to the project. The researcher then began coding by closely reading each of the files, scanning for texts relevant to the purpose of the study. Nodes were created to represent a code. Furthermore, node hierarchies were also created to distinguish codes with general ideas to more specific themes. For example, the statement of participant S8, “Another thing that really helped me was playing sports,” “playing sports” was explicitly stated as a helpful experience during the adjustment of KESA students in the US. Therefore, a general node was created and named “helpful experiences” to include all other data pertaining to the experiences helpful to the KESA students during adjustment, while a specific node was created and named “playing sports” to place all the data referring to playing sports as a helpful experience in adjustment. This coding process continued until the researcher had saturated the data. The researcher utilized the proposed data analysis plan in the previous chapter, in which the modified van Kaam method of phenomenological analysis proposed by Moustakas
(1994) was followed. Prior to data analysis, the researcher employed bracketing, or the suspension of personal beliefs and biases on the subject of the study.

The van Kaam method includes a seven-step analysis which consists of: (a) horizontalization, (b) reduction and elimination, (c) clustering and thematizing, (d) validation of invariant constituents, (e) individual textural description, (f) individual structural description, and (g) composite description.

Horizontalization involved labelling of the quotes and excerpts related to the helpful or challenging experience of being a KESA student in the United States. The related or relevant experiences, according to Moustakas, were referred to as invariant constituents. Each of the transcripts was read, and each line was analyzed for relevant data. The invariant constituents were first labelled based on the two research questions, highlighting quotes relevant to helpful or challenging experiences of being a KESA student in the United States. The sample for horizontalization in Figure 3 involved invariant constituents regarding helpful experiences of being a KESA student in the United States, which helped address the first research question.

S2: I was able to believe and depend on them when I was going through difficult times. I have close friends that have been here for a long time.

S8: Another thing that really helped me was playing sports. Helpful experiences
Reduction and elimination involved setting aside the data irrelevant to helpful or challenging experiences of being a KESA student in the United States. For example, the statement of participant S7, “I sometimes see kids who come against their wills and I really don’t understand how they can overcome all the obstacles. I know that there are kids who just couldn’t make it and had to go back to Korea.” was not central to either helpful or challenging experience of being a KESA student in the United States. The statement was not an experience of the participant, and was therefore eliminated in the labelling process.

During clustering and thematizing process, the researcher assigned thematic labels to the data, and then the themes were grouped. An example of clustering and thematizing is provided in Figures 4 and 5 below. In Figure 4, themes were assigned according to the thematic content of the excerpts.

S2: I was able to believe and depend on them when I was going through difficult times. I have close friends that have been here for a long time.

S8: Another thing that really helped me was playing sports.
the sample excerpts were thematically labelled, in which themes referring to helpful experiences of being a KESA student in the US were identified.

In Figure 5 below, a sample of clustering and thematizing data labelled under challenging experiences of being a KESA student in the United States. Data with similar thematic content were clustered together, and were assigned a theme. In the example, the excerpts contained statements regarding the difficulty of speaking or understanding English were clustered together. The theme “language barrier” was assigned to the cluster.

S3: I talked to my parents almost every day or at least every other day through Facetime. My mom always calls. I talk to a few of my close friends once a week. They all Social Media and because of the time difference, we talk on the weekends. We also use Facebook and Instagram to find out what’s going on in everyone’s life.

S1: Well, I guess at the beginning, it was hard because I couldn’t understand English. Everything was difficult.

S5: It wasn’t too bad but I still had difficult time understanding everything because everything was said in English. That made things kind of hard.

S7: At first, it was just the language barrier and cultural differences that made things difficult for me.

S8: Well. The language barrier presented the biggest challenge for me.

Figure 5: Sample clustering and thematizing of challenging experiences.
The validation of invariant constituents was then conducted as the fourth step of the analysis. The step included the comparison of the identified clusters and themes with the complete transcript. The step was necessary in order to verify that the derived themes were in the context, and explicitly stated in the data. The fifth, sixth, and seventh steps, generation of individual textural description, individual structural description, and a composite description, included the review of the clusters and thematic labels through the entirety of the data, not just through each transcript individually. The three final steps also involved finalizing the themes, and finally addressing the research questions.

**Evidence of Trustworthiness**

Methods of increasing trustworthiness of the study were employed by the researcher. The researcher performed member checking, in which the researcher gave copies of the transcript, both original transcripts in Korean language and translated version in English language, to the respective participants for review and validation. Member checking increased the accuracy of the study; thus, the credibility of the study was also increased. Proper documentation of the processes throughout the study was employed by the researcher to increase the dependability of the study. Documenting the processes involved in this study may increase the chance of generating similar results in a replication of the study. Properly handling documentation of the data was also employed by the researcher in order to increase the confirmability of the study. Documentation of the data allowed the researcher, and may allow the readers to cross-reference the results with the actual data. The transferability of the study was increased through detailed description of the context of the results.

**Results**
This section provides the presentation of the study findings. Four major categories were identified to address the overarching research question on the perceptions of KESA students about their experiences of adjusting to a new environment. The first two categories, (1) experiences prior to coming to the United States, and (2) perceptions on being a KESA student, were considered as contributing factors to the participants’ adjustment to a new environment. The third category, helpful experiences, addresses the first research question, while the fourth category, challenging experiences, addresses the second research question. As such, this section is organized according to the four categories. Under each category, themes and sub-themes will be provided in subsections. Each theme and sub-theme is organized according to the frequency of mentions, with the highest recurring theme appearing first. Excerpts will be provided to support the findings. At the end of each subsection, a summative table of themes, sub-themes, and frequency of mentions will be provided.

**Experiences prior to coming to the US.** In this subsection, experiences of participants which were related, but not directly relevant, to helpful or challenging experiences of being a KESA student in the United States are presented. Three themes were generated in this subsection: (1) early exposure to English, (2) early exposure to American culture, and (3) decision to come to the United States.

**Early exposure to English.** Among the ten participants, nine were exposed to the English language during elementary school. Participant S5 was revealed to be the only participant to encounter English in middle school. The participants’ exposure to English was generally through specialized school or through American pop culture. Regardless, all of the participants were exposed to English prior
to coming to the United States. There are two further subsections in this subsection: (1) special instructions, and (2) American books, shows, movies, and music.

**Special instructions.** All of the participants received special instructions learning English prior to coming to the United States. The instructions were typically through receiving one-on-one tutoring, English camps, and most of all, attending cram school. Cram school is a specialized school that provides extra academic support to students, outside of students’ regular schools, to achieve academic goals. The participants shared that cram schools were generally scheduled after regular classes, in which some cram school classes ran up to ten o’clock at night. The participants also shared that they generally did not receive homework in regular school, but they did receive homework in cram school. Homework and performance in cram school did not directly contribute to the final remarks of the students in regular school.

Participants S1 and S7 both experienced studying English in the Philippines. S1 attended regular school in the Philippines for two years, while S7 attended English camp for one month each year for a period of three years. Furthermore, S7 continued to practice conversational English with her camp counselors via Skype. S7 also attended cram school, in which all of the other participants also attended. Participant S4 said that she “wasn’t really good in English” and she attended cram school since elementary school. The participant added that:

Well, I always went to English cram schools since my elementary school years.

However, I don’t think I really had any difficulties in my school English classes.

That means I think I went to those cram schools to really learn English, regardless
of my school work, but it eventually helped me with my school grades. In the end, I guess they were all to improve my school grades in English subject.

Nonetheless, some participants expressed that cram school did help improve their grades, but not their conversational English skills, such as in the experience of participants S3 and S10. S10 went to cram school to learn English, “however, none of it was for daily conversational English.” S3 went to cram school, but did not learn conversational English, and “ended up getting tutored in English at the end.”

*American shows, movies, and music.* Reading and listening to English through shows, movies, and music also helped expose the participants to English. The majority of the participants were initially exposed to shows and movies; however, the participants watched with Korean subtitles. Nonetheless, the participants found listening to English helpful. Participant S10 claimed that, “Well, at first I watched them with subtitles. I then watched them without subtitles more.”

Participant S7 “watched American movies without Korean subtitles”, and found it “fun” and “very helpful” as she tried to learn English. The participant added that:

When I was young, our TV had a feature that could get rid of the Korean subtitles for the Disney movies. I watched all Disney movies without Korean subtitles so many times that I almost memorized the scripts for each movie. I watched Disney movies throughout my childhood until I started to watch American dramas as a teenager.

*Early exposure to American culture.* The majority of the participants generally received early exposure to the American culture through cram school and international
school. Two sub-themes were identified as early exposure to American culture: (1) American teachers, and (2) American pop culture.

*R
* Americ
* an teachers.* Participants who attended international school typically met American teachers. An international school could be defined as local school with an international curriculum, or a school originally from one country, but based in another, following a different curriculum than that of the base country (Savva, 2013). The international schools referred in this study follows the former definition. Furthermore, English lessons in cram schools were also generally taught by American teachers. Participants S3 and S10, through attending international school, were able to experience events, such as Halloween and prom, which were considered part of American culture and the events were aided by American teachers. Participant S3 said that:

I am not sure if I can call it a culture, but I’ve been to school festivals. In 6th grade… definitely not when I was in middle school… so in 6th grade, at that school, there was something called foreign language day. There were many events for this festival, like singing pop songs and English essay writing contest. So, I’ve done those kinds of things at school.

Participant S10 shared that, “The parties or events at the school were something that you cannot experience in Korean schools. I was able to experience cultural events such as homecoming parties or proms with friends.”

However, participants who attended cram schools were generally taught, but were not able to experience American culture. The exception was participant S6, who shared that:
With the teachers from the cram schools, I would just talk about classes and sometimes we would talk about famous events such as Halloween, or big holidays like July 4th and Thanksgiving. And we would have parties to celebrate those holidays during classes.

American teachers in cram schools generally shared lectures of the American culture, as participant S4 stated, “Well. They did talk about American culture a little bit during the class, but I don’t remember having other conversations outside of classes.”

American pop culture. The researcher asked the participants whether American books, shows, or movies helped them be exposed to the American culture at an early age. Among the participants, S4 was the only one to mention using the internet to gather information. Participant S3 was the only participant to have found books and movies to be helpful. Participant S3 said that:

I think there were a lot of books and movies because I attended a writing class where I had to read one book a week. Those books were originally English books that were translated into Korean. The one that I remember… I don’t remember the title… Ah, I can’t remember all of a sudden. The main character’s job was to walk dogs. There’s no job like that in Korea. Little things like that… I learned through books and movies. Also, teen movies like High School Musical have things like homecomings and proms which you don’t get to see in Korea. It made me realize that there are things that exist in America that cannot be found in Korean culture.

The other participants, such as S5, S6, S7, and S10 preferred watching American TV shows or movie over books. Participant S7 shared that:
I loved watching High School Musical when I was young. When you watch these dramas or movies, you kind of start imagining what American culture or lifestyle would be like. As I was watching High School Musical, I developed this desire to come and live in America. I guess that kind of played a role when I decided to come as a study abroad student.

The researcher noted that some of the participants, such as S1, S2, and S8 claimed to not have had formal orientation on American culture, or had early exposure to the American culture through any means, even though participant S8 attended a winter cultural tour camp in the United States during elementary school. Participant S4 revealed that she did not go through agencies or organizations while processing her transfer to the United States, and claimed to not have formal orientation on American lifestyle as well. Participant S3 shared that she had heard of American culture from “friends who lived in America during their childhood and came back.”

**Decision to come to the United States.** Coming to the United States to study involved decisions of the participants. In this subsection, a discussion on whether the decision was mostly personal or mostly from the parents will be provided. The subsection is further divided into two subsections: (1) personal decision, and (2) parents’ decision.

**Personal decision.** At an early age, some of the participants were able to personally decide to go to the United States to study. The reasons for wanting to study in the United States varied from academic performance to the desire to attend a university in the United States. Participant S8’s decision sprouted from a suggestion. The participant expressed:
To be honest, I didn’t really study when I was in middle school. I always went out with my friends and didn’t really take school seriously. When I became 9th grade, I really didn’t know where I was headed. One day, I was having dinner with my family and saw the world map on the wall next to the kitchen table and saw America on the map. That brought back good memories of my time spent in California when I was in elementary school. I then asked mom whether I should go back to America. I wasn’t really serious about what I said but my mom took it very serious and started to look for ways to send me to America, and here I am, in America!

For participants S3, S4, and S7, their parents were initially not as supportive, and needed to be convinced of the benefits of studying abroad. The parents of the participants were concerned about sending their daughters far away from home.

Participant S4 shared that initially, her parents were sending her to an international school in China to achieve her goal of attending college in the United States. However, a Korean-American from the international school suggested that studying in the United States provided better chances. Participant S4 said that:

My ultimate goal was to go a college in America, so our plan took a 180 degree turn. We prepared within a month and I came to America right away. It was very fast process. Well, my parents weren’t really excited about sending me so far away from home. However, I really wanted to come and I think my feeling weighed in a lot more during the decision-making process.

Participant S7 was determined to study in the United States despite any circumstances. Initially, her family planned for her and her sister to study in the United
States accompanied by their mother. Eventually, the participant shared that her mother and her sister could no longer come with her, and her parents did not want her to go as well. The participant then shared that:

My dad didn’t really want to send his daughter overseas all by herself and he opposed the idea at the beginning. I think my mom agreed with my dad and was trying to find ways to keep me in Korea and said that I needed to come up with 100 reasons of why I wanted to study abroad in America. I am sure she didn’t think that I was going to come up with 100 reasons, but I did. I sat down and wrote down 100 reasons why I wanted to come. I also found books that talked about studying abroad and continued to persuade my parents. My father finally gave in and said I could go!

Parents’ decision. For some of the participants, their parents’ decision weighed more than their own in studying in the United States. Some participants were being “compliant”, and were eventually persuaded to go; however, participant S9 claimed to be obliged to follow her mother’s decision. Participant S9 shared that:

Yes, I really wanted to stay at Korean International School, but I think my mom didn’t really like the school. She really tried hard to persuade me to study abroad. She always said that it was ultimately my decision, but I felt that she really wanted me to go. I kept saying ‘no’, but in the end, I had to come.

Participant S2 claimed that her parents made the ultimate decision, and said that:

I think because I was attending an international school in Korea and because a lot of my classmates decided to study abroad, my parents thought it was a better idea for me to study abroad instead of continuing to attend school in Korea.
Participant S1 was the only participant who shared that her decision was neither highly personal nor highly weighed upon by her parents. The participant claimed that she was highly influenced by her older brother. Participant S1 shared:

So, for me, I kind of followed his footsteps and went to Philippines and also decided to come to America. Before I went to Philippines, my mom and I decided that I would come to America after learning English in Philippines first. My host family in Philippines also recommended that I go to America to study abroad as well.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Frequency of mentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early exposure to English</td>
<td>Special instructions</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>American shows, movies, and music</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early exposure to American culture</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>American teachers</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>American pop culture</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision to come to the US</td>
<td>Personal decision</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parents’ decision</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Perceptions on being a KESA student in the United States.** In this subsection, participants shared their perceptions on being a KESA student in the United States. The participants’ perceptions did not directly influence helpful or challenging experiences as a KESA student in the United States; however, the perceptions may be premeditating to the experience. Two themes discussed in further subsections emerged under this finding: (1) school system differences, and (2) spending free time.
**School system differences.** The participants perceived some differences between the American and Korean school systems. The majority of the differences were in favor of the American school system, in which the participants claimed that studying in the United States was easier, and in a way, better. Among the school systems, three sub-themes were identified as differences: (1) teachers, (2) proactive learning, and (3) ability to choose subjects.

*Teachers.* The participants claimed that teachers in America differed from teachers in Korea. The participants felt that teachers in Korea were said to be limited to do their job, and were more authoritative to their students. Teachers in America, on the other hand, were claimed to be more approachable, respectful, and concerned about their students. Participant S6 expressed:

Well, first of all, students here respect the teachers. In Korea, students don’t respect their teachers at all… They typically don’t engage themselves in classes… and I was like that too. But American teachers treat their students with respect so students can’t treat their teachers badly. It’s like students and teachers can be friends here. In Korea, teachers order students what to do and students, in turn, feel like the teachers only tell them what to do because they are older and students end up disrespecting them. Teachers in America are so friendly and helpful and the biggest difference is the fact that the teachers are so passionate about what they teach. In Korea, it just seems like the teachers teach as their job. So I think that was the main difference. Also, the grading is different. In America, it is an absolute grading system whereas in Korea, it is a relative grading system so it’s sort of motivating when you get a high grade in Korea because you know you are
doing better than others. Here, you really don’t know how you are doing compared to others so sometimes it’s less motivating.

The participant added that:

Other than the things I’ve already mentioned, I don’t really know… The teachers in America just really care for the students and think about them whereas teachers in Korea are not like that at all. Rather, teachers in Korea make quick assumptions and judge students compared to teachers in America who ask what’s going on when students seem like they are in the slightest bit of trouble. Korean teachers don’t care whether students sleep in classrooms or whether they are sick, they just don’t care.

Participant S5 perceived that American teachers were more “open-minded”, while participant S7 perceived that American teachers were “definitely friendlier” and were “very compassionate”. Participant S10 also perceived American teachers to be “friendlier”, as her teachers greeted her in the hallway, while in Korea, teachers “don’t always remember all of their students’ names.” Participant S4 shared similar views, and said that:

Well, I go to a small private school where student population is very small. I am not sure if that’s why but teachers are so kind and nice. If you go to them with questions, they answer you with sincerity and so much kindness. In Korea, it’s so hard to approach teachers for anything. I am not sure if I ever went to see a teacher outside of classroom.

Proactive learning. Other than the teachers, the learning style was also different in the United States compared to Korea. Learning was typically proactive in the
American schools as opposed to the passive learning in Korean schools. Participant S4 shared that:

I think the atmosphere here is more free. Kids speak and ask questions freely during class time and everyone thinks that’s normal. But in Korean schools, kids just take notes while teachers lecture. It’s completely one-way approach there. I hope kids know and prepare themselves for this different system before they come so they can speak more and ask questions more in classes without feeling out of place.

Participant S4 also said that there was a lot of memorization in Korean schools. Participant S7 also said that:

In Korean schools, you can just relax every day until about three weeks before the mid-term or final exams. When that time comes, you start memorize, memorize, and memorize for the exams, but in America, you focus so much on actual learning. Before exams, you focus on learning, and for exams, you just use what you learned. It was still kind of hard, but it was so much more fun because it felt like I was really learning something new all the time.

Participant S1 basically explained that studying in the United States promoted proactive learning, in which teachers allowed and encouraged the students to participate and share opinions in class. Participant S1 also said that:

I am not sure if it was only at my school in Korea, but many kids were kind of shy when they had to present something in front of the class or during discussion times. Many kids felt that it was better to just sit quietly during the class than voicing their opinions. But in American schools, there are lots of seminars and
presentations during the class time and they give grades for participation. I guess that’s why American kids participate more and voice their opinions more actively than Korean kids.

*Ability to choose subjects.* Another difference between American and Korean schools was the students’ ability to choose subjects. As participant S1 said, in Korean schools, “subjects you can take are all set by grade level.” The participant added, “But in American schools, students are allowed to take classes per their abilities or level. The fact that I was able to choose my own subjects was the biggest difference for me.”

Participant S3 shared her experience during her first day of classes in the United States. Participant S3 said that:

In Korea, we are assigned to certain classes, such as class 1, class 2, class 3, and etc. and students stay in those classrooms all day and the teachers will come in to teach their subjects. Teachers move around in Korea and students don’t. But on my first day here, the bell rang and...[laughter] Kids all of a sudden get up and were going somewhere! [laughter] I had no idea where they were going so I just followed them out because they were all leaving. Because no one ever told me I had to leave. No one said that I had to move to my next class! I think that was the most and very first shocking experience for me.

*Spending free time after-school or on weekends.* Spending free time as a student in the United States and in Korea also had differences, as perceived by the participants. Three sub-themes were identified under this theme. Free time as a KESA student in the United States allowed (1) staying home, (2) clubs or sports activities, and (3) hanging out with friends, while in Korea, free time after-school or on weekends was usually spent on
attending cram school or receiving private tutoring. Although the participants mentioned
that making friends and going to places with friends were easier in Korea, it was actually
more difficult to find a schedule to be with friends outside school and cram school hours.

*Staying home.* Despite having free time, the majority of the participants’ response
of how free time was spent in the United States was to stay indoors. For participants S1,
S3, and S7, free time was generally spent doing homework. Participant S1 typically
“come home from school, do my homework, relax a bit, and go to sleep.” However for
participant S3, free time was spent doing homework due to the desire for good grades.
S3 shared that:

I think the reason is because even if had to do all the homework in Korea, it was
only for cram schools which means they didn’t affect my grades in school. It
means it didn’t have any impact on my life. Even if I didn’t do my homework for
cram schools, they don’t give you F’s. They just say “why didn’t you do your
homework? Do your homework next time!” That was all. But here in America, I
don’t go to cram schools. All my homework is for school. If I miss even one
assignment, I get an F. This matters, unlike homework from cram schools in
Korea. On those homework, I used to guess when I felt sleepy and tired. Here, if I
guess, I am going to get bad grades, so I can’t. I guess that gives me more
pressure and makes me tired.

Other than doing homework, other indoor activities done by the participants were
playing on the computer, watching TV shows, and playing video games.

*Clubs or sports activities.* Another activity that occupied the participants’ free
time in the United States was participating in extra-curricular clubs or playing sports.
The participants expressed that they had more options for clubs and sports in American schools, and generally had more free time to become involved in those activities compared to when they were in Korea. Participant S6 also stated that she had more freedom to choose her activity in the United States than in Korea. Participant S6 said that:

In America, they have a lot more clubs and choices in classes like art. In Korea, there’s only one option that your teacher assigns you that you must do. I also think it’s great that there are a lot of music class options here. I just think there are a lot more activities in America in general.

Participant S5 shared that she “does club activities after school on the days when there are club meetings.” Participant S7 “played sports”, while participant S8 specifically mentioned “basketball”, and participant S9 mentioned “volleyball”. Nonetheless, several of the participants’ statement ended with doing homework. For instance, S7 said that, “In America, I played sports and worked on my school homework after school.” S10 said that, “Well, at the beginning, I played volleyball after school. I used to practice two to three hours each day and went home. At home, I did my homework and slept.”

_Hanging out with friends._ The participants also hung out with their friends. Participant S2 claimed, “I just love talking and hanging out with friends so we go to coffee shops and hang out or go shopping.”

Participant S4 shared how she spent her free time before compared to how she spends her free time at present. S4 narrated:

Well. I don’t play sports, but I watch or help managing the school teams after school in America. I also spend time working on my homework. On weekends, I
was going to a SAT cram school to prepare for SAT until recently. However, I was kind of getting overwhelmed with my school work, so I quit. Nowadays, I just spend time with my friends or work on my homework on weekends.

Other activities mentioned by the participants were going to church, and attending tutorial. Participant S10 still attended cram school after regular school, while participant S1 received private tutoring in preparation for SAT. Participant S3 revealed that she was not religious prior to coming to the United States, and was influenced by her host family to go to church. Participant S3 shared:

I became a devout church goer here. I go to church every Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. I do my homework for school Saturday nights or Sunday nights. I go to Friday night meetings on Fridays. On Saturdays, I go to rehearsal for my gospel team where I sing. I go to church to worship on Sundays. I guess that’s all I do on weekends. I play with my friends sometimes if I get a chance.

Table 6

Perceptions on Being a KESA Student in the United States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Frequency of mentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School system differences</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proactive learning</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ability to choose subjects</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spending free time</td>
<td>Staying indoors</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clubs or sports</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hanging out with friends</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Helpful experiences. This subsection addresses the first research question on the factors that the students perceive to be helpful in their adjustment to a new environment as a KESA student in the United States. Being in a foreign country with a “very different” culture, and without their parents, the participants shared their experiences that
were most helpful during their adjustment in the United States. Three themes emerged as helpful experiences: (1) having friends, (2) activities, and (3) social media and instant messaging.

**Having friends.** Several of the participants mentioned that having friends, especially in school, helped them adjust to their new environment. Participant S9 shared that:

When I first came to my school in America, there was a girl who approached me first and started up a conversation by asking me whether I needed any help or was looking for my classrooms. She helped me so much at the beginning and said hi to me every day.

Participant S8, however, said that it was difficult to make friends in the United States if one were “not good in sports, or do not have other talents, whether academically or personally.” Participant S10 said otherwise, and stated that:

In American schools, you go to different classes each period. That means you will see more students and make more friends. You are not bound by certain groups within your class like Korean students are in Korea where you stay in one classroom throughout the whole day. You get to meet more new faces here and you are even taking same classes with kids who are in different grade levels depends on the class you are taking. You can become friends with all of them regardless of their grades or age.

Regardless, participant S2 claimed that having friends in the United States helped her with the things she “did not know or was having a difficult time with.” S2 said that,
“I was able to believe and depend on them when I was going through difficult times. I have close friends that have been here for a long time.”

**Activities.** Getting involved in extra-curricular activities and playing sports generally helped the participants adjust in the United States. Doing activities and playing sports allowed the participants to meet people with similar interests. Participant S6 claimed that volunteer work helped her gain confidence in fitting in. The participant added that watching American shows helped her be more comfortable and to “adjust quickly.” Participants S8, S9, and S10 played sports, and regarded that playing sports helped them adjust to their new environment. Participant S9 shared that:

> There was a girl on our tennis team and I became very close through playing tennis first. Then she had a friend who joined us and three of us became real close. We spent so much time together after playing tennis, by going to different events such as Halloween parties, and other functions.

Participant S10 expressed that being in the school band provided her with “opportunities to interact with other students,” and she had “very fond memories of being a member of the band.” S10 also played volleyball in the beginning, and shared that:

> I joined the volleyball team when I first came to the school. I never played volleyball before and had no idea how to play, and my English wasn’t really good either. But all my teammates were so nice and they helped me so much as I adapted to the new culture.

**Social media and instant messaging.** As the participants left friends and family in Korea, social media and instant messaging played a part in the adjustment to a new environment. The participants were able to contact their parents, siblings, and friends for
free, and they were able to stay updated through social media. Participant S6 shared that she used “Facebook and Instagram occasionally.” Several of the participants used Kakaotalk, a Korean messaging application for mobile phones, or Facetime to contact friends and family, especially when they were feeling homesick. Participant S3 shared that:

I talk to my parents almost every day or at least every other day through Facetime. My mom always calls. I talk to few of my close friends once a week. They all go to school, and because of the time difference, we talk on the weekends. We also use Facebook and Instagram to find out what’s going on in everyone’s life.

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Helpful Experiences</th>
<th>Frequency of mentions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having friends</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activities</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media and instant messaging</td>
<td>4</td>
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**Challenging experiences.** This subsection addresses the second research question about the challenging experiences during the adjustment period of the KESA students in the United States. Six themes were identified in this subsection. The themes were: (1) Language barrier, (2) being away from family, (3) not owning a car, (4) keeping in touch with old friends, (5) cultural differences, and (6) racism.

**Language barrier.** Despite early exposure to the English language in Korea, and the added English lessons discussed in a previous subsection, the majority of the participants mentioned language barrier as a challenge in their experience as adjusting KESA students in the United States. Participant S3 shared that she experienced difficulty in understanding and being understood in English. S3 said that, “I guess at the beginning
it was hard because I couldn’t understand English. Everything was difficult. Because of my lack of English, I couldn’t understand what different clubs even meant and what they were for.” S3 added that:

I also felt so embarrassed to talk to other students during class time. I was so worried about my pronunciation and I was so embarrassed to speak out. I didn’t have enough courage so I used to speak so quietly and classmates or teachers would say ‘excuse me?’ and I used to think people didn’t understand me because my English was so bad.

Participant S5 was also challenged with pronunciation. However, her “biggest challenge” was understanding textbooks. S5 stated that:

When I studied hard but there were things that I just still could not understand. That was hard to accept. I would read chapters in a textbook 3-4 times, but I just could not understand what it meant. That was hard.

Participant S8 simply said that, “The language barrier presented the biggest challenge for me.” Participant S7 also believed similarly. Participant S1 shared her concern that the language barrier may have affected some of her grades. S1 said that:

At my school, there are many presentations or discussions during class times. Teachers give us a topic and we are supposed to have discussions in class. Sometimes exams are given in this format. When this happens, I become afraid to speak out because I am worried about making pronunciation or grammar error and as I am thinking about forming correct sentences with correct pronunciation I lose my chances to speak. When this happens, some teachers will give us a 0 for participation grade or for the whole presentation. I think they feel that I don’t
want to participate and that’s why I didn’t say anything. I know it’s hard for them to tell why I really didn’t speak, but it’s not like I didn’t want to as they may have thought.

**Being away from family.** Although the participants were living with a host family, and have not encountered problems with their host families, being away from their immediate family was revealed to be challenging for the KESA students. Participant S4 explained that, “It’s more of me having to do everything on my own. I know there is my host family, but I still have to make many decisions on my own. That sometimes becomes quite stressful.”

Participant S2 said that, “Probably being apart from my family was the most difficult thing.” S2 cited a time when she got sick. The participant stated, “Just when I was sick and no one was there to take care of me— that’s when I really missed my mom, parents.”

**Not owning a car.** Some of the participants cited that in Korea, it was easy to get around due to the convenient subway system and other means of public transportation. In the US, however, the participants shared that it was a challenging experience to not own a car. Participant S5 said that, “in America, you can’t go anywhere if you don’t have a car.” S5 added that:

Everyone also lives so far away from each other and there is no public transportation. With no car, it’s basically impossible to meet friends. In Korea, I was going to a boarding school, so I didn’t really have to worry about how to get to other places anyways. But during weekends or breaks, I would come home and arrange meetings with my friends. We would decide where we were going to meet
and I would simply get on a subway and go anywhere I wanted. There are also so many places that sell variety of delicious food and places to go to. I think it’s so much easier and so much better to do things in Korea than in America.

Participants S7, S8, S9, and S10 said that to get around, they had to ask their host families for rides, “It was not easy to ask for rides all the time,” as stated by S7. S10 shared that:

Korea has a great public transportation system, so it’s much easier for us to meet friends. On the other hand, there is not much of a public transportation we can use in America. If I want to go out, I have to ask for a ride from my host family. That makes it difficult to make any arrangements to meet with my friends.

Keeping in touch with old friends. Some of the participants claimed that it was easy to see their friends every day when they were in Korea; however, when they moved to the United States, they found it challenging to keep in touch with old friends.

Participant S9 said that the “frequency of contacting old friends became less and less.” Participant S8 had a similar experience, and narrated that:

When I was in Korea, my friends were everything! I valued their opinions and trusted them more than I did with my parents’. However, after I came to America, I started to realize that many of my friends were just passing by in my life. If I were friends with 200 people, about 190 of them were just [passers-by] and only 10 were my true friends. Now there aren’t that many that I am still able to contact, and because there aren’t that many friends that I can contact, I contact my parents even more and I became [more] closer to them instead.
Participant S10 shared that she was initially envied by her old friends due to the fact that she no longer had to attend cram schools every day and the fact that she didn’t have to study as much in the United States. Participant S10 added that:

Since I came to America, our lives have changed drastically. Our school environments are very different for us now and the way we study and live our lives became very different that we don’t really share same topics anymore when we talk.

Cultural differences. Cultural differences, according to the participants, encompassed the food they ate, pastimes, and interests. Participant S9 said that:

I felt it was hard to adapt to the new surroundings and the new culture. It felt like everything changed. Food changed, house changed, and everything else changed overnight. I had to adapt myself to the totally different environment and it was so hard.

In addition, S9 mentioned “food” and sharing “thoughts and feelings” about a “handsome idol” with her friends in Korea as one of the important cultural differences that she missed. Finding friends with similar interests was also challenging for participants S1 and S8. Participant S8 shared that:

What I mean by cultural difference is that our senses of humor were different and kids’ interests were different. It was hard for me to know what I was supposed to say to attract other kids’ interests and constantly trying to figure out how I was supposed to act to be one of them.

Participant S1 shared her desire to branch out from her Korean friends, and make American friends, but cultural differences made it difficult for her. S1 said that:
Teachers or counselors sometimes think that we don’t like spending time with American students or we feel uncomfortable around them and that’s why we only hang out with Korean students, but that’s not true! We do want to have close relationship with American students, but since we have cultural differences…. Because of cultural differences, we really don’t have much to share and emphasize with. We don’t watch same dramas or TV shows. We were born and grew up in totally different environment, and that’s why it’s hard for us to approach American people.

**Racism.** Some of the participants experienced forms of racism during their adjustment period. Participants S2 and S4 felt that some teachers lacked the cultural sensitivity to know that not all Asians were Chinese. S4 said that she was not affected so much, but felt that “schools cared more about Chinese students because there are so many of them.” For S2, she felt upset, and said that:

They all assume that all Asians are Chinese. I know there are many Chinese in America. But it kind of makes me feel upset. Do I look Chinese? It’s upsetting to think that to Americans, we all look the same way and they automatically think that we are all Chinese without even taking simple courtesy to ask where we are from.

Participants S1 and S10, on the other hand, felt that teacher “preferred White students” in general. S10 also said that, “There are students who mimic our pronunciation and make jokes out of it behind our back too. I think these can be all racism.” S1 shared that teacher tend to be more lenient towards White students. S1 narrated that:
Our school has very strict dress code. If we wear short shorts or skirt, we get in trouble by teachers. When that happens, American kids joke with teachers and say things like “oh, I forgot to do laundry and didn’t have the right shorts or skirts!” They can do this because they can freely communicate with teachers and teachers laugh and joke back to them. For us, when we get caught with short uniform, teachers say something and we just say ‘okay’. It feels like American kids and we both broke the rule, but how it’s being handled can look very different. I think I envy American students because I would like to be more friendly with my teachers like they are too. I hope teachers can be little more understanding and talk to us like they do with American kids. They seem softer or more gentle when they talk with American kids. This sometimes comes across as racism to us. It feels like they look down on us because we are Asians or they can treat us with no respect because we don’t speak fluent English. It feels really terrible when that happens. My friends and I know which teacher doesn’t like Asians and mistreats us.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
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<td>Language barrier</td>
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<td>Being away from family</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not owning a car</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping in touch with old friends</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural differences</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racism</td>
<td>6</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Summary

This chapter provided the presentation of results derived from the data analysis plan guided by the modified van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994). The purpose of this
phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of KESA students in the United States in relation to their adaptation to their new environment, as well as the factors that they perceive to help or challenge them in the process of adaptation to the new environment. The overarching research question of the study was: what are the perceptions of KESA students about their experiences of adjusting to a new environment?

To be more specific, the following research questions guided the study:

1. What factors do children perceive to be helpful when they are adjusting to a new environment as KESA students in the United States?

2. What factors do children perceive to be challenges when they are adjusting to a new environment as KESA students in the United States?

The findings of this study were divided into four subsections: (1) experiences prior to coming to the United States, (2) perceptions on being a KESA student in the US, (3) helpful experiences, and (4) challenging experiences. The third and fourth subsections directly addressed the two research questions. The first and second subsections were not direct to the helpful or challenging experiences of the KESA students in the United States during adjustment period; however, the experiences and perceptions contributed to the experience of adjusting to the new environment as a whole, which addressed the overarching research question. Findings from this study revealed that the participating KESA students had the intention to study in the United States, whether for secondary school or for college, or for other academic reasons, or KESA students in the United States were sent by their parents to study in the United States. KESA students in the United States had early exposure to the English language, mostly through regular school and cram school. However, the students noted that English taught
in school and in tutorial focused on grammar and technicalities, and not on conversational English, which resulted in language barrier as the top challenging experience during their adjustment period in the United States. The students recommended watching American TV shows or movies for a fun and more effective way to learn English. As for learning the American culture, TV shows and movies created expectations among the students, in which most of the expectations were not as they were in reality. Being away from family and keeping in touch with old friends were identified as challenging experiences for the students; nonetheless, the use of social media and instant messaging was identified as a helpful experience in the students’ adjustment. Furthermore, having friends in the United States and doing club activities and playing sports were helpful experiences, and generally occupied the time of the students, as well as helped the students interact with other people using the English language. Cultural differences and racism existed as challenging experiences for the students during their adjustment period. Overall, the adjustment experience of the KESA students in the United States was challenging at first, then became generally positive upon adjustment. Further discussion of the findings, along with the implications of the study, will be provided in the next chapter.
Chapter 5: Summary, Discussion and Recommendations

Summary

Problem

The purpose of this study has been to explore KESA students’ perceptions of their experiences living abroad without their parents. Unique historical and cultural factors combined with globalization created a massive push in the last couple of decades for Korean students to study abroad, primarily in the United States. This is evidenced by the startling increase in the number of young Korean students sent to study abroad without their parents’ accompaniment. According to the Educational Statistics Data Base, the number of KESA students grew from 2,259 in 1995 to 27,668 in 2007 (KEDI, 2008). Despite this tremendous increase, little is known about the lived experiences of these students, the kinds of challenges they face and their ability to cope with those challenges.

In order to fill this gap, the researcher conducted interviews with the general research question, what are the perceptions of KESA students about their experiences of adjusting to a new environment? Two specific research questions were derived from this overarching theme:

1. What factors do children perceive to be helpful when they are adjusting to a new environment as KESA students in the United States?

2. What factors do children perceive to be challenges when they are adjusting to a new environment as KESA students in the United States?

By exploring the experiences which both help and hinder their ability to adapt to a new cultural environment the researcher hopes to aid parents and educators charged with preparing these students to better help them adjust to life outside of their own
country prior to their departure. In addition, the outcome of this study could provide valuable insights and knowledge for counseling professionals and educators in the United States, whose direct encounters with KESA students have been increasing in recent years in their work settings, in providing necessary and adequate services during the adjustment period.

**Method**

The method used for this study was a qualitative phenomenological research design. Individual interviews were conducted in Korean language (per participants’ preference) to evaluate the research question. Research showed that the sample size for qualitative studies ranges from 10 to 20 participants as being sufficient to achieve data saturation (Mason, 2010). Beck (2009) noted in his guidelines that a sample size ranges from six to twenty-five to achieve data saturation. For this study, a total of sixteen KESA students were initially recruited. After the demographic surveys were performed, six of the sixteen participants were deemed unqualified based on the qualification criteria. As a result, ten students were selected for final participation. Participants were selected by using purposive sampling, which is the selection of samples based on a specific set of characteristics needed for the study (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Data was analyzed using Moustakas’ (1994) prescribed method for analyzing phenomenology based on the initial method of van Kaam.

**Results**

Four major categories were identified to address the overarching research question on the perceptions of KESA students about their experiences of adjusting to a new environment. The first two categories, students’ experiences prior to coming to the
United States, and perceptions on being a KESA student, were considered as contributing factors to the participants’ adjustment to a new environment. The third category, helpful experiences, addresses the first research question, while the fourth category, challenging experiences, addresses the second research question.

In the first theme, experiences prior to coming to the United States, the researcher found that all students had formal education in English prior to arriving in the United States, but also found that the education they received was little help in understanding conversational English. Students also said that they had been exposed to American pop culture through movies and TV shows while they were in Korea. Only one student noted using the internet to gather information about American culture before departing Korea. The interview also revealed that while some students were encouraged by their parents, in some cases the students advocated for going abroad to study.

The second theme, perceptions on being a KESA student, students relayed some of their ideas about how the school systems are different and how they are able to spend their free time outside of their schools. Participants suggested some large differences in the way school is carried out in the United States vs Korea. The three major differences noted by the students were teachers, proactive learning and the ability to choose subjects. The researcher found that students perceived American teachers differently than those in Korea, suggesting that American teachers were more approachable and less authoritative. Another aspect was learning style, that is, students said that American schools focused more on proactive learning and less on rote memorization. They were also pleased in the ability to choose their subjects. Whereas in Korea each grade has a very specific
curriculum associated with it, high school students in the United States have more flexibility in choosing their classes.

Participants also noted differences in how they were able to spend their free time, during after school hours or on weekends. They found they had much more free time to spend with other students in the United States compared to Korea. In Korea, most time outside of school is reserved for attending cram schools or receiving private tutoring. In the United States, on the other hand, they were allowed more flexibility in arranging time spent with their friends, joining clubs or playing sports.

The third theme that emerged was *helpful experiences*, which speaks directly to the first research question: what factors do children perceive to be helpful when they are adjusting to a new environment as KESA students in the United States? Three themes emerged under this umbrella as helping students to adapt to their new cultural surroundings: having friends, getting involved in extracurricular activities and keeping regular contacts with their family and friends. Having friends helped students to feel less alienated and helped them to make better adjustment to the new culture of the United States. Participating in extracurricular activities, such as joining clubs or playing sports in school, helped students to find others with similar interests and assisted them in finding friends. Maintaining regular contacts with their parents and friends in Korea via social media and instant messages helped students feel less isolated.

The fourth and final theme, *challenging experiences*, speaks directly to the second research question, what factors do children perceive to be challenges when they are adjusting to a new environment as KESA students in the United States? Within this major theme the study revealed six separate common experiences which challenged
participants’ ability to adapt: language barrier, being away from family, not owning a car, keeping in touch with old friends, cultural differences and racism.

The most commonly cited barrier to adaptation was the language barrier. Even though all participants had received formal English language education prior to entering the United States, most of them said that their training had been too formal to be helpful. Most of the students reported having difficulty understanding conversational English and self-consciousness about using the language in front of their native peers.

Being away from family and having to do things on their own without their parents’ help were also revealed as being difficult for most students. Perhaps this also played a role in their complaint that it was difficult to find ways to spend time with friends without a car. In Korea, it is very easy to get around with public transportation, but in the United States a car is virtually necessary. In the same vein, participants complained that it was difficult to stay in touch with old friends even with the use of technology due to their different life styles and the time difference. Cultural differences and racism were also revealed to be a challenge. Students reported difficulty in connecting with other students because of cultural differences. Some students also reported experiencing some form of racism or another, both from their peers and their teachers.

Limitations

The results from the study are rich in narrative and description, however it is limited in its ability to offer explanations for the findings. The point of a phenomenological study is to explore a phenomenon where little is known. The method allows for a rich descriptive narrative that gives researchers a good starting point for
exploring specific issues more thoroughly, but does not allow for analysis of cause and effect or evaluation of the impact of each specific item. For example, we know that students had some preexisting perceptions about American education, but the study results do not allow us to comment on how they effected the educational experiences of the students. For this reason, the study results are useful for describing experiences, but tell us little about how these experiences translate into outcomes.

In addition, the sample was only ten students, nine of which were female, all living with host families in a relatively urban area of the Washington Metropolitan region, and all of which were in high school and had been in the United States for a couple of years. This makes it difficult to assess the problems they faced when they first arrived and how severely the change effected their psychological well-being over time. In addition, it could be the case that boys and girls, students who live in rural areas and those who live in urban areas, experience different types and levels of challenges during acculturation.

Discussion

The influx of KESA students in the United States has been on a steady rise for the last couple of decades. This section will discuss how the present research helps to both dissect this phenomenon and explain it, as well as how better to serve this large influx of students. Each research finding will be discussed along with its implications and how it contributes to the literature, as well as place it in its historical and cultural context.

The first two themes that emerged from interviews were their prior experiences before entering the United States and their perceptions on being a KESA student in the United States. These experiences, ideas, and biases are rooted in a deep cultural history
surrounding education and social class as well as shaped by Korea’s experience as an occupied nation. It is useful to do a quick review of this history to help ground our understanding of their prior experience and perceptions of being a KESA student in the United States.

The first public education system was created during the Three Kingdoms Period (57 BCE-935 AD) and had Confucian ethics at the center of its educational programs (Park, 1991). This trend continued in the Koryo Period (918-1392) with the addition of Buddhist teachings and rise of social class distinctions as the balance of power shifted between the natives and the Mongols (Park, 1991).

The Chosun Dynasty (1392-1897) saw the rise of Neo-Confucianism, which put family and education at the center as the primary concerns of Korean society (Lee et al., 1984). Confucianism advocates education as the most important means for perfecting man, and this idea weaves its way through Korean culture all the way up to the present. High-quality, widely-available education was a Neo-Confucian ideal and Neo-Confucianism assumed that good education led to good government and a good society (Kalton, 1998). It was believed that the quality of education could be precisely measured by a set of national examinations (Schubert, 1986). The goal of these national examinations was to choose government officials on the unbiased basis of academic ability and as a result, achievement in these national exams led to social prestige (Lee, 2010; Tu & Ikeda, 2011). Chosun education was similar to modern Korean education in that both Chosun education and modern Korean education emphasize readying students for national exams and in both systems, education offers a way to gain power (Tu & Ikeda, 2011; Lee, 2010). During early modernization, the education curriculum began to
shift to economics, politics and natural sciences (Tu & Ikdeda, 2011). Shortly after gaining independence from Japan, Korea began to industrialize, with a fully modern education system at its center (Altbach & Umakoshi, 2004).

This historical legacy had left a deep mark on Korean families and their views of education as a means to gain prestige in society. In addition, the Japanese stifling of education left Koreans with a strong motivation to educate their children. This emphasis is evidenced by the literacy rate which showed a dramatic increase from 22% in 1945 (the last year of Japanese occupation) to a rate of nearly 100% by the year 2000 (Kim-Renaud, et al., 2004; Chun & Choi, 2006; Sorensen, 1994). The number of students in secondary schools doubled between 1945 and 1947. Elementary enrollment rates passed 90% in 1964, middle school enrollment rates passed 90% in 1979, and high school enrollment rates passed 90% (Sorensen, 1994). This is also apparent in the percentage of students who attend college and the percentage who expect their children to attend college. The rate of high school graduates going on to higher education increased from 40% in the early 1990s to almost 84% in 2008, and 93% of Korean parents reported that they expect their children to go to college (The Economist, 2013).

Another side effect of this cultural emphasis on both education and social success has been a very strong focus on learning English very early on in their education. Early contact with western civilization and globalization convinced Koreans that English skills were necessary in order to succeed. This has been termed English Fever to describe the shear ferocity with which English has been implemented in the Korean Education system. Indeed, all of the students in this study reported receiving English language education very early on, all but one student began in elementary school and the other began in...
middle school. However, the students also reported that their education in English was not sufficient and that they continued to have difficulty with conversational English.

Perhaps this is due to the rigorous rote memorization style of Korean education and the emphasis placed on exams (Tu & Ikeda, 2011; Lee, 2010).

The participants’ perceptions regarding being a KESA student in the United States surrounded two major themes, school system difference and spending free time. The students noted three major differences in the school system and all students said that studying in the United States was easier and, in some ways better, than in Korea. As mentioned above, Korean education has historically placed a heavy emphasis on rote memorization and exam scores. Perhaps for this reason teachers are perceived to be much more authoritative in Korea than in the United States. The KESA students overall preferred US teachers whom they reported were more flexible and approachable than their counterparts in Korea. Their experiences with a much more rigid education system likely contribute to their fondness of the American system in this way. Along similar lines, students also said they preferred the proactive style of learning that emphasized engagement over rote memorization.

As a result of the cultural emphasis on educational attainment, Korean students’ time was highly circumscribed in their own country (Lee, 2010). Outside of regular school most students attend cram schools designed to boost their regular class performances, or spent more time studying to get a head-start than others. For this reason, the participants in this study were pleased to discover that they had much more free time to spend with their friends, joining clubs, playing sports, or just relaxing indoors.
The last two major themes from the interviews, *helpful experiences* and *challenging experiences* both speak directly to questions posed by the researcher. Most students noted that having friends (mostly Koreans), participating in extracurricular activities and maintaining contacts with their families and friends in Korea using social media and instant messaging all helped them to ease the transition into American culture. However, the students also noted serious challenges including the language barrier, being away from family, not owning a car, keeping in touch with old friends, cultural differences and racism.

The language barrier appeared to be the most common issue and the most challenging to overcome for many students. This may seem counterintuitive given the above-mentioned emphasis on English education from primary school, but studies have shown that this is a pervasive problem in the education system of Korea. One of the most often cited reasons for this is the focus on grammar and translation as a teaching method (Asia-Pacific Global Research Group, 2013; Chun & Choi, 2006). Students complained that their English was too formal and they had a very difficult time understanding conversational English. In addition, perhaps due to cultural expectations of success, students struggled with the embarrassment of not having mastered a language they had studied for many years.

The challenges reported by these students are particularly telling as there is very little research that describes the relative success of these students in the United States. Some studies have shown delays in ESA students’ psychosocial, linguistic and academic development, as well as their experiences with high level of stress due to acculturation (Chung, 1994; Kuo & Roysircar, 2006; Park, 2007; Tsong & Liu, 2009). Still others
have shown that without proper support these students are at high risk of substance abuse, gambling, depression and antisocial behavior (Tsong & Liu, 2009). Despite these risks, parents of the Korean students show no signs of slowing the trend to send their kids overseas to study. According to a survey, more than 30 percent of Korean parents indicated that they are willing to send their children abroad for study if the circumstances permit (Kim, 2005).

Taken together, the findings from this study and others combined with sheer volume of students coming into the United States to study makes a strong argument for understanding the unique challenges faced by very young students who travel abroad without their parents. The implications of this study are far reaching. Given the massive influx of students from Korea, counseling professionals and educators must be equipped to deal with the unique challenges facing KESA students. The next section will discuss the possible implications as well as make recommendations for future research.

**Recommendations**

The goal of this study was to explore the lived experiences of KESA students living in the United States. As noted above, the number of students flowing into the United States from Korea demands more attention to the issues faced by the students, but little is known about them or how successfully they are coping with the stress of living in a new place without their family. Since there is very little research on this subject a phenomenological study was conducted to help explore the issues that can help counseling professionals and educators deal with the unique problems faced by KESA students and the avenues that should be pursued by further research.
This research has helped to clarify for education professionals the unique challenges faced by KESA students living in the United States. Since the study showed that the largest and most common challenge associated with moving to the United States was the language barrier, it should not be assumed that the education they received in Korea was sufficient. Students complained that the language instruction was too formal and they were embarrassed about their ability to speak English in front of native speakers. One thing educators can do is offer classes to Korean students to learn conversational English during their adjustment periods. This in turn can improve their confidence since they would be practicing with native speakers as well as non-native speakers, which may improve their ability to make new friends. It is also important that educators show more patience and sensitivity in their encounters with the students. Even with the information provided by this research, there is still much to be discussed regarding KESA students.

First, little is known about the success rate of these students. While the students in this study appeared to adapt over time, we were not able to assess the degree to which they were able to effectively transition to US style education. A more in depth look at coping strategies would be helpful here, perhaps with a more experimental design to assess whether or not these strategies actually effect the academic outcomes of students. While students reported challenges, the study design did not allow the researcher to assess how much these challenges effected the outcomes of both the students’ academic and personal experiences. For example, many reported problems with conversational English, but we were not able to assess how this effected their ability to perform
academically. We were also not able to assess the degree to which they were able and willing to seek help in this regard.

Second, this study did not allow assessment of psychological outcomes. Some studies have been conducted regarding outcomes associated with poor adaptation, but the literature is quite silent on how to combat these issues. This research has presented the literature with some possible avenues to begin answering this question. For example, students said that having friends helped them to cope with the stress of acculturation, so future studies should look at this and other possible avenues for combating the increased stress of being alone in a foreign country.

Third, while participants said that their English education was insufficient the results tell us little about what specific issues came up to prevent the students from communicating. We do have one clue, students said that their education was too formal and that conversational English was difficult to understand. Other research should explore what specific issues arise when KESA students move from communicating primarily in Korean to primarily in English.

Fourth, there has been a downward shift in the age of the students who are studying overseas without their parents (See tables 2.2 and 2.3). Future studies should explore the different ways that the transition effects different age groups and the specific issues faced at each level. Perhaps, for younger students, the language barrier is not the largest concern. Given that many of the students of elementary school age come without any family, the amount, variety and depth of issues that may accompany them could be infinite.
This study also has some implications for school counselors and others charged with working with ESA students, particularly from Korea. To help increase future and current counselors’ awareness and sensitivity towards the needs of the students from Korea and neighboring countries, courses that familiarize counselors with east Asian cultures could help them understand the unique sets of challenges of those students coming into the United States. In addition, schools that find themselves with a large enough ESA student population can create orientation programs to educate them on American culture and its school system to ease their adjustment into their new surroundings. In this regard student peer counselors who are also ESA students would be a great resource. In addition, offering group counseling sessions on a regular basis could offer ESA students the opportunity to share their difficulties and challenges with others who may be going through similar experiences. These exchanges may help them relieve some of their emotional stresses. It is also recommended that school counselors keep a record of other counseling professionals or organizations in their local areas, who can offer counseling services to teenagers in different languages. Such a record could be useful in case referral is needed for students who require more in-depth counseling services.

This study provides a starting point for understanding the unique challenges faced by KESA students and ESA students more broadly. While we have done a good job of describing these issues, future research should attempt to explain and generalize these findings to a broader array of ESA students.
References


Open Doors. (2014). *Open Doors 2014: International students in the United States and study abroad by American students are at all-time high.* Retrieved from


Appendix A

Request Letter to Principals

Dear (Principal),

My name is Won (Matthew) Lee and I am a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education program at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, VA. I am conducting a research study regarding perceptions and experiences of Korean Early Study Abroad students in the United States, particularly around the Washington Metropolitan area. I plan to interview Korean international high school students about their experiences.

I am writing you to seek permission to speak to your Korean international students about the study with the hopes of acquiring their voluntary participation in the interview process. I am looking for students who are enrolled in grades 9 to 12, who have spent at least one year and less than three years in the United States as Early Study Abroad students. I am bi-lingual with Korean and English, so the students will be provided the option of completing the interview in either language. The information meeting will take approximately 30 minutes and can take place at a location designated by the school.

I have included a copy of the informed assent for students to provide more information about the study. I will contact you again via telephone in a week to discuss any questions or concerns you may have about your students’ participation in the study.

Should you have any questions or concerns before next week, please feel free to contact me at my cell phone or e-mail address listed below.

Thank you so much in advance for your response.

Sincerely,

Won (Matthew) Lee, M.Ed.

Doctoral Candidate, Virginia Tech

e-mail:  wjlee@vt.edu

Cell Phone:  703-915-9518
Appendix B

Recruitment E-mail for Principals

Dear Korean International Students at ________________ School:

Mr. Matthew (Won) Lee is a doctoral student at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia. As his doctoral dissertation, Mr. Lee is currently conducting a research study to explore the experiences of Korean Early Study Abroad students in the United States in relation to their adaption to their new environment, as well as the factors that they perceive to help or challenge them in attaining successful adaption. The outcome of this study is expected to provide new insights and knowledge for counseling professionals, who have direct encounters with Early Study Abroad students.

You are cordially invited to attend the orientation meeting that will be held by Mr. Lee on ________________, at __________ in the ______________. The orientation meeting will not exceed 30 minutes, and during that time, you will be provided with detailed information about the study, as well as opportunities to ask any questions you may have about the study. After the orientation meeting, should you decide to participate in the study, you will meet with Mr. Lee individually at a later time for a personal interview. The interview will take approximately an hour and it will be audio recorded by Mr. Lee. Details of the interview procedure, along with any related issues such as confidentiality, will be discussed during the orientation meeting.

Your participation in either orientation or personal interview is strictly voluntary, and the decision to participate or not will not have any effect on your grades.

Should you have any further questions about the study, please feel free to contact Mr. Matthew Lee directly at wjlee@vt.edu or by his cell phone at (703)915-9518.

Thank you so much for your time and interest.

Sincerely yours,

_________________________
Principal’s Name
Appendix C

Informed Assent Form for Participants English Version

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent for Participants in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

Research Title: The Perceptions and Experiences of Korean Early Study Abroad Students During Their Adaptation Period

Principal Researcher: Won J. Lee

Advisor: Dr. Nancy Bodenhorn

Introduction and Procedures of the Study

You are invited to participate in a research study in which the researcher explores the experience of being an Early Study Abroad student in the United States. Your participation in this study involves a personal interview with the researcher during which you will be asked questions about your opinions and perceptions relative to your experience as an Early Study Abroad student. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes. With your permission, the interview will be audiotaped and transcribed (and translated to English if necessary), the purpose thereof being to capture and maintain an accurate record of the discussion. Your name will not be used at all throughout the transcription or presentation of results. On all transcripts and data collected you will be referred to only by way of a pseudonym.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore experiences of Korean Early Study Abroad students in the Washington Metropolitan region during their adaptation periods through qualitative methodology.

Benefits

This research will hopefully contribute to understanding the experience of Early Study Abroad students who come to the United States to study at an early age, and so the potential benefit of this study is increased understanding of ESA students and improvement of support by helping professionals.

Risks

The amount of risk for participating in this study is same as you will encounter during a usual classroom activity. During the interview, participants may recollect difficult experiences of trying to adjust to the new culture as ESA students. Participants are allowed to stop the interview at any time, or to refuse to answer any questions that cause
any discomfort. If there is current distress that is communicated in the interview, you will be offered a list of counselors who can provide support.

**Compensation**

There is no financial compensation for participating in this study.

**Data Storage to Protect Confidentiality**

*Under no circumstances whatsoever* will you be identified by name in the course of this research study, or in any publication thereof. Every effort will be made that all information provided by you will be treated as strictly confidential. All data will be coded and securely stored, and will be used for professional purposes only. Only the researcher will have access to the data and will be destroyed upon publications and presentations of the study.

**Freedom to Withdraw**

Participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty. Participants also have the right to refuse to answer any question during the interview.

**Preferred Time for Interview**

Please choose your preferred day and time to be interviewed (circle a preferred day and indicate your preferred time below).

Monday  Tuesday  Wednesday  Thursday  Friday  ____ AM  ____ PM

**Subject’s Permission**

I have read the Informed Assent Form and details about this study. I confirm that I meet the criteria for participating in this study. I have had all of my questions answered and I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary Consent:

______________________________  ____________________
Participant Signature                Date

Should you have any questions or concerns about this research or researcher’s conduct or your rights as a research subject, or need to report a research-related injury or event, you may contact the VT IRB Chair, Dr. David M. Moore at moored@vt.edu or (540)231-4991.

You may also contact one of the researchers listed below if you have any questions regarding the study and/or your participation.

Dr. Nancy Bodenhorn  nanboden@vt.edu  540-231-8180
Won J. Lee  wjlee@vt.edu  703-915-9518
Appendix D
Informed Assent Form for Participants Korean Version
피연구자 동의서

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

연구 제목: 한인 조기유학생들의 적응 기간 동안 겪는 경험과 인식에 관한 연구
주 연구자: 이원진
어드바이저: Dr. Nancy Bodenhorn

연구 및 절차에 관한 소개

당신은 미국 내 조기 유학생들이 겪는 경험을 조사하는 연구에 참가를 위해 초대를 받았습니다. 당신의 본 연구 참가는 주 연구자와의 개인적인 면담을 통해 조기 유학생으로서 당신이 가지고 있는 의견이나 인식에 대한 질문에 답하는 것으로 진행됩니다. 본 면담은 약 60분 정도내에서 이루어지며, 당신의 허락 하에 면담 내용은 보다 정확한 기록을 위해 음성으로 녹음 되며, 그 후 필기로 기록 (필요에 따라 영어로 번역) 하는 과정을 거치게 됩니다. 당신의 이름은 본 연구 과정 내에 어떤 경우에도 공개되지 않을 것이며, 모든 기록물이나 연구 결과 발표에 당신의 이름은 익명으로 언급 될 것 입니다.

연구 목적

본 연구의 목적은 워싱턴 메트로폴리탄 인근에 거주하는 한인 조기유학생들이 적응 기간 중 겪는 경험을 질적 연구 방법을 통해 조사하는 것 입니다.

이익

본 연구를 통해 미국에 어린 나이에 유학 오는 한인 조기 유학생들의 경험 및 삶에 대한 좀 더 깊이 있는 이해를 돕고, 결국 이를 통해 조기 유학생들에 대한 이해 증진 및 그들을 돕고자 하는 전문가들의 도움의 영역을 넓히는 이익을 추구하고자 합니다.
위험 요인

본 연구에 참여하며 겪을 수 있는 위험 요인의 정도는 당신이 일반적인 수업에 참여하여 겪을 수 있는 정도에 비해 낮지 않습니다. 면담 중 혹은 당신이 조기 유학생으로서 미국 생활에 적응할 당시 느꼈던 어려움을 회상할 상황이 올 수도 있습니다. 당신은 언제고 면담의 중단을 요청하거나, 불편함을 야기하는 질문들에 대한 답변을 거부할 수 있습니다. 만약 면담 중 나누는 얘기로 인해 심적인 불편함을 경험하게 될 경우, 당신에게 도움을 줄 수 있는 전문 상담자들의 명단을 드리도록 할 것입니다.

사례

본 연구 참가를 위해 금전적인 사례는 주어지지 않습니다.

익명성을 보호하기 위한 자료 보관

어떠한 상황에서든 본 연구가 진행되는 기간 동안 당신의 이름은 실험으로 사용되지 않음이며, 당신이 제공한 모든 정보들이 최대한의 비밀 보장을 받을 수 있도록 모든 노력을 기울이게 될 것입니다. 모든 정보들은 암호화 되며 안전한 장소에 보관되고 연구 목적을 위해서만 사용되게 될 것입니다. 모든 정보들은 연구자만이 접근 및 이용이 가능하며 연구가 종료 됨과 함께 폐기처분 될 것입니다.

참가 중단의 자유

당신은 어느 때고 아무런 불이익을 당하지 않고 본 연구에 참가를 중단할 수 있는 자유가 있으며, 면담 중 어떤 질문에도 답변을 거부할 수 있는 권리가 있습니다.

피연구자의 동의

나는 본 연구에 대한 동의서와 그 구체적인 내용을 읽어 보았으며, 나는 본 연구의 참가 대상으로서의 자격을 갖추었음을 확인합니다. 또한 연구에 대해 내가 가지고
있는 모든 질문들에 대한 답변을 얻었으며, 위의 사항들을 인지했음과 본 연구에 자발적으로 참여하기로 동의합니다.

_______________________________________   _____________________
피연구자 서명   날자

본 연구에 대한 문의 사항이이 있거나, 본 연구 또는 연구자의 행위나 당신의 연구대상으로서의 권리에 대한 우려가 있을 시, 또는 연구 관련 부상이나 사건을 보고해야 할 경우 VT IRB 의장인 David M. Moore 박사님께 moored@vt.edu 또는 (540)231-4991 로 연락하실 수 있습니다.

아울러 본 연구나 연구 참여에 관해 질문이 있을 경우 하기의 연구자 중 한분께 연제고 연락하실 수 있습니다.

Dr. Nancy Bodenhorn   nanboden@vt.edu   540-231-8180
Won J. Lee   wjlee@vt.edu   703-915-9518
Appendix E

Demographic Survey

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study! Please complete the survey below. The information collected in this questionnaire will be kept strictly confidential and will only be used for the purposes of this research study.

1. What is your age? _____

2. What is your grade level? _____

3. Gender: M ___ F ___ Other ___

4. How many years have you been in the United States as an international student? _____

5. Have you spent any time overseas prior to coming to the United States to study as an ESA student? Yes ___ No ___ If yes, please indicate the country name and the duration of your stay:

__________________________________

6. Have you attended any schools (including international schools in Korea) that English was the main language of instruction? Yes ___ No ___ If yes, how many years have you attended the school? _____ year(s) _____ month(s)

7. What is your current status of living? Boarding _____ Host Family _____
Appendix F

Interview Protocol

Date _______________________                      Student ID ________________

Pseudonym __________________________

Introduction

■ Greet the student
■ Discuss the purpose of the study
■ Discuss the structure of the interview (audio recording, taking notes, and use of pseudonym)
■ Ask if the student has any questions
■ Test audio recording equipment
■ Tell student to relax and begin the interview

Questions about prior experience

1. Please tell me what your exposure to the English language was before you came to the United States.
   - Did you have any formal classes?
   - Did you receive any private lessons in English outside of your school curriculum?
   - Did you watch any television shows or listen to radio programs in English?

2. Please tell me what your exposure to culture of the US was before you came to the United States.
   - Did you have any orientation in preparation for your life in the United States?
   - Had you interacted with people from the United States in Korea?
   - Did you read any books, watch TV shows or movies that portrayed culture of the US? What ideas or impressions did you have about culture of the US from any of these?
Questions about coming to the United States

1. Please tell me about the decision making process for you to come to the United States as an ESA student.
   - How involved were you in the decision making process?

Questions about adjustment period

1. When you think back to your first few weeks in the US, what three descriptors would you use to characterize those days?
   - Explore each descriptor with a follow-up question of: can you give me an example of a time or situation that was particularly ____________ to you?

2. When you first started school in the US, what differences or similarities did you notice when comparing the US school to your Korean school?
   - Did the teachers act any differently?
   - Did the students act any differently?
   - Do you look at these differences any differently now than you did when you first arrived?

3. What kinds of things did you do with your time after school and on weekends in Korea? What kinds of things do you do now after school and on weekends?
   - Is it easier or harder for you to arrange to do these activities?
   - If different, how did it happen that you stopped doing __________? How did it happen that you started doing __________?

Questions about living away from home

1. What do you miss most from Korea?

2. How much time and what kind of contact do you have with family or friends in Korea?

3. How have these relationships changed since you have come to US?

4. How did you make and keep friends in Korea? How have you made and kept friends in US?
Questions about overall experience

1. How do you feel about your experience of being an ESA student?

2. What do you think was most helpful to you as you were making adjustment to the new environment?

3. What do you think was most challenging to you as you were making adjustment to the new environment?

Suggestions and Recommendations

1. What advice would you give to future KESA students who are preparing to come to attend schools in the United States?

2. What would you like for US school teachers and other personnel, including school counselors to know about KESA students?

3. What do you think would be helpful for future students to know or learn before they depart Korea?

Concluding Questions

1. Is there anything else you would like to add or share about your experience as an ESA student that you feel is important for me to know?

Concluding Statement

■ Thank the student for his/her participation

■ Ask if the student would like to see a copy of the results

■ Record all observations, feelings, thoughts and/or reactions about the interview
Appendix G

Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

MEMORANDUM

DATE: December 8, 2015

TO: Nancy E Bodenham, Won Jin Lee

FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires July 29, 2020)

PROTOCOL TITLE: Exploring Korean Early Study Abroad students’ perception on their experiences during their adaptation period in the United States

IRB NUMBER: 15-1055

Effective December 8, 2015, the Virginia Tech Institution Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the New Application request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As: Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 6,7
Protocol Approval Date: December 8, 2015
Protocol Expiration Date: December 7, 2016
Continuing Review Due Date*: November 23, 2016

*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.