EXPERIENCES OF SIX EAST ASIAN GRADUATE STUDENTS

IN ONLINE COURSES

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

International student enrollments and online courses enrollments in the United States have been increasing. As today's society has more different paradigms and educational worlds expand their field into online education, there are more culturally and ethnically diverse students in educational fields. International students mostly confront adaptation issues, but sociocultural differences could be big issues especially for East Asian students because their sociocultural values are different from Western sociocultural values. This suggests that communication is important for both instructors and East Asian students in order to understand East Asian students' sociocultural experiences in online TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Language) courses. The three research questions are: 1) What are the experiences of East Asian students in online TESOL courses? 2) What are the sociocultural experiences that East Asian students encounter when taking online TESOL courses? 3) What strategies do East Asian students use to facilitate their learning in online TESOL courses? The main instrument for collecting data was a qualitative study with face-to-face interviews in order to understand East Asian students' experiences better and obtain rich data regarding phenomena and issues.

Five themes were generated from the interviews: (1) keeping silent, (2) classroom differences, (3) positive attitude, (4) sociocultural experiences, (5) online learning strategies. Specifically, sociocultural experiences included language barriers and English proficiency, communication and preferences, a sense of belonging, and

content materials. For East Asian students, communication was the most important part

in online learning.

DEDICATION

To my father, mother, and little sister

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CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

There are more than 1 million international student enrollments in the United

States between 2014 and 2015 with growth a rate of 10 %. The top three places of origin

of international students are all Asia: China; 304,040, India; 132,888, and South Korea;

63,710 (Institute of International Education, 2015). Additionally, according to National

Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the component ratio of English language

learners (ELL) in public school students of school year 2013-14 (9.3 %), which is higher

than in 2003–04 (8.8 %) and 2012–13 (9.2 %), has shown increasing the number of

English language learners (ELL) in the school (Kena et al., 2016). Plus, international

English as a Second Language (ESL) students are one of the highest population in post-

secondary institutions (Aytac, 2016; International Student Enrollment Trends, 2015).

According to a ten-year or more research project, Latino/a and Asian students are

the two ethnic groups who are more to take English as a Second Language (ESL)

courses (Snyder et al.., 2016). As culturally and ethically diverse student populations

increased, there is an need for twenty-first century leaders to use culturally responsive

teaching to "address the language and cultural barrier issues that often exist between

teachers and students who speak English as a second language or non-standard forms of

English" (Taliaferro, 2011, p. 15). Furthermore, in many courses including TESOL, it is

important that both students and instructors understand sociocultural values in their classes.

Additionally, NCES shows that in fall 2014, nearly one out of four undergraduate students took distance education courses, while 2.1 million students, which is 12% of total undergraduate enrollment, exclusively enrolled in distance education courses (Kena et al., 2016). Plus, one out of three total post-baccalaureate students participated in distance education, while 25% of total post-baccalaureate students exclusively enrolled in distance education courses (Kena et al., 2016). Moreover, according to Digest of Education Statistics, for international students, 26% undergraduate Asian students were taking online classes in 2012 (Snyder et al., 2016). Moreover, about one fifth of Asian graduate students (19.4%) were taking distance education in 2012 (Snyder et al., 2016). All statistic data suggest that applying technologies in education is not a choice but a requirement in a multicultural and multi ethnic world.

Thus, various colleges attempt to use innovative courses and strategies in their curriculum. To be specific, a number of universities already provided online courses; Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) such as edX, made by MIT and Harvard University; Coursera, two Stanford University professors, OpenupEd, a project of the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities, so that the public or students from other schools can take classes for free (Dylla, 2014). Moreover, there are lots of online education tools such as Voki which is a webtool "a free online service that allows users to create personalized speaking avatars and embed them in a blog or wiki or send them via e-mail" (Aikina & Zubkova, 2015, p. 66). In addition, there are lots of schools

which provide online degree courses or use online educational tools for students. For example, in Texas A&M University, Department of Teaching, Learning and Culture alone provides 6 online degree or certificate programs such as curriculum and instruction, TESOL, STEM, urban education, and secondary certification program (Texas A&M University [TAMU], 2016).

Among various courses, TESOL courses are one of the most popular programs that East Asian takes the most as already noted. Even though titles of TESOL courses are different from school to school, what students are learning is similar. As students need to teach English to non-native speakers, they would have educations related to learning other ethnicity, culture and language, representing the course named world literature or understanding special population. Furthermore, with a basic knowledge of English, TESOL courses provide knowledge on education such as foundation of education, and educational psychology. Students would learn various theories in TESOL, general TESOL approaches, stages for the teaching second language skills, and multiple methods for materials preparation and assessments (Goshen College, 2016; Texas A&M University [TAMU], 2016). TESOL helps non-native speakers to transit successfully into English learning environment. Effective TESOL requires "skill, a quality ESL program, well-trained educators, and an ongoing melding of the ESL information and coursework throughout the students' courses" (Sull & Seelow, 2016, p. 40). Several approaches enable the process of effective teaching TESOL to go smoothly (Sull & Seelow, 2016). Therefore, online environment is an important source of instructional delivery approaches for a variety of contexts in education (Skordis-Worrall, 2015; Ku &

Lohr, 2003). With changing trend, modern education fields need to study how they can cover diversity and how they can teach students with high technologies. According to Gay (2009), "a very different pedagogical paradigm" is one of essential factors in order to develop the underperformers from different racial groups (p. 26). As today's society has more different paradigms, educational worlds continue to expand their field from traditional teaching to online education.

However, international students confront adaptation issues to new educational environments (Warner & Miller, 2015). They also have sociocultural issues in online education because of its characteristic. As online learning is an easier way to access to study for many students, there are more culturally and ethnically diverse students in online education settings. Thus, when students take online classes, they also experience difficulty of communication and cultural difference like students feel in the traditional classroom. According to Craig et al. (2012), "Although some researchers have found that there are differences in the use of synchronous tools which are dependent on factors such as culture, others have found that using such tools may cut through potential barriers" (p. 8). Therefore, if students and instructors in online classes ignore cultural gaps, it may bring about "detrimental educational and psychological consequences", which prevents students from developing themselves and makes them feel lonely in classrooms (Kang & Chang, 2016, p. 780; Chen & Bennett, 2012).

Consequently, cyberspace needs to consider a culture in order to communicate people from everywhere because online environment is not a "neutral or value-free platform for communications" (Rovai, 2007, p. 83). Thus, as cultural gaps among online

students are getting greater, they have a lot of chances to misunderstand other people from various backgrounds (Rovai, 2007, p. 83). Furthermore, Ku and Lohr (2003) support that Asian and American students have different characteristics, and new coming East Asian students have cultural difficulties:

> Most Asian students have different learning styles and cultural backgrounds as compared to their American peers. Students who are new to the country and enrolling in online courses have to deal with the issue of cultural novelty not only in daily life, but also in the online learning environment. (p. 96)

Despite the growing evidence of studying sociocultural context in TESOL and online learning of East Asian students, most of researchers focus on technology of online learning. Few researchers have conducted assessing sociocultural problems among East Asian students in online TESOL education. It is essential to understand sociocultural experiences that East Asian students have in online TESOL courses.

Statement of the Problem

As technology developed, students with different background, culture, and ethnic group have increased in today's class and learning with technology has become popular among many schools. Modern educational worlds also expand their fields from traditional teaching to online education with changing trend and different paradigms. In distance education, there may be differences like sociocultural beliefs between native students and international students. However, many prior studies on distance education have conducted research on the technical part (McIsaac & Gunawardena, 2001). Most studies have analyzed existing data or have been quantitative. Researchers need to

conduct studies based on sociocultural differences. While most research about East Asian students' participation in online learning spaces have been captured through quantitative studies, there is a need to have more research that uses a qualitative approach since sociocultural contexts impact learning in online spaces.

Research Questions

Followings were the research questions that guided the study:

1. What are the experiences of East Asian students in online TESOL courses?

2. What are the sociocultural experiences that East Asian students encounter when taking online TESOL courses?

3. What strategies do East Asian students use to facilitate their learning in online TESOL courses?

All the information from each interview provided overall answers for the research questions.

Definition of Terms

This section explains definitions of terms and concepts that are used in this study, providing contexts for this study design and research.

East Asian Student

East Asia generally refers to the nations such as China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan (United States Central Intelligence Agency, 2011). However, because of characteristic of study population, East Asian students in this study refer to students from China, Korea and Taiwan.

English as a Second Language (ESL)

For the purpose of this study, ESL is defined as teaching English as a Second Language. However, the term can be described differently from schools to schools, departments to departments, and courses to courses: TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language), TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language), TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Language), and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) etc (Montrose, 2015). In this study, the term "TESOL" is used.

Sociocultural Experiences/Sociocultural Context

For the purpose of this study, sociocultural contexts that are addressed in this study are language proficiency, communication style, and contents of class materials (Joo, 1999).

Online Learning/Online Education/Distance Education

Definition of online learning in this study is a learning service that can be provided with synchronous or asynchronous communication (Rovai, 2007). Distance education is an umbrella term but these three terms are used interchangeably in this study.

Significance of the Study

Despite the growing evidence of studying sociocultural contexts in TESOL and online learning of East Asian students, most of researchers have focused on technical part of online learning. Few researchers have conducted assessing sociocultural experiences among East Asian students in online TESOL education. Bringing and using students' sociocultural values to curriculum and classrooms are important in online

education settings. Thus, it is essential to understand sociocultural experiences that East Asian students have in online TESOL courses. The results of the study might be useful for curriculum makers to address diverse populations. Also, it might also be helpful for instructors to consider characteristics of East Asian and understand them much better in their online lessons.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis consisted of five chapters. Chapter I presented a background of the study, statement of the problem, research questions, definition of several important terms in this study, and significance of the study. Chapter II included the literature review and theoretical framework. Chapter III displayed methodology and procedure of the study and Chapter IV discussed five themes that were identified from data analysis while Chapter V included the discussion, conclusion, and recommendations.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

      Most present studies are designed and developed with existing literatures so that studies can be closely connected to each other. Theoretical framework also provides contextual information for the present study. The first section included sociocultural values of East Asians students in their classrooms and importance of considering their values in online education environments. The second section provided the development of technology in educational fields and sociocultural sensitivity of distance education. The last part introduced Teaching English to Speakers of Other Language (TESOL) in higher education. Theoretical/conceptual framework provided context of distance education and sociocultural perspectives, which was main theme of the thesis paper.

Sociocultural Values of East Asian Students and Online Education

      Although the idea of sociocultural values for East Asian students in online education predated Wang's study, one of the most contributing parts in Wang's study was its exploration of Asian students' online experiences in American universities and sociocultural influences on their learning (Wang, 2006). Her study implies that Asian students might have cultural difficulties while taking online classes in American universities. Cultural difficulties generally occur because sociocultural values of East Asia education are different from those of American education. Under English academic setting, Asian students are usually silent and do not seem to participate in the class and

activities as compared to American students. However, Asian students are often reluctant to express their opinion because they are afraid of losing their face. Face, which is closely connected to Asian culture, refers to "the embodiment of pride, dignity, honor and self-esteem" (Lee, 2011, p. 76; DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2004). According to Choi (2015), no matter their level of English proficiency, they keep silent in the class because they worry about losing their face regarding their language abilities. As Wang (2006) mentioned, the same thing happens in online setting and Jun and Park (2003) noted the same results in their study. In fact, Jun and Park (2003) found out that language barriers was their main reason for losing face when they speak up. This is called "lurking in silence".

Moreover, Wilson (2001) offers sociocultural characteristics of Asian learning style: "For Hong Kong Chinese, their Confucian heritage was the most obvious example of ethnic culture. It was manifested in a number of ways, especially students' deference to teachers, unquestioning acceptance of grades, reluctance to express opinions, and their motivation to learn because they thought they should, rather than because of an intrinsic desire for knowledge" (p. 54). In addition, in Asian education setting, asking questions and high oral participation during class time are considered as disobedient and disrespectful behaviors, challenging the authority of the teachers (Choi, 2015; Liu, 2002). Thus, a good student in Asia means that they are sitting and listening to teachers and well memorize what they learn from teacher (Choi, 2015; Ng & Smith, 2004). Thus, because of their educational background, almost all East Asian students, such as Korean, Chinese and Taiwanese, are unwilling to speak up in the American classroom.

Considering the sociocultural needs of a diverse student population and understanding potential sociocultural obstacles are important, encouraging students to bring more than one cultural viewpoint to the online groups (Palloff, 2007).

Development of Technologies and Cultural Considerations in Distance Education

As technology is developing, the Internet has become a widely used study support tool to develop "a wider learning context" (Chang et al., 2014, p. 367). Therefore, using the internet has become a must in education. Nevertheless, understanding effectiveness of the internet is necessary to employ it (Sweeney & Ingram, 2001). Especially, the effectiveness is closely related to communication and interaction in terms of online learnings. Thus, some opponents of online learning argue that online learning rather makes students feel confused, isolated, and frustrated without sufficient communication and engagement in the online learning environments (Kaufmann, Sellnow, & Frisby, 2016; Markova, Glazkova, & Zaborova, 2017; Zaborova & Markova, 2016; Ni, 2013). Moreover, issues exist regarding the nature and extent of the interaction and its effects on student performance even if many web-based learnings provide an effective means of communication such as an electronic bulletin board, discussion board, email, or synchronous chat areas for successful learning (Gorsky et al., 2010; Picciano, 2002).

Despite these problems, in the modern world, technology is becoming an integral part of the learning process (Aikina & Zubkova, 2015). The technology removes "geographical barriers", bringing revolution to the recent global communications in online learning environments (Treuhaft, 2000). With geographical barriers being brought

down, many students from various countries and backgrounds are gathered in the online education setting. This suggests that context of discussion and contents between instructors and students are often different. For example, a number of international students in American universities, who usually have lack of understanding of the American society and cultures, often experience of being marginalized in the online discussion (Jun & Park, 2003). "In this case, cultural discontinuities occur when the schemata of a learner and instructional designer do not correspond" (Wilson, 2001, p. 54). Thus, sensitivity is needed when people establish online learning environments for global villagers who have various background, ethnicity, learning style, and strategies (Treuhaft, 2000). Furthermore, designing and delivering online educational learning programmes and courses are a required area for educational researchers in order to develop more systemic research concerning perception of a global audience (Lobaina, 2016; Wang, 2007).

Online Teaching English to Speakers of Other Language (TESOL) in Higher Education

Among various English education programs, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Language (TESOL) is popular English language teacher program among Asian people as previously stated. Thus, a lot of TESOL associations are located in Asia and many universities in Asia try to provide TESOL programs for their students. Specifically, Duksung Women's University, which is one of Korean universities, makes a TESOL program in order to give opportunities of having TESOL certificate to students, cooperating with the City University of New York (Duksung Women's University

[DSU], 2012). However, because students have to come to school in order to take class, the opportunities sometimes quite limited to some students. Therefore, as distance education technology improves, students start to choose distance education over traditional education. England (2012) suggests that this phenomenon happens because "the degree they seek is unavailable in their [students'] geographical area" and students want to find possible online options that "suit their personal or professional needs" with greater flexibility (p. 2). As a result, a growing number of global audience become students with computer technology online and they expect institutions of higher education to meet their needs of having and developing online courses and programs by competing each other (Tan et al., 2010; Liu, 2007). Thus, in the United States, more than 40 universities provide language teacher education online and by distance worldwide, which refers to TESOL master's level program, while more than 400 private institutions are providing TESOL certificates online (England, 2012).

Furthermore, it seems that there is no difference between traditional education and distance education except for its teaching methods. However, unlike traditional education, online TESOL program uses more teaching materials; blackboards or other online instructional system, online sources, mobile phone like text messages and telephonic communications, and various video formats (England, 2012). In addition, educators should know that online courses are truly different from face-to-face courses as for "classroom settings, modes of delivery, or student population" (Hung & Lee, 2012, p. 188) and interactions, syllabi, materials, assessment, and testing (England, 2012). This is because instructors are key roles in establishing successful new form of educational

methods (Hung & Lee, 2012; Garrison & Cleveland-Innes, 2005; Meyer, 2003; Shea et al., 2005; Tallent-Runnels, et al., 2006). This implies that sociocultural consideration in online setting should be dealt with differently. Thus, in this vein, this article analyzes sociocultural values that East Asian students have experienced in TESOL distance education.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

Distance Education

According to Scholosser and Simonson (2006), distance education started in Sweden in 1833. Since then, distance education has experienced growth and changed constantly from correspondence study to electronic education. With historical basement, distance education can be defined with four components: Institutionally based teaching and learning, separation of teacher and students, interactive telecommunication, and concept of connecting learners, resources, and instructors (Scholosser & Simonson, 2006). Meanwhile, McIsaac and Gunawardena (2001) contends that "what was once considered a special form of education using nontraditional delivery system is now becoming an important concept in mainstream education" (p. 403). Moreover, they propose theoretical constructs to understand the distance education. These constructs include global movements, technologies, interaction, learner environments, and course designs. It is important that all constructs have each theme and intimately connect to one another. "If one or more [components or constructs] are missing, then the event is something different, if only slightly, than distance education" (Scholosser & Simonson, 2006, p. 3).

Additionally, Moore and Kearsley (2005) also emphasize systemic view of distance education because a distance education can be operated only when every component works properly. These subsystems include learning, teaching and role of the students, communication between learner and contents, instructors, other learners, course design, and management (Moore & Kearsley, 2005). Among all the elements, communication is the most important parts in context of the distance education. This implies that communication between students and professors or among students is one of the most important considerations in course design and instruction of distance education. Moreover, "it is the effective interaction of instructor, student, and delivery system that affords distance education its prominence within the educational community", which enable distance education to create successful educational package (McIsaac & Gunawardena, 2001, p. 431).

Understanding Sociocultural Perspectives

People understand the world with their social and cultural lens. Social construct places its importance on content-driven knowledge. Governed by rules, social construct consists of expectations, boundaries, relation, and pedagogy (Macfarlane, Macfarlane & Webber, 2015). Meanwhile, cultural construct emphasizes context-driven knowledge. Governed by values, cultural construct includes thoughts, feelings, identity, and beliefs (Macfarlane, Macfarlane & Webber, 2015). However, as social construct and cultural construct are inextricably linked, independent examination of social and cultural system is insufficient (Zopf, 1978). Culture offers "the rationale for human systems and stands in a cause-and-effect relationship with all of other parts… At the same time, culture is

result of social interaction and constantly changed" (Zopf, 1978, p. 497). Still, rather than simply driven from social interaction, culture is "the specific structures and processes that encompass and locate individuals actually guide the types of interactions [people] will have with others" (Macfarlane, Macfarlane & Webber, 2015, p. 19; Vigotsky, 1978). With historical markers, cultural contexts are also provided so that "it can shape the potential outcomes for individuals and groups" (Macfarlane, Macfarlane & Webber, 2015, p. 19; Scrimsher & Tudge, 2003). According to Macfarlane, Macfarlane and Webber (2015), in today's society, research planners, policy makers, and professionals become globally aware that sociocultural perspectives are valuable sources in their fields. Sociocultural system is "set of reciprocating processes, structures, functions, and dysfunctions linked together within a framework so as to make up an identifiable and operating whole unit, limited by the natural world" (Zopf, 1978, p. 3). Likewise, sociocultural perspectives gain its important position on instructional approaches as it combines social and cultural views, affecting educational outcomes (Macfarlane, Macfarlane & Webber, 2015).

Thus, technology-based learning activities need to consider sociocultural context in distance learning system, which motivates students to learn in a more structured manner. Based on the framework, this study examines correlation between distance education and sociocultural context. Moreover, reflecting international students' opinions must be helpful source for developing distance education courses.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Chapter III described methodology that was implemented in this study, including design of the study, pilot study, participants, instrument, data collection, and data analysis. A qualitative study design was employed to better understand the experiences of East Asian students. Data were collected in an individual face-to-face interview during the 2017 Spring semester.

Design of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore the experiences of East Asian students who have participated in online TESOL courses. This study used a case study design involving in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The following section provided a description of rationale for a qualitative methodology and case study design.

Rationale for a Qualitative Methodology and Case Study Design

While quantitative study designs are structured, rigid, and fixed in order to make sure accuracy of measurement, qualitative study designs are often flexible and less strict in gathering information (Kumar, 2011). As every study is based on the limited context of the research data and designs, cautious analysis is needed especially in qualitative study. Among numerous qualitative study designs, case study is chosen as it innovates methodology, and enables the researcher to ask questions that can be risky (Winchester, 2015; Fitzpatrick, Al-Qarni & Meara, 2008). Johnson and Christensen (2000) define that

"case study is a research design that provides a detailed account and analysis of a bounded system or one case (or more cases)" (p. 327). Case study is useful when it comes to understanding holistic view of the situation, phenomenon, group, or community (Kumar, 2011). Six East Asian graduate students participated in this study. The researcher gathered information from each student and considered them as single case, which helps the researcher to comprehend each case in its entirety (Kumar, 2011).

Moreover, the data collection invloves on interviews and opinions from participants in qualitative research, which makes any interpretation of questions highly subjective (Winchester, 2015). Nevertheless, a qualitative design is helpful for researchers to understand people and events better in their social environments with the holistic approach, which gives rich data to researchers regarding the issues or phenomena (Bell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In qualitative methodology, personal experiences are regarded as important sources of data, as philosophy and characteristics of data try to interpret the data in meaningful ways (Bell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Thus, as this study placed its importance on students' experiences, case study and qualitative design were the most appropriate methodology to use. The thesis proposal and the interview protocol were sent to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for review and obtained approval from IRB before conducting the research.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to assess the appropriateness of the interview questions and study design. A female Taiwanese master's degree student in education at the university was participated in the pilot study. After completing the pilot study, some

questions were modified and the order of the interview questions was changed for clarity. This helped researcher to get meaningful data from participants. Each interview lasted between 40 and 60 minutes. The whole flow of conversation and the interview questions was modified depending on the degree of the interviewee's understanding and interaction with interviewer.

The data were analyzed after the interview was conducted. The result of the pilot study supported that East Asian students had different sociocultural perspectives in online TESOL courses. Moreover, the results were generally matched with the review of the literature of sociocultural differences in online education courses and opinions regarding East Asian students' view on online learning environments.

Participants

Participants were all students at university located in east central Texas. The university provided 128 undergraduate degree programs and 256 graduate degree programs. According to Data and Research Services (2016), 4,286 students from Asia enrolled in the university on Fall 2016. Purposeful sampling procedure was employed so that a researcher could look for suitable participants.

After the initial contact in person, e-mail, and mobile phone (See Appendix A), which explained the purpose of the study and invited participation, six out of eight graduate students in the department had been founded to take part in the study. They consisted of four Chinese students, one Korean student, and one Taiwanese student. Half of them were master's degree students and the other half were doctoral students, which attempted to explore their different experiences between the two degrees. All of them

had taken at least one online TESOL course in the department. In this study, students

with exclusively taking TESOL courses were preferred, but students with taking

required courses, which were also part of TESOL program, were considered as potential

participants. During the interviews, identity protection was guaranteed by avoiding any

mention of specific course names. Pseudonyms were used in this study in order to

protect confidentiality. Table 1 showed the demographic information of each participant.

Table 1 Demographic Information of Participants

Participants	Ethnicity (Asian)	Gender	Degree Level	Length (in year)	The Number of Taking Online Courses
Ellie	Chinese	Female	Ph. D.	4	2
July	Korean	Female	Master's	14	12
Rucy	Chinese	Female	Master's	2	1
Sam	Taiwanese	Male	Ph. D.	6	1
William	Chinese	Male	Master's	2	2
Xia	Chinese	Female	Ph. D.	3	1

Ellie came from China and was a Ph. D. student. She had studied in China until

she got her Bachelor's degree. Then, she came to study and spent two years to get her

master's degree in America. Ellie started her doctoral study immediately after receiving

master's degree, which meant she was a second-year doctoral student. She had never

taken online courses until she started her doctoral degree. Ellie took two online courses

in her first two years of doctoral degree.

July was originally born and raised in South Korea until she immigrated to the

United States at the age of 12 with family. She had been studying in America since and

received her bachelor's degree in an American university. While July attended the university, she had taken two online courses. When she started her master's degree, she was a Teaching English to Speakers of Other Language (TESOL) major and exclusively took twelve online TESOL courses.

After Rucy got her bachelor's degree in China, she came to the United States for the first time to pursue her master's degree. She had been to America for two years. Rucy was Teaching English to Speakers of Other Language (TESOL) major and had taken one online course. At the time of interview, she was in her last year of study.

Sam got his bachelor's degree in Taiwan and was a fourth-year Ph. D student. He received his master's degree from the same school of his doctoral study in the United States. Sam studied his master's degree for two years, which meant that he had studied in the United States for six years. He was not TESOL major and took one online course when he was a master's degree student.

William came to the U.S. to study his master's degree. He was in his last year of study, majoring in TESOL. William had never taken online courses in his undergraduate because taking online courses was not popular in China. He took two online courses in his last one year.

Lastly, Xia was a Ph. D. student who had studied master's degree in China. She was in her third year of doctoral study. Xia was not a TESOL major and took one online course.

Data Collection

This study explored experiences of East Asian students in sociocultural perspectives, beliefs, reasoning, and feelings. As the goal of qualitative study design was to explore subject areas, the researcher can elicit deeper meanings from the participants (Saldaña & Omasta, 2017). "Semi-structured interviews are particularly well suited for case study research" (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017, p. 47). Therefore, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions enabled the researcher to investigate the inner world of the interviewees (Johnson & Christensen, 2000).

Data Collection Instrument

An interview protocol was used to guide the interview (See Appendix B). The first interview question asked interviewees about basic information about themselves such as their own culture, length of stay in the United States, and languages they could speak. The second question dealt with perspectives of interviewees toward face-to-face classes in American university. Next question asked participants about online courses they had taken before they came to the United States. Next two questions requested their experiences when taking online classes and their views on online learning in America. Question six and seven were related to sociocultural experiences and how those sociocultural backgrounds affected their academic goals. Lastly, the researcher asked participants about their strategies to facilitate their online learning and suggestions to improve the online courses.

Interviews lasted between 40 and 60 minutes. Face-to-face meetings were preferred and meeting place, time, and date were set up for the convenience of the

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researcher and participants. A room was reserved in library to decrease distractions. The interview room was arranged for the interviewer and interviewees to face each other. However, one participant was not available for face-to-face meeting and was interviewed via video chatting online. In this case, only the time and date were set up for the meeting. At the beginning of each interview, an information sheet was distributed to participants (See Appendix C). The sheet contained basic information about the study, the purpose of the study and the benefits and risks. Participants were informed that their participation in this study was totally voluntary and all the information was kept private and involved no penalties if they decided not to participate in the study.

Procedure of Data Collection

Before each interview was conducted, the researcher spent several minutes greeting and having a simple conversation in order to alleviate nervous of participants. This was also helpful for interviewer and interviewees to create comfortable environments during the interview.

After greeting and explaining the information sheet, the researcher asked participants about concerns and questions regarding the present study or interview. Brief and instant explanation was provided but presenting detailed explanation of the purpose or contents of the study was controlled by the researcher. This was done because specific explanation had possibility to lead participants where the researcher wanted to go, which prevented the researcher from gathering neutral and objective responses.

While conducting the real interviews, the sequence of the questions was changed and some questions were skipped or added according to individual participant's

responses and situations. If further explanation was needed, probing questions were sometimes added. For instance, if interviewees answered that they had positive or negative view on online learning, they were asked what specific aspects of online learning made them think it was positive or negative. If one was identified that they had taken any online courses in their country, the researcher requested further explanation to them such as comparing their online experiences in their country and those in American university. Last interview question was asking any suggestions for teachers, faculty members, or people related to curriculum to improve the online courses. Participants were also encouraged to provide final comments, suggestions, and any concerns to the study.

Data Analysis

In qualitative studies, data collection and analysis are linked closely to each other when it comes to "building a coherent interpretation of the data" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 151). Data analysis in qualitative study design can be defined as "a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 150; Strauss & Corbin, 1997). While the interviewees were answering the questions during their interview, the researcher tried to avoid interrupting them lest the researcher should lead her informants to predetermined assumptions. All the six interviews were transcribed by the researcher right after each interview was finished. All the interviews were basically conducted in English. However, the researcher allowed participants to share their experiences in language that made them feel more comfortable. The researcher considered their opinions and recorded their responses in their mother

language to avoid bias and misinterpretation of their responses. In this case, their responses were firstly transcribed in their native language. Transcripts were made and translated in English with third person who could speak both their mother language and English. Then, after transcripts were read over and over again, themes were analyzed to obtain meaningful data and cross-case findings. Moreover, analysis was conducted on campus until all the data were transcribed. Member-checking process was conducted by sharing transcripts and findings with interviewees and other graduate students to check accuracy of the interview.

This study followed Creswell (2003)'s a generic process of data analysis. Before collected data were analyzed, process of condensation was conducted in order to use analytic process effectively (Saldaña & Omasta, 2017). In this pre-step, the investigator placed focused on important data and deleted trivial data that were unrelated the research questions of interest (Saldaña & Omasta, 2017; Seidman, 2013). The first step of data analysis was to reflect overall meaning of the information (Creswell, 2003). Then, the information underwent "a systemic process of analyzing textual data", which was called a coding process (Creswell, 2003, p. 192). In the transcription stage and the coding process, the researcher tried to identify phenomena and patterns, collecting and highlighting key words and sentences. After the coding process, the researcher generated and identified some themes using their description of data. Next step was to "advance how the description and themes will be represented" in the data (Creswell, 2003, p. 194). The description and themes were divided into a few categories in order to obtain meaningful data and cross-case findings. In each category, original transcriptions of

interview were included as a quoting format. Whenever the investigator discovered new information, these categories were modified. Interpretation or meaning of the data was a final step of data analyzing process (Creswell, 2003).

Five major themes have identified through data analysis related to online learning experiences of East Asian students: keeping silent, classroom differences, positive attitude, sociocultural experiences, and online learning strategies. These five themes corresponded with the findings of the literature review.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

The study employed a qualitative case study using a face-to-face, in-depth semi-structured interview to gain detailed stories about East Asian graduate students' experiences in online learning settings. As a result, five themes were generated. The themes were keeping silent, classroom differences, positive attitude, sociocultural experiences, and online learning strategies as noted in Figure 1. Each will be discussed in the chapter.
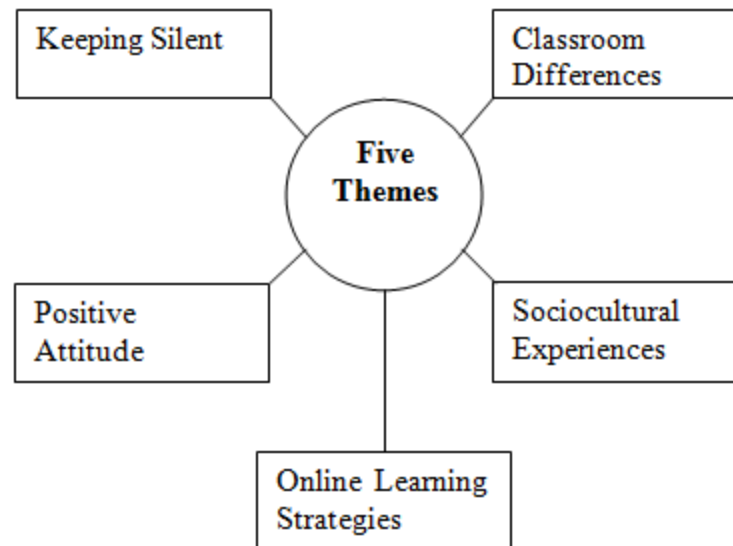
Figure 1 Five Themes

In this chapter, five themes are discussed. Keeping silent dealt with characteristics of East Asian students in American classrooms regarding viewpoints of participants. It was identified that classroom differences existed between America and East Asia such as classroom atmosphere, characteristics of teachers, and teaching style. Participants had positive attitudes toward online learning in terms of flexibility and convenience. Sociocultural experiences focused on language, communication, a sense of belonging, and content materials regarding viewpoints of participants. Online learning strategies related to strategies they had used when they took online classes.

Keeping Silent

The participants reported that East Asian students usually kept silent in the classroom from their experience and observation, even though characteristics depended on their personality. William reported that, "They [Chinese and East Asian students] do not participate in the discussion as much as local students because of culture [which related to a teacher centered classroom and that teachers had authority in the classrooms]." Sam noticed that, "They [East Asian students] do not talk much until they are pointed to express their opinions. [It seems that] they do not feel comfortable with discussing issues in class discussion." He added, "[One of the reasons may be that] they do not want to show themselves to the public. Another reason [may be that] they are not prepared for class." Rucy also provided her opinion, "East Asian students do not prefer oral discussion and talk in the classroom because they are not as confident as native speaker because of language proficiency." July stated that, "Korean students are less likely to ask questions to the professors and teachers because they respect teachers. In

Korea, when students ask too many questions, they are considered questioning teacher's authority. So, when students are raised with that culture in mind, Korean students are not used to questioning the authority much."

Asking Questions

As stated by Xia, "I am afraid of asking questions sometimes because I am not used to asking questions in my own culture and checking my understanding like American classmates." However, even if Xia was afraid of asking questions, she liked to have discussion with her classmates especially when she could get new information from them. This helped her to enhance her understanding of some topics and contents that she did not understand on her own. Meanwhile, Ellie and Sam had slightly different experiences. Ellie reported that, "I have my Chinese friends, classmates and colleagues who usually keep silence in the classroom and do not ask questions. But I am different. Even though I am coming from a culture that I usually listen to the lectures from teachers, I am the one who always wants to ask questions… I think my experience [in face-to-face class] is positive especially like me who like to ask questions and discussions" Sam shared his opinion as well, "When professors give questions to all of students [in East Asia], they [Chinese or East Asian students] don't want to speak up because they are told not to do so. They [East Asian students] learned to wait professors to give them answers…[But in America,] I tried to participate in the most of discussions both online and face-to-face classes actively. I tried to join in the discussion."

Classroom Differences

   The participants shared differences between classes in American schools and East Asian schools. Over half of the participants agreed that most American classrooms were student-centered, with lots of discussions among students, while majority of East Asian classrooms were teacher-centered in which classrooms were teacher centered giving lectures. For example, William stated: "American classroom had really different classroom atmosphere compared to Chinese classroom. American classroom is not teacher-centered class but more like student-centered." Ellie shared similar viewpoint. She said, "When I firstly came here, what I found was that courses in America were very different from China. In America, I found out that there were lots of discussion and much less lectures. In China, I remembered students barely talked in the class and almost 80% of classes were lectures from professors. This might happen in America as well but I felt most of the class were based on discussion among students in American classes." Rucy added, "Even though it was online course, professors still required us to have a lot of online discussion."

   It was also revealed that characteristics of teachers from America and East Asia were different. Xia shared her experience, "In America, students should be the first to ask questions. I remembered the first meeting that I met my advisor in America. I expected to get general information about Ph. D program from the advisor. But she kept asking me what the questions I had. Meanwhile, when I met an advisor in China, the professor gave me a lot of general information… American professors wait for questions. But if students ask questions, American professors would give students their

understanding of questions from students. [Characteristic of professor] is totally different [between America and China]."

Other participants also agreed that teaching style and strategy were different. Ellie commented that, "Teaching [style] is different. I saw undergraduate students in America had more small research projects while those students in China did not really have project. From my experience, American students focused more on practice to apply theory or knowledge they had learned. However, in China, students basically focused on learning knowledge, not on applying them. I think learning process of America is more like step by step while that of China is not." Rucy also explained that, "Professors in America would give specific requirement online each week, which is totally different from China. Some professors in face-to-face classes of China would not give me clear instruction while American professors gave me detailed and specific explanation for the assignments with examples…I do not think there were examples provided in my previous experience in my undergraduate at China. The instruction provided by professor in my country [China] was not specific and clear [compare to America]."

Positive Attitude

Most participants said that they had positive experiences in their online courses. July shared her experience, "[In online class,] I definitely felt like I was learning a lot and I had more attention from the professor than face to face class because I would get personal feedback." Rucy added that, "I think it [my view on online learning] is more positive. Online experience in America is new experience for me. It is more academic and systematic compared to China. It makes me learn how online courses work in

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American context." Ellie also explained positive aspect of online class, "Once class is over, every material in the physical classroom is gone unless I can record it. For online courses, even though I know that I cannot download voice threads, I can watch again and review whenever I want. This is the good part."

Flexibility and Convenience

All interviewees agreed that online learning was flexible in terms of time and location. July reported, "In online setting, I can take all the time that I want before I reply to the comments to the classmates. Especially for English as a second language speaker like me, coming up with classmates' response is really important, thinking of better words, better phrases... I started to take online courses when I was in China. So, even if I come back to my hometown, I can still take online courses at the comfort of my hope. At my all my free time, I can also work. I only need my laptop to learn everything. Online education is flexible." Xia said, "In face-to-face classes, there are a lot of discussions which are not useful for me. I think that is waste of my time. But for the online course, I don't need to seat in the classroom for whole class hours. I have more flexible schedule in online learning. I can read the materials and watch the video [while classmates had discussions that are not useful for me]."

Sam also said that, "Students do not have to wait until other students finished their talking... In online, everyone can post their opinions as their convenience. Students can have five days to post the answers and respond to others [because it is on a weekly basis]. They can take times to post and respond their opinions to other students. I think this is related to flexibility of online courses." William replied, "Good aspect [of online

learning] is that you don't have to be physically in the classroom. [Moreover,] I can have more flexible time of how I am going to work on assignments. I can manage my time." Ellie commented that, "In online education, time and location is more flexible. In face-to-face classroom, I have to have specific time to take part in the physical classroom [while online class is not]."

Sociocultural Experiences

Language Barriers and English Proficiency

All participants agreed that they had language barriers because English was not their native language. Some of the participants talked about their language proficiency. William shared that he used to misunderstand instruction and get a bad grade. He also mentioned that flow of conversation in the classroom was too fast to understand discussion, and he sometimes could not understand some terminology or abbreviations while taking classes. Rucy reported that face-to-face courses were more stressful than online courses because they were [sometimes] too hard to respond quickly in discussion. She partly preferred online discussion because she could take her own time to think about what she was going to say, which was related to her language proficiency.

However, when they took courses, some of the participants had different situations. Ellie noticed that, "Compared to explaining my personal feelings or experiences in English, it is easier for me to discuss content materials in English. So, when I talk about research project or contents of the class with professors, I think I have good communication. I think this is because academic communication has more focused on specific topic. The other reason is that I know how I can academically express certain

words in English." From Sam's observation, some of his East Asian classmates told him that they had trouble understanding what professors were saying in face-to-face courses. He thought they had language proficiency issues. However, he did not have any trouble communicating with his classmates or professors. According to the interviews, most of the participants did not have concerns about their language barriers.

Communication and Preference

As already noted, most of the participants had positive points of view on online learning. However, some of them preferred face-to-face courses to online courses because they could have instant and direct communication with professors and classmates in face-to-face classrooms. As explained by William, "I care more about interactions between professors and students in the class. [I don't have a preference but,] I would choose the one which has more interactions between students and professors…Face-to-face class is more about classmates' [initial] thought and discussion. I want to know their instant response and initial thoughts, not organized or prepared one." Rucy reported that, "I would prefer face-to-face course to online course because I have a lot of questions as an international student when taking courses. I prefer to solve those problems in face-to-face classes with my professors. It is easier for me to communicate to describe questions. And face-to-face course give me more chance to have interaction with my classmates. In online classes, I don't think there is any interaction between my classmates." Sam liked to take face-to-face courses because he could communicate more with professors and classmates. From his experience, online classes had passive

discussion compared to face-to-face because he could not have instant communication with classmates on online discussion boards.

The other participants had different perspectives. Ellie preferred face-to-face courses to online courses in terms of asking questions immediately and directly. However, when it comes to group projects, she preferred online. She said that her preference was not related to language or culture but related to convenience because she did not have to record all the materials and all group members did not have to meet in the physical location. Xia reported that her preference between the two depended on the quality of the class and comments from friends. Only July liked to choose online courses over face-to-face courses because she did not have to have instant responses to the questions in online courses. She felt embarrassed and pressured when there was a pause between conversations in face-to-face classes because of face saving. Even though she had lived in the United States for 14 years, this situation still made her feel stressed and insecure.

A Sense of Belonging

According to the participants, a sense of belonging depended on their own experience and situation. Xia shared her experience that her online group members took their own contribution to the discussion, which made her feel part of the class. Ellie shared that she felt a sense of belonging when having online discussion boards with voice threads because she could see the active participation of classmates in online classrooms. July reported that, "[I have been here for 14 years but] when I speak with a couple of friends who don't share same culture or I feel like I don't know the topic that

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they are talking about, I still don't know how I can fit in sometimes…Both of instructor and classmates are helpful to feel a sense of belonging but good instructor is more helpful because Korean [might] place more importance on the authority." July added that personal feedback or comments from professors made her feel more part of the class. Sam could not fit into discussion when he did not have background knowledge. Sam stated, "In some of courses that I had taken, which were [related to] gender issues or language legacy, I could not join [in the discussion] because I have no background knowledge. They [Classmates] were [sometimes] talking about high school life in America. [But] I don't have any experience [in America]."

Rucy explained her experience in face-to-face classes, "When there are lots of native speakers in classes, [I feel that] international students do not become major part of the class. So teachers speak faster and those native speakers in the classroom would [also] response very quickly. International students need time to think about what they need to say to translate in their own mind. So I think that is little bit stressful for me in the class that has lots of native speakers." She also shared her special experience in an online class. In her online class, the professor asked students to schedule face-to-face meetings. Rucy contended that the professor's strategy of having face-to-face meetings and interactions in her online class was good [teaching strategy] for all students including international students and her.

Content Materials

Interestingly, all master's degree students except for July who used to have American educational context, said they had difficulty understanding content materials

while doctoral students felt less difficulty compared to master's students. According to Rucy, when courses focused on practical aspects, she did not have any difficulty understanding content material. However, when it comes to focusing on academic aspects, she sometimes felt that it was hard to understand content materials. She felt that because content materials were based on American educational context and the material was unfamiliar to international students. They had no background knowledge in American educational context as well. Rucy explained that it was sometimes hard for international students, including her, to understand and discuss content since she did not have an American experience. William noted his experience when he said, "I think textbooks are all same. American professors just have different teaching strategy or different interaction method…But sometimes I could not understand some terminologies or abbreviations [that were used in the classroom]."

However, all doctoral degree students had different perspectives. Xia stated that, "Content material is fine. All the courses are new to me. [Even if contents are different,] it is okay because all the contents are related to the topic of the lesson. I want to learn something new that I did not know before. The information from the courses can convince me and it can change my idea. It is really helpful for me." Sam added that, "Ph. D. courses have lots of articles, journals, and general textbooks. I think professors provide updated literature on topics that we are discussing." Ellie emphasized that she easily understood content from online discussions among her classmates with their examples, which took her to a deeper level of understanding content.

Online Learning Strategies

Each participant had their own strategies in their online learning setting; however, their strategies were not different from the ones they used in their face-to-face classes. July focused on the syllabus to check due dates and grading criteria and wrote them down on a calendar that she needed to do for her classes. Ellie had a friend who always took at least one class with her so that they could discuss assignments and requirements. Sam had active communication with the professor when he took an online class. Rucy was the one who always asked for help from her professors and classmates and searched unknown terminology, concepts, words, or assignments online. Three out of six participants, Sam, Xia, and William, stated that the most frequently used strategy was to read assigned chapters in advance, so that they could have background knowledge.

Similarities and Differences among Chinese, Korean, and Taiwanese

Three ethnic groups showed similarities rather than differences. As already noted, almost all the participants had teacher-centered educational experience in their own culture compared to American classrooms. In data analysis, classrooms in East Asian culture focused on lectures from teachers and learning knowledge. It was presented that the role of the professors in the online classrooms was important for East Asian students because their classrooms were teacher-centered. Moreover, almost all of them encountered language barriers whether they took either online or face-to-face courses, and some of them sometimes did not understand contents because of linguistic problem. However, East Asian informants did not feel sensitive to their language barriers. The most common denominator was that all ethnic groups considered interaction and

communication as the most important part of courses even though each of them had their own preferences between online and face-to-face courses.

A notable difference among three ethnic groups from data analysis was face saving. According to the interviews, the Korean, July, placed importance on how she looked to others than the other two groups. This made her decide her preference between the two teaching methodologies, online and face-to-face courses. The Korean participant was likely to choose online learning to take her time to plan her idea and make her comments on classmates perfect. In this way, she could save face. Meanwhile, most Chinese and Taiwanese participants preferred face-to-face courses to online as they could get direct feedback and have fast communication with classmates and professors, even though face saving was important for them as well. One Chinese participant and Taiwanese participant rather actively took part in discussion. The other Chinese participant even said that even though assignments on face-to-face classes were more challenging, it was a better chance for her to get quick feedback from her classmates and professors.

Differences according to Degree Level

Regardless of degree level of participants, all of them wanted to take face-to-face courses than online courses in terms of communication between students and professors and among classmates. However, data analysis identified that doctoral degree students had higher level of understanding and positive views on content materials and felt a sense of belonging easily compared to Master's degree students. All doctoral students had studied their master's degree in America before pursuing their doctoral degree and

had lived in the United States more than three years. This meant that doctoral degree students had more opportunities of having educational experiences than master's degree students. Thus, all three doctoral students felt comfortable when it came to content materials and a sense of belonging as compared to master's degree students. Additionally, all doctoral students had better language proficiency than master's students. According to the interview, language proficiency of doctoral students had increased in terms of speaking and discussion, even though they could have problems in other parts.

Role of the Instructor

During the interview, most participants considered the role of the instructors as important part of online learning. The Korean participant said that good instructors outweighed classmates because Koreans placed more importance on the authority. Two Chinese participants said it was important that instructors should summarize what students discussed and give personal comments to each student. For example, one Chinese participant said that professors need to give new information based on the discussions among students. The other participant shared her experience that one instructor required students to schedule face-to-face meetings when she took an online course, which helped her to interact better with her instructor. Thus, among various roles of instructor, it was identified that communication with professors was the most important for East Asian students.

Participants provided positive opinions toward online learning when professors had active communication with students and gave detailed, personal feedbacks. Students also had optimistic points of view when professors gave them clear and specific

instructions and made them have active discussion among students. However, according to the interviews, all the participants still wanted professors in online education to communicate more personally with students. In fact, two participants said that at least one or two personal face-to-face meetings during the semester, using either in person or online video chatting, might be helpful for online students to feel a part of the class and that it would increase their motivation to learn. Moreover, they want to have more clear instructions and details and specific examples from the instructors. On the contrary, students felt negative toward online learning when they experienced online classes with instructors who did not make the students feel a part of the online courses. The East Asian student felt that it was important for teachers to communicate with them because it impacted the way they learned in the classroom since they were coming from a teacher centered classroom to a student.

Summary

In this chapter, five themes were generated with shared experiences of the six participants. Those five themes focused on maintaining East Asian students' silence in American classroom, differences between American and East Asian classroom, optimistic points of view toward online learning, various sociocultural experiences of East Asian students, and strategies they had used in online learning.

Even though characteristics were different from students to students, most of participants agreed that East Asian students were afraid of expressing their opinions in class discussion and asking questions in public. Some reasons were related to cultures in East Asian classrooms, the other reasons were confidence and language proficiency, and

another reason was related to insufficient preparation for the classes. Moreover, differences between American schools and East Asian schools were clearly showed as themes. While American classrooms were mostly students centered, focusing on discussions among students, East Asian classrooms were mostly teacher centered, concentrating on lectures from teachers. Thus, teachers of East Asia usually provided a lot of information to students while those of America mostly answered questions that students specifically wanted to know. Additionally, teaching styles and strategies were also different. American teachers encouraged students to practice and apply knowledge based on what they had learned but East Asian teachers encouraged students to have knowledge that he or she delivered. Even though there were big differences between two cultures, most of participants had optimistic points of view toward online learning. Most positive viewpoints were closely related to flexibility in terms of time and location.

In sociocultural experiences, all participants agreed that they had language barriers. However, for some participants, language barriers were limited to their daily communication. Even though most participants had positive opinions about online learning, they still preferred face-to-face courses to online courses because students could have direct communication with professors and other students in face-to-face classrooms. Only one Korean participant liked online courses than face-to-face courses. Their preference between online and face-to-face learning was different but all the participants agreed that they felt a sense of belonging when they could have active and direct communication with professors and classmates. Content materials also affected to students. It was identified that doctoral degree students tended to understand content

materials better than master's degree students. This happened because doctoral students had more educational experiences than master's degree students.

Furthermore, their strategies were not different from the ones they used in their face-to-face classes. Most students read the textbooks before they came to classes. East Asian group did not have notable differences among themselves but it seemed that the Korean cared more about saving face more than the others. In addition, because all the participants have been in East Asian culture, they considered the role of the instructors as an important part of online learning.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The result of the study identified sociocultural experiences of East Asian graduate students in their online TESOL courses at American university. The research questions that guided the study were: 1) What are the experiences of East Asian students in online TESOL courses? 2) What are the sociocultural experiences that East Asian students encounter when taking online TESOL courses? 3) What strategies do East Asian students use to facilitate their learning in online TESOL courses?

In the last chapter, results from data analysis were summarized and described with five themes from data analysis: keeping silent, classroom differences, positive attitude, sociocultural experiences, and online learning strategies. The attitude and sociocultural experiences of East Asian students were a complex phenomenon, which required various interpretations. Thus, discussion in the following section presented cross case finding. First section focused on why East Asian students kept silent in American classrooms with information from the participants. Next section dealt with how sociocultural values of East Asian students affected positive attitude toward online learning. Lastly, overall study and result of data analysis were briefly summarized, and recommendations and suggestions for future study were also presented.

Reasons for Keeping Silent in Classroom

Cultural difficulties occurred when sociocultural values were different between two cultures. Especially, further to Wang (2006), sociocultural values of East Asian students and educational environments were truly different from those of American students and educational environments. It was showed that most East Asian students kept silent regardless of learning tool and did not seem to participate in class discussions. However, collected data showed that those situations happened because most East Asian students had been under teacher centered classrooms which gave teachers authority in the classrooms. This could impact behaviors of East Asian students' asking questions in American classrooms. Students who were used to East Asian culture and thought that asking too many questions would mean that they would be seen as challenging the teachers' authority. Moreover, East Asian students kept silent as they were afraid of losing face. As already noted, face was "the embodiment of pride, dignity, honor and self-esteem" (Lee, 2011, p. 76; DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2004). Although all three ethnic groups regarded that saving face is important, the Korean student placed more importance on face than the other two groups. Many Koreans liked to be as perfect as possible. Language barriers were one of the reasons they did not want to speak openly because their mother language was not English.

Sociocultural Values Affecting Positive Attitude

Sociocultural Values and Communication

According to Treuhaft (2000), the removed geographical barriers with the technology not only encouraged students to gather in the online education but also

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enabled them to take online courses everywhere at any time. All the participants agreed that flexible time and location was the best part of online education. While taking online courses, they could manage their time. They felt that online classes provided them more time to spend revising, and rewriting papers and working on other classroom assignments and readings. They also noted the flexibility that they could even take courses when they were out of the country.

However, interaction and communication involving constructive systems should be the first task to create successful educational package in distance education. (Scholosser & Simonson, 2006; McIsaac & Gunawardena, 2001; Moore & Kearsley, 2005). It was identified that students who took online courses were inclined to have negative opinions when their course did have inactive communication. To be specific, East Asian students, who were used to teacher centered classroom (Wilson, 2001) and wanted to have clear instructions from teachers, were likely to have negative attitude toward online learning whenever they had no interaction with teachers. This also affected a sense of belonging of East Asian students, which was closely related to interaction among students in online learning. Students felt a part of the class when they saw active online discussion boards and shared same topics with other classmates. It was also identified by the participants that teaching strategies of professors were one of the strongest factors in online learning.

Sociocultural Values and English Ability

As already noted, all Asian students had language barriers and sometimes had difficulty understanding content while taking online classes. However, according to the

findings, linguistic problems and understanding content materials depended on students'

degree level and the year they had studied in the United States. Jun and Park (2003)

argued that language barriers prevented many Asian students from fully participating in

online learning, inactive participation related to sociocultural values. Choi (2015)

contended that a good student in Asia meant that students were sitting and listening to

teachers and memorized what they learned from teachers. This suggested that passive

participation of East Asians students in the study was more related to their sociocultural

values because students were taught to follow teachers without questioning and they

wanted to become good students in American classrooms. Additionally, most

participants did not feel uncomfortable of their language proficiency. Participants

thought that they needed to overcome those barriers. Thus, all discussions implied that

findings mostly correspond with the literature review.

Summary of the Results

This research concentrated on sociocultural experiences of six East Asian

graduate students in American University in terms of their online courses. The purpose

of this study was to, 1) interpret behavior of East Asian student in online TESOL courses;

2) explore sociocultural experiences and strategies that East Asian student encounter

when taking online TESOL courses. A qualitative case study was used, and in depth,

one-to-one and semi-structured interview were employed to gain a detailed story of

participants related to their experiences in online learning.

From the literature review and data analysis, five themes were presented. The themes were: 1) keeping silent, 2) classroom differences, 3) positive attitude, 4) sociocultural experiences, and 5) online learning strategies.

It was found that most East Asian students kept silent in the classroom. In addition, they were afraid of asking questions. There were a few reasons why they did not ask questions. Firstly, to ask questions was not a part of their cultural learning experience. Secondly, they did not feel comfortable with participating in classroom discussion because they were not confident as native speakers because of their language proficiency.

In theme two, classroom differences, the participants felt that the atmosphere of East Asian classrooms was different from that of American classrooms. East Asian classrooms were teacher-centered and focused on delivering knowledge. Thus, teacher had an authority in the classrooms and if students asked a lot of questions it was viewed as the students were challenging their authority of the teacher. Theme three, positive attitudes, it was found that East Asian students have a positive attitude toward online learning. They talked about flexibility and convenience. In fact, they repeatedly stated that they could have flexible time schedule and take the courses wherever they wanted if they had laptop. Also, the structure of online learning provided them time to go back and review materials. Some shared how they received more detailed personal feedback from professors in online courses.

In theme four, sociocultural experiences, all the participants agreed that they had language barriers because English was not their native language. For some participants,

they sometimes misunderstood instruction, and flow of discussion was too fast for them to understand and to follow the discussion. Furthermore, they felt difficulty communicating with professors and classmates. It was difficulty at times expressing their feelings and emotions. They did not feel that their language barriers were related to academic communication such as discussing content materials and research projects. In fact, one student noted that no linguistic problem. Sometimes, East Asian students did not feel a sense of belonging, when they were talking with people who do not share their own culture, or if they did not have much knowledge about background on the topic. However, they felt part of the class when they were able to participate in the class discussion and felt valued when their classmates acknowledged their contribution to the project or class assignment. Also, the personal feedback or comments from professors increased their sense of belonging.

In theme five, online learning strategies, overall students used similar strategies found in the face-to-face classes. They would read the assignment in advanced, take classes with other East Asian students or seek assistance from the professor or other classmates about terminology, concepts or assignments.

Conclusions

The researcher originally planned to ask for sociocultural difficulties of East Asian students when taking online courses and the way they overcame those difficulties. However, it was realized that East Asian students tended to overcome sociocultural gaps between their own culture and American culture well, even though they had language barriers and sociocultural gaps. They rather thought that they needed to overcome those

issues as East Asian students who studied abroad. The participants did their best to overcome their linguistic problem and get used to American communication, teaching and learning style. All their effort helped them to solve their adaptation issues.

As already noted in the literature review and findings, balance of instructors, students, and delivery system was required to make online learning effective. Active communication among those three constructs was also required. Interaction with instructors was especially important for East Asian students because of their sociocultural values. As a result, culturally responsive teaching was needed and technology based learning activities need to consider sociocultural context more in distance learning systems.

This study was interesting for online TESOL teachers, learners, institutions, or even education scholars who were interested in TESOL area. In the next part, recommendations and suggestions for the future study would be provided based on the findings.

Recommendations

The research results yielded several recommendations for American institutions, faculty members in America, native speaking students and East Asian students who would come to study in the United States. Each is discussed below.

Recommendations for American Institutions

Asian students had usually been under teacher-centered classrooms, which meant they put their importance more on teachers. Thus, East Asian students who had taken online learning in this study had positive attitude toward online learning when they had

active communication with professors or got personal and detailed feedback from professors. Among interviewees, Rucy had an experience of face-to-face meetings when she took online class, which helped her to learn actively. This suggested that face-to-face interaction or at least personal feedback from professor increased motivation to learn especially for East Asians students in online learning. It is recommended for American institutions to make policies or practices in online classes that require one or two face-to-face meetings in each semester. With the policies and practices, American schools also need to develop online methodology to connect students and instructors instantly so that professors and students could communicate personally.

Recommendations for Online Faculty Members in America

Professors in America still needed to think about how they could embrace East Asian students including students who had various sociocultural backgrounds. Specifically, William provided that if professors made the presentation or instruction more comprehensible, it would be good for East Asian students to understand content in classrooms. The more specific content materials were, the better and easier students could understand materials. The other participant, Rucy, also suggested that providing visual and audio examples was easier for East Asian student to understand instructions better than providing only written forms.

Additionally, it would be helpful for professors to take part in several workshops related to international culture because those workshops would provide professors information about sociocultural values, educational values, learning styles and learning strategies of international students in their cultures. There were a wide range of

workshops. For example, professors encouraged East Asian students to share their own cultures in introductory classes at the first week of the semester online. In various workshops, American teachers might learn what they need to know to teach East Asian students. They could also learn that East Asian students' educational cultures and sociocultural values had required them to follow teachers' rule and instructions.

Lastly, as the findings indicated, roles of instructor were important part for East Asian students in online. Especially, communicating with instructors was important for them. Like July suggested, if the professors could talk to each student with face to face or video chatting once or twice a semester, they need to make sure that the student was doing well and teachers should give personal feedback on some project, which could increase motivation to learn for East Asian students with school policies and practices. Especially, meetings would help students to learn more about the courses and provide more opportunities to students having more communication with them. Moreover, Ellie contended that professors should make curriculum that communicate more with students using developed methodologies such as video chatting in online classroom, not just typing and uploading discussions. Thus, professors in American university especially should learn and understand how to communicate with East Asian students and develop strategies to encourage interaction among students.

Recommendations for Native Speaking Students

Native speaking students were a good educational source for East Asian students because East Asian students had better and more chances to learn about American context from native speakers. Actually, several participants mentioned that domestic

students helped them in the classroom when they met unknown content materials in classroom. To be specific, Ellie understood unfamiliar content materials while she was discussing with domestic classmates online or watching online discussion boards among native speakers under voice thread. Rucy asked questions to her native speaking classmates to understand context in classroom and content materials. This suggested that native speaking students provided background knowledge to East Asian students, which was an important source for them in American classroom. Thus, American students should try to help East Asian classmates, understand their own sociocultural values, and have active communication with them.

Recommendations for Incoming East Asian Students

For students, they need to have background knowledge to feel more part of the class. Sam told that he actively participated in discussion most of the time when he had background knowledge. However, when he did not have background knowledge, he could not fit into discussion. If students read assigned materials and searched unfamiliar terminology before coming to online classes, it would be helpful to increase their sense of belonging and would make it easier to join the online discussion. Moreover, it was important for students to know American culture and educational environments before they came to the United States to study. Those recommendations implied that institutions, professors, and students were all important factors for online learning. It was really important for all factors to have culturally responsive policies, teaching, and learning, which made online learning work well.

Suggestions for Future Study

The findings of this study mainly presented positive perspectives on online learning and sociocultural experiences in online learning, language barriers, preferences between online and face-to-face courses, a sense of belonging, and content materials. A qualitative case study was employed to describe and obtain detailed stories of participants with their own experiences.

It was found that even though most participants had positive opinions on online classes, they wanted to take face-to-face courses more than online courses because they could have more instant reactions, active communication, and direct interaction with classmates and professors in face-to-face classrooms more than online classrooms. Exploring preferences between face-to-face and online courses of East Asian students taking TESOL is another area in need of investigation by future researchers. For example, future researchers could conduct quantitative studies designed to explore specific reasons of their preferences and check whether their preference between two methodologies in TESOL could widely be applied to East Asian groups studying in the United States.

The study also investigated that linguistic problems and understanding content materials depended on students' degree level and the year they had studied and been educated in the United States. Interested researchers would examine which specific educational environments, educational backgrounds, learning styles, and characteristics of doctoral students bettered their understanding and adaptation compared to those of master's degree students in American classrooms.

This study mainly focused on the stance of East Asian students in online education. Because the most important part of distant education is effective interaction with instructors, students, and delivery systems, exploring the stance of instructors and various online delivery systems should be dealt with in the future study. Moreover, examining not only East Asian students but also students in other Asian regions would be an interesting avenue for future research.

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APPENDIX A

INTRODUCTION LETTER

March 2017

Dear Research Participant:

I am Master's degree student in the department of Teaching, Learning and Culture at Texas A&M University. I am in the process of writing my thesis and I am collecting data for the purpose. The purpose of my study is to explore sociocultural experiences that East Asian students have met in their online courses. The finding of study may include the overall understanding problems and needs of East Asian students and suggest way to serve them better.

Many prior studies on distance education have conducted research on the technical part. Additionally, most studies have analyzed existing data or have been quantitative. It is essential to understand multicultural issues that East Asian students have in online TESOL courses using qualitative study design. Thus, this letter is to request your participation in my educational research. Sharing your opinions will be valuable source of this research. If you are interested in participation, I would like to interview with you within the next several weeks. The interview will be one time in the library and will last between 40 to 60 minutes. However, additional meetings can be asked so that you can clarify my results. Your participation is entirely voluntary.

I hope that you are willing to help me by sharing your experiences. I am looking forward to talking to you. Along with your consent form, confidentiality will be guaranteed. If you agree to participate in the study, please return this letter with your contact information via e-mail. This information is on the back of this letter. Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns regarding my request.

Best regards,

Ji Soo Leem

Master's degree student

Texas A&M University

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IRB EXPIRATION DATE: 03/15/2022

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Tell me something about yourself.

    1-1. Where are you from? Can you share your culture?

    1-2. How long have you been in the United States?

    1-3. How many languages do you speak? Share your experience with me in

        language that makes you feel more comfortable.

2. Can you talk me about your experiences in face-to-face classes? Is it positive or

negative?

3. Have you ever taken online courses before you came Texas A&M University?

    3-1. If so, tell me briefly about your experience.

4. Tell me about your experiences of taking online courses in Texas A&M University.

    4-1. When did you take online courses?

    4-2. What online courses did you take/ are you taking?

    4-3. Do you have any specific reasons of taking online courses?

    4-4. Describe how your courses consist of.

5. Describe your online experiences related to your view on online learning.

    5-1. If you have positive view on online learning, why do you think so?

    5-2. If you have negative view on online learning, why do you think so?

6. Describe your online experiences related to your own culture (China/Korea/ Taiwan)

on online learning.

6-1. If you had taken any online courses in your country, please compare them

to online courses in Texas A&M University.

7. Do you think your sociocultural backgrounds affect your academic goals when taking online courses?

7-1. Did you feel a part of class when you taking online courses?

8. What strategies you use to facilitate your learning in online TESOL courses?

9. From your experiences with online courses, do you have any suggestions for teachers to improve the course?

INFORMATION SHEET

Project Title: Experiences of Six East Asian Graduate Students in Online Courses

You are invited to take part in a research study being conducted by Ji Soo Leem, a researcher from Texas A&M University. The information in this form is provided to help you decide whether or not to take part. If you decide you do not want to participate, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits you normally would have.

Why Is This Study Being Done?
The purpose of this study is to explore sociocultural experiences that East Asian students have met in their online courses.

Why Am I Being Asked To Be In This Study?
You are being asked to be in this study because you are an East Asian student who had taken or is currently taking online ESL courses.

How Many People Will Be Asked To Be In This Study?
8 people (participants) will be invited to participate in this study locally. Overall, a total of 8 people will be invited at 1 study centers.

What Are the Alternatives to being in this study?
No, the alternative to being in the study is not to participate.

What Will I Be Asked To Do In This Study?
You will be asked to share your cultural experiences in ESL online courses. Your participation in this study will last up between 40 to 60 minutes, depending on the degree of understanding and interaction, and includes 1 visit only.

Are There Any Risks To Me?
The things that you will be doing are no greater than risks than you would come across in everyday life. Although the researchers have tried to avoid risks, you may feel that some questions/procedures that are asked of you will be stressful or upsetting. You do not have to answer anything you do not want to.

Will There Be Any Costs To Me?
Aside from your time, there are no costs for taking part in the study.

Will I Be Paid To Be In This Study?
You will not be paid for being in this study.

Will Information From This Study Be Kept Private?
The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only Ji Soo Leem and Dr. Patricia Larke will have access to the records.

Information about you will be stored in locked file cabinet; computer files protected with a password.

Information about you will be kept confidential to the extent permitted or required by law. People who have access to your information include the Principal Investigator and research study personnel. Representatives of regulatory agencies such as the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) and entities such as the Texas A&M University Human Subjects Protection Program may access your records to make sure the study is being run correctly and that information is collected properly.

Information about you and related to this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted or required by law.

Who may I Contact for More Information?
You may contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Patricia Larke, to tell her about a concern or complaint about this research at 979-777-1816 or plarke@tamu.edu. You may also contact the Protocol Director, Ji Soo Leem at 979-267-3540 or jleem@tamu.edu.

For questions about your rights as a research participant; or if you have questions, complaints, or concerns about the research, you may call the Texas A&M University Human Subjects Protection Program office at (979) 458-4067 or irb@tamu.edu.

What if I Change My Mind About Participating?
This research is voluntary and you have the choice whether or not to be in this research study. You may decide to not begin or to stop participating at any time. If you choose not to be in this study or stop being in the study, there will be no effect on your student status, medical care, employment, evaluation, relationship with Texas A&M University, etc.

By participating in the interview, you are giving permission for the investigator to use your information for research purposes.

Thank you.

Ji Soo Leem