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Recognizing the expatriate and transnational distance student: A preliminary demographic exploration in the Republic of Korea

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Abstract

Descriptions of distance students in the literature are robust. Yet when speaking about students outside of a national context, nuance is lost by the failure to identify the complexity in borderless higher education. The global student body is often too broadly categorized as "international" when in reality, this can be further refined to produce two additional classifications that more appropriately identify and describe a hitherto invisible phenomenon: the expatriate and transnational distance student. Utilizing respondent-driven sampling, student demographic and academic program data were collected using these two operational definitions. The resulting data suggests a potential profile for the expatriate/transnational distance student phenomenon as manifested in South Korea, along with broader demographic and program characteristics. As a nascent phenomenon and introductory inquiry, the research is limited in scope with the intention of a) establishing a taxonomy for the distance education community, b) a practical method for investigation, and c) avenues for further research such as student characteristics, motivation, attrition/retention, etc. Such insight would assist policy/guidelines for universities, their programs, and instructors.

Keywords: distance students; transnational education; international education; demographics; Korea; globalisation; research methodology

Introduction

Online distance education has grown tremendously in the 21st century (Allen & Seaman, 2013; Simonson, Smaldino, Albright & Zvacek, 2012). Yet, despite growth each year in online course enrollment (Allen, Seaman, Poulin & Strout, 2016), it "is very difficult to speak singularly about online learning, as there are numerous factors within different disciplines and course and program environments" (Lorenzo, 2015, p. 45). Moreover, distance students themselves embody a staggering number of valuable and insightful characteristics. As a result, many categorizations, attributes, or labels have been used to describe and explore this intrinsic complexity which ranges from being non-traditional, prior academic experience and attrition/retention, socioeconomic status and ethnicity, university generational status within a family, and ultimately online course success (Aragon & Johnson, 2008; Bean & Metzner, 1985; Dumais, Rizzuto, Cleary & Dowden, 2013; Hachey, Wladis & Conway, 2013; Kauffman, 2015; Kaupp, 2012; Kelly & Schorger, 2003; Liu, Gomez & Yen, 2009; Packham, Jones, Miller & Thomas, 2004; Roblyer & Davis, 2008; Stoessel, Ihme, Barbarino, Fisseler & Stürmer, 2015; Tyler-Smith, 2006; Xu & Jaggars, 2013; Yoo & Huang, 2013).

Two that stand out in absentia, however, are the expatriate and transnational distance student (Appendix A). In light of this absence, this researcher hopes to inspire discussion and further research into this otherwise undocumented distance student body that suffers from a poverty of recognition. Equally valuable are the lessons learned from an introductory study into a transparent and distributed population, and the insights gained from their demographics.

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Background

Expatriation is not a new phenomenon in and of itself. Work assignments abroad in the corporate sector, government and military posts, and even missionary assignments have been studied extensively from the perspective of cultural models and adaptation (Hall, 1959 and 1976; Lewis, 2010; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Individuals may choose to self-initiate expatriation and even a study of expatriate workers in academia has been conducted locally in Korea by Froese (2012). However, while a wealth of information exists regarding distance students in their domestic contexts in addition to a robust amount of literature regarding expatriate workers abroad, there is a noticeable paucity of scholarly reference to the phenomenon of the expatriate and transnational distance student.

Ziguras (2008) only briefly mentioned this and assumed that "the experience of expatriate students in distance education provided from their country of origin is very similar to that of domestic students located in the institution's home country" (p. 640), and shifted focus back to the experience of international distance students. However, this is an assumption rather than an evidence-based conclusion. Living and learning cross culturally has profound effects on the individual (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Moreover, there is more involved in the distance education enterprise beyond the virtual classroom from student support services at an administrative level (e.g., academic advising, registration, student support) to specialized services unique to/required by the particular host country of the expatriate/transnational student (e.g., apostilles). This gap in knowledge was the impetus for conducting an exploratory study into these two types of distance students to begin the conversation by simply recognizing who they are.

Global Distance Students

One of the challenges associated with discussing distance learners is their heterogeneity (Lorenzo, 2015). This reality also extends to any attempt at having a more meaningful discussion regarding students outside of a local, national context. Often the main area of focus are the potential difficulties that can arise as the result of differences in one's native language or cultural heritage, and how these perspectives relate to pedagogical, curricular, and technological designs (Selinger, 2004). This, however, is true of domestic multicultural populations as cultural/linguistic profiles can shift and clash across a broad spectrum at the national, regional, and local level (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). As noted with the concept of distance and non-traditional students, global distance students (GDS) are difficult to speak singularly about (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Lorenzo, 2015). Erichsen and Bolliger (2010) recognized "that the graduate student experience can be intensely stressful and perplexing" and "it can be particularly so for international students" (p. 312). One reason the scholars noted for this is the lack of social knowledge in comparison to their domestic peers, but there is no reason to exclude expatriate/transnational distance students from that challenge as well, especially since this type of cultural isolation or insulation has been well documented to have significant impact on the individual (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Feelings of isolation online and the detrimental effects it can have on student retention is also well known, though this may be even more pronounced for international students (Erichsen & Bolliger, 2011). This, of course, is equally true for the expatriate and transnational that live and learn cross-culturally, particularly in locations where the culture(s) and language(s) may be significantly different from their own, and where they may have spent extensive/intensive periods of time (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009).

A notable discrepancy in applying the generic label of international to all global distance students, however, is the lack of internal refinement in this broad categorization (the paradox of twins). On the surface, like a set of twins, the international, expatriate, and transnational distance student can appear very similar if not identical. When speaking singularly about such a population, it is difficult to

know whether such students are truly international (i.e. present only for the duration of the educational program), have immigrated (i.e. have moved to the country for reasons and a duration unrelated to an educational program), or potentially expatriates/transnationals which blurs the boundaries of local legal status, reasons for moving/living abroad, and potentially linguistic/cultural heritage (Froese, 2012; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Yet also like twins, it is crucial to recognize the differences and individuality of each group.

Habib, Johannesen, and Øgrim (2014) described the use of a virtual learning environment by international students in an on-site program and tried to address this same classification problem among the international students in their study. They offered the general classification of the Global South and Global North where "students from the Global South have probably experienced the so-called digital divide, a divide in terms of economy, access, knowledge and power" and "are lagging far behind the North when it comes to technological infrastructure and penetration of personal technology" (p. 197). Another study conducted by Lee (2011) at a Korean university examined the perceptions that national and "international" students have of the role of the instructor in the classroom, while Selwyn (2011a, 2011b) examined a large group of learners distributed all over the world that were attending a university located in the UK. Similarly, Gemmell, Harrison, Clegg and Reed (2013) conducted a case study of an online graduate program based out of the UK, yet only described the experience that national students had with international peers in the virtual classroom and not vice versa. The noticeable characteristic shared in all of these studies is that not only are the perspectives of the GDS participants under-represented, they are not clearly recognized.

While it is easy to apply a single label to a heterogeneous and complex group, this does not allow for more meaningful distinctions to be made, or a more sophisticated filter to be applied. In an increasingly global and/or internationalized field of higher education, it behooves us to adequately and appropriately represent the complexity of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2015). The literature, while informative in exploring numerous (and disparate) characteristics of distance learners in the 21st century, is noteworthy in this absence, and as this researcher posits, has been too quickly dismissed (see Ziguras, 2008), or inadvertently mixed together under a catch-all label of "international".

Key Research Objectives

There were three main objectives that this researcher intended to accomplish with this study: a) provide a practical taxonomy for describing and discussing global distance students for the distance education community, b) suggest and demonstrate a practical methodology to collect data on a transparent and distributed population, and c) highlight some of the applications of this knowledge. In tandem, these three objectives should be able to serve as a foundation for more meaningful research and discussion. To that end, the first priority was to establish the demographic characteristics of the expatriate and transnational distance students as found in the Republic of Korea (as a consequence of where this researcher resides), as well as the characteristics of the distance programs they were involved in.

Since no prior documentation or research exists from this particular perspective, it was considered essential to identify and describe, at least in basic ways, the students themselves. As a result, descriptive and contextual data could be offered to start a discussion. Similarly, an objective was to compare how students in these two categorizations were similar with/different from distance students in studies that Selwyn (2011a, 2011b) conducted in terms of demographics. Second, collecting such data and testing the viability of the sampling method illuminated unexpected challenges. While this affected the ultimate sample size in this instance, it was valuable nonetheless to highlight how

departmental and/or university record keeping can benefit from a slight modification in recording whether or not their distance students live abroad and where. In effect, the result is a blueprint that can streamline future studies in Korea and elsewhere in the world.

Methodology

Operational Definitions

Given the notable ambiguity in speaking clearly about the GDS population, this researcher developed and proposed a taxonomy based on the student's relationship to their host country and that of the academic institution (Appendix A). This descriptive relationship is beneficial for two reasons since a) it avoids socioeconomic, cultural, and/or ethnic bias which is easily observed (and exemplified) in the argument between the terms expatriate and immigrant (and the classifications used by Habib et al., 2014), and b) because it adequately describes the nuance central to the expatriate/transnational distance student phenomenon. Therefore the two terms below are the foundational lenses for this study.

- Expatriate Distance Student: A student from country A, sojourning via a non-tourist visa in country B, attending university online in country A.
- Transnational Distance Student: A student from country A, sojourning via a non-tourist visa in country B, attending university online in country C.

Visibility

The expatriate/transnational distance student population, though not a sensitive one, is transparent (Creswell, 2015). While census data is collected and published by the Korean Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and Immigration Department, there is no obvious way to extrapolate the number of foreign residents who could be expected to complete distance programs online while abroad. This makes random or probabilistic sampling unfeasible (Creswell, 2015; Levin & Fox; 2011). While data published by the MoJ does contextualize and categorize the amount of foreign residents in Korea by visa type and age (among other categories), and serves as an invaluable point of reference, there is no obvious way to identify the population beyond snowball sampling. For example, as of 2015 the foreign population of Korea was reported at 1,899,519 people or roughly 3.69% of the population (MoJ, 2016, p. 36). If we examine residents by nationality and visa type, a more complex portrait emerges. Respondents in this study represented four nations (Canada, the U.S., the U.K., New Zealand) however Korean immigration only reports on Canada and the U.S. due to their relatively large number of foreign residents at 25,17 and 138,660 respectively (p. 45). It should be noted that although the foreign resident numbers for the U.S. are considerably larger than many nations (though only roughly 7.5% of all foreign residents), this is skewed by the presence of the American military under Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) visas.

When looking at visa type and subsequent issuances, that amount can be more realistically contextualised. The highest number of visa types (E-2) reported in this sample totaled at 16,144 for all eligible nationalities combined (MoJ, 2016, p. 37). In other words, there are far fewer U.S. citizens living in Korea outside of the military than the numbers would suggest prima facie. More to the point is that the number of foreign residents in Korea is at present a very small fraction of the total population, and the nationalities represented in this study represent an even smaller fraction of the foreign population. The challenge of estimating representative statistics notwithstanding, this endeavor also uncovered difficulties/limitations with identifying expatriate/transnational distance students at this researcher's own university department's distance program.

While students must provide addresses when applying to and enrolling in the program, many list their home-addresses of record as a matter of convenience, not their current actual residence. A search of the department's database by an academic advisor produced only a single address abroad, despite common knowledge that there were around 10 students living abroad in South Korea currently enrolled in the program. Thus in order to recruit participants from within the department as a matter of convenience, the survey was simply advertised on the department's Moodle homepage.

The primary sampling plan was to announce a basic demographics survey and recruit participants currently in South Korea. To do so, this researcher built a website to advertise the nature and scope of study. This served multiple purposes such as acting as a simple access point for all related information, along with indicating the initial announcement and subsequent open response period (Andrews, Nonnecke & Preece, 2003; Archer, 2008; Bennett, & Nair, 2010). The survey was advertised on 13 internet/social media forums that cater to expatriates locally (in addition to word of mouth). Given the context of public social media forums, it was important to establish credibility as a researcher and research project. The website was hosted on this researcher's university's server, and all contact was directed to a university email address that shared the same domain name (Perkins, 2011).

The design of the website also took into account advice from the literature for universal access as it was made mobile friendly (Andrews et al., 2003), and the survey tool chosen, SurveyMonkey, specialized in conducting surveys (Waclawski, 2012). Moreover, SurveyMonkey would also provide better data security (Barchard & Williams, 2008), easier logic features, and a question bank to draw from if needed (Waclawski, 2012). Several revisions of the overview page, as well as the layout of the information were made in order to make it as clear as possible to respondents (Evans & Mathur, 2005).

This researcher also had the survey items reviewed and piloted by several known acquaintances who fit the definition of expatriate distance student as a formative evaluation for wording, clarity, and to point out any discrepancies or errors (Bennett & Nair, 2010; Burford et al., 2009; Morrison, Ross, Kalman & Kemp, 2011). By observing and timing trial runs, the length of time needed to complete the survey was documented and advertised as an effort to increase participation (Andrews et al., 2003; Archer, 2008; Sinkowitz-Cochran, 2013; Trouteaud, 2004).

The survey ultimately resulted in 25 fixed items that ranged from basic demographics (e.g., gender, age range, area of residence) to characteristics of the academic program (e.g., level of study, location of the program). A 26th item was an optional, open-ended text-box that allowed respondents to add any additional or clarifying information. Equally important was recognizing the complication of respondents potentially having completed more than one program online while living abroad. For such a scenario, participants were asked to simply list the most recent/highest level of study and list additional online programs such as certificates, licenses, or other degrees in the optional text box.

The survey was advertised prior to the opening date for two weeks, and collected responses through various channels (i.e. email link, web link, embedded form) for one week following the announcement period. Throughout the collection period, additional reminder-announcements were made, and reminder/follow-up emails were sent to participants who signed up for the survey mailing list in an effort to increase the response rate (Edwards et al., 2009).

Results

The initial response count was 38 over the seven-day collection period with 5 incomplete responses. The completed total response rate was n=33. The most effective channels through Survey Monkey proved to be the direct email link (19 responses) for the mailing list, with the direct web link (17 responses) that was advertised on various public and private social media forums coming in second. The embedded survey form on the research project website was the least effective (2 responses).

Response activity was also clustered around the opening of the collection period, though throughout the week there was a low but consistent response rate until day 6. This researcher offers the following profile extrapolated from the data. A far more detailed presentation of the demographics is presented in tables B and C in the appendices B and C.

- The expatriate/transnational distance student in South Korea is:
  - Disproportionately male (87.8%)
  - Most likely single/not-married (57.6%)
  - Around 35 years old at the start/during the program (45.5%)
  - Begins the program on average around 5 years of expatriation (60.6%)
  - Lives in the capital-metropolitan area (81.9%)
  - Studies almost exclusively at the master's degree level (84.9%)
  - Most likely to be studying online in their home-country (69.7%)
  - Has no prior online course experience (78.8%)
  - Has a program GPA of around/above 3.6 (69.7%)
  - The program and field of employment/study are congruous (84.8%)

Discussion

As an exploratory study, the primary goal was to collect and offer data that was descriptive and indicative rather than anything generalizable to other populations, or anything predictive as was noted in a study with similar scope and purpose conducted by Hughes in 2013. This would allow comparison to other literature regarding characteristics of distance students, and more importantly provide a starting point with insight and context for discussion and further exploration.

The general profile of the expatriate/transnational distance students fits the three characteristics of the non-traditional student proposed by Bean and Metzner in 1985, but more relevantly is very similar to the students in studies that Selwyn (2011a/b) conducted, particularly in terms of age, prior educational attainment, and GPA. Although the data has stated limitations from sampling methodology and sample size, the most salient characteristic that stood out was the gender distribution similar to MOOCs. Broadly speaking higher education statistics tend to have women students/degree earners as a slight majority (Hoyt & Simon, 2016). Although the most recent data published by the Ministry of Justice detailing Korean immigration statistics does not report the gender distribution of visa types, they do provide entry numbers by gender with a majority being women at 55.6%, and by gender and age with there being nearly double the amount of women entering Korea between the ages of 20-29 at 1,060 versus 1,908 respectively, and a slightly higher amount of women between the ages of 30-39 at 1,243 to 1,452 respectively (MoJ, 2016, p. 24).

Although these numbers vary from year to year and age bracket to age bracket, there is a large disparity between that of foreign male and female entries. The results for expatriate/transnational students cannot be generalized without the caveat of them potentially being grossly inaccurate, but the gender ratio is definitely not reflected by Korean Immigration statistics (MoJ, 2016), or general higher education statistics (Hoyt & Simon, 2016). It is possible that they are mostly male for reasons that are unclear; but this requires more data. Moreover, if universities and/or departments tracked these characteristics, there would be an additional point of reference to compare against local immigration statistics, especially if relying on a sample selected from a single university/department.

This researcher has provided a two-way chi-square test to examine the likelihood of a relationship between categorical data; and in this particular case, gender, in table 1. This is appropriate since it does not assume "a normal distribution in the population nor interval-level data" (Levin & Fox, 2011, p. 235). A basic cross-tab and chi-square analysis suggests that the following potential relationships

are statistically insignificant. This researcher offers the reminder that the focus of this paper, however, is on offering the conceptual taxonomy, a practical research method, and highlighting future research avenues and issues more so than an emphasis of the results given the small sample size.

Table 1: Gender and distance student classification cross-tab and chi-square

	Expatriate	Transnational	Sub-total
Male	20 (87%)	9 (90%)	29 (87.8%)
	20 (20.21) [0]	9 (8.79) [0.01]	
Female	3 (13%)	1 (10%)	4 (12.2%)
	3 (2.79) [0.02]	1 (1.21) [0.04]	
Sub-total	23	10	33

The chi-square statistic is 0.0606. The p-value is .805539.

The second preliminary data point that stood out was student age. Nearly 55% of respondents reported being older than 35 within the ranges of 35-44 and 45-54 being the most prominent. Bean and Metzner's (1985) criteria for the non-traditional student all apply (i.e. classified as a part time student, not living on campus, and being older than 24) but arguably to a degree far beyond what was originally imagined, even in the case of graduate students. Living in a different country with a different language and culture for years is arguably quite different from not living on campus. Nonetheless, additional chi-square tests in table 2 suggest some statistical relationships but also reveal the challenge of having low cell counts in several categories. Levin and Fox (2011) noted that the counts per cell should not be too small, although exactly what this threshold should be depends on a number of factors. Notable again was the gender distribution. According to the Ministry of Justice (2016), as of 2015 there were more women entering the nation than men for comparable age categories.

Table 2: Gender and age at time of program cross-tab and chi-square

	15-24 years old	25-34 years old	35-44 years old	45-54 years old	Subtotal
Male	0 (0%)	11 (96.5%)	12 (80%)	3 (100%)	26 (78.8%)
	0.79 (0.79)	*11.03* (0.00)	*11.82* (0.00)	*2.36* (0.17)	
Female	1 (100%)	3 (3.5%)	3 (20%)	0 (0%)	7 (21.2%)
	0.21 (2.93)	*2.97* (0.00)	*3.18* (0.01)	*0.64* (0.64)	
Subtotal	1	14	15	3	33

$\chi^2 = 4.536$, df = 3, $\chi^2/df = 1.51$, $P(\chi^2 > 4.536) = 0.2091$
Expected values are displayed in *italics*
Individual χ^2 values are displayed in (parentheses)

Moreover related to age was the length-of-time abroad when students decided to enroll in online programs. It is not widely known what the average length of expatriation is in South Korea but this researcher suggests/speculates from personal experience (having lived nearly a decade in-country) that two to three years is probably the most common. Respondents that have lived in country for a decade or more are quite interesting from this researcher's perspective as it is unclear as to what the impetus is to complete a graduate degree at such a later point in time. This is detailed in table 3.

Table 3: Gender and expatriation length at time of program cross-tab and chi-square

	0-2 years	3-5 years	6-8 years	9-11 years	15-17 years	18+ years	Sub-total
Male	7 (100%)	12 (92.3%)	6 (85.7%)	3 (75%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	29 (87.8%)
	6.15 (0.12)	*11.42* (0.03)	*6.15* (0.00)	*3.52* (0.08)	*0.88* (0.02)	*0.88* (0.88)	
Female	0 (0%)	1 (7.7%)	1 (14.3%)	1 (25%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	4 (12.2%)
	0.85 (0.85)	*1.58* (0.21)	*0.85* (0.03)	*0.48* (0.55)	*0.12* (0.12)	*0.12* (6.37)	
Sub-total	7	13	7	4	1	1	33

$\chi^2 = 9.246$, df = 5, $\chi^2/df = 1.85$, $P(\chi^2 > 9.246) = 0.0996$
Expected values are displayed in *italics*
Individual χ^2 values are displayed in (parentheses)

A fourth point that was surprising was the uniformity in the degree of study. In order to have the visas listed (in most if not all cases), an undergraduate degree is necessary. Thus, studying at the master's level is completely logical. Yet, for those that already had master's degrees prior to expatriating to Korea, there are only two instances of doctoral level study, and reasons for this are not forthcoming. However, there were few instances of licensure or certificate programs, or doctoral level study. Some respondents noted that a certificate of some kind was completed as a component of their master's program, or in addition to it (given the structure of the survey, it was included in the optional comments section). Graduate or professional certificates may not be valued as much as a full degree is. As noted earlier, while master's level study is logical, there is no obvious reason why those who came to Korea already possessing graduate degrees are not pursuing additional or higher levels of study such as a doctorate, especially if they work in higher education.

A brief explanation of the visa categories is described below but not all statuses necessarily have a direct relationship to any particular employment industry. This is exemplified with the F categories of visa, and to a much lesser degree with the E category. Broadly speaking, the visa classifications that participants held are described below, with an additional set of chi-square analyses in table 4.

- E1 - University Professorship
  - While this is required for official designation as a professor, many working for Korean universities do not necessarily hold this visa and are designated assistant professors or work in other non-credit programs. In practice, this is not necessarily adhered to and circumvented with the E2.
- E2 - Foreign Language Instruction in Conversation Only

- As noted above, in practice this visa status is should granted solely for instruction in conversational aspects of a foreign language, although practically speaking many work in areas beyond the scope of the designation (e.g., writing instruction).

- E7 - Specialized Skill
  - This researcher is personally mostly familiar with E-7 visas for international school teachers (i.e. licensed content area teachers), though other jobs like copy editing or programming can qualify under this broad (if not vague) designation.
- F1 - Visiting relatives for an extended period of time
  - An ethnic Korean who is not a Korean national might be visiting parents, grandparents, siblings, etc. who are citizens for a period greater than 90 consecutive days.
- F2 - Long Term Residency Visa (merit based)
  - This is a merit/point-based visa that, among more germaine requirements, requires significant Korean language skill. Holders of this visa are not restricted to any one area of employment.
- F4 - Ethnic Koreans who are not Korean citizens
  - This visa is often obtained by members of the Korean diaspora around the world who have originally never had Korean citizenship, or whose family left Korea as a minor, or gave it up to maintain/obtain a different nationality. Adoptees also qualify under this designation.
- F6 - Marriage to a Korean citizen
- H1 - Working Holiday

Table 4: Gender and visa type cross-tab and chi-square

	E1	E2	E7	F1	F2	F4	F6	H1	Subtotal
Male	2 (66.7%)	18 (94.7%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	4 (80%)	1 (50%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	29 (87.8%)
	2.64	16.7	0.879	.879	4.39	1.76	0.879	0.879	
Female	1 (33.3%)	1 (5.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (20%)	1 (50%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (12.2%)
	0.364	2.30	0.121	0.121	0.606	0.242	0.121	0.121	
Subtotal	3	19	1	1	5	2	1	1	33

Chi-square = 5.64 Degrees of freedom = 7 Probability = 0.582

In briefly scanning the types of programs students were enrolled in, they are almost entirely related to education, which is congruous with the visa categories. Additionally, the geographic distribution of students in the various Korean provinces also reflects the regular population distribution within Korea with about half of the nation residing in the capital (approximately 10 million) or the surrounding metropolitan area (an additional 13 million).

Contributions

Although this study is a proverbial first step into uncharted territory, it has provided three pillars for future research to build on in the form of a student definition and taxonomy for global distance students, experiences from with a practical research methodology along with limitations/suggestions, and a discussion of avenues for future research below. Globalization has challenged the traditional

relationships between nations and people, and with greater patterns of migration and access to higher education, there are new relationships to consider and explore in the domain of distance education and the students therein. The hope is that this paper provides the distance education community with a better way to address distance students as a whole, and more effectively identify and address their needs. Moreover, universities and departments can better tailor programs to meet the needs of such students or simply market their programs more effectively. For example, in the field of education, the Korean context presents a number of challenges to the application of inquiry based learning or self-directed. learning given that this not the norm in Korean education. How western-based education departments understand or address this for expatriate/transnational distance students remains to be seen. Other legal compliances such as the American FERPA or COPPA do not exist in this context. Similar regulatory/statutory content may ultimately prove to be less useful from a practical standpoint, among other significant differences in how the education system functions, and the perpetually limited roles and influence that expatriate/transnational students have in it as working professionals. This goes far beyond the pedagogical implications for learners that Selinger (2014) described.

Other more germain requirements like degree authentication through apostilles and notarization regulations are required in Korea and presumably other comparable requirements exist elsewhere. The question is whether or not universities, their departments, and support services are prepared to accommodate these unique needs that otherwise do not necessarily exist for national students.

Limitations

First was the unexpected difficulty of identifying distance students under this categorization from within a known database (i.e. a department database), in addition to recruiting participants from an in-situ population locally. These hurdles necessitated the use of non-probabilistic respondent-driven sampling that limited the ability to obtain more data in the form of a larger sample, as well as broader applicability. However, as noted by Hughes (2013) in relation to a similarly small sample of 25 participants with international students, “the findings are intended to be descriptive and indicative, rather than predictive or generalisable” and to offer “personalised, contextualised insights” (p. 139).

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the complexity and nuance of the global distance student population by clearly articulating a definition of the expatriate and transnational distance student. This distinction highlights this phenomenon’s absence in the literature, as well as the more than likely unintentional but problematic biases in other definitions. The findings presented here provide a first look at how the expatriate/transnational distance student is manifested in South Korea through a simple demographic lens, along with their related academic programs. From this vantage point, both the expatriate and transnational distance student fall in line with other descriptions of distance students in the literature, but also raises questions for which there are no clear answers. The insight and context are meant to serve as a starting point for further investigation to address these questions, and explore others not currently asked. This is envisaged in not only the Korean context, but at a regional, and global scale as well.

Future Research

There are numerous opportunities and avenues for future research. In a local context, possibilities include expanding the sampling scope within South Korea through more active participant recruiting methods in addition to having a much longer announcement and data collection period. This should

more effectively address the relatively small sample size in this study. The demographic study can be replicated in other countries to see if there may be trends among the expatriate and transnational distance student population in national, regional, and global scales, or if there are disparate characteristics from host-nation to host-nation.

The sample collected in this study indicated a significant disparity in the gender ratio, but without more data, it is difficult to suggest this is accurate. This scale at which this trend occurs can further be explored. The potential for future qualitative studies such as phenomenological inquiries would give voice to this particular group and provide deeper insight in the essence of a being an expatriate/transnational distance student that is not widely known. Additionally, exploring why foreign residents are opting to attend university in their home countries when earning a local degree would not require the authentication process that is required by the Korean government for visas and the Ministry of Education for Korean nationals who have earned degrees abroad. Yet as this study indicates, there are students willing to incur the extra work and complexity for reasons unknown.

Exploring aspects of isolation would be interesting as well since distance students living in nations with cultures and languages that are different from their own may compound the online isolation often described by distance students more broadly. There is no clear data, either, on the success/attrition rates of this particular population that would yield insight on why either result is the case. While the sample here reported significantly high GPA's, how many do not actually complete their programs and why? Such data could inform university, department, and/or program policies, provide better guidelines for academic support staff, or offer suggestions for instructors to adapt curriculum and/or pedagogical approaches for such students.

Moreover, given that local academic opportunities exist in Korea at all academic levels, often with generous scholarships for foreign residents, it is not known why students are choosing to study elsewhere. In this particular study, the majority of degree programs were focused on master's degrees in language education and reputable, nearly 100% scholarship granting programs are offered locally in English in the same field! As distance students, numerous opportunities exist to explore technology specific issues as well such as self-regulation or self-directedness in a virtual environment situated in a foreign culture. In short, there is a virtually limitless horizon to explore and numerous future discussions to have.

This researcher hopes to start that discussion by providing a taxonomy to identify and describe expatriate and transnational distance students in a way that is practical, equitable, and globally applicable, share experiences of expected challenges that may be proactively addressed in light of this study, and to inspire the distance education community to explore national, regional, and global trends that are intrinsic to the expatriate and transnational distance student phenomenon.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Table A: Proposed Concepts and Definitions

Term	Delivery Method	Operational Definition
Global Distance Students (GDS)		To encompass all subcategories of international, expatriate, and transnational distance students
International Student	Face-to-Face	A student who requires a student visa to attend the institution onsite.
	Distance	A student who is designated as an international student by proxy of citizenship that is different from that of the institution's country. No visa is needed to attend online and the student resides in their home country of citizenship.
Expatriate Student	Face-to-Face	A student who does NOT require a student visa to attend the institution onsite by proxy of another non-tourist sojourn status (e.g., working visa, residency visa, dependant visa).
	Distance	A student who does NOT require a student visa to attend the institution at a distance by virtue of having the same citizenship as the the institute, and sojourns abroad with a legal non-tourist status (e.g., work visa, residency visa, dependant visa).
Transnational Student	Face-to-Face	A student that lives in a geographically dense or deliberately connected group of nations where commuting to country C is possible, while living in country B, and having citizenship from country A. (e.g., the EU). A visa may or may not be necessary for student status.
	Distance	A student whose nationality is different from both their current legal residency, and neither have a visa or citizenship of the institution they are studying at (i.e. a national of nation A, sojourning via a non-tourist visa in nation B, attending a university in nation C). They are designated as an international student by the institution but have local non-tourist sojourn status.

Appendix B

Table B: Demographic information of participants

Demographic factors		% of total	Count (n=33)
Distance student classification	Expatriate	69.7	23
	Transnational	30.3	10
Nationality	Canada	18.2	6
	New Zealand	3.3	1
	United States	54.5	18
	United Kingdom	24.2	8
Gender	Male	87.8	29
	Female	12.1	4
Relationship status	Single, never married	57.6	19
	Married	36.4	12
	Divorced	6	2
Age while completing the program in country	15 - 24	9.1	3
	25 - 34	36.4	12
	35 - 44	45.5	15
	45 - 54	9.1	3
Visa status during the program	E-1	9.1	3
	E-2	54.6	18
	E-7	3	1
	F-1	3	1
	F-2	18.2	6
	F-4	6	2
	F-6	3	1
	H-1	3	1
Geographic location within Korea	Seoul, Teukpyolshi	54.6	18
	Gyunggido	27.3	9
	North Gyeongsangdo	6	2
	South Gyeongsangdo	6	2
	South Jeollado	3	1
	North Chungjeongdo	3	1

Table B (Continues...): Demographic information of participants

Demographic factors		% of total	Count (n=33)
Length of expatriation in Korea at time of the program	0-2 years	21.2	7
	3-5 years	39.4	13
	6-8 years	21.2	7
	9-11 years	12.1	4
	15-17 years	3	1
	18 years +	3	1
Employment Status	Full-time	90.9	30
	Part-time	3	1
	Freelance	3	1
	Unemployed and not looking for work	3	1
Number of prior earned degrees (Bachelor's and higher)	0 degrees	3	1
	1 degree	63.6	21
	2 degrees	24.2	8
	3 degrees	6	2
	4 degrees	3	1
Prior distance course programs taken	0	78.8	26
	1	21.2	7
Principal industry of employment	Automotive	3	1
	Education	90.9	30
	Government	3	1
	Unemployed	3	1
Average number of courses taken per semester	1-2	63.6	21
	3-4	21.1	7
	5-6	3	1
	6 or more	3	1
	Other	9.1	3
Grade point average	3.6-4.0	69.7	23
	3.1-3.5	9.1	3
	2.6-3.0	3	1
	N/A	12	4
	Other	6	2

Appendix C

Table C: Characteristics of participant's academic programs

Academic program characteristics		% of total	Count (n=33)
Geographic location of the program	Australia	9.1	3
	United Kingdom	30.3	10
	United States	60.6	20
Type of institution	Public	60.6	20
	Private	39.4	13
Program delivery method	Online (100%)	69.7	23
	Hybrid (<100%)	30.3	10
Length of academic semester	7-8 week quarter	12.1	4
	10 week semester	27.3	9
	15-16 week semester	45.5	15
	Other	15.1	5
Level of study	Bachelor's	6.1	2
	Master's	84.9	28
	Doctoral	6.1	2
	Certificate	3	1
Cost of program in local currency (1 million won = app. 900 USD)	0-10 million won	18.2	6
	10-20 million won	54.6	18
	20-30 million won	18.2	6
	30-40 million won	3	1
	40-50 million won	6.1	2
Major/focus of program	M.S. Instructional Design & Technology	3	1
	MA TESOL/Applied Linguistics/TESL/TEFL	45.5	15
	M. Education	12	4
	M. Educational Technology	6	2
	M.S. Educational Leadership	3	1
	M.S. International Management	3	1
	M. Business Administration	3	1
	M. Curriculum & Instruction	3	1
	M.F.A. Creative Writing	3	1
	B.S. Communication	3	1

Table C (Continues...): Characteristics of participant's academic programs

Academic program characteristics		% of total	Count (n=33)
	B. Information Science & Technology	3	1
	Ed.D. Literacy, Culture, & Language Education	3	1
	Ed.D. Educational Technology	3	1
	DELTA Certificate	3	1
	Teacher Licensure	3	1