

ANDRAGOGICAL CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON GRADUATE EDUCATION IN SOUTH KOREA

Inero V. Ancho

ancho.iv@pnu.edu.ph

College of Graduate Studies and Teacher Education Research
Philippine Normal University

ABSTRACT

What happens five years after study abroad? In the context of teacher education, what andragogical critical reflections may be identified? These inquiries are central in the discussion of this paper as the researcher attempts to present his narratives encompassing his experience as an international student in Korea and as an academic in the Philippines. Critical reflection as an approach used in this research involves in-depth and complex thoughts and relating these to improve professional practice. The experiences of the researcher become central to the learning settings as an anchor towards the enhancement of processes and practice. Four phases concerning critical reflection are involved in the discussion of the paper: describe, inform, confront, reconstruct. The describe phase in this paper encompasses the researcher's contrasting and opposite experiences as a former international student and current academic. For the inform phase, government policies and university mandates are outlined as responsible for shaping the entire reflective experience. For the confront phase, the researcher has identified tolerance as a characteristic to be the main driving force that could impact the implementation of lessons learned in South Korea. Lastly, the reconstruct phase has aligned six andragogical assumptions to the researcher's current practices about what has been learned during the study abroad experience.

Keywords: andragogy, critical reflective practice, internationalization of education, study abroad

1. INTRODUCTION

An individual's desire to pursue higher education abroad is rooted in a variety of reasons and motivations. While the belief is anchored on strengthening one's track record and qualifications, other benefits also go along with study abroad. According to Strange and Gibson (2020), practical and directly linked pursuits are examples of programs the pave way to effectively designing study abroad programs. Cultural immersion and language training are two aspects that highlight the experiences of students who pursue education abroad. Despite obvious challenges, the number of students who go abroad and study continues to rise.

Kubota (2016) noted that issues on gender, race, geography and socioeconomic disparity are often associated with study abroad concerns. According to Doo and Wang (2018), foreign students face health issues owing to lifestyle alterations, including diet and sleep routine.

Education institutions worldwide have been consistent at promoting their programs marketing them as suitable for students from any part of the globe. In the context of short-term study abroad programs, Nguyen (2017) concluded that carefully planned activities and tasks, integrating valuable engagement and systematic reentry plan create a significant impact on the students. In the context of students coming from the minority, these short-term programs serve as an avenue in promoting transformative learning (Walters et al., 2017). On the other hand, Coker et al. (2018) opined that while these short-term courses are seemingly significant, programs that run for a semester yield a more benefit gain. With all these experiences in another country, it is worthy to recognize that an individual's exposure to study abroad results in improved skills in terms of cultural proficiency (Terzuolo, 2018).

Typically, studies on study abroad cover aspects of internationalization of education, challenges of foreign students, brain drain, and even language acquisition. It is undeniable that study abroad is an area of research that is commonly explored given its characteristics and ever-changing landscape. Jiani (2017), for example, noted how China is seen as a source of outbound students and at the same time as a host for inbound students. To these Chinese students, the reputation of overseas universities appears to be the crucial criteria for the study abroad decision (Cebolla-Boado et al., 2018). However, return migration and reflection are areas that specifically weave the entire study abroad journey still need exploration, especially in the Philippine context. These necessitate inquiry, as those students who have been abroad having returned home and contribute to nation-building backed by one's international exposure.

With internationalization at hand, higher education institutions have responded positively by boosting their study abroad programs (Jackson, 2018). South Korea is one of the countries frequently receiving international students worldwide. In recent years, statistics shows a drastic increase in foreign students' enrolment in South Korean universities. This phenomenon has been attributed to various reasons, mainly due to the popularity of Hallyu (Korean wave) in the context of pop culture, language, culture, and society. True enough, South Korea is indeed capitalizing on its soft power in preparation to become a leader in the

international education arena. Lee (2017) has examined what is dubbed as the unique aspects as Chinese students decide to study in South Korea and other East Asian countries. According to Dewi (2018), amplifying internationalization efforts is anchored on the need to boost the viable advantage of South Korean education institutions.

It is also worthy to note the presence of Filipino students abroad, which has been increasing in the past years. Filipinos pursue higher education outside the Philippines through various financial assistance and fellowships. The consistently growing number of Filipino scholars abroad has been a significant phenomenon. A study by Ancho and Park (2019) highlighted how the organization Pinoy Iskolars sa Korea advocates the intellectual and social welfare of Filipino students in South Korea.

Andragogy provides the link between the course of learning and what the learner needs (Moore & Shemberger, 2019). According to Loeng (2017), Alexander Kapp was the pioneer teacher to use andragogy to refer to adult learning. When it comes to andragogical platforms, Galustyan et al. (2019) concluded that these should be consistent and focused on learners. Youde (2018) present criticism of an Andragogical Model and found out how tutors become the source of external inspiration for part-time adult learners. Kamaşlı and Özönur (2017) presented six basic assumptions on andragogy concerning previously conducted studies in the field: need to know, self-concept of learners, the role of the learners' experiences, readiness to learn, orientation to learning, and motivation.

What happens five years after study abroad? In the context of teacher education, what andragogical critical reflections may be identified? These inquiries are central in the discussion of this paper as the researcher attempts to present his narratives encompassing his experience as an international student in Korea and as an academic in the Philippines.

1.1 SETTING AND CONTEXT OF CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

To provide the needed directions for this paper, it is necessary to set the context of the inquiry by providing a researcher background from which the critical reflections are anchored. With this information at hand, it is assumed that enabling aspects that contribute to the critical reflection process are set according to the context.

The researcher's first study abroad experience happened in 2005 when he was sent to South Korea for a year-long language fellowship through an exchange student scholarship. For two semesters, he studied the Korean language and culture at a private university in South Korea. He came back to the Philippines and eventually finished his undergraduate degree in 2007 from the country's national university.

He was then employed as a college instructor in Manila, teaching communication and public speaking courses to tertiary students. It was his first actual exposure to teaching methodologies and the education field involving young adults (aged 18 to 23).

In 2008, he was offered a scholarship to pursue graduate studies in Education at one of Korea's leading national universities. The contract was for a Masteral degree for the period 2008 – 2010. Through the supervision of his Korean academic advisor, he was able to continue through his Ph.D. program through various assistance and academic scholarship. He was awarded Ph.D. in Education in 2015.

He came back to the Philippines in 2016 and currently works as an Assistant Professor at the country's national center for teacher education. He teaches courses in educational leadership in management, curriculum and instruction, andragogy, and the Korean language. There is a seemingly notable increase on the interest of Filipino students regarding Korean language and culture (Ancho, 2019). This experience has strengthened the researcher's experience in pedagogy and andragogy in the context of teacher education. As part of the graduate college, he serves as an academic supervisor to MA and Ph.D. students in their thesis and dissertation projects, advises the college's graduate student organization in educational leadership and management, and performs various functions in research, instruction, and extension.

1.2 FIRST OF A TWO-PART STUDY

Five years after study abroad in South Korea, the researcher deemed it worthy to conduct an andragogical inquiry through critical reflection. For this paper, the focus of the study is the experience of the researcher as a student in South Korea (MA and Ph.D. programs) and as an academic in the Philippines (faculty of the graduate college). The perspectives of the researcher are used as the only lens of critical reflection.

The researcher has decided to emphasize the first part of the study since his contexts as a former international student and current academic could provide crucial and critical narratives worthy of exploration. This paper will carry critical reflections on andragogy anchored on the identified framework of the study. Moreover, the following aspects are also highlighted in this study: internationalization of education, study abroad, and teacher education.

The second part of the study which will be discussed in another paper will deal with the perspectives of the South Korean advisor following the same process of critical reflections. It will also integrate significant findings of this paper to strongly present arguments on the (former) international student – Korean academic andragogical critical reflections.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on the Critical Reflective Practice Method as presented in a study by Cunningham and Wandei (2019). It involves four crucial phases – describe, inform, confront, and reconstruct. The very same approach is used in this present study as the researcher (1) describes his (A) South Korea study abroad and (B) Philippine academic experiences, (2) informs (A) and (B) experiences concerning those concerns that can't be controlled (Cunningham, 2011 in Cunningham & Wandei, 2019), (3) confronts how (A) can be practically applied and implemented in the context of (B), and (4) reconstructs how (A) contributes to (B) with emphasis on andragogical considerations.

Originally in the study of Cunningham, the narratives of the international student and the academic advisor were presented and discussed. In the context of this paper, this has been altered by focusing only on the accounts of the researcher as both a foreign student in the past and an academic in the present. The weaving of the researcher's narratives and his Korean academic's will be presented in the second part of this study.

3. METHODOLOGY

Critical reflection as an approach used in this research involves in-depth and complex thoughts and relating these to improve professional practice. The experiences of the researcher become central to the learning settings as an anchor towards the enhancement of processes and practice. The scope of experience encompasses two periods: the researcher's

experiences as a foreign Ph.D. student in Korea (2011 – 2015) and as an academic in the Philippines (2016 – present). Morley (2014) utilized this approach as an academic instrument and a research approach in working on the accounts of “empowerment and change.”

Critical reflection in the study of Hepworth et al. (2014) was undertaken by employing research literature and personal research experience, which is also the main methodology of the current study. Smit (2020) employed critical reflection as a method by anchoring the process on concept introduction, supplemented by reflection.

4. DISCUSSION

This section presents the researcher's narratives in connection to the two periods identified, experiences as a foreign Ph.D. student in Korea and as an academic in the Philippines. It is systematically divided into four parts according to the four phases classified by Cunningham (2019): describe, inform, confront, and reconstruct. For phase, the principles of andragogy (Knowles et al., 1998) will be anchored on each reflection to achieve the goal of the research, as aligned in the six basic assumptions of adult learners (Kamışlı & Özönur, 2017)

4.1 Describe Phase: Yin yang of Experiences as a Former Foreign Student and Current Academic

After spending years in South Korea as a foreign student, and currently working as a faculty member of a teacher education institution, the researcher sees the entire spectrum as the opposite, contrasting, and eventually complementary.

The experience highlights extremely opposite functions: teaching and learning which in the long run can be confined as interconnected and highly significant to one another. These aspects create a complete image of what can be expected in a study abroad program and eventually those of return migration and joining the workforce in the researcher's home country.

As an international student, the researcher was required to take coursework and attend classes in his specialization and elective courses. Since the researcher's Ph.D. program is not entirely an international program since most Korean graduate students make up the class. There were a few foreign students who came from Nepal, China, and Mongolia. Classes were conducted in the Korean language while textbooks are mostly in English. The researcher sees it as an

opportunity to both complete the needed academic coursework and enhance his Korean language proficiency.

At the start of the graduate program, an academic advisor is assigned to each student to be supervised. The mentoring process involves training on scholarly publication, career, and coursework supervision. This process provided the researcher the needed attention since it highlights individualized sessions with the professor and frequent conversation. It is also an opportunity to expand the researcher's mindset about living in Korea as his academic advisor would provide insights and directions about Korean society, culture, and language.

Numerous activities are also provided by the education college, so students could interact and socialize. Aside from organizing academic conferences, scheduled sports festivals and dialogue are held to ensure that students, foreign or local, are not only confined in the four walls of the classroom.

Since the university hosts more than 1,000 international students, regular programs and projects are initiated to maximize their stay in South Korea. These programs cover cultural, academic, and language exchange strategies. The researcher has been active in all these activities and has even won the Korean Language Speech Contest in 2012.

However, the entire picture has not been always favorable and acceptable. The researcher has also faced challenges during his stay at the university. Most of the time, it involves financial difficulties as the scholarship was not enough to cover the entire expenditures. Food is also an issue since adjusting to spicy meals has been a great challenge to him. Homesickness would sometimes create serious concerns especially when facing personal difficulties and no family member would be around physically to help.

The study abroad experience is filled with extremely contrasting moments. Studying abroad is not a picture of purely classroom interaction and exciting life overseas but rather it is made colorful by sacrifices, hardships, and difficulties. The researcher believes that these opposing and contrasting moments laid down the foundation for personal maturity and professional growth.

Currently, the researcher teaches graduate-level courses in the field of educational leadership and management and curriculum and instruction. Given his background in South Korea, he also handles Korean as a foreign language which graduate students take as a requirement for

graduation. Part of his advocacy includes promoting ethical leadership in Philippine schools, especially these issues carries serious impact on the entire education landscape (Calderon & Ancho, 2018). He is currently assigned as a program coordinator who provides academic advising to students in the MA and Ph.D. programs. Interestingly, there are a few international students in the researcher's current university; most of them have taken his classes.

The experiences as an academic serve as a springboard in reflecting how his functions have changed, from student to professor. This time, he is no longer the student who takes classes but facilitates the lectures. He also serves as a panel member in thesis or dissertation presentations at the university.

Since 2016, he is assigned as the faculty adviser of an organization that aims to uphold the graduate students' academic and professional welfare. It has indeed created a 360-degree turn on the part of the researcher who was once a recipient of programs and projects for students. Currently, he proposes activities that would benefit graduate students.

The researcher is also involved in research mentoring and collaboration. He provides directions to students as a thesis or dissertation supervisor. He has been actively promoting scholarly publication by mentoring graduate students to publish work in reputable and peer-reviewed journals.

The researcher's current function in the university in the Philippines is considered a contrast and opposite of those experienced in South Korea. While these are both different and reversed, these could be considered complementary and operating in the same education context.

Following crucial reflection on these experiences, aligned with Kamışlı & Özönur's (2017) study, it is central to note the following assumptions on andragogy are showcased in the describe phase: self-concept and motivation.

For self-concept, the reflection is anchored on the belief that he is solely responsible for his own life, especially as a foreigner in South Korea. He provides his self-direction and the decision springs from the mindset that careful planning and strategic approach should be undertaken for concerns regarding personal and professional concerns. As a former foreign

student and current academic, he has contributed to design and create an environment that nurtures self-direction.

The motivation to pursue higher studies abroad is partly connected to up-skilling and professional preparation. Internal motivation serves as a driving force to accomplish the researcher's previously identified goals and desires.

Both self-concept and motivation create an impact on the researcher's current practice in the university, especially in the aspects of his main functions in instruction, research, extension, and production.

4.1 Inform Phase: Government Policies and University Mandates Shaping the Experience

The second phase involves the issues that shape the experiences of the researcher as a former international student and current academic. To be consistently aligned in these contexts, the researcher mainly focuses on government policies and university mandates (South Korea and the Philippines). In the long run, this section presents how these policies and mandates contribute to the overall experience of the researcher as a student and academic.

Since all international students in South Korea require proper and appropriate Visa, the researcher has complied with all these mandates by regularly updating his status at the local immigration office. The student visa indicates activities permitted and the responsibility regarding the academic requirements. After officially graduating, the visa needs to be reclassified in case the individual wishes to stay longer or return to his home country.

The university also requires graduate students to publish academic researchers in reputable and refereed journals. This requirement to officially complete the degree was accomplished by the researcher after he has completed all the academic courses. This way, he was able to solely focus on research activities and gradually prepare to write his dissertation.

As a Filipino student who has an intermediate level of Korean language proficiency, the research has also been part of numerous committees and groups in the university concerning international students' welfare. He has served in numerous capacities as the point person for the Filipino student group. This led to the opportunity of being able to conduct programs and projects that involve other Filipino students in the university. In 2013, when the super typhoon hit the Philippines, he was the focal person to spearhead the donation drive for the

victims of the calamity. Earlier in the same year, a Filipino Day Celebration was also held which invited the participation of children of Filipino women married to Korean.

These experiences are the driving force that motivates the researcher to conduct research involving the Philippines and South Korea. To date, the researcher's fields of interest include internationalization of education, school leadership, Korean studies, and andragogy. He is determined to establish the Filipino – Korean connection in the field of education. The value and richness of experiences in terms of student activities in South Korea has also been the inspiration of the researcher when crafting programs and activities for his students in graduate school.

Following critical reflection, the assumption on the “need to know” has strengthened the inform phase as the learner has fully satisfied the need to establish reasons why the learning and experience must take place. Eventually, after recognizing the rationale for the experience, it paved the way to a more meaningful and deep application and practice.

4.3 Confront Phase: Tolerance as Main Import from South Korea to the Philippines

The third phase focuses on how the researcher's knowledge and lessons gleaned from the international student experience could be applied and implemented in his current capacity as an academic. An emphasis is given on the Philippine setting in the attempt to identify these specific areas for possible implementation and application.

Two main concepts are central under this section when talking about the lessons learned from South Korea that could be applied in the Philippines: tolerance and innovation. These constructs encompass personal and professional ideals that define how the researcher performs his role as an academic. It is undeniable that these constructs have been intensified because of his experience in South Korea as an international student.

The researcher has personally embraced tolerance towards various cultures and ways of life. While living in South Korea, he has seen opposing and contradicting practices and behavior of people but instead of developing an intolerant and indifferent mindset, it was made as an opportunity to widen his horizon, be understanding, and accepting. Amid natural biases and confusion brought about by culture, language, and social differences, the researcher took this

as a golden opportunity to learn, relearn, and unlearn things according to context. He was also able to revisit his own beliefs and understanding concerning other people's way of life.

Coming back to the Philippines, he carries with him a broader sense of perspective in terms of culture, belief, religion, and even political mindset. As he deepens his ability to recognize the difference, his tolerance has been instrumental to effectively deal with his students in an andragogical setting.

He contributes to the promotion of tolerance by integrating the values and concepts he learned in South Korea in all graduate classes that he teaches. Eventually, this action has created a synergy effect as students have observed respect, honesty, understanding, and empathy. With tolerance in the classroom that involves adult learners, it is expected that charity, compassion, and mutual understanding will be given greater attention. To the researcher, these core values should be the strong foundation of education leaders who will be at the forefront of social transformation.

4.4 Reconstruct Phase: Six Andragogical Assumptions in Current Practices

The last segment, which is the reconstruct phase, centers on how the experiences in South Korea may be utilized in promoting a more "culturally responsive" (Cunningham & Wandei, 2019) to the needs of Filipino students concerning Knowles et al. (1998) six andragogical assumptions presented by Kemişli & Özönur's (2017). To process this critical reflection, the researcher looked back at his experiences as well as his current practices.

In the "need to know" assumption, the researcher believes that it is essential to properly lay down the foundation and provide avenues for dialog between the teacher and the students before the actual learning experience. This way, the expectations, and needs are clarified, as adult learners are informed of different reasons for the learning activity. Knowing the necessity for learning contributes to assisting the students in realizing their expectations while addressing their needs. Also, the learning activity becomes a legitimate valuable undertaking since this is done based on informed and legitimate reasons.

In the researcher's current practice, the start of an academic semester marks the negotiation period for his students to express their expectations of the course as well as for them to know what is expected of them. This provides a clear-cut agreement of how the learning activity

will create an impact on them, as well as considering the student's reasons for taking the course.

Particularly in the context of graduate school in which the researcher is currently affiliated, adult learners may experience difficulties and challenges during their academic journey, but these do not serve as a hindrance but rather an aspect of the experience since the reasons for undertaking such decision are informed and well-understood.

The self-concept of learners is promoted when adult students are recognized for their ability to provide direction for their lives and be identified with this capability. The learning environment should be nurtured in such a way that it creates opportunities for adult learners to be responsible for their own decisions.

The context of graduate education involves adult learners who represent a vast spectrum of experience. It is vital to bank on and anchor on these experiences various approaches to teaching and learning. Compared to their counterpart in the undergraduate and basic education levels, students in graduate school carry with them a great amount of personal and professional experience which significantly affects their attitude and performance. Maximizing these experiences could serve as a springboard in navigating their graduate school journey.

More than theoretical and futuristic views on the application of learning, adults enter graduate school to express readiness to pursue higher studies and translate the acquired knowledge into their professions. Adult learners are specifically eager to discover things that matter, those that can be situated in their contemporary professional practices. Their readiness to learn should be recognized when planning activities related to teaching and learning.

With the things they are learning in graduate school, how do Filipino adult learners effectively translate these into the usual daily practice of their professions? This question is central in the researcher's preparation for classes and activities involving adult learners. The adult's orientation to learning should be given enough attention because it gives direction to the flow of one's academic journey: those that deal with everyday situations and feature real-life and practical applications are wanted.

Lastly, internal motivators should be recognized and provided a niche to flourish. Adult learners attend graduate school because of the desires that need to be fulfilled and most of

these are potent, meaning strong and springing internally. It is critical to recognize this aspect to eventually align learning courses and experiences to achieve mutual goals.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The overall goal of this study is to present the narratives of the researcher concerning his experiences as a former international student and a current academic. These are eventually anchored on the six assumptions of andragogy as applied in the researcher's current practices. Four phases of critical reflection are involved in the discussion of the paper: describe, inform, confront, reconstruct.

The describe phase in this paper encompasses the researcher's contrasting and opposite experiences as a former international student and current academic. For the inform phase, government policies and university mandates are outlined as responsible for shaping the entire reflective experience. For the confront phase, the researcher has identified tolerance as a characteristic to be the main driving force that could impact the implementation of lessons learned in South Korea. Lastly, the reconstruct phase has aligned six andragogical assumptions to the researcher's current practices with what has been learned during the study abroad experience.

Studying abroad goes beyond what has been learned and experienced abroad. It entails what can be borrowed from overseas and eventually be applied and implemented locally. The entire spectrum of study abroad is filled with lessons and takeaways that could shape the local landscape: internationalization, practices, and beliefs. Critical reflections serve as a springboard in refining practices that involve adult learners towards the achievement of learning goals. It is about time to look at what has been imported by those who went to study abroad.

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