

A Narrative Inquiry into Chinese International Students' Experience in Korean Learning at Sehan University

Yuqing Qin^{1,2}

¹Shandong University of Engineering and Vocational Technology;

²Sehan University

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the current situation of Korean learning of 5 Chinese international students (3 female students and 2 male students) at Sehan University. Through narrative inquiry, five narrators are asked to share their Korean learning experience. Semi-structured interviews are used to record and analyze the collected interview texts, so as to explore their learning motivation and the current situation of their language learning, summarize the difficulties in the learning, and propose corresponding strategies to improve the effect of their language learning. The results of this study can bring some suggestions for Chinese international students to improve their motivation and overcome the difficulties in Korean learning, and it can also offer suggestions for universities or teachers to develop teaching strategies for international students.

KEYWORDS

Korean learning; narrative inquiry; motivation; situation; teaching strategies

1 Introduction

With the implementation of the "Study Korea 300K" program, the total number of foreign students studying in Republic of Korea in 2024 is 208,962, according to the statistics of foreign students in domestic higher education institutions released by the Republic of Korea Educational Development Institute, and the number of international students from Asia is 189,635, accounting for 90.8%, among whom, there are 72,020 Chinese students, accounting for about 34.5% of the total number of international students, which shows that China is the largest source of students studying in Republic of Korea and ranks first among more than 200 countries.

It is more and more important to study the motivation, learning status, learning experience as well as social and cultural adaptation pressure of Chinese students studying in Republic of Korea. Studies found that the students' daily life, the process of adapting to the new environment, their accomplishment of their studies (Yen & Inose, 2003), etc., are closely related to Korean language ability. Therefore, how to improve their Korean language ability is a crucial issue. To explore this issue has a positive significance. This study aims to explore the current situation of Chinese students' Korean learning in Sehan university to analyze the problems in the learning. Through the analysis of this key issue, it will provide important information for international students to improve their learning motivation and overcome the difficulties because of the lack of Korean language ability.

2 Theoretical Background

2.1 Motivation of Foreign Students in Korean Learning

Learning motivation plays an important role in foreign language learning. Learning motivation is the reason for the learner to succeed in their study, and it is the driving force that helps the student to continue their study (Hong, 2014). Similar to the motivation for studying abroad, Korean learning motivation of foreign students is also multi-faceted, mainly from the two directions of study and life. Previous studies have shown that academic success is the biggest motivation for foreign students to learn Korean. Kim (2018) investigates the motivation of foreign students from Kuwait, China, and Vietnam, and points out that the most noteworthy topic for the learner to achieve high academic achievement is the motivation of learners. In addition, foreign students are motivated by the desire to be able to communicate daily in Korean and experience Korean culture (Seo, 2020). Therefore, the motivation of Korean learning for international students is not single, but comprehensive. Through a case study of Chinese exchange students in Republic of Korea, Liu (2018) points out that comprehensive motivation is dominant and durable in Korean learning among international students.

2.2 Adaptation of Foreign Students to Korean College Life

Chinese students in Republic of Korea will encounter some difficulties in their academic study, which is closely related to the lack of Korean language ability. For international students who aim to obtain degrees, their lack of language

abilities can lead to low academic achievement (Yen & Inose, 2003). Choi (2007) points out that the higher the Korean language level is, the more easily students can adapt to college life. Correspondingly, there will be less difficulties encountered in language learning. Related studies also show that the lack of Korean language ability of international students will bring many difficulties to their study (Min, 2014). Moreover, the insufficient of Korean language ability is also the main reason for difficulties in communication with the local people in life (Seo, 2020). It can be seen that the Korean language ability of foreign students has a great influence on the process of studying abroad, which is reflected in all aspects of study and life.

3 Research Method

3.1 Narrative Inquiry

In this study, the narrative inquiry method is used to understand the Korean learning of Chinese students in Sehan University. The narrative inquiry method is critical to qualitative research that aims to understand phenomena through research participants' experiences (Wellington, 2024). It was first introduced by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) who believed that the narrative inquiry method could enable people to understand the nature of human complexity, which is not involved in previous quantitative data analysis. This approach allows the participants to tell their actual experience in life in their own voices, allowing the researchers to understand their lives, and participate in the process of reorganizing and reconstructing the subjects' experience, so that the researchers and participants turn it into a meaningful story. The purpose of this study is to explore the current situation of Korean learning of Chinese international students, focusing more on the personal language learning experience in the school context.

3.2 Research Participants

This study focuses on five Chinese foreign students at Sehan University. In order to truly reflect the current situation of Korean learning among international students, after revealing the purpose of the study to international students and asking for their willingness to participate, the researcher selected 5 students as research objects who have Korean courses every week, voluntarily share their learning experience, and maintain a cooperative relationship with the researcher.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was conducted for approximately 5 weeks from October to November, 2023. Each Chinese student interviewed in the study conducted a focus group interview (about 50 minutes), which was followed by two one-to-one personal interviews to supplement the interview text. Before the interview, all participants filled in questionnaires about personal information to obtain the basic information of the five participants. The researchers and participants talked about the given topic in the form of dialogue in a relaxed atmosphere, and the researchers guide them to express their ideas in Chinese freely. The researchers have recorded the interview content in detail, and at the same time, have also saved the sound recording data. In this study, the participants were interviewed in the "semi-structured interviews", in which five Chinese students learned the research content and prepared the answers in advance according to the research questions given. The narratives were analyzed in four steps.

The first step was the process in which the talks were transferred into written forms in detail by the researcher and two assistants. All the information expressed by the participants was completely transformed into words, including their facial expressions and tone.

The second step was to determine what each narrator wanted to tell the reader, in line with the four dimensions of narrative inquiry: learning motivation, current learning situation, difficulties and learning strategies. The researcher herself read the text repeatedly and confirmed the ambiguous expression with the narrators to avoid misunderstanding and ambiguity.

In the third step, in order to find out the data related to the research questions, the researcher repeatedly read the collected and transcribed data through group and individual interviews. The units of texts were highlighted and labelled in some categories to generalize the key information by the researcher and assistants. In order to truly express the participants' meaning, the categories were labelled by using some words that narrators had used in their narrative to generalize the information, and the categories were further established by developing sub-themes, such as "convenience in life" and themes, such as "motivation", so as to code the original data to obtain key information. The results of this process is shown in <Table 1>.

Finally, the researcher chose the utterance of a narrator that described the theme of the category for the second time to make sure the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the categories, sub-themes and themes. And before this procedure, the participants confirmed whether the answers to the research questions found in the text were consistent with

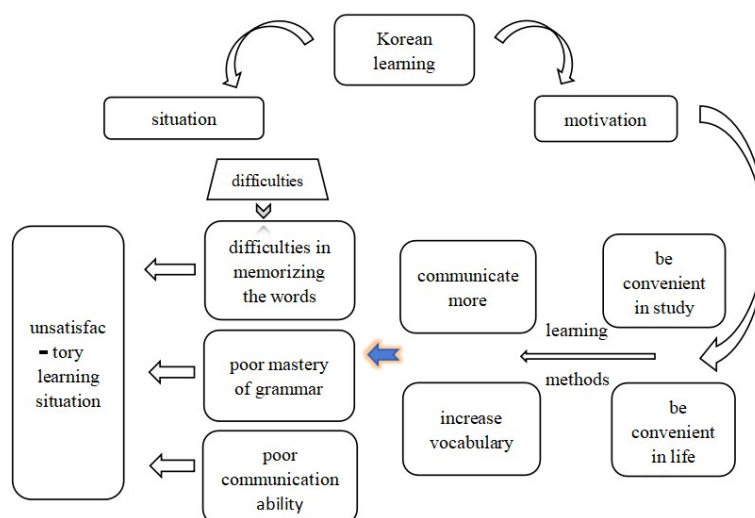
participants' conversation content, and whether the content expressed was consistent with their own ideas.

Table 1 the code of interview texts

category	sub-theme	theme
Be convenient in daily life.	convenience in life	Theme 1 motivation
Have more freedom in life.		
Don't need the translation software outside.	convenience in study	
Prepare for the further study in Republic of Korea.		
Communicate with professors.		
The vocabulary is limited.	difficulties in memorizing vocabulary	Theme 2 current learning situation
To memorize words is tough.		
To identify the meaning of words is hard.		
The grammar rules are not easy to master.		
It is easy to forget the grammar.	poor mastery of grammar	
It is hard to apply grammar rules into study.	poor communication ability	
The proper expressions are inadequate.		
Words can not be formed into sentences.		
The translation software is needed.		
Memorize more words.	an increase in vocabulary	Theme 3 learning methods
Punch in the words.		
Learn to spell more words.		
Listen more and practice more.		
Communicate with the local people.	more communication	
Speak more.		

4 Research Results

The results of the study show that their learning motivation is not adequate on the whole. In general, the motivation of Chinese students to study Korean is mainly to be convenient in their study and life, that is, in order to have a better communication with professors and basically talk with local residents, which is showed in <Table 1>. To acquire another new foreign language by improving their Korean ability is also their learning motivation. However, the current situation of Korean learning is not ideal. In order to alleviate the current situation, the five respondents adopted different learning methods to improve their learning effect. The results can be illustrated by the following picture:



They do have foreign language learning motivation but their learning motivation is inadequate.

The purpose of learning Korean is to be more convenient in study and in life, in other words, to communicate with professors and local people fluently. And to acquire a new language is another motivation. However, all of these five participants express that their Korean language learning motivation is insufficiency.

- 1) to be convenient in life and study

I have no strong desire to learn Korean since I can understand the Professors in class with the help of the translator. But..., because in Republic of Korea, I need to talk with the residents, for the convenience of life, so the spelling of Korean language, and understanding are very important. (participant A)

I don't have to learn Korean nowadays, and I have no plan to take the Test of Proficiency in Korean this year. But in the future, I want to continue my study in this country, because I am studying for a master's degree, and I want to live here more comfortably (happily). (participant C)

Learn Korean well, mainly for the purpose of study; and then of experiencing Korean culture, as well as good communication. But it is not necessary to learn Korean, just because this is a long process, and there is no difficulty in understanding professors in class because we have the translator. (participant D)

Since I come to Republic of Korea, it is a good chance to learn Korean. If you master the language well, you can communicate with Korean normally. It is convenient for us. And It is also good for my study. (participant E)

2) to acquire a new language skill

To master the Korean language is also useful. In the future, Korean language will be used in my business, so it's important for me to learn it well, you know, it's my third foreign language. A new skill! (participant E)

Learning a language well feels good. My English is poor, especially oral English. I can't speak English fluently when I talk with foreigners, and I think I will not learn English well. I am frustrated. So If I learn Korean well, it is also a new skill after all. (participant D)

There are some difficulties in the language learning and the current situation of Korean learning is not satisfactory.

1) Their vocabulary is limited and to memorize words is too difficult.

Too little vocabulary; I can spell a few words. Even I can spell the words, but sometimes I do not know what it means. These words are not always in my mind. (participant A)

It is also tough to memorize words, because the memorized words only last a few days in memory. When I use them, I can't pick them out in my memory. My vocabulary is limited. (participant C)

Remembering the words is too difficult, and I always forget them. The Korean words are really complex to spell correctly. (participant B)

2) The mastery of grammar is not an easy task and grammar rules that have been learned can not be applied into daily life.

Not learn well, and it is easily to forget; though some grammar rules are mastered, but can not use them. I mean, I can't apply these grammar rules in my study. (participant C)

Grammar is still beyond my understanding, let alone to master it. (participant A)

After a period of study, learning is more and more difficult, and grammar and sentence pattern become more and more complicated, so I can not hand them easily. (participant D)

3) Because of failure to form words into sentences skillfully, their oral Korean and daily communication ability are poor, therefore, Chinese students need the translation software to communicate with local people.

I can't talk with others in Korean because I find no word to express me, even to sentences; I have to use the translation software Papago when I go outside, but sometimes the software gives the inaccurate translation, and then I get into trouble. (participant B)

Though words are memorized, I can't form many sentences. I just use a few words to communicate with the local people and sometimes I have to use my body language. you know, a little bit embarrassed. It is hard to open the mouth. (participant A)

The main problem is that I can't communicate with Koreans. It's really hard to speak oral Korean. My pronunciation is strange and I need to work on my pronunciation a bit more, or else they couldn't understand what I say. (participant E)

Although the interviewees have many difficulties in language learning, they still have the confidence in improving their Korean ability and explore different learning methods to improve their Korean proficiency. The learning methods are specifically summarized as follows:

1) The first thing is to increase the vocabulary, and all five participants emphasize the importance of memorizing words. This is a crucial step in learning Korean, because it is the accumulation of basic knowledge.

Punch in to remember the words to increase the vocabulary. we should insist it every day. It must be a long-term task. we should know that memorizing words is boring, but it is important for us to acquire a language. (participant B)

Spell more and memorize more words. To learn Korean well is a tough job, and to keep words in mind is much more difficult. But I will put more effort into this job. (participant A)

If you want to acquire a new language, the first thing you should do is to increase your vocabulary, and then the grammar, which provide a solid foundation for language learning. Memorize more words. (participant C)

It is impossible to memorize all words in a short time. We should remember words step by step. Reading is a good way to increase the vocabulary. Read more reading materials to memorize the new words. And it will increase the vocabulary imperceptibly. (participant D)

I always recite dialogues to enrich my vocabulary. Meanwhile, I can also learn some useful phrases and sentences from these dialogues. Watching TV or films is another approach. This is my way to acquire a language. And you know, watching TV or films is rather interesting, and you will be happy to do so. (participant E)

2) The courage is needed to communicate with Korean students and local residents. It will improve their communication ability in Korean through the process of understanding and expression.

Open the mouth and communicate with the Koreans. If you want to learn a language well, don't be afraid of losing face. we should imitate others in the pronunciation and expressions. Learn to speak sentences every day. (participant A)

It is the most difficult task for me to talk in Korean. Sometimes I can catch the meaning of the Korean sentences, but I can make a quick response. In recent days, I focus myself on my communicative ability. I think the effective way is to speak more and practice more. (participant C)

I'm always afraid of making mistakes in communication. It makes me lose confidence. I should overcome this anxiety. Dare to communicate with the residents and make full use of every minute to practice our oral language. I'm sure it can enhance our oral Korean ability. (participant D)

Since we are in Republic of Korea now, it is a good opportunity to improve our spoken language. Take action now. Communicate more with the local people. (participant E)

3) Focus on grammar learning and try to apply these rules into daily communication.

I know some words, but I can not put them together into sentences. When I talk with the residents, I hardly speak some sentences to express my meaning. I think it is mainly due to my lack of grammar rules. To master grammar rules is important for me, because it is the framework for mastering sentence patterns, even to a language. (participant D)

I feel frustrated to learn grammar rules. It's so complicated. But I will not give up. I will try my best to master more grammar rules, and then I could connect words into sentences to say it out. (participant B)

5 Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Conclusion and Suggestion

Through the interview text analysis, the following conclusions and suggestions are obtained from this study.

Firstly, the current learning situation is not satisfactory, which is mainly due to the insufficient internal motivation and lack of strong desire to learn Korean. Therefore, Chinese foreign students should realize the importance of Korean learning and take a positive attitude towards it. It is necessary for them to set up their own learning goals and learning plans.

Secondly, because of the short learning time of Korean, the Korean level of Chinese students in Sehan university is relatively not high, and the current learning situation is not satisfactory. In view of this situation, the university should appropriately increase the time of Korean lessons, not only limited to 2 hours a week, which will provide more time and chances for them to learn Korean.

Thirdly, Chinese students need to use translation software to communicate with local people. In order to alleviate the situation, the school can add oral Korean courses and create the context for Korean learning, so that students dare to open their mouths, dare to communicate, and dare to express themselves.

5.2 Research Significance

Meanwhile, this study has some positive significance, which lies in the following information specifically.

1) With Chinese students, the number of whom is in a sharp increase, as the research participants, the research aims to understand the process of adaptation in Korean universities, and analyze the difficulties in this process, thus put forward the relative learning strategies, hoping to be helpful for Chinese students in Korean learning, so that they can adapt to campus life in Republic of Korea easily.

2) The results of this study can not only provide help to international students studying in Republic of Korea, but also enable teachers to understand students' Korean learning process, recognize the obstacles in learning and propose the practical help needed, so as to develop effective teaching strategies to stimulate learning motivation, which is also helpful for teachers to investigate students' satisfaction in the Korean learning experience, find out the problems in teaching, and take measures to improve students' learning effects.

3) This study can be used as the basic data to deeply investigate the life and study of Chinese students in Republic of Korea from more aspects. From the country's viewpoint, it is of certain research significance to provide practical help to international students to attract more international students to study in Republic of Korea, which is conducive to the smooth development of the "Study Korea 300K" program.

5.3 Limitations

The respondents of this study are limited to five Chinese international students, therefore, to extend the research results of these five students to all international students in Republic of Korea is not comprehensive. Meanwhile, in the setting of the characteristics variables of the test subjects, this study only sets the students' gender, age, and major. The more characteristics of the respondents, such as students' family situation and learning environment, should added to make the study more comprehensive.

About the Author

Yuqing Qin is a lecturer at Shandong University of Engineering and Vocational Technology and is currently a doctoral candidate at Sehan University in Republic of Korea.

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