Sense of Belonging and Psychological Adjustment of Returnee Students in Korea

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Key words: returnee student, sense of belonging, adjustment

Recently Korean society experienced globalization due to economic growth and active cultural exchange. In particular, the number of returnees, students who have returned from study abroad, are now increasing rapidly. In terms of identity, returnees may face many challenges as their identity is constantly being challenged by new environments. For some of them, a sense of belonging to their native community has been deeply challenged by new environments. For some of them, a sense of belonging to their country and to college in relation to their identity is an integral part of feeling at home which can be attached to a place or significant relationships (Walker, 1998). Because it is a subjective, emotional response to a community, a strong sense of belonging would be intimately linked to successful adjustment and psychological health of returnees (Goodenow, 1993). But there are only a few recent studies addressing the psychological characteristics of returnee college students in Korea.

This study aimed to examine the psychological characteristics of returnee college students and compare them to those of college students who had never lived abroad, with a focus on their identity and sense of belonging. Further, we examine how these factors are associated with their psychological and academic adjustment.

METHOD

Participants
- 294 Korean college students (132 returnee students and 162 general students who have never lived abroad) recruited from a number of colleges in Korea, were asked to participate. On average, Returnees lived in 1.53 foreign countries for a total of 9.83 years.

Instruments
- The Abbreviated Multidimensional Acculturation Scale (AMAS; Zea et al., 2003), the Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM; Goodenow, 1993), the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ; Baker et al., 1985), the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D; Radloff, 1977), the Symptom Checklist (SCL-90; Derogatis et al., 1973)

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

As shown in Table 1, significant difference in identity level was observed in both the returnee group and the college students who had only lived in Korea (hereafter termed the “general student” group): Returnees reported significantly higher perception of Korean identity than general students. And there were no differences between the returnee and general group in total score of sense of belonging, campus adjustment, depression and anxiety.

As shown in Table 2, in both groups, the sense of belonging variables especially college belonging) explained a significant amount of variance in campus adjustment. For depression and anxiety, however, a sense of belonging to Korea and a sense of belonging to the university were both significant predictors in both returnee and general groups (see Table 3).

This study provided a preliminary examination of the contribution of a sense of belonging and a sense of identity to the psychological adjustment of returnee students in Korea in comparison to the general college population. We found that a strong sense of belonging is positively associated with measures of psychological adjustment in both the returnee and the general college student group. We hope this study will lay the foundation for future work on identity, belonging and adjustment issues in various Korean returnee students. Future research is needed to examine further the precise role of returnees’ perceived sense of belonging to their country and to college in relation to their objective performance and achievement.

REFERENCES

