Acculturation, Psychological and School Adjustment of Early Study-Abroad Adolescents in Terms of Stress Coping Strategy

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The goal of this study was to examine the correlations of stress coping strategies and cultural, psychological and school adjustment among Korean early study-abroad adolescents in the United States. Participants were 437 Korean early study-abroad adolescents aged 15 to 18 years old enrolled in summer language institutes located in Seoul and Gyeonggido, South Korea. The survey consisted of questionnaires relating to coping strategies and cultural, psychological and school adjustments. The data was collected during the break time of summer language institute classes. Results showed that these adolescents’ problem focused and social support coping strategies were positively related with acculturation, psychological adjustment and school adjustment, and emotion focused coping strategy was positively related to satisfaction of life.

Keywords: Early study-abroad adolescents, stress coping strategy, acculturation dimension, psychological adjustment, school adjustment

Introduction

Early study abroad has been a fast growing phenomenon among young Korean adolescents for the past 20 years. Studying abroad in a foreign country at an early age implicates sudden exposure to a new environment that is alien to their mother culture. Early study-abroad adolescents encounter very stressful situations during their adolescence, which is a developmentally critical period. Studies have reported that study-abroad adolescents experience psychosocial maladjustments and difficulties in coping with the acculturative stress (Constantine, Okazake, & Utsey, 2004; Leong, Mallinckrodt, & Kralj, 1990; Misra, Crist, & Burant, 2003; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006; Ying & Liese, 1990, 1994). According to Oberg (1960), the stress situations that early study-abroad adolescents face in encountering a new culture can be explained by the term “culture shock” which is defined as a psychological reaction to a culture change that is initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous cultural systems. During this process, adolescents experience high levels of anxiety as they encounter a new culture of foreign habits, gestures and languages through interactions with others. Thus, Korean early study-abroad adolescents are known to inevitably experience more and different types of stressors than those of Korean adolescents studying in South Korea. The issues that early study-abroad adolescents face vary such as family issues, cultural adjustment, finance, school adjustment, racism, health, interpersonal issues and psychological stress. This paper aims
to study stress coping strategies and cultural, psychological and school adjustments of Korean early study-abroad adolescents.

Acculturation is a dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members leading to some longer-term psychological and socio-cultural adaptations between both groups (Berry, 1997). Adolescents who experience acculturation show different patterns in adjusting to the host culture such as separation, assimilation, integration, and marginalization (Coleman, Casali, & Wampold, 2001). The particular strategy they choose in acculturation affects their adjustment to a new culture. The four-mode acculturation model helps explain how the degree of acceptance or denial with the host or foreign culture influences mental health (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987). The four acculturation modes or strategies proposed are separation, assimilation, integration and marginalization. They are created by combining either high or low levels of two acculturation dimensions which explains attitudes toward host and foreign culture (Kim, 2007). Individuals who choose integration strategy adhere to both their home and host cultures. Assimilation occurs when they adhere to the host culture but reject the home culture. Maintaining the home culture and rejecting the host culture is explained by separation strategy. Finally, marginalization occurs when one rejects both the home and host cultures. Integration has been theorized and known to be associated with the best mental health outcomes, perhaps because it allows people to “hold cultural norms that are functional in both the U.S. and Asian cultures while being able to reconcile any conflicts that arise between the two cultural systems” (Kim, 2007, p. 143). Recent scholars advocate for the bilinear perspective of acculturation’s dimensions. It proffers that identification with one culture does not necessarily lessen that with the other culture (Miller, 2007; Rudmin, 2009). Bilinear models assume adherence to one culture lessens adherence to the other culture in measuring acculturation whereas most previous studies on acculturation and mental health have been based on linear models (Koneru, Mamani, Flynn, & Betancourt, 2007; Miller, 2007). Studies have shown that bilinear models better explain the Asian American cultural orientation and more accurately predict their personality than linear models (Abe-Kim, Okazaki, & Goto, 2001; Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000).

Research on immigrants and study-abroad adolescents have reported that psychological adjustment and school adjustment are very important factors that affect the positive adjustment of immigrants and international students along with acculturation (Park & Doh, 2001; Bang, 2008; Li & Song, 2008; Berry et al., 1987; Buddington, 2002; Gill, 2007; Kosic, 2004; Wong-Reiger & Quintana, 1987; Ying, Lee, & Tsai, 2007). In the context of international student adjustment, theorists have distinguished two outcomes of acculturation—psychological adjustment and socio-cultural adjustment (Berry, 1997; Ward & Kennedy, 1994). Defined as “feelings of wellbeing and satisfaction,” psychological adjustment is often measured by level of depression which includes symptoms such as depressed mood, feelings of worthlessness, loneliness, and unfriendliness from others (Radloff, 1977; Searle & Ward, 1990; Yi, Lin, & Kishimoto, 2003). Satisfaction of life is another domain that determines the psychological well-being of adolescents (Gilman & Huebner, 2003; Huebner, 2004). High satisfaction of life showed a significant relationship with low level of adolescent delinquency and in such factors as self-confidence (Dew & Huebner, 1994), child-parent relationship (Huebner, 2004) low depression and anxiety (Gullone & Cummins, 1999) and drug abuse (Zullig, Valois, Huebner, Oeltmann, & Drane, 2001). For adolescents who spend most of their day in a school setting, school adjustment is an important setting where possible stressors predict and determine the adjustment of Korean early study-abroad adolescents. Thus, all three domains of adjustment which are acculturation, psychological adjustment, and school adjustment have to be taken into consideration in order to
understand the positive adjustment of Korean early study-abroad adolescents.

Psychological adjustment may be best explained by a stress and coping framework (Ward & Kennedy, 1999). The use of maladaptive coping strategies might be one factor contributing to research findings that have demonstrated international students’ acculturative stress (Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006; Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, & Al-Timimi, 2004; Yang & Clum, 1995; Yeh & Inose, 2002). Recent studies on stress have focused on individual differences in adaptive and maladaptive results of stress. The individual differences are influenced by mediating factors between stress and maladjustment, which are one’s cognitive interpretation of stress, stress coping strategies, social skill and support (Han, Jang, & Ahn, 2004). In a study of South Korean international students, Yeh and Inose (2002) demonstrated that these adolescents utilized a wide-variety of coping techniques, such as psychological coping, physical coping, problem solving, social support, and entertainment. Coping efforts may also play a role in psychological and acculturative adjustment. In a group of international students from various Asian countries, suppressive coping (i.e., avoidance of coping and denial of problems), reactive coping (i.e., strong emotional responses, distortion, impulsivity, and cognitive confusion), and lower self-esteem predicted depressive symptoms (Wei, Ku, Russell, Mallinckrodt & Liao, 2008). In a longitudinal study of Chinese international students, better acculturative adjustment was associated with a positive problem-solving orientation, as well as confidence in one’s ability to cope with being in the U.S. (Wang, Heppner, Fu, Zhao, Li, & Chuang, 2012). The results of these studies suggest that coping should be considered more closely when looking at the adjustment of international students.

Previous research on factors affecting acculturation focused mainly on immigrants and international college students (Berry et al., 1987; Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 1978; Friedman & Jaranson, 1994; Sykes & Eden, 1987). Study results on Korean early study-abroad adolescents show the overall status of study-abroad adolescents as well as issues regarding the social aspect of the study abroad phenomena and implications for policy makers (Kim, 2005; Kim, 2001; Park, 2006; Sohn, 2002; Ahn, 1996; Lee, 2005; Lee, 2001; Lim, 2005). Moreover, recent studies on study-abroad adolescents’ adjustment have focused on specific psychological maladjustment aspects such as anxiety, depression, self-esteem or life satisfaction (Kang, 2008; Yu, 2005; Jo, 2007). Also, previous studies defined Korean study-abroad adolescents to be well adjusted or mal-adjusted to the host culture based upon their psychological status yet this needs to be looked at from a multidimensional perspective. While previous research has been limited in understanding Korean early study-abroad adolescents, this paper intends to take a more integrative approach in examining the psychosocial experience and coping strategies of Korean early study-abroad adolescents’ adjustment. Based on the results of prior studies, the present study aims to examine the correlation among stress coping strategies, acculturation, psychological adjustment and school adjustment of Korean early study-abroad adolescents.

Method

Participants

A total of 437 study-abroad Korean adolescents aged 15 to 18 years participated in this study. This study defined early study-abroad students as adolescents who were enrolled in a foreign junior high or high school for more than a year. Participants in this study were limited to high school students studying only in the United States in order to minimize interfering variables such as other foreign countries for this study. This study consists of 244 male and 193 female students with 65 15 year-olds, 124 16 year-olds, 144 17 year-olds and 104 18 year-old students as shown in Table 1. About 90.6% of the fathers and 83.5% of the mothers received a bachelor’s
Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Sample (N=437)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>16</th>
<th>17</th>
<th>18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>32(7.3)</td>
<td>75(17.2)</td>
<td>81(18.5)</td>
<td>56(12.8)</td>
<td>244(55.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>33(7.6)</td>
<td>49(11.2)</td>
<td>63(14.4)</td>
<td>48(11.0)</td>
<td>193(44.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>65(14.9)</td>
<td>124(28.4)</td>
<td>144(33.0)</td>
<td>104(23.8)</td>
<td>437(100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2-1
Demographic Information of Sample (N=437)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Length of Stay</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 2 years</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2~4 years</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4~6 years</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longer than 6 years</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Level of Father</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary School Graduate</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School Graduate</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
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<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Graduate</td>
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<td>48.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate School</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>42.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation of Father</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor worker</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical labor worker</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White-collar worker</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expertise technician</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative manager</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
degree or higher and responded that their perceived socioeconomic status (SES) was “above average” (see Table 2). Given that the South Korean college graduate male population is 37.8% and 25.4% for the female population according to Statistics Korea’s survey data in 2005, the overall socio-economic status of households showed itself to be above average. As seen in Table 2, the length of stay in the States for 140 students was less than two years; 164 students stayed between two to four years; 71 students stayed between four to six years; and 62 students reported that their stay was longer than six years.

### Measures

**Stress Coping Strategy.** In order to examine the stress coping strategy for participants, a Ways of Coping Questionnaire (WCQ; Folkman & Lazarus, 1988) was translated into the Korean language by the researcher and 18 items were omitted out of a total 50 items that were not relevant for participants for this study after factor analysis on preliminary survey results; thus only 32 items were adopted. The questionnaire includes four sub-scales with 14 items on problem-focused coping, five items on social support, seven items on wishful thinking, and 60 items on emotional coping.
four items on emotional-focused coping. The Cronbach's $\alpha$ for each subscale was .88 for problem-focused coping, .79 for social support, .65 for wishful thinking, and .68 for emotional-focused coping. A 4-point Likert-type scale was used for this measure.

**Acculturation.** In order to examine participants' acculturation, the Psychological Acculturation Scale (PAS; Tropp, Erkut, Coll, Alarcon, & Vazquez-Garcia, 1999) which Hodges (2002) reconstructed for Asian international students in the States to measure acculturation was adapted. Berry's (1980) scale proposed four types of acculturation categories yet the actual acculturation of individual cannot be categorized by four separate categories (Chung & Yang, 2004). Thus the PAS was analyzed by combining Berry’s (1980) four acculturation type into two dimensions that assess Integration-Marginalization ($\alpha$ =.61) as one dimension and Assimilation-Separation ($\alpha$ =.88) as another. The Integration-Marginalization dimensions assess the degree of an individual’s adherence or rejection of both cultures and the Assimilation-Separation determines how much a participant is leaning toward or away from one culture. Each dimension was measured by a 5-point-Likert scale and received a total score (some questions, for example, included: *I would only consider Asians as my potential date; I speak my native language whenever I can*). High score of Integration-Marginalization dimension meant that the participant showed more adherence toward both cultures and a high score in the Assimilation-Separation dimension meant that participants showed more adherence toward the foreign culture. For the present study, the scale was translated into the Korean language and two items were omitted that that showed low reliability through a reliability test of the scale. A total of 39 items were used for this study. Cronbach’s $\alpha$ was .81 for the Assimilation-Separation dimension and .62 for the Integration-Marginalization dimension in this study.

**Psychological Adjustment.** To measure depression of participants, the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI; Beck, 1967) was utilized. The BDI was translated into Korean language in order to avoid any misinterpretation. The BDI includes total of 21 items on a 4-point Likert-type scale (sample questions included: *I do not feel sad; I have not lost interest in other people*) that assesses cognitive, behavioral, affective, and somatic dimensions of depression. Internal consistency (Cronbach’s $\alpha$) of BDI data in previous studies of Korean participants ranged from .89 to .94 (Han, Yum, Shin, Kim, Yoon, & Chung, 1986). Cronbach’s $\alpha$ was .95 in this study.

To assess satisfaction of life we utilized Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWL; Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985). The scale was translated into the Korean language by the researcher and verified validity through a preliminary survey on a 5-point Likert-style scale. Five items (for example, *I am satisfied with my life; If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing*) received a total score from 5 to 25; higher scores demonstrated a participant’s higher satisfaction with life and a lower score indicated a low satisfaction with life. Cronbach’s $\alpha$ was .79 in this study.

To measure school adjustment, a School Related Coping scale (Kim, 1993), which was modified from 41 original items to 25 items by Lim (2006), was utilized on a 5-point Likert-style scale (sample questions included: *I feel comfortable talking to teachers in my school; There are times when I don’t want to go to school*). The scale included subscales such as adjustment with the teacher, adjustment with peers, adjustment in class, adjustment with school life, and adjustment with school environment. Cronbach’s $\alpha$ was 0.91 in this study.
**Procedure**

A preliminary internet survey was conducted with 16 male and 17 female students currently enrolled in high schools in the United States starting from October 2007 until December 2007. Necessary revisions or supplements were made for the questionnaire after reviewing the feedback from the participants.

The actual survey for this study was administered during the summer break period of Korean early study-abroad adolescents by visiting language institutes located in Seoul and Gyeonggi province area. A total of 560 survey sheets were distributed during the break time between classes and collected. Participants who started their studies in the States prior to elementary school were excluded and a total of 437 samples were used for analysis.

**Results**

**Correlation between stress-coping strategy, acculturation, psychological adjustment and school adjustment**

In order to review the correlations between stress coping strategy, acculturation, psychological adjustment and school adjustment, Pearson correlation coefficient was analyzed. Table 3 shows high correlation coefficient ranging from $r=-.35$ to $r=.51$ among stress coping strategy, acculturation, psychological adjustment and school adjustment.

**Correlation between stress-coping strategy and acculturation**

The result of correlation analysis showed positive correlation between assimilative dimension of acculturation with problem focused coping strategy ($r=.13$, $p<.01$) and a negative correlation with wishful thinking ($r=-.17$, $p<.001$). The integrative dimension of acculturation was positively correlated with a problem focused ($r=.16$, $p<.01$) and social support ($r=.22$, $p<.001$) and emotion focused ($r=-.13$, $p<.01$) and wishful thinking ($r=-.26$, $p<.001$) was negatively correlated. That is, adolescents who choose problem focused coping strategy are more likely to take an assimilative or integrative attitude toward the host culture and adolescents who cope with stress with social support tend to show more integrative acculturation. Adolescents who use more wishful thinking as stress coping strategy tend to show separation or marginalization with the host culture and adolescents who chose an emotion focused coping strategy tend to be more marginalized with the host culture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Stress Coping Strategy</th>
<th>Acculturation</th>
<th>Psychological Adjustment</th>
<th>School Adjustment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Problem Focused</td>
<td>Social Support</td>
<td>Emotion Focused</td>
<td>Wishful Thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assimilation-Separation</td>
<td>.13**</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.17***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration-Marginalization</td>
<td>.16**</td>
<td>.22***</td>
<td>-.13**</td>
<td>-.26***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>-.18***</td>
<td>-.14**</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.25***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction of Life</td>
<td>.33***</td>
<td>.15**</td>
<td>.10*</td>
<td>-.12**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Adjustment</td>
<td>.51***</td>
<td>.34***</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Numbers in cells represent Pearson correlation coefficients

$p<.05$, **$p<.01$, ***$p<.001$
This result is congruent with the previous research on Asian immigrants who show marginalized acculturative attitude frequently used emotion focused stress coping strategy in the United States (Hodges, 2002). This is also consistent with research findings that problem focused coping which actively deals with the situation may be the most effective strategy for psychological adjustment, more so than an emotion focused strategy that tries to handle feelings of distress (Compas, Malcarne, & Fondacaro, 1988; Ebata & Moos, 1991; Kurdek & Sinclair, 1988; Wills, 1986). In other words, the result shows that an active coping strategy such as problem focused and social support lead to more adaptive results in the acculturation of Korean early study-abroad adolescents.

Correlation between stress-coping strategy and psychological adjustment

**Depression.** The correlation analysis between stress coping strategy and depression indicated a negative correlation between depression and problem focused coping ($r=-.18, p<.001$) and social support ($r=-.14, p<.01$). In contrast, depression and wishful thinking ($r=.27, p<.001$) showed a positive correlation.

**Life satisfaction.** Life satisfaction of Korean early study-abroad adolescents was positively correlated with problem focused coping ($r=.33, p<.001$), social support ($r=.15, p<.01$) and emotion focused coping ($r=.10, p<.05$). Yet life satisfaction was negatively associated with wishful thinking ($r=-.12, p<.05$).

The result demonstrates that adolescents who chose problem focused and social support as a coping strategy were less depressed and adolescents who tried to cope with stress by using a wishful thinking strategy were more depressed. In addition, adolescents who use problem focused, social support and emotion focused coping strategies feel more satisfaction with their lives. On the other hand, adolescents who used a wishful thinking coping strategy showed low levels of life satisfaction.

The finding supports previous research that revealed that problem management such as problem focused and social support strategies are more highly associated with psychological adjustment than with an emotion regulation strategy (Stallard, Velleman, Langsford, & Baldwin, 2001). In contrast, emotion focused is a coping strategy that uses emotion regulation to cope with stress, which is known to be negatively associated with psychological adjustment, yet the Korean early study-abroad adolescents who used wishful thinking showed a higher life satisfaction level. This result is consistent with previous studies that showed that, depending on the stressful situation and nature of the stressor, subjective and optimistic distortion of a situation or evasion may be more adaptive than precise perception of situation and an aggressive problem focused strategy (Snyder & Higgins, 1988). This means when one realizes that stressors of studying abroad in a foreign country are not a temporary situation but rather a continuous issue, stress coping strategy that regulates emotion may be associated with satisfaction of life for Korean early study-abroad adolescents.

Correlation between stress-coping strategy and school adjustment

School adjustment was positively associated with problem focused coping ($r=.51, p<.001$) and social support ($r=.34, p<.001$). The finding supports earlier research result on Korean high school students’ school adjustment, which showed that problem focused coping and social support were highly associated with successful school adjustment (Roh, 2007). Similarly, problem focused and social support are effective stress coping strategies for adjusting well to school for Korean early study-abroad adolescents.

**Discussion**

By examining stress coping strategies, acculturation, psychological adjustment and
school adjustment in a sample of 437 Korean early study-abroad adolescents, the present study aimed to deepen the current understanding. Results showed a significant correlation between Korean early study-abroad adolescents’ stress coping strategy and acculturation. The correlation analysis result showed that the more Korean early study-abroad adolescents used problem focused coping strategy, the higher the level of assimilative and integrative acculturation. In addition, adolescents who used social support coping more frequently showed a higher integrative acculturation attitude towards the host culture. In contrast, adolescents who use wishful thinking as coping strategy showed low level of assimilative and integrative acculturation, which implies a high tendency of marginalization and separation from the host culture. High levels of emotion focused coping were related with adolescents’ low level of integrative attitude with the host culture, which means a high tendency of marginalized acculturation. That is, it can be stated that adaptive acculturation is achieved effectively when Korean early study-abroad adolescents use problem focused coping by trying to directly manage the stressors such as a stress provider or stressful situation and by seeking help from others rather than trying to manage through emotion distancing from the stressful situation and controlling their emotional state.

Secondly, the correlation analysis revealed significant correlation among coping strategy, depression, satisfaction of life and school adjustment of Korean early study-abroad adolescents. According to the results, the adolescents who use more problem focused and social support coping were less depressed and adolescents who used more wishful thinking strategy were more depressed. Satisfaction of life was higher for adolescents who used more problem focused, social support and emotion focused coping, yet adolescents who used more wishful thinking showed lower satisfaction of life.

According to a cognitive-transactional view of stress, a specific strategy or mode of coping cannot be defined as effective or ineffective independent of the context in which it is used (Forsythe & Compas, 1987). An effective and flexible use of appropriate coping skills that have “goodness of fit” with other variables in the stress and coping process is an important factor for successful adjustment. Despite the prevailing assumption made from previous research results that emotion focused coping, which tries to moderate emotional reactions are associated with psychological maladjustment, passive coping strategies such as wishful thinking or avoidant coping may be more adaptive depending on different circumstances.

Considering that about 67.9% of the sample showed that the length of study abroad period was longer than two years between the ages of 15 to 18 years, the stressor is very likely to be perceived as long-term stressor. In such circumstances, for the Korean early study-abroad adolescent who perceive a stressful situation as a long-term stressor, passive coping strategies such as wishful thinking and emotion focused coping may buffer their stress and help their satisfaction of life. This finding provides important implications for the necessity of guiding Korean early study-abroad adolescents to utilize coping strategies more effectively and flexibly in order to help them to adjust to a foreign culture well.

The results from this study may not be appropriate to generalize or represent all study-abroad students since the participants were highly motivated students who were willing to enter language institutions in South Korea during their summer break with relatively high academic performance and language ability.

Demographic information such as age, gender and length of stay in the States were not considered in analysis; nor were empirical characteristics such as academic performance, language proficiency and living status.

Lastly, the study only reviewed the correlation among stress coping, acculturation, psychological adjustment and school adjustment, but did not show the causal relationship among the variables.

Despite the limitations mentioned above, this study has significant theoretical and empirical contributions. The acculturation was
determined by assimilative and integrative dimensions that measure the degree of acculturative attitude of Korean early study-abroad adolescents. This allows researchers to understand the extent of adherence to the host culture of adolescents rather than categorizing them into simple adjusting or maladjustment groups. Furthermore, the adjustment of Korean early study-abroad adolescents was reviewed from a multi-dimensional perspective by considering the correlations among acculturation, psychological adjustment and school adjustment.

Finally, the study revealed the correlation between the stress coping strategies with Korean early study-abroad adolescents’ acculturation, depression, life satisfaction and school adjustment. The findings imply that a problem focused coping strategy is associated with overall adjustment, yet an emotion focused coping strategy was also effective in buffering psychological adjustment. This provides important implications and may serve as basic data in future development of support program for early study-abroad adolescents’ adjustment.

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