



## **Language Preparation of International Nursing Students: A Study of Learning Motivations and Decisions**

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Study abroad is not an easy decision for international students who cannot manage the local language and academic courses, particularly nursing students who need to communicate with their patients in clinical environments. This study aims to explore international nursing students' experiences of pre-sessional language prerequisite courses in South Korea. Three directions were categorised, including what are the motivations and reasons to come to South Korea, how do the international nursing students describe their Korean language courses as the prerequisite for their nursing programme at one of the South Korean universities, and why did the participants select South Korea as their destination for the nursing programme. Based on the Social Cognitive Career and Motivation Theory and a qualitative design, the researcher invited 12 participants who are taking the pre-sessional language courses before the nursing programme commencement. The results indicated that personal considerations, interest in career development, and financial considerations are three of the key elements. The outcomes of this study allowed the nursing school leaders and government agencies to polish their current curriculum plans, international students' recruitment strategies, and post-study career developments for international nursing students in the East Asian region.

**Keywords:** bilingualism, international student, language learning, nursing education, social cognitive career and motivation theory, student mobility

### **INTRODUCTION**

Nursing is one of the popular academic programmes for secondary school graduates and second-career changers in South Korea (Hyun et al., 2018). Like many vocational programmes, nursing and health degree graduates are more likely to receive employment offers from their interned sites and clinical environments due to the human resources and workforce gaps (Dos Santos, 2019; Lee & Fitzgerald, 2008; Timsina et al., 2017). Although international students may need to seek sponsorship from potential employers, nursing programmes graduates are more likely to be sponsored by many large-size hospitals and medical centres due to their multilingual and multicultural skills (Gasiorek & van de Poel, 2018).

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As a result of globalisation and financial development, many students decide to study abroad in foreign countries and regions to gain international academic and life experience. According to a recent report (*South Korea: Record Growth in International Student Enrolment*, 2018), the population of international students increased significantly due to social, cultural, and entertainment facilities in South Korea. In 2017, more than 70,000 international students were enrolled at one of the South Korean universities as degree-seeking students. Within the 70,000-student population, nearly 52,000 were non-degree students, such as language school students and vocational trainees. By 2023, the South Korean government aims to recruit at least 200,000 international students to establish the country as an education hub in the East Asian region (*Education of International Students*, 2020). Although the COVID-19 Pandemic may affect the enrolment of college and university students, the student enrolment may increase after the global health crisis.

One of its recruiting strategies is to expand the range of academic programmes taught in English for international students who do not have any Korean language proficiency (Kim, 2017). According to the *Study Korea Project 2004 (Education of International Students*, 2020), South Korean colleges and universities should establish some academic programmes taught in languages other than Korean to serve the needs of international students, particularly in the STEM (Sciences, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) field (Jung & Lee, 2019). In fact, not all students, teachers, visitors, and administrators speak Korean or have Korean language proficiency. The English language programmes and qualifications are essential for international students and newcomers (Cho, 2012; Kim et al., 2014).

In addition to traditional academic and degree programmes, many universities provide Korean language courses and programmes for students who want to gain Korean language proficiency for the purposes of personal development or academic preparation (i.e. preparation for their university degree programme). Unlike in traditional degree-seeking programmes, students of these courses usually spend their day at a language-learning school or school of continuing education affiliated with a public or private university. Students may enjoy and use the facilities and services of the university if they are enrolled on one of the Korean language courses it offers (He & Huang, 2018). Once the student has completed a certain level of the Korean language course, passed the TOPIK (Test of Proficiency in Korean), and met the university's admission requirement(s), he or she may be able to enrol in one of the academic programmes offered by any of the South Korean universities, in this case, the nursing programmes (Ayhan & Gouda, 2021).

First of all, some academic programmes require Korean language proficiencies. The abovementioned Korean language courses are the prerequisite before official commencement, in this case, the nursing programmes. Although many of the nursing academic programmes were taught in English, many nursing departments require advanced-level Korean language proficiency as the requirement for graduation. However, for some other courses without any Korean language requirements, the abovementioned Korean language courses are popular with many students who want to

learn the Korean language, enjoy the experience of living in Korea, or gain access to university admission opportunities after completion (Bae & Song, 2017).

One of the main questions would be, why do nursing students, nurses, and nursing professionals need multilingual and multicultural proficiencies and skills in the South Korean environment? According to some previous studies (Kim, 2009; Junmo Kim & Kwon, 2012), due to the economic development of the South Korean environments, many foreigners decided to come to South Korea for personal, career, and educational developments. As not all of them could speak Korean, health and nursing professionals who can speak English or foreign languages would be useful. Some scholars (Ahn & Kang, 2017; Choi & Yi, 2012) also advocated that nursing students should handle at least two languages (i.e. one in their native language and one in a foreign language) in order to handle the future workplace conditions and environments (Dos Santos, 2021a; Dos Santos, 2021). As hospitals and health facilities always encounter and serve foreign patients and patients without the local language proficiencies, the ideas of multilingualism and multiculturalism are greatly needed in many professional environments. Therefore, the demands for multilingual skills are significantly high. Currently, many potential employers (e.g. hospitals, medical centres, clinics, caring facilities) are thirsty for nursing professionals with Korean language proficiency and at least two additional language skills before university graduation.

### **The Background of the Current Quarantine Requirement in South Korea**

Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, as of early 2021, starting from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020, South Korean citizens and foreigners have been required by the government to quarantine for 14 days upon their arrival in South Korea in order to obtain the freedom of movement, regardless of the purpose of their visit. However, the quarantine requirement adversely affects the motivation of international students. More importantly, as many Korean language courses are offered via distance-based and online methods, international students do not need to come to South Korea to study these programmes (Byun & Slavin, 2020).

A recent study (Stewart & Lowenthal, 2021) collected data from a group of international exchange students who were forced to take distance learning courses on-campus during the COVID-19 Pandemic in South Korea. The results indicated that students felt isolated, disconnected from society, and had less social interactions with others during their exchange experiences. However, another study (Dos Santos, 2020b) indicated their distance learning students enjoyed their online learning experiences, outcomes, and performances due to the flexibility and academic freedom. In other words, no one teaching and learning strategy can satisfy the needs of all students (Dos Santos & Kwee, 2021; Kwee & Dos Santos, 2021; Kwee, 2021).

In fact, almost all of the language teaching courses were delivered online due to the social distancing recommendation. In other words, students can study the live-lesson from the internet without any physical attendance in the school and traditional classroom environment. However, a group of students continued to come to South Korea for some of the optional discussion sessions with their language teachers. Therefore, the

researcher wants to understand the motivations and reasons why these students decided to come to South Korea for their language courses during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

### Theoretical Framework

The current study employed the Social Cognitive Career and Motivation Theory (Dos Santos, 2021), which was developed based on the Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 1994; Lent & Brown, 1996). Lent and his co-workers advocated that individuals' career decisions and development are influenced by their basic academic and career interests, how they establish their education and career decisions, and the process of achieving positive results in terms of their academic and career goals. In other words, individuals' career decisions and development are exclusively influenced by these three factors (Lent et al., 1994; Lent & Brown, 1996). However, due to the social, cultural, and financial developments over the decades since this theory was proposed, there have been changes to the behaviours, decision-making processes, and motivations of individuals and groups. Based on a previous study (Dos Santos, 2021), the current study accordingly employed the Social Cognitive Career and Motivation Theory to reflect the contemporary needs, behaviours, motivations, and intentions of individuals. Such a theory captures both individuals' career intentions and their motivations and behaviours, based on both psychological and internal factors combined with self-efficacy and social and external factors. Six factors can be categorised based on the theory, including 1) academic interests, 2) personal considerations, and 3) achievement of education and career goals, all based on psychological and internal factors combined with self-efficacy; 4) interest in career development, 5) financial considerations, and 6) surrounding environments and individuals, based on social and external factors. Figure 1 illustrates the Social Cognitive Career and Motivation Theory (Dos Santos, 2021b).

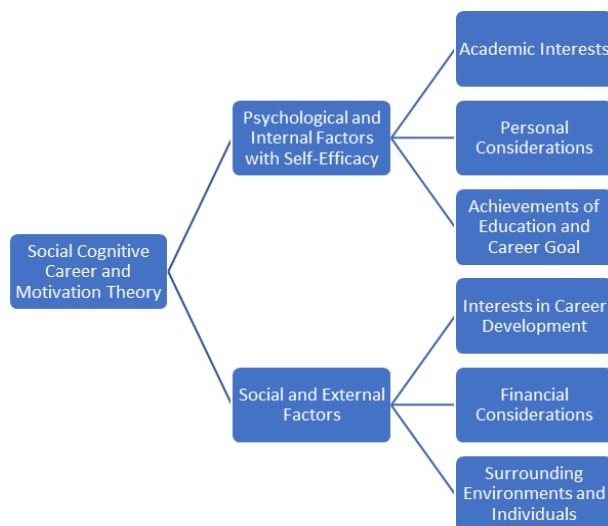


Figure 1  
Social cognitive career and motivation theory (Dos Santos, 2021b)

### **Significance of the Study**

The contribution of this study has three components. The current study employs a qualitative design (Aghaei et al., 2020). This allows the researchers to capture an in-depth understanding of the perspectives and motivations of those international students who decided to come to South Korea to undertake their undergraduate nursing programme and Korean language courses as their prerequisite (Kim et al., 2014).

Secondly, the study contributes to knowledge of recruitment strategies at the university level. The nursing programme is one of the popular academic courses for international students. However, advanced-level Korean language proficiency is required before the commencement. However, the COVID-19 Pandemic has led to significant changes in teaching and learning strategies and practices in many university courses and classroom environments. Although many programmes continue to use distance-based and online tools, students' experiences of these can be different due to the limited peer-to-peer, instructor-to-student, and interactive activities and exchanges (Stewart & Lowenthal, 2021). Therefore, it is essential to understand how international students experienced their learning experiences and their lifestyle in general in the South Korean environment during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Thirdly, coming to South Korea to study a Korean language course is not easy for many students due to their financial and personal responsibilities (Jung & Kim, 2018), particularly during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Therefore, this study also fills a gap in understanding the motivations for studying abroad during the global crisis. It may also reflect the situations and social issues in other countries which share a similar background to the South Korean environment. In this case, a group of international nursing students was examined for this issue.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to explore international nursing students' experiences of Korean language courses (i.e. the prerequisite course), in this case, during the COVID-19 Pandemic. It focuses on how these students describe their motivations, reasons, and experiences as Korean language learners in one of the nursing undergraduate programmes in South Korea (Wills et al., 2018).

In short, the current study was guided by three research questions: 1) Based on the Social Cognitive Career and Motivation Theory, what are the motivations and reasons for international nursing students to come to South Korea? Why? 2) How do the international nursing students describe their Korean language courses as the prerequisite for their nursing programme at one of the South Korean universities? 3) Why did the participants select South Korea as their destination for the nursing programme, particularly during the COVID-19 Pandemic?

## **METHOD**

### **Qualitative Design: Phenomenological Approach**

The purpose of this study is to explore international nursing students' experiences of Korean language courses (i.e. the prerequisite course), in this case, during the COVID-19 Pandemic. It focuses on how these students describe their motivations, reasons, and experiences as Korean language learners in one of the nursing undergraduate programmes in South Korea. First of all, the researcher collected data and qualitative information from a wider population in South Korea. In other words, the participants did not belong to one single site or location. The participants are currently enrolled in different nursing programme(s) and Korean language courses offered by one of the South Korean universities or affiliate language schools to the university. The phenomenological approach is appropriate in this study because it can capture the comments and opinions from students all across the Korean peninsula, regardless of the geographic location. For example, it is not uncommon that international students may select Seoul, the capital city of South Korea, as their destination due to the urban setting and environment. However, the intentions and motivations of international students in rural universities and language schools could be different. Therefore, the wider perspective and qualitative design (i.e. phenomenological approach) should be appropriate in this study.

### **Participants**

The researcher collected qualitative data from 12 international nursing students currently enrolled at one of the nursing programmes and Korean language schools affiliated with a South Korean university. The snowball sampling strategy (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009) was employed to recruit students all across the Korean peninsula. Based on the personal connection of the researcher, the researcher verbally invited three participants for the study. After the participants verbally agreed with the study and related arrangement, the researcher sent the study's rationale, interview protocol, interview questions, unsigned agreement, and related materials to the participants via email. When the participants signed and returned the agreement to the researcher, the researcher asked each participant for two interview sessions. Once the participants completed the interview sessions, they should refer at least one potential participant(s) for this study. After several discussions and referral(s), 12 participants decided to join. The participant should meet all the following criteria,

- International student (i.e. do not hold South Korean citizenship);
- Currently enrolled at one of the Korean language schools and courses;
- The Korean language school should be affiliated with a South Korean university;
- Came to South Korea during the COVID-19 Pandemic;
- Only work as a full-time or part-time worker after their school hours;

### **Data Collection**

The semi-structured interview session and focus group activity (Creswell, 2012) were employed to collect the data from the participants (Dos Santos, 2020a; Tang & Dos Santos, 2017; Tong et al., 2007). First of all, the participants contacted the researcher based on the email address on the agreement forms. Then, the researcher arranged the interview sessions based on the availabilities of each participant. In order to increase the validity of the qualitative study, two semi-structured interview sessions were employed. The first interview session focused on the ideas about the motivations and reasons to South Korea for their nursing programme. The second interview sessions focused on the ideas about their experiences of the prerequisite language courses and the decision-making process, particularly South Korea as their educational destination during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Due to the recommendation of social distancing, the participants selected either face-to-face or distance-based interview sessions. Both channels were valid and acceptable. As a result, all participants decided to complete their data collection procedures via distance-based tools. Each interview session lasted from 49 to 129 minutes. Please note that the researcher provided at least three weeks of break time before the second interview session. The participants could re-think and prepare their interview answers for the second interview.

After completing 24 interview sessions, all participants were invited to join the focus group activity for further sharing. Please note that the researcher provided at least three weeks of break time for all participants after the second interview session. Four participants were assigned into a group (as the researcher tended to seek the in-depth and intensive sharing and stories from the participants, a limited group would be appropriate). Therefore, three sessions were hosted. Due to the social distancing recommendation, the focus group activities were completely hosted online via a distance-based platform. The focus group activities lasted from 98 to 114 minutes. After the researcher categorised data from the interview sessions and focus group activities, the researcher invited each participant for the member checking interview for confirmation. All participants confirmed their materials and approved them for the study. Each member checking interview lasted from 28 to 33 minutes. During the interview sessions and focus group activities, the researcher employed a digital recorder to record the comments and opinions from all the parties. The researcher received approval from all parties.

Qualitative research studies are concerned about the validity of the study. Therefore, three data collection tools were employed: interview sessions, focus group activities, and member checking interviews. As all participants confirmed and shared their stories multiple times, all parties have confirmed their data for further development.

### **Data Analysis**

After the researcher completed the data collection procedure, the researcher transcribed the voiced messages and materials to the written transcripts. The researcher re-read the materials multiple times in order to find out the connection between the materials. Based on the grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), first, the researcher

employed the open-coding technique (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) for the first-level themes and subthemes. For this stage, the researcher could categorise 14 themes and 15 subthemes as the first-level themes. However, qualitative researchers (Merriam, 2009) advocated that further developments were greatly needed. Therefore, the researcher employed the axial-coding technique for the second-level themes' categories. As a result, two themes were merged.

### **Human Subject Protection**

The signed agreements, personal contacts, email addresses, background information, voiced messages, written transcripts, computer, and related materials were locked in a password-protect cabinet. Thus, only the researcher could read the materials. After the researcher completed the study, all the related materials were deleted and destroyed to protect all parties' privacy. The study was supported by the Woosong University Academic Research Funding (2021).

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

After the data collection and data analysis procedure were complete, the researcher developed three main themes and one subtheme based on the interview sessions and focus group activities. The data from the participants is rich, meaningful, and engaged. In terms of the Social Cognitive Career and Motivation Theory (Dos Santos, 2021; Lent et al., 1994; Lent & Brown, 1996), individuals' motivation and decisions may be influenced by five different factors. It is proposed that three main factors were captured here, based on the theory.

#### **Personal Considerations: Interest in Korean Popular Culture and Nursing Education**

First of all, the researcher sought the understanding and stories about the motivations and reasons why South Korea would be their destination for nursing academic programmes and training. All of them advocated that Korean popular culture is the most important key element. Although the researcher further asked about the degree quality, nursing education curriculum, and materials for the nursing training, only a few believed the Korean education, particularly nursing programmes and training, has reached the international standard. The following statements were some of the sharing about how Korean popular culture and entertainment influenced their motivations,

*...I really like Korean K-pop and Korean TV drama...I want to come to Korea...because I want to watch the singers' concert... Korean K-pop is very popular in many countries...I came to Korea because of the BTS and Black Pink...I wish I can go to their concert every week...(Participant #3, Interview)*

*...the TV drama in Korea...they are so good...I want to go to the places and cities...the restaurants...from the TV drama...I will have the same lunch and the same lifestyle of my dream star...coming to Korea and living in Korea...it looks like my dream...come true...(Participant #12, Interview)*



The 1980s and 1990s was a time of rapid development of the entertainment industry in East Asia, focused primarily on movies in Hong Kong and cartoons and anime in Japan. Most people did not recognise the existence of South Korea, even though it is located in the same region. According to a previous study (Ko et al., 2011), unlike the other two countries in East Asia (i.e. China and Japan), Korean culture was underrated before the entertainment and beauty industry were introduced. During this decade, based on the development of private sector businesses and investment by the South Korean government, the international reputation of South Korean business has improved, and the country is better known. In line with this, based on the sharing, all of the participants received admission offers from other nursing schools and universities (from other countries and regions). However, as all the participants in the study expressed a personal interest in Korean culture and entertainment (but not other countries), they decided to move to South Korea for their nursing education and training. As two participants put it,

*...I received three offers from Korea, the United States, and Australia...but I want to come to Korea...because I think I can learn the nursing programme and go to the concert of the K-pop star in Korea...I can only watch the TV shows in Australia or in the United States...Korea can satisfy all my needs...(Participant #7, Focus Group)*

*...I love Korea because of the TV shows...I want to come to Korea for the nursing programme and training, and language...and I wish I can join the TV drama and talk show as an audience...also, if I can go to the TV show as a nurse...if I can talk to the TV star...I can spend all my saving and time...I can go to the district...where the movie stars are living...I cannot imagine...I am living in a city...the same as my dream singer...and I can also study my nursing degree in the same city...(Participant #1, Focus Group)*

All 12 participants said that one of their main reasons to come to South Korea for nursing programme and training was the entertainment stars, music concerts, and TV shows. This reflects the findings of some previous studies (Han, 2017; Jin, 2018; Sohn & Youn, 2016) indicating that Korean popular culture and the so-called “Korean wave” have become significant motivators for foreigners and international students to come to South Korea to pursue their language, academic, and personal development. Although a recent study (Stewart & Lowenthal, 2021) indicated that international students might not enjoy their study abroad experiences during the COVID-19 Pandemic, the results of this study did not echo the finding from this previous study. On the other hand, all participants enjoyed the learning arrangement and advocated their own decision. Based on the Social Cognitive Career and Motivation theory (Dos Santos, 2021; Lent et al., 1994; Lent & Brown, 1996), this finding is consistent with such a research direction.

### **Interest in Career Development: The Potential Opportunities as Multilingual Nursing Professionals**

Multilingual and multicultural nursing professionals are in demand due to the increasing international population in South Korea (An, 2014; Junio et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2013; Yu et al., 2011). The long-term investment(s) of the South Korean government and the development of private sector organisations has created many job opportunities. Due to

the recent developments in the information technology, beauty, entertainment, and tourism industries, many mid- and large-size companies and organisations have begun sponsoring multilingual and exceptionally skilled workers and professionals (Junio et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2018; Lim et al., 2019). As not all international expats and professionals can perfectly speak Korean, nursing professionals who can speak foreign languages are in demand.

Although Korean language proficiency is not required for the working visa (i.e. for international nursing graduates and professionals), many employers and sponsoring companies (e.g. hospitals, medical centres, and clinics) expect applicants to have a reasonable grasp of the Korean language. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, the participants may start their prerequisite Korean language courses online. However, all decided to come to South Korea. Although language schools and online language learning programmes are available in the learners' home countries, the living environment and learning experience of being in South Korea will always increase social, cultural, and communicative proficiency and understanding. According to a previous study (Leong, 2015), one of the best ways to learn a language and culture is to live in the relevant country. Although the South Korean government set a social distancing policy and quarantine requirement for all incoming visitors from foreign countries, people continued to come to South Korea during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Two comments capture the reasoning,

*...I want to learn the Korean language in Korea because I want to learn the culture of Korea...after I finished the language programme...I can enter the nursing school immediately because some of the nursing courses have face-to-face teaching elements...also, why do I want to come to Korea for my nursing education and degree...because I believe Korea has a good job future...I can see the good vacancy and good job opportunities...for foreigners with good bilingual skills... (Participant #10, Interview)*

*...if I have good Korean language skill...I think the hospitals and companies...will look at my CV...at least I have a certificate from the best university in Korea...I can use the career service and referral service at my university...also, if I can gain some local networks and connections from my classmates, teachers, and friends...it will increase my chances...to be hired in Korea... English medium instruction in Korean higher education: Challenges and future directions... (Participant #11, Interview)*

A group of these young people expressed their ideas about developing their nursing education progression after completing the Korean language course. Based on a previous study (Kim, 2017), although many Korean university programmes are taught in Korean and English, most of the university services, facilities, professors, students, and community support structures are not set up to serve a large number of foreigners without Korean language proficiency (An, 2014; Junio et al., 2017; S. Kim et al., 2013; Yu et al., 2011). In other words, it is not easy to complete a degree programme at one of the South Korean universities without any ability to speak the language. As some participants explained,

*...I was planning to come to Korea for a major in nursing study...the university said that learners do not need to have any Korean language proficiency as the admission requirement...but I should have Korean proficiency by the end of my second year...because during the third year, we all have to go to the placement...in the local hospital...with local patients who cannot speak foreign languages...I talked to one of the student representatives...she told me that it is always good to have at least TOPIK Level 3 [around 400-450 hours] for any effective communications...also, the registration exam is written in Korean too...it is important to understand Korean language...during the beginning and starting point...(Participant #5, Focus Group)*

*...we are not in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand, or Singapore...no one in Korea can speak English...so I have to have some Korean language skills...before I applied for the university...the Korean government told us that we don't need any Korean language skills...which is not true...I talked to some of my friends who are studying their university degree in Korea...they told me that it is essential to have some Korean skills...before I entered the university...(Participant #8, Focus Group)*

In fact, these participants planned to continue with their nursing programme or qualification after completion of at least one year of the Korean language courses. In other words, the participants wanted to focus on Korean language proficiency exclusively before the commencement of their nursing programme (An, 2014; Junio et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2013; Yu et al., 2011). Due to the development of the tourism and leisure industry (Chiu et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2018; Yu et al., 2011), many potential employers now recruit bilingual nursing professionals with international experiences and perspectives, particularly those having both English and Chinese proficiency. Two comments capture this motivation,

*...there are so many Chinese visitors in Seoul and Busan before the COVID-19 Pandemic...many employers and hospitals need to have Mandarin Chinese speakers...to serve their patients...it is not uncommon to see a lot of medical staff who can speak Chinese fluently...as I can speak Chinese and English...I want to learn Korean...but I want to increase my skills first...and then I can start my nursing education...my nursing school allows that...(Participant #9, Focus Group)*

*...if I cannot speak Korean...it is very hard for me to study on-campus and seek any nursing positions after university...I used to work in a hospital when I came to Korea...I want to gain some experiences in Korea ...because it is unique to all of us...I can enjoy the city's culture...the real culture without tourists...but I can learn the Korean language at school too...when I completed the language course with near-native proficiency...I do not have to worry about the Korean language problems anymore in my nursing classroom...I can learn the nursing knowledge and practice in the nursing school and hospital sites...(Participant #2, Interview)*

Unlike the finding from another recent study (Stewart & Lowenthal, 2021), all participants expressed their positive experiences of their nursing programmes and language courses experiences (with distance learning options) in South Korea. In fact,

although the COVID-19 Pandemic caused a lot of difficulties and challenges for international students, in particular the loss of opportunities to attend face-to-face lessons on-campus with their classmates and teachers, all the participants enjoyed and accepted the unique arrangements put into place under the social distancing recommendation (Dietrich et al., 2020). This reflects the findings of some previous studies (Edgeworth & Eiseman, 2007; Mesidor & Sly, 2016) that international students tend to go to rural communities to study abroad as they want to learn about the real communities and societies of the host country (Amtu et al., 2020). Based on the Social Cognitive Career and Motivation Theory (Dos Santos, 2021; Lent et al., 1994; Lent & Brown, 1996), this confirms the relationship between an interest in career development and the motivations and decision-making process of the individuals in this study.

### **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

Firstly, the researcher only captured comments and opinions from international nursing students who are seeking Korean language courses at one of the South Korean universities' affiliate language programmes before their nursing programme commencement. The views of other international students and those completing their Korean language courses via distance-based and online tools are therefore not included. However, based on the rationale of this study, and as set out clearly above, the research set out to understand and explore the ideas and experiences of individuals who had decided to come to South Korea. Future research may extend the population under study to include students who are working on their language courses via distance-based and online tools. Such results will be meaningful for further reforms and developments. Secondly, due to the recommendations of social distancing and other government policies, face-to-face focus group activities could not take place. However, all the students understood how to take part in the distance-based and online focus group activities used in this study, based on their experiences of online courses and lessons. Future research studies may employ face-to-face focus group activities, particularly after the COVID-19 Pandemic is over. The use of a face-to-face data collection procedure may yield different findings.

Thirdly, the current study was conducted during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Although this is a unique period for the global community, the results and ideas expressed may be different from those raised prior to the Pandemic, as individual and group behaviour may be influenced by government policies and distance-based learning arrangements. Therefore, after the COVID-19 Pandemic, researchers may wish to conduct a similar type of investigation with comparable participants in order to compare the differences across time.

Fourthly, as this is a small study, only nursing students from overseas countries were invited. Therefore, in the future, researchers and scholars may take this study as their research design and blueprint for international students in other subject matters and academic programmes. For example, many colleges and universities may require language requirements as the prerequisite. Therefore, the voices and experiences of these groups of international students are meaningful.

## CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE PRACTICE AND CONCLUSION

Three main contributions to practice are identified. Firstly, there are no other current studies or projects examining international nursing students' motivation and decision-making processes in relation to studying Korean language courses during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The current study, therefore, closes a gap in the literature in this field. Although the COVID-19 Pandemic will not last forever, the results will remain a significant piece of information through which to understand international nursing students' behaviours and decision-making processes during the global crisis.

Secondly, the international student population is one of the most important groups in the South Korean educational environment, in this case, international nursing students as the sample(s). During the COVID-19 Pandemic, the enrolment of international students dropped significantly due to the quarantine policy. Therefore, the current study and results filled up the gap in this area.

Thirdly, these results will allow government agencies and university leadership to reform and refine the current *Study Korea Project*. Unlike in normal times where international student enrolment has remained stable, the COVID-19 Pandemic has had a great impact on recruitment strategies. Therefore, the results from this study will fill a knowledge gap for student recruitment and retention during and after the COVID-19 Pandemic.

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