

Cultural Adaptability and Self-Efficacy in Second Language Skills: An Investigation of Korean Study-Abroad Returnees*

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Choe, Mun-Hong. (2024). Cultural adaptability and self-efficacy in second language skills: An investigation of Korean study-abroad returnees. *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal*, 32(4), 151-170. This study investigates the relationship between cultural adaptability and self-efficacy in second language (L2) skills among Korean college students. Using a scale developed through a synthesis of existing scales, interviews, and expert reviews, the study aims to identify which aspects of cultural adaptation are more closely linked to self-efficacy in L2 development and what cultural idiosyncrasies pose unique challenges for Korean learners of L2 English. A sample of 35 students who studied abroad for over a year in the USA, the UK, and Canada participated in the study. The results reveal considerable variability in students' cultural adaptability across affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions. Notable differences were observed between groups with high and low L2 self-efficacy in specific aspects of cultural adaptation, such as minimizing cultural differences, emotional sensitivity, and avoidance of interaction. Overall, the findings suggest that affective sensitivity and behavioral resilience are more strongly associated with higher L2 self-efficacy than cognitive awareness of cultural differences.

Key Words: cultural adaptation, second language acquisition, individual difference factor, self-efficacy, English as a second language

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1. Introduction

There has been growing interest in examining intercultural competence as a key predictor of successful individuals in foreign environments (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003; Katıtaş et al., 2024; Oberste-Berghaus, 2024; Ott & Michailova, 2018; Suinn, Khoo, & Ahuna, 1995). Although the capacity to acquire a nonnative culture has not been recognized as a learner-inherent factor in second language (L2) research, various fields of study, such as social psychology, business management, and nursing inter alias, have investigated cultural competence with the premise that individuals vary in their ability to comprehend and adapt themselves to different cultural norms. This view of cultural acquisition as a specific faculty has been supported by research across a number of disciplines (Ang, Rockstuhl, & Tan, 2015; Bennett, 1993; Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992; Byram, 2020; Wang & Ten, 2024). However, the processes involved in second culture acquisition and individual differences therein remain relatively underexplored in L2 pedagogy.

Cross-cultural differences did not resonate significantly with scholars in L2 acquisition and applied linguistics, who were more focused on psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic aspects (Kramsch, 2014). This limited attention to individuals' varying abilities to adapt to a new culture is partly attributable to modern linguistics, which has emphasized universal aspects of language and acquisition processes while largely disregarding cultural contexts. In L2 pedagogy, discussions about how learners acquire another culture and language have predominantly been framed within social constructivism. Sociocultural perspectives have aimed to elucidate the factors shaping L2 learners' perceptions of the host society and its culture. Research has focused on variables such as age of immersion, social distance, duration of stay, acculturation stages, and motivational attitudes, as these are thought to influence the variability in individual learners' language development (Barjesteh & Vaseghi, 2012; Brown, 1980; Darvin & Sun, 2024; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Beckett, 2009; Shumann, 1978, 1990; Robinson, 1991; Robinson-Stuart & Nocon, 1996).

It is assumed that learners who demonstrate greater cognitive and sociocultural resilience have fewer affective barriers and go through the stages of acculturation with relative ease. However, research in L2 pedagogy has overlooked the impact of adult learners' intercultural competence on their language development. Despite extensive studies on L2 learning and individual differences over recent decades, there is limited understanding of how individuals vary in their ability to acquire a second culture. Although language and culture learning may not adhere to a unified set of principles,

they are inherently interconnected, tailoring each other throughout the developmental process. Discussions linking L2 learning to cultural competence focus on how individual differences in L2 development arise from learners' subjective perceptions and attitudes toward the target language community (Barjesteh & Vaseghi, 2012; Fantini, 2020; Khan, Ahmed, & Saeed, 2023; Lantolf & Beckett, 2009 for reviews). Nevertheless, the importance of individuals' ability to grasp and adapt to the cultural norms of the target language community has not been addressed sufficiently.

This perspective of acculturation as a distinct and variable skill has been reflected in various models and assessment tools (e.g., Bennett, 1993; Byram, 2020; Deardorff, 2011; Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003; Ott & Michailova, 2018; Zhao et al., 2023). L2 pedagogy, however, has yet to explore the relationship between cultural competence and language development. The present study aims to investigate the extent to which L2 learners' cultural adaptability accounts for their self-efficacy in the target language skills. In particular, the study examines whether there are substantial differences among L2 learners in their ability to acquire a second culture and how their affective, cognitive, and behavioral sensitivities toward cultural differences influence their self-perceived L2 efficacy.

2. Research Review

2.1. Cultural Adaptation and Individual Differences

Early research in language acquisition primarily concentrated on learners' internal competence and the natural progression of their language development. As the field has evolved and diversified, one of the ongoing debates has been the interaction between learners' native culture and language and their individual differences in L2 attainment. In addition to the cognitive-behavioral perspective, the acculturation-pidginization model posits that learners' perceptions of cultural distance between their native and target cultures influence the quality and quantity of linguistic input they receive (Schumann, 1978, 1990). A greater perceived cultural distance leads to reduced engagement with the target culture and less interaction with native speakers, resulting in insufficient input for successful language learning.

In general, greater familiarity with the target culture and a stronger desire to integrate into it enhance communication with native speakers. Likewise, if the learner's

first language is closely related to the second language, communication tends to be easier, which can facilitate more successful language learning. In real-world settings, however, the influence of a learner's native culture is almost always intertwined with the impact of their first language. This complexity underscores the need for simplified frameworks in understanding language acquisition, leading to research efforts focused primarily on cross-linguistic distance, which can be more objectively defined and measured. In his foundational work on cognitive semantics, Talmy (2000) introduces a cognitivist perspective on the relationship between culture and language acquisition. He proposes that acculturation is driven by a cognitive module with distinct developmental characteristics rather than being driven by behavioral learning (Koch & Takashima, 2021; Kordes, 1991; Minoura, 1992).

The concept of a cognitive module for acculturation gains further relevance when considering its connection to the developmental aspects of language acquisition. It implies that encountering new cultural patterns later in life might allow individuals to understand them intellectually without necessarily integrating them into their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors (Talmy, 2000). This view partly contrasts with the sociocultural perspective of acculturation, which emphasizes the role of individuals' varying perceptions. Instead, it suggests that acculturation, in both its process and outcome, depends more on an individual's *capacity* to recognize and replicate cultural patterns. The fact that some subtle cultural aspects can only be fully acquired during a sensitive period mirrors the distinction between L1 and L2 acquisition (Lantolf, 1999; Kramsch, 2014). Language learners who have internalized the concepts and cultural codes of their first language may struggle to grasp culturally nuanced meanings in a second language via mere exposure.

To successfully integrate into a non-native culture, individuals need specific attributes, such as intrinsic interest in the culture, a keen ability to recognize cultural differences, and intention to adapt their thoughts and behaviors to align with the often implicit norms of the community. These attributes are collectively referred here to as cultural adaptability, a theoretical construct used to understand and predict successful cultural integration. This concept prompts several important questions, similar to those raised by the acculturation-pidginization model. For example, how much variation exists in individuals' ability to adapt themselves to new cultural patterns? Does an individual's cultural adaptability increase with time spent in the target culture, or does it remain relatively stable? Moreover, do individuals from more homogeneous societies exhibit less

adaptability and greater ethnocentrism compared to those from culturally diverse environments where frequent intercultural interactions are common? Investigating these and other related questions could shed light on our understanding of additional language and culture learning.

2.2. Measuring Cultural Adaptability

Various tools have been proposed to measure individuals' abilities to identify cultural differences, empathize with people from the target culture, adapt in cross-cultural situations, and improve their sensitivities through increased awareness and experience. These tools commonly operate on the assumption that cultural competence encompasses multiple dimensions, including recognizing implicit cultural elements, showing interest in intercultural communication, and applying newly learned cultural practices (Bennett, 1993; Dearsdorff & Berardo, 2023; Hammer et al., 2003; Suinn et al., 1995). However, their direct relevance to second language research is limited, as they fail to distinguish between the processes of language acquisition and cultural acquisition.

As mentioned, cultural adaptability can be defined as the ability to recognize and understand cultural patterns, maintain an open-minded and empathetic approach toward individuals from diverse backgrounds, and adapt one's behavior to given cultural contexts. This ability is particularly important in L2 learning, as it enables the learner to interpret meaning beyond locutions, engage in culturally appropriate communication, and build connections with the target language speakers. Previous assessment models typically encompass dimensions such as cognitive awareness of cultural differences, interest in cross-cultural interactions, and the willingness to adopt new cultural norms (e.g., Dearsdorff, 2011; Hammer, et al., 2003). In the context of L2 learning and teaching, Schumann's (1976, 1978, 1990) acculturation model stands out as a particularly influential theoretical framework. He posits that the perceived social distance between a learner's native culture and the target language community modulates their learning experience. A greater perceived distance can lead learners to limit their interactions with members of the L2 community, thereby restricting their opportunities for language development. He further connects this view to neurocognitive psychology, suggesting that affective and cognitive responses to cultural differences are mediated by specific neural processes.

The role of cultural competence in predicting individuals' successful adaptation to new cultures has been debated in international business and social psychology (Earley &

Ang, 2003). One frequently referenced model identifies four components of cultural *intelligence*: cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and behavioral (Ang et al., 2015). The cognitive component pertains to the knowledge individuals have about cultural differences. The metacognitive component involves individuals' awareness and monitoring of their own cultural beliefs, knowledge, and behaviors. The motivational component relates to individuals' enjoyment and confidence in engaging with other cultures. Finally, the behavioral component refers to individuals' readiness to adapt their behavior to fit new cultural contexts. "Intercultural sensitivity" is another term commonly used to describe individuals' varying abilities to adapt to new cultural environments. This concept is similarly defined by multiple components, including openness to cultural differences, awareness of cultural patterns, and behavioral flexibility in intercultural interactions (Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992; Chen & Starosta, 1996).

Cultural adaptability can also be seen as individuals' varying coping styles and strategies when adapting to a new culture. According to this view, people do not uniformly acculturate to another culture but instead employ different strategies. Acculturation styles generally fall into four categories: separation, marginalization, assimilation, and integration (Barry, 2001; Berry, 2006). Separation occurs when an individual chooses to maintain their original identity without making efforts to engage with the host culture. Marginalization refers to individuals who distance themselves from both their original culture and the foreign culture. Assimilation happens when an individual abandons their traditional identity in favor of adopting the foreign culture. Integration occurs when an individual successfully integrate multiple identities, allowing them to adapt flexibly to various cultural settings.

An influential model focusing on such developmental aspects was proposed by Bennett (1993) for use in employee training programs. This model was designed to enhance employees' cultural awareness and adaptation skills for working in foreign environments. It outlines how individuals typically progress in adapting to a new culture, starting from an initial ethnocentric mindset and advancing to a stage where they appreciate and integrate cultural differences. The model emphasizes the developmental trajectory of cultural adaptation. It assumes that individuals differ in their ability to learn and adapt to new cultures and so not everyone will reach the advanced level of ethnorelativism — the perspective that evaluates foreign cultures without bias or prejudgment, rather than through the lens of one's own cultural standards. Building on this conceptual framework, Hammer et al. (2003) developed the Intercultural Development

Inventory, a scale that incorporates six stages of acculturation. The first three stages are ethnocentric, where individuals tend to disregard cultural differences, defend their own cultural norms, and downplay the importance of multicultural awareness. The remaining three stages are ethnorelative. This progression starts with the acceptance of cultural relativity, progresses through adaptation where individuals adjust their attitudes and behaviors to function effectively in the host culture, and culminates in integration. The integration stage is marked by the development of alternative cultural identities, allowing individuals to interact meaningfully with people from the host culture (Hammer, 2012).

3. Method

3.1. Participants

Participants in this study were 35 adult learners of L2 English; 10 were males and 25 were females. Among them 7 were eliminated from analysis since they had been in English-speaking countries as a child for over 6 months. The remaining 28 were undergraduate or graduate students who had studied abroad for the first time as an adult. Their mean age was 22.56 ($SD = 4.88$) and length of sojourn in a English-speaking country was 16.22 months ($SD = 9.10$).

At first, their learning experiences abroad were investigated in depth. On average, they engaged in more interactions related to academic topics (32.50 hours per week, $SD = 20.16$) than in daily or personal topics ($M = 30.00$ hrs/w, $SD = 16.33$), suggesting that academic settings provide more opportunities for interaction with English L1 speakers (ENSs). They interacted more frequently with ENSs outside of school ($M = 54.29$ hrs/w, $SD = 22.35$) than within school ($M = 45.36$ hrs/w, $SD = 22.19$). When asked about their weekly interactions with ENSs, approximately one-third of the learners reported speaking with them for 9 or more hours. About 21.4% reported 7-8 or 5-6 hours of interaction per week, respectively. A smaller portion reported 3-4 hours (14.3%) or 1-2 hours (10.7%). The majority of study-abroad students regularly engaged with ENSs, but the quality and quantity of their interactions varied considerably.

The participants voluntarily participated in the study in response to online advertisement and personal contacts, who were informed that the study aimed to investigate L2 learners' cultural adaptation in relation to their confidence in L2 skills.

3.2. Developing a Measurement Scale for Cultural Adaptability

Drawing on the overview of existing theories and measurement tools of cultural adaptability, an effort was undertaken to develop a scale that better fits L2 research. This effort proceeded in two phases. In the first phase, a preliminary version consisting of 82 items was developed. The majority of items in this version were based on those in the previous scales discussed above (see Choe, 2022, for details). The items that directly address language ability as part of cultural competence and those that are not relevant to L2 learning situations were eliminated. Instead, one's inclination to emulate new cultural patterns and continuous development in the affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions of cultural adaptability are included in each section. In addition, individuals' interest in the target culture and their predispositions to understand its patterns were emphasized. In the second phase, interviews with study-abroad returnees and expert reviews were conducted to further refine the scale.

The instrument was a self-report questionnaire where participants indicated their responses on a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first section included 15 items designed to assess participants' awareness of and ability to understand cultural differences (i.e., cognitive aspects of cultural adaptation). The second section measured affective adaptability with 15 items evaluating participants' interest, enjoyment, empathy, respect, and sense of belonging in cross-cultural contexts. The third section, which addressed behavioral adaptability, contained 15 items aimed at evaluating participants' actual adaptation of their behavior and behavioral flexibility in social interactions. Behavioral adaptation was emphasized because cognitive and affective dispositions alone did not guarantee that individuals would translate their understanding and feelings into appropriate actions. Thus, evaluating one's ability to change or adjust behavior across various cultural contexts is a critical aspect of assessing cultural adaptability (Landis & Bhawuk, 2020). Finally, participants' self-efficacy in L2 English skills was assessed using a 5-point Likert self-report questionnaire.

Individual interviews were conducted with 28 study-abroad college students. A pre-planned set of interview questions was crafted to gather insights into their personal experiences and understandings of cultural differences. These questions were designed to prompt participants to reflect on their recognition of, interest in, and behavioral responses to new cultural patterns encountered during their studies abroad. Examples of the questions included: "When do you most clearly notice cultural differences between Korea

and the United States?” “What challenges have you faced in interacting with people around you?” “Do you feel prepared to live effectively in English-speaking countries?” and “Do you want to adopt behaviors similar to English L1 speakers when interacting with them?” The responses from the interviews were used to revise the initial items by eliminating redundant ones and refining their wording.

Finally, two experts in L2 pedagogy reviewed the revised items. They were asked to judge the relevance of each item to the concept of cultural adaptability and evaluate the validity of the scale. To ensure impartiality, they were provided with the items without any background information on the scale’s assumptions. They were asked to rate each item based on its appropriateness and effectiveness in measuring a learner’s cultural adaptability.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis began with an examination of the overall relationship between an individual’s cultural adaptability and their L2 self-efficacy. Following this initial analysis, the focus shifted to a more detailed exploration of the three subdomains of cultural adaptability— affective, cognitive, and behavioral—and their correlations with self-efficacy across specific language skills. The final phase of the analysis delved into individual question items within each subdomain, aiming to identify the specific elements that contribute to significant differences between groups with higher and lower self-efficacy.

4. Results and Discussion

The analysis of self-efficacy in L2 skills among the 28 participants showed varying levels across four language skills.

Table 1. Participants’ Self-Efficacy in L2 English Skills ($N=28$)

L2 Self-Efficacy	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Listening	3.36	0.73
Speaking	2.86	0.85
Reading	3.25	0.75
Writing	2.89	0.79

The mean self-efficacy scores indicated the highest confidence in listening, followed by reading. While participants feel reasonably confident in comprehension skills, their self-efficacy in production skills is relatively low. The majority (46.4%) reported a balanced confidence between spoken and written language.

Table 2. Participants' Self-Efficacy in L2 English Across Different Skills

Self-Efficacy in L2 Skills		<i>N</i> (%)
Spoken ↓ Written	Spoken language more confident	8(28.6)
	Spoken-written balanced	13(46.4)
	Written language more confident	7(25.0)
	Total	28(100)
Comprehension ↓ Production	Comprehension skills more confident	14(50.0)
	Comprehension-production balanced	13(46.4)
	Production skills more confident	1(3.6)
	Total	28(100)

Half of the participants (50.0%) felt more confident in comprehension, with a similar proportion (46.4%) feeling balanced between comprehension and production skills. Only 3.6% reported higher confidence in production skills. Participants showed a marked inclination towards comprehension over production skills.

Table 3 shows their mean scores on cultural adaptability.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Scores on the Scale of Cultural Adaptability (*N*=28)

Cultural adaptability	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Affective adaptability	3.56	1.17
Cognitive adaptability	3.93	0.83
Behavioral adaptability	3.72	1.15
Total	3.74	1.05

The assessment of cultural adaptability among participants revealed different levels across three subdomains. The highest possible score for the measurement was calculated as 3 subdomains multiplied by 15 items per subdomain, multiplied by 5 Likert points per item, totaling 225. The raw scores were then standardized to a 5-point Likert scale.

Participants exhibited the highest level of adaptability in cognitive respects, i.e., the ability to notice and comprehend new cultural information. This was followed by behavioral adaptability. Affective adaptability, which measures emotional responses and adjustments to new cultural patterns, was comparatively lower.

Table 4. Results of ANOVA for Participants' Cultural Adaptability

Source	Type III <i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Partial η^2
Within-subjects	429.78	2	214.89	6.78	.002	.20
Cultural adaptability	429.78	2	214.89	6.78	.002	.20
Error	1712.79	54	31.72			
Between-subjects						
Intercept	263772.21	1	263772.21	2758.69	.000	
Error	2581.61	27	95.62			

As shown in the ANOVA results (Table 4), there was a significant main effect of the subdomain of cultural adaptability ($F = 6.78$, $p = 0.002$) and a partial η^2 of 0.20, indicating that the variability in cultural adaptability scores is influenced by which domain of adaptability is measured, accounting for approximately 20% of the variance in the dependent variable. Also, the between-subjects difference demonstrated an F -value of 2758.69 ($p < 0.001$). This means that students were significantly different in their scores on cultural adaptability. It can thus be said that both the subdomains of adaptability and the overall sum play important roles in understanding individual differences in L2 learners' cultural adaptability. Table 5 presents the results of Pearson correlation analyses, providing insight into the relationships between overall L2 self-efficacy and specific language skills.

Table 5. Correlation Coefficients Between L2 Self-Efficacy Measures

Pearson $r(p)$	Overall self-efficacy	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
Overall self-efficacy	•	.79(.000)	.79(.000)	.83(.000)	.84(.000)
Listening		•	.50(.006)	.57(.001)	.52(.005)
Speaking			•	.47(.013)	.53(.004)
Reading				•	.67(.000)
Writing					•

A strong positive correlation was observed between overall L2 self-efficacy and all four language skills, with coefficients ranging from 0.79 to 0.84. Overall L2 self-efficacy was most strongly related to writing ($r = 0.84$) and then reading ($r = 0.83$), suggesting higher L2 self-efficacy is strongly associated with greater confidence in written language. Table 6 presents the correlation coefficients for the variables in question.

Table 6. Correlation Coefficients for Cultural Adaptability Measures

Pearson $r(p)$	L2 Self-efficacy	Cognitive	Affective	Behavioral	Overall adaptability
L2 self-efficacy	.	-.02(.911)	.16(.429)	.18(.353)	.16(.421)
Cognitive		.	.09(.621)	.33(.088)	.47(.011)
Affective			.	.71(.000)	.87(.000)
Behavioral				.	.91(.000)
Overall adaptability					.

The correlation analysis examined the relationships between overall L2 self-efficacy and each domain of cultural adaptability. Since this study aims to identify which specific aspects of cultural adaptability have a greater impact on study-abroad students' cultural adaptation and L2 acquisition, examining the correlations among the three dimensions of adaptability can provide relevant information. The results revealed no significant correlations between overall L2 self-efficacy and cultural adaptability with respect to each of its subdomain. Meanwhile, behavioral and affective adaptability were more closely related to overall cultural adaptability ($r = 0.92, 0.87$, respectively) while cognitive adaptability showed a moderate correlation ($r = 0.47$). These findings suggest that behavioral and affective adaptability are more strongly associated with overall cultural adaptability, and so these aspects of adaptability may be more crucial in the course of cultural adaptation.

In order to see which aspects of cultural adaptation pose greater difficulty for Korean learners of L2 English, their responses to each question item were analyzed. Table 7 presents the mean scores in descending order and the comparisons between higher and lower self-efficacy groups.

Table 7. Responses to the Items of Cognitive Adaptability

Cognitive adaptability	Overall (N=28)	Lower self-efficacy (N=15)	Higher self-efficacy (N=13)	Mann- Whitney <i>U</i>
	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>p</i>
[Values, Ways of living]	4.61(0.63)	4.60(0.63)	4.62(0.65)	0.93
[Food, Ingredients]	4.32(0.55)	4.27(0.46)	4.39(0.65)	0.56
[Manners, Customs]	4.25(0.65)	4.33(0.62)	4.15(0.69)	0.56
[Ethnocentricity: Minimization]	4.21(0.83)	3.93(0.79)	4.54(0.78)	0.04*
[What is disliked]	4.11(0.63)	4.20(0.41)	4.00(0.82)	0.68
[What is liked]	4.11(0.49)	4.00(0.38)	4.23(0.59)	0.34
[Joys, Leisure activities]	4.07(0.77)	3.93(0.88)	4.23(0.59)	0.49
[Things considered important]	4.04(0.58)	3.93(0.46)	4.15(0.69)	0.41
[Interpersonal conflicts]	3.96(0.84)	4.07(0.79)	3.85(0.89)	0.53
[Ethnocentric understanding]	3.96(1.14)	4.07(0.70)	3.85(1.52)	0.65
[Understanding developed over time]	3.93(0.89)	3.93(0.96)	3.92(0.86)	0.89
[Things considered unimportant]	3.82(0.95)	3.93(0.88)	3.69(1.03)	0.62
[Facial expressions and gestures]	3.79(0.79)	3.67(0.82)	3.92(0.76)	0.59
[Difference in worldview]	3.14(1.24)	3.13(0.99)	3.15(1.52)	0.86
[Ethnocentricity: Simplification]	2.57(1.43)	2.73(1.39)	2.39(1.50)	0.47

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

The highest mean score was observed for [Values, Ways of living], while the lowest was for [Ethnocentricity: Simplification]. The Mann-Whitney *U* test indicated a significant difference in [Ethnocentricity: Minimization], with higher self-efficacy students scoring significantly higher compared to their lower self-efficacy counterparts. These suggest that those with higher L2 self-efficacy are more sensitive to cultural differences and tend not to minimize them. Other dimensions, such as [Food, Ingredients] and [Manners, Customs], did not show significant differences between the two groups. While most aspects of cognitive adaptability are more or less consistent across self-efficacy levels, the ability to minimize ethnocentric views differentiates higher self-efficacy students from those with lower self-efficacy. Table 8 presents the results of the items measuring affective adaptability.

Table 8. Responses to the Items of Affective Adaptability

Affective adaptability	Overall (N=28)	Lower self-efficacy (N=15)	Higher self-efficacy (N=13)	Mann- Whitney <i>U</i>
	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>p</i>
[Motivation for intercultural interaction]	4.14(1.08)	4.07(1.03)	4.23(1.17)	0.47
[Curiosity]	3.86(1.29)	4.27(0.96)	3.39(1.50)	0.13
[Friendship, rapport]	3.82(1.09)	4.00(0.85)	3.61(1.33)	0.59
[Shy, apprehensive]	3.82(1.06)	3.33(0.98)	4.39(0.87)	0.00**
[Sensitivity in emotion/mind reading]	3.75(0.84)	3.40(0.91)	4.15(0.56)	0.03*
[Uncomfortable, anxious]	3.68(1.22)	3.53(1.13)	3.85(1.35)	0.32
[Unpleasant, difficult]	3.43(1.10)	3.07(0.96)	3.85(1.14)	0.06
[Affective assimilation over time]	3.39(1.03)	3.13(0.99)	3.69(1.03)	0.19
[Empathy]	3.36(0.91)	3.27(0.79)	3.46(1.05)	0.59
[Affective attentiveness]	3.32(1.09)	3.40(1.06)	3.23(1.17)	0.79
[Companionship]	3.25(1.35)	3.20(1.21)	3.31(1.55)	0.82
[Attraction]	3.21(1.32)	3.33(1.35)	3.08(1.32)	0.62
[Affinity, membership]	3.18(1.52)	3.33(1.54)	3.00(1.53)	0.59
[Ethnocentricity: Personal relationship]	2.79(1.26)	2.80(1.01)	2.77(1.54)	0.93
[Estrangement, marginalization]	2.75(1.46)	2.80(1.27)	2.69(1.70)	0.75

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

With regards to affective adaptability, the highest mean score was found for [Motivation for intercultural interaction], while the lowest was for [Ethnocentricity: Personal relationship] and [Estrangement, marginalization]. The Mann-Whitney *U* tests identified significant differences in two areas. First, higher self-efficacy students reported significantly higher scores in [Shy, apprehensive] than did lower self-efficacy students. This means that those with higher L2 self-efficacy are less likely to feel shy or apprehensive in interactions. Moreover, there was a significant difference in [Sensitivity in emotion/mind reading], with higher self-efficacy individuals scoring higher than their lower self-efficacy counterparts. That is, those with higher self-efficacy appeared to be more sensitive to emotional cues and better at mind reading. Other dimensions, such as [Curiosity], [Friendship, rapport], and [Empathy], did not show significant differences between the two groups. All in all, while affective adaptability is generally comparable

across self-efficacy levels, significant differences in the ability to manage anxiety and emotional sensitivity mark a distinction between higher and lower self-efficacy individuals. Table 9 presents the results of the measures of behavioral adaptability.

Table 9. Responses to the Items of Behavioral Adaptability

Behavioral adaptability	Overall (<i>N</i> =28)	Lower self-efficacy (<i>N</i> =15)	Higher self-efficacy (<i>N</i> =13)	Mann- Whitney <i>U</i>
	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>p</i>
[Interaction skills developed over time]	4.54(0.69)	4.33(0.82)	4.77(0.44)	0.16
[More open-minded over time]	4.29(0.76)	4.33(0.82)	4.23(0.73)	0.62
[Interaction with various people]	4.21(1.07)	4.00(1.13)	4.46(0.97)	0.17
[Disguised, superficial interaction]	3.89(1.34)	3.80(1.27)	4.00(1.47)	0.49
[Interpersonal conflicts]	3.86(0.97)	3.60(0.91)	4.15(0.99)	0.12
[Difficulty in building relationships]	3.75(1.27)	3.87(1.06)	3.62(1.50)	0.86
[Confidence in adaptive behavior]	3.71(1.27)	4.13(1.06)	3.23(1.36)	0.06
[Intention to integrate]	3.71(1.24)	3.87(0.92)	3.54(1.56)	0.89
[Behavioral modification]	3.64(1.28)	3.53(1.30)	3.77(1.30)	0.62
[Behavioral imitation]	3.64(0.99)	3.53(0.92)	3.77(1.09)	0.53
[Behavioral flexibility]	3.61(1.13)	3.67(0.82)	3.54(1.45)	0.89
[Avoidance of interaction]	3.57(1.29)	3.20(1.27)	4.00(1.23)	0.08
[Interaction to seek information]	3.36(1.22)	3.20(1.08)	3.54(1.39)	0.47
[Behavioral assimilation: Appearance]	3.04(1.45)	3.13(1.36)	2.92(1.61)	0.72
[More social interactions with ENSs than with Koreans]	3.04(1.23)	2.80(1.32)	3.31(1.11)	0.25

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

When it comes to behavioral adaptability, the highest mean score was observed for [Interaction skills developed over time], while the lowest was for [Behavioral assimilation: Appearance] and [More social interactions with English native speakers than with Koreans]. There was a relatively larger difference in [Confidence in adaptive behavior], where higher self-efficacy students reported greater confidence than lower self-efficacy students. Although the p -value (0.06) is just above the threshold for significance, it suggests that those with higher self-efficacy are more likely to have confidence in their

adaptive behaviors. Another notable difference was observed in [Avoidance of interaction], with higher self-efficacy individuals scoring substantially higher ($M = 4.00$) than their lower counterparts ($M = 3.20$), with a p -value of 0.08. This implies that lower self-efficacy students tend to avoid interacting with ENSs. Other areas such as behavioral flexibility and interaction types did not exhibit significant differences between them. It can therefore be said that some aspects of behavioral adaptability, such as confidence in adaptive behavior and avoidance of interaction, show marked differences between higher and lower self-efficacy students.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that differences in cultural adaptability significantly influence L2 development. Overall, students with higher levels of adaptability demonstrate a greater awareness of cultural nuances and implicit social cues, which enables them to develop a refined understanding of cultural differences. Importantly, cognitive awareness of cultural differences does not necessarily equate to a positive attitude towards them. It appears that what truly fosters cultural adaptability is not merely having a positive attitude towards the target culture but rather a willingness to attain socially desirable roles within it. In this regard, second culture acquisition involves not merely understanding another set of values and beliefs but adopting and integrating these values and beliefs to guide one's behavior (Castells, 2009; Kramsch, 2014). Those who demonstrate higher levels of affective and behavioral adaptability are more likely to encounter and make sense of new cultural experiences. They thus are better able to form social connections with speakers of the target language and participate in interactions effectively. Furthermore, those with social resilience can manage the challenges of transculturation and L2 learning more effectively, and this resilience can in turn enhance L2 learning by creating more opportunities for practice and exposure within personally meaningful contexts (Byram, 2020; Deardorff, 2011).

Therefore, fostering both psychological and behavioral dimensions of adaptability can enhance L2 acquisition and cultural integration. The cognitive dimension involves understanding cultural norms and anomalies, which are essential for effective communication in a new cultural environment. Equally important is the affective dimension, which encompasses emotional responses, attitudes, and motivations towards

the target culture. Moreover, students who cultivate behavioral resilience are better equipped to overcome challenges, build relationships, and remain open to unfamiliar experiences. By addressing this multifaceted nature of cultural adaptability, teachers can create a more integrated learning experience that prepares L2 learners to communicate effectively in diverse cultural contexts, ultimately leading to more successful language acquisition.

To conclude, this study contributes to the field by demonstrating that there is considerable variation in cultural adaptability among learners and that affective and behavioral adaptation, as well as cognitive awareness, are crucial for L2 acquisition, influencing one's sensitivity to the cultural dimensions of the target language. The variation can be partly attributed to the contrast between participatory and observational learning. Some learners engage in immersive learning, actively participating and receiving contextualized feedback from their interactions with others. Others, however, tend to adopt a passive, observational stance, focusing on interpreting the behaviors of peers, adults, and media representations in the target culture while limiting their own participation. These learners receive only indirect feedback and rely heavily on their personal interpretations of observed behaviors, ultimately resulting in a biased understanding of or adaptation to the culture. Integrating cultural sensitivity lessons alongside language skills and fostering a positive, open-minded attitude toward cultural differences can, therefore, promote L2 acquisition. This intervention may not only improve language proficiency but also encourage students to embrace the cultural values essential for successful intercultural communication.

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