The Influence of Korean University Students' Contact Experience with North Korean Refugee Students on Social Identity and Integrated Conflicts

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Abstract: This study investigated the influence of South Korean university students' contact experiences with North Korean refugee university students on social identity and integrated conflicts. The study was conducted with students in years 1–4 of university enrolled in S University in Seoul. Data from 446 participants were gathered. Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between college students' contact experience with North Korean defector students, with variables of social identity and integrated conflict included. In addition, a t-test was conducted to analyse the differences in social identities and integrated conflicts according to whether or not college students participated in a unification leadership camp and whether or not they attended lectures related to unification. This study found significant correlations between variables such as contact experience, social identity and integrated conflicts. In addition, an increase in experiences between North Korean defectors and South Korean university students had a positive effect on social identity and negatively affected integrative conflict. In addition, there was no difference in social identity and integrated conflicts according to whether or not students participated in the Unification Camp or attended lectures related to unification. The results of this study will contribute to the development of programs and course openings to increase social identity and reduce integrated conflicts by expanding the contact experience between South and North Korean college students.

Keywords: Contact experiences, Integrated conflicts, North Korean refugee university students, Social identity.

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1.   **Introduction**

Recently, as the summit meeting between the two Koreas was held, the Korean peninsula had to prepare for the era of unification. Accordingly, the South Korean government is establishing a foundation for the unification of government and preparing for unification through politics, society, and education. There is a steady increase in North Korean defectors to the South since 2005, according to the Ministry of Unification (2019), exceeding 33,000 in November 2016, compared to 20,000 in November 2010. The cause of the increase in North Korean defectors has gradually changed from life-style escape in the past to an escape to improve the quality of life due to a desire for freedom, future dreams, and better life opportunities for their children.

In addition to the increase in the number of North Korean defectors in South Korea, the South Korean government has been implementing a special admission system for North Korean defectors since 1999 to help North Korean defectors adapt to South Korea and settle in society. This admission is easier for South Korean youths, but after entering college, they have various difficulties such as differences in basic academic ability, economic difficulties, relative deprivation, maladjustment to university culture, and selection of departments that are irrelevant with career aptitude (Korea Youth Policy Institute, 2008). In addition to the special screening of overseas Koreans and tuition support, mentoring for friendship after entering college and cultural adaptation programs addressing cultural differences are lacking, and there is continuing dropping-out of North Korean university students. According to Lew et al. (2013), the dropout of North Korean students during their college life causes a burden of time as well as physical and psychological pressures to find a new career path, leading to frustration and stress.

In order for North Korean students to adapt to South Korean social culture and school, it is important for them to establish social identity. Social identity means the value given as a member of a certain social group, the self-concept of an individual from the perspective of emotional meaning (Tajfel, 1978). Adams and Hogg (1990) state that social identity entails a special feeling from the fact that an individual belongs to a specific group. Social identity is an important factor as it influences the kind of prejudice the individual belonging to the social group responds to (Major & O'Brien, 2005). In fact, social identity is a representative theory to understand the cause of social conflict, which is more objective than the cognitive system that looks at oneself, environment and others, and becomes a social psychological framework that can be analysed in a total manner. Also, Fook and Sidhu (2009) mentioned the importance of interaction.

When shared similarities within the group or competition with other external groups is emphasized for the members of the group, the individual becomes more aware of social identity and can experience increased self-esteem by acquiring positive social identity from belonging to a positive group. On the contrary, if an individual perceives that social identity as a member of a group lowers his or her pride, the individual not only tries to leave the group he or she belongs to, but also shows a negative attitude towards that group (Tajfel & Turnal, 1979). In particular, in a culture where Korean students' contact with North Korean students in South Korea emphasise blood relations, delays, and relationships with groups such as the influence group on social identity and integrated conflicts, the influence of social identity can be heightened because the role and relationships within the group to which individuals belong are considered more important than being an individual with independent autonomy (Kim & Park, 2005; Yang, Vidovich & Currie, 2007).

Ashforth and Mael (1989) state that individuals have a personal identity and a social identity based on their own characteristics, and try to augment their identity by integrating both identities. Based on social identity theory and self-categorization theory, if a person belonging to another group is re-categorized into a given group, the prejudice between groups can be reduced (Turner et al, 1987). If social identity is acquired through self-category, depersonalization occurs and the self is defined as a member of social category rather than a unique individual. Therefore, categorization helps information processing, but it can cause social stereotypes, group cohesion, conformity behaviour, self-centeredness, and conflicts between groups (Turner, 1985). Therefore, if internal group favouritism is formed by the competition between groups, it can increase the favour shown towards members of the former foreign group through re-categorization into one group defined in other terms (Kim & Kim,

2010), so North Korean students can be re-categorized as students attending the same university, not as South Korean students or North Korean students. Therefore, it is important to help them join and adapt to the group.

Also, there is conflict expressed in the belief that other cultures conflict with one's own culture. These conflicts can cause difficulties in interpersonal relationships and prejudice against other cultures (Esses, Haddock, & Zanna, 1993). Murray et al. (2008) argue that these conflicts amplify anxiety in the relationship between groups and make it difficult for them to form mutual empathy. Integrated conflict involves four conflicts factors of realistic conflict, symbolic conflict, anxiety between groups, and negative stereotypes, which cause conflict and prejudice against other groups (Stephan, Ybarra & Bachman, 1999). The realistic conflict presented in the first theory is expressed as a realistic goal among groups which can lead to conflicts due to decreases in their benefits due to competition for limited resources such as college admission, dormitory housing or scholarships. The second symbolic conflict is experienced when the values and behaviour of domestic college students are considered to be infringed or disordered by North Korean students. Third, the anxiety between groups is manifested when domestic college students are anxious about mutual contact or avoid contact due to anxiety in interactions with North Korean defectors (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). Finally, negative stereotypes here refer to negative expectations or beliefs of Korean university students about North Korean defectors (Oh, Nam & Yoon, 2014). These integrated conflicts affect the formation of attitudes towards outside groups in conflicts over both practical resources and the semantic system.

The group anxiety caused by the interactions between North Korean students and current college students includes doubts about the other's cultural competences, uncertainty about how to interact, discrimination, and tensions that can cause unpleasant behaviour. It is also associated with anxiety over possible rejection by outside group members (Barlow, Louis, & Terry, 2010). According to Ko (2011), antagonism and conflict are caused as the children of North Korean defectors are incorporated into Korean society, and largely involve low social identity resulting from the stigma of being North Korean defectors due to the anti-communist ideology still common in South Korean society. This shows that North Korean students avoid interpersonal relations and do not inform others of their origins, which may have a negative impact on the national roadmap whereby they can be fostered as leaders and bridges in the era of future unification of the Korean peninsula.

In order to help prepare for this future, this study focuses on the school adaptation problems of North Korean students in higher education institutions. Research on North Korean students has examined the following: Problems in and social adaptation to settlement support (An, 2013; Jeon et al., 2010; Jung, 2008; Yoon, 1998), and post-traumatic stress and trauma (Jung, 2012; Yang, 2013; Yun & Oh, 2010) experienced during the defection process. Past research has mostly focused on policy and welfare aspects and various studies (Jo et al., 2004; Ko, 2011; Park, 2007; Shin, 2021; Lee & Bailey, 2020; Lee, Yoo, Bailey, 2020) of what is needed to help North Korean students join South Korean society are insufficient.

Therefore, it is necessary to study how contact experience affects social identity and integrated conflict in the social environment of a university, which is a higher education institution where North Korean students and South Korean students meet and study and live together. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of contact experience between North Korean students and South Korean college students on the social identity of South Korean university students and the impact of social conflict. In addition, this study aims to investigate whether there was a difference in social identity and integrated conflict among South Korean university students depending on whether they participated in the unification camps held at South Korean universities and whether they took lectures on unification.

Research question

The following research questions attempt to understand how social identity and integrated conflict are linked before and after North Korean college students' escape from North Korea by exploring in depth the anxiety, crisis and difficulties experienced by them in college.
1. What is the correlation between college students' contact experience with North Korean students, social identity and integrated conflict?

2. Does the experience of contact with North Korean students affect social identity and integrated conflict?

    2-1. Does the experience of contact with North Korean students affect social identity?

    2-2. Does the experience of contact with North Korean students affect integrated conflict?

3. Is there any difference in social identity and integrated conflict by participation in the unified leadership camp?

    3-1. Is there any difference in social identity by participation in the unified leadership camp?

    3-2. Is there any difference in the integrated conflict by participation in the unified leadership camp?

4. Is there any difference in social identity and integrated conflict associated with receiving lectures on unification?

    4-1. Is there any difference in social identity associated with receiving lectures on unification?

    4-2. Is there any difference in the integrated conflict associated with receiving lectures on unification?

2.   Method

2.1   Participants

The subjects of this study were college students from the first to fourth years of study at S University in Seoul. Of the 450 students from whom data were collected, 446 were selected after excluding 4 who gave insincere data. The gender, age, grade, and major composition of the subjects who participated in the test are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants

Variables		N (%)
Gender	Male	260(58.3)
	Female	186(41.7)
Year	1st	73(16.4)
	2nd	125(28.0)
	3rd	123(27.6)
	4th	125(28.0)
Faculty	Liberal arts	53(8.5%)
	Social sciences	437(69.8%)
	Natural Sciences	130(20.8)
	Engineering	6(1.0)
Total		446(100)

The participants included 260 male students (58.3%) and 186 female students (41.7%). There were 73 first-year students (16.4%), 125 second-year students (28.0%), 123 third-year students (27.6%), and 125 fourth-year students (28.0%). The composition by majors is 68 students (15.2%), 122 students (27.4%), 49 students (11.0%) in the natural sciences, and 207 students (46.4%) in the engineering college respectively.

2.2   Measurement Scales

The intergroup contact test developed and validated by Ward and Masgoret (2004) consists of three quantitative contact questions and five qualitative contact questions. The reliability of the test is shown by Cronbach's α .684 for quantitative contact and .821 for qualitative contact.

The Korean Social Identification Scale (Sung, 2001) comprises 16 questions total: 7 questions for group self-esteem, 5 questions for self-category, and 4 questions for group intervention. The reliability of the test is shown by group self-esteem, α = .875; self-category, α = .778; and group intervention, α = .756.

The integrated conflict test was conducted using the integrated conflicts test developed by Stephanie et al. (1999, 2000, 2002). The 13 questions comprise 3 real conflict questions, 3 symbolic conflicts, 2 anxiety questions between groups, and 5 negative stereotypes. The reliability of the test is shown by: realistic conflict, α = .842; symbolic conflict, α = .881; negative stereotype, α = .905; and anxiety between groups, α = .790. The composition of the test is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The composition of measurement scales

Domain	Factor	Item	Cronbach's α
Intergroup Contact	quantity contact	3	.684
	quality contact	5	.821
Social Identity	group self-esteem	7	.875
	self-categorization	5	.778
	group intervention	4	.756
Integrated Conflicts	realistic conflict	3	.843
	symbolic conflict	3	.881
	intergroup anxiety	2	.905
	negative stereotype	5	.790

2.3 Research Procedure

This study analysed the results using SPSS 25.0 for the difference analysis, correlation analysis, and regression analysis of contact experience, social identity, and integrated conflict between South Korean university students and North Korean defector college students. Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the correlation between the contact experience with North Korean students, social identity, and integrated conflict. Regression analysis was conducted to confirm whether college students' contact experience with North Korean students affects social identity and integrated conflict. Finally, *t*-tests were conducted to find differences in social identity and integrated conflict according to the presence of unification leadership camp and unification-related class.

3. Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations of university students' experience in contact with North Korean defectors, social identity, and integrated conflict variables

In this study, descriptive statistics of contact experience, social identity, and integrated conflict were analysed, and Pearson's correlation coefficient was measured to analyse the correlation between the variables. The results of the correlation analysis are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Means, standard deviations, and correlation among the study variables.

		D	Intergroup Contact	Social Identity	Integrated Conflicts
Intergroup Contact			1		
	46	9.482 .063			
Social			.201**	1	
Identity	46	2.583 .154			
Integrated Conflicts			−.243**	.154**	1
	46	0.430 .788			

The average value of contact experience was 19.482 (*SD* 4.063), social identity was 52.583 (*SD* 6.154), and integrated conflict was 30.430 (*SD* 7.788). In the correlation between contact experience, social identity, and integrated conflict, which are the main variables of this study, contact experience had a positive correlation with social identity ($r = .201$, $p < .01$). However, there was a negative correlation between contact experience and integrated conflict ($r = -.243$, $p < .01$). Also, there was a significant correlation between contact experience and integrated conflict ($p < .01$), but it was found that the coefficient was not high, at the level of .1–.2.

3.1 The effects of university students' contact experience with North Korean defectors on social identity and integrated conflict

The Effects of University Students' Contact Experience with North Korean Students <Quantitative Contact (1-3 questions), Qualitative Contact (7-11 questions)> on Social Identity (12–29 questions).

The results of multiple regression analysis to confirm the effect of contact experience on social identity are shown in Table 4. Before confirming the effect of the contact experience of the North Korean defectors' college students on social identity, the average and standard deviation were examined through descriptive statistics. The average of social identity was 52.583 (*SD* 6.154), average of quantitative contact was 3.448 (*SD* 1.216). In addition, the average of qualitative contact was 16.003 (*SD* 3.823). The contact experience was 19.482 (*SD* 4.063). The results are shown below in Table 4.

Table 4. Effect of Social Identity of Intergroup Contact

Dependent variable	Independent variable	B	SE	β		t	p	VIF
	(constant)	46.639	1.450			32.175	.000	
Social Identity	quantity contact	.016	.251	.003		.064	.949	1.132
	quality contact	.302	.075	.200		4.031	.000	1.132

$F = 9.298$ ($p < .001$), R^2 (adj R^2) = .040(.036), Durbin-Watson = 2.057

The results of multiple regression analysis presented in Table 7 show that the total contact experience variables had a positive effect on social identity (B = .302, p < .001). As shown in the analysis of variance in Table 8, the influence of contact experience on social identity was statistically significant (p < .001), with an explanatory power of 4%.

3.2 The Effect of Contact Experience <Quantitative Contact (1-3 questions), Qualitative Contact (7-11 questions)> on Integral Conflict (30-42 questions)

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to see if contact experience affected integrated conflict, and the results are the same as those presented in Tables 9 and 11. Before confirming the effect of the contact experience of the college students of North Korean defectors on the integrated conflict, the average was 30.430 for integrated conflict, (*SD* 7.788), and the average of quantitative contact was 3.448 (*SD* 1.216). In addition, the average of qualitative contact was 16.003 (*SD* 3.823). The contact experience was 19.482 (*SD* 4.063). The results are shown below in Table 5.

Table 5. Effect of Integrated Conflicts of Intergroup Contact

Dependent variable	Independent variable	B	SE	β	t	p	VIF
Integrated Conflicts	(constant)	37.112	1.760		21.087	.000	
	quantity contact	1.637	.304	.256	5.382	.000	1.132
	quality contact	−.633	.091	−.330	−6.950	.000	1.132

$F = 29.281$ (p < .001), R^2 (adj R^2) = .117(.113), Durbin-Watson = 2.037

The multiple regression analysis presented in Table 10 shows that both quantitative contact (B = 1.637, p < .001) and total contact experience (B = −.633, p < .001) have an effect on integrated conflict. As can be seen in the analysis of variance of Table 11, the impact of contact experience on integrated conflict was statistically significant (p < .001), and the explanatory power was 11.7%.

3.3 Differences in social identity and integrated conflicts according to the presence or absence of participation in the unified leadership camp.

The results of the *t*-test were analysed to see if there was any difference in social identity and low integration conflict in the unification leadership camp. The results are shown below in Table 6.

Table 6. Two paired-sample t-test of unification leadership camp

Factor	Group	N	M	SD	t	p
Social Identity	1	191	52.691	5.852	.286	.775
	2	253	52.521	6.401		
Integrated Conflicts	1	191	30.602	7.574	.473	.636
	2	253	30.249	7.943		

The difference between social identity and integrated conflict was examined according to the participation of the unified leadership camp, and there was no difference in social identity and integrated conflict according to the creation of the unified leadership camp.

3.4   Differences in social identity and integrated conflicts between the presence or absence of lectures related to unification

A t-test was conducted to see if there was any difference in social identity and integrated conflict between the two classes. The results are shown below in Table 7.

Table 7. Two paired sample t-test of related to unification class

Factor	Group	N	M	SD	t	P
Social Identity	1	298	52.728	5.946	.729	.467
	2	146	52.274	6.606		
Integrated Conflicts	1	298	30.516	7.370	.587	.557
	2	146	30.061	8.262		

There was no difference found in social identity and integrated conflict by participation in the unification leadership camp.

4.   Discussion and Conclusions

This study analysed the correlations and influence of college students' contact experience with North Korean students on social identity and integrated conflict. Through this study, although the experience of quantitative and qualitative contact with North Korean students was found to have a significant correlation with social identity, the experience of quantitative and qualitative contact with North Korean students showed a negative correlation with integrated conflict, and there was a significant correlation between social identity and integrated conflict.

In addition, the result of analysis of the influence of college students' contact experience with North Korean students on social identity showed that it had a positive influence, with an explanatory power of about 4.0%. Also, the effect of college students' contact experience with North Korean students on integrated conflict had negative effects, with an explanatory power of about 11.7%. However, there was no difference in the degree of difference in social identity and integrated conflict by participation of university students in a unification leadership camp. Likewise, there was no difference in social identity and integrated conflict by attendance at unification-related lectures.

Alternative schools for North Korean students provide specialized educational programs (Han, Lee, Kim, Chae, & Kim, 2010) aimed at supplementing the learning gaps that occurred during the process of defection, and it is relatively easy to enter South Korean universities through special admissions. However, as they adapt to college life after entering university, there are difficulties due to academic, economic, cultural and psychological differences. Such cases can be seen in the high dropout rate of North Korean students (Lee, 2016). This is an important problem because it concerns not only North Korean students, but also North Korean defectors after graduating from college (Woo, 2008). They are nationals of the Republic of Korea, but they show a difference in their way of thinking and interests from South Korean college students. However, North Korean students experience alienation, anxiety over exposure of their status, and emotional difficulties (Kim, 2009). Since they do not have the same social identity, it is necessary to support the formation of the social identity of North Korean college students and reduce integrated conflicts.

Research devoted to the successful adaptation of North Korean students to South Korea should focus on inter-Korean educational integration and school adjustment, and research for strategic and institutional measures should seek to provide appropriate alternatives and support measures for them as an important long-term foundation for successful unification. Shin (2021) said that unification education for students with different political tendencies should include narrative creation, perspective adoption and ways to find consensus. As a follow-up study of this study, it is necessary to conduct research on various North Korean students. And, the results of this study can serve as basic data for mid-to long-term follow-up studies of education integration in preparation for unification of the two Koreas that may be referenced or reflected in the promotion of school unification education and policies on unification education integration.

5.   References

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