EXPLORING EAST ASIAN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THEIR PREPARATION FOR STUDY ABROAD FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS IN U.S. UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

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This study used grounded theory as a framework to explore how the preparation for studying abroad would affect the academic success of East Asian undergraduate students in American universities. To understand how East Asian students’ previous educational experience would influence their current study in the U.S., 12 East Asian undergraduate students who had various educational experience before they began their undergraduate studies in the U.S. were interviewed. Three research questions were examined in this study, including: 1) how did East Asian students prepare to study in American universities; 2) how did their preparation affect their academic success in American universities; 3) what are challenges they are still facing in American universities?

Twelve participants from China, South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong were selected on purpose from five universities in order to recruit participants with diverse background. Interviews were conducted individually with each participant.

This findings show how East Asian students’ English learning experiences in their homelands, their preparation experiences, and their success and challenges in U.S. universities. The knowledge of English language and American culture is the core category which is highly involved with their preparation for study abroad and their undergraduate study in the U.S. The study concludes that East Asian students can benefit from all the preparation programs which are held either in their homelands or the host countries. However, the barriers in language and culture are difficult for East Asian student to overcome in college.

This findings of this study not only help future East Asian students who interested in studying in the United States be better prepared before going abroad but also help American
institutions to better understand their international students from East Asia and provide better on-campus support for them.
Dedicated to all the participants in this study
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter I. INTRODUCTION</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background of the Study</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justification for the Study</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Purpose Statement</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter II. LITERATURE REVIEW</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An Overview of East Asian Students in the United States</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current East Asian Students in the United States</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons for Studying in the United States</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The push-pull model</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A preference to American universities</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Overview on the Characteristics of Schooling and English education in East Asia</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similarities in Education in the Four Countries and Areas</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of teaching and learning in primary and secondary education levels</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English education in primary and secondary level</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of teaching and learning in primary and secondary education levels</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
English education in primary and secondary level ............................ 17
Taiwan............................................................................................................ 17
Characteristics of teaching and learning in primary and secondary
education levels.................................................................................. 17
English education in primary and secondary level ......................... 18
Hong Kong..................................................................................................... 19
Characteristics of teaching and learning in primary and secondary
education levels.................................................................................. 19
English education in primary and secondary level ......................... 20
Influence of Confucianism........................................................................... 20
The importance of examination .............................................................. 21
Value of education..................................................................................... 22
High expectation on academic success ................................................. 22
A Brief Overview on the Classroom Communication in U.S. Universities ................. 23
Preparation for Studying in American Universities........................................ 24
Test preparation programs ................................................................. 25
International High School Programs ..................................................... 26
Advanced Placement (AP)................................................................. 26
The General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced Level .............. 27
International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme .................................... 27
Bridge Programs for International Students ........................................... 28
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Number of new international students in the United States from 2004/05 – 2013/14</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>East Asian student enrollment in U.S. 2012/13 – 2013/14</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The research process of this study</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Coding process</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The paradigm model of axial coding</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The paradigm model in this study</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The paradigm of the findings</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Symbols used in the coding process</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>An example of open coding in this study</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Demographic information of participants</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Themes and subthemes in this study</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

When I worked in China for a study abroad agency three years ago, I helped hundreds of Chinese students complete their applications to American universities. After these students arrived in the United States, not all of them could smoothly adapt to their academic life in U.S. universities. More often they complained that they felt that it was difficult to understand professors’ lectures, give presentations, work in groups, and write research papers. A few students even had to drop out due to their low GPA in college. Many students told me that they wished that they would have known more about American universities before they went abroad, which made me curious about whether more preparation before going abroad is helpful for international students to adapt to their life in the U.S.

Therefore, this experience aroused my interest in conducting a study to investigate if international students’ preparation for study abroad will affect their adaptation to American universities and their academic success. Most East Asian countries and areas, such as China, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, have similar characteristics in educational systems and cultural values (Flaitz, 2003). Thus, I decide to conduct my research among East Asian students instead of Chinese students only. This chapter includes the following sections: 1) background of the study, 2) justification of the study, 3) the purpose statement, 4) limitations, and 5) definition of terms.
**Background of the Study**

International students are a crucial part of many U.S. universities. In the past 15 years, the number of international students in the U.S. has significantly increased by 72% from 514,723 in 1999/2000 to 886,052 in 2013/14 (Institution of International Education [IIE], 2014a). International students not only enrich the diversity of U.S. universities and colleges but also financially support the U.S. universities’ operations (Chan, 2004). International students contribute to the U.S. economy through their spending on tuition and daily consume in the U.S. (IIE, 2014a). Usually international student’s tuition fee is usually two to three times higher than the domestic students’ in public universities. According to Bartlett & Fischer (2011), some American public higher education institutions whose state funding was reduced benefited from the increasing international student population, thus they started to expand their international student population, which could bring more financial support to the universities.

Among the international student population, East Asian students have become the largest group of the international students in the United States. According to Open Doors 2014, 44.4% of international students in the United States are from East Asian countries (IIE, 2014b). East Asian students have become an important group in American campuses, thus it is worthy to conduct a study to investigate their academic life in U.S. universities. This study may guide U.S. universities to understand and help their current East Asian students and recruit prospective East Asian students in the future.

However, it is not easy for East Asian students to apply to American universities and
adapt to the life in the U.S., due to the differences in language, education, culture, and other aspects. A plethora of research has shown that international students faced various challenges in both life and academics (Wan, Chapman, & Biggs, 1992; Ramsay, Barker, & Jones, 1999; Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2002; Andrade, 2006). For East Asian students, it seemed even more difficult due to the massive differences in language, schooling, and values (Choi & Nieminen, 2013). According to Choi & Nieminen (2013), in order to study in American universities, East Asian students spent a large amount of time and money on English learning and college preparation. Currently in East Asian countries and areas, there are a great number of international high schools, English language schools, international exchange programs and other programs related to study abroad (Law, 2007; Park, 2009; Lee, et al., 2009; College Board, 2014). According to Lee et al.’s research (2009), most students who enrolled in international high schools and similar study abroad programs went to study overseas for their bachelor degrees.

Simultaneously, there are also an increasing number of students who study in ESL programs in the U.S. before their undergraduate study (IEE, 2014c). Usually these students’ English proficiency does not meet the minimum English requirements of American universities. It may take from a few weeks to two years for them to complete the ESL programs.

However, there is little research exploring how these programs, i.e. college preparation programs, international exchange programs, international high school programs, ESL program, and etc., will influence the students academic performance in college. Thus,
this study will investigate how East Asian students’ preparation for studying in the U.S. will affect their academic success in American universities.

**Justification for the Study**

This study focuses on a small number of international undergraduate East Asian students who attended different preparation programs or had various living abroad experiences before they started their undergraduate study in the U.S. Fewer studies have examined the period when international students prepare for study abroad. This study may help U.S. universities better understand how East Asian students prepare to study in the U.S.

Moreover, the research results of this study may provide some insight for university personnel and international college students. The results may be helpful for educators and administrators to understand their programs better from East Asian students’ perspectives. The results may help them adjust their programs to help East Asian student better adapt to their college life in the United States.

**The Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to investigate how current undergraduate students from East Asian countries and areas prepared to study in the United States and explore if these preparations will help them better perform in their American universities. Research questions in this study are as follows:

1. How did East Asian students prepare to study in American universities?
2. How did their preparation affect their academic success in American universities?
3. What are challenges they are still facing in American universities?

Limitations

There are two limitations in this research design. First is the validity threat in sampling. There are only 12 participants in this research, but there are more types of preparation programs than the number of the participants. Thus, the participants cannot represent all East Asian students. To decrease this threat, the research was conducted in five different universities across the U.S. in order to recruit participants with diverse experiences in study abroad preparation. However, due to the limitation of the sample size, this threat might not be completely avoided.

The second limitation is that the trustworthiness of the data. Under a qualitative research approach, the research results mainly developed based on the participants’ interviews. It is hard to measure the trustworthiness of the participants’ expressions. To decrease this threat, participants’ identification is fully protected which may increase the participants’ willingness to express their real thoughts.

Other limitations occurred during the research procedure, such as the representation of the participants, are discussed in the conclusion chapter.

Definition of Terms

College preparation program – program that helps international students improve English and adapt American college life without any college credit hours and are offered by American universities, institutions in East Asia, and private educational companies
ESL program – English as second language program in which international students enrolled as full-time language learning students in both non-for-profit universities and private for-profit institutions and companies to take academic English courses without any college credit hours

IELTS -- International English Language Testing System, an English proficiency test accepted by many English-speaking universities worldwide

International cooperation program – undergraduate program run by both foreign and American higher education institutions

International high school program – programs taught in English and offered by high schools in East Asian countries and areas

Prepared students – students who studied in international high schools or attended any college preparation program, ESL program, or other similar program

TOEFL – Test of English as a Foreign Language, an English proficiency test accepted by many English-speaking universities worldwide
CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

To better understand East Asian undergraduate students’ academic achievement in American universities, it is necessary to know the reasons why they choose to study in the U.S., how they come to the U.S., and what they experienced before they start their studies in American universities. Thus, this chapter reviews the literatures in four sections. The first section reviews the current number of East Asian international students in the United States and the reasons why they chose to study in the U.S. The second section included three parts which describe the similarities in education in East Asian countries and areas, the primary and secondary education in East Asian countries and areas, including teaching and learning styles, student characteristics, and English education in each country and area, the Confucian influence on schooling and the value of education in East Asia. The reviewed countries and areas are where the participants in this study originally from: China, South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. The third section briefly reviews the classroom communication in U.S. universities, and the fourth section reviews programs which East Asian students attend to prepare for studying in foreign institutions, especially in American universities and colleges.

An Overview of East Asian Students in the United States

Current East Asian Students in the United States

The United States, one of the most popular study abroad destinations, attracts thousands of international students to pursuing the U.S. diplomas (IIE, 2014b). In the recent ten years, the number of new enrolled international students in the U.S. increased year by
year (see Figure 1). In 2014, the United States was the country that hosted the largest number of international students in the world. (2014b). The Open Doors Report indicated that in 2013/14, the number of international students in the United States rose to 886,052 with an 8% growth from the previous year (IIE, 2014c). Among them, 8.9% were enrolled in associate degree programs, 38.6% in bachelor degree programs, 42.3% in graduate programs, 4.8% for Non-degree intensive English programs, and 5.3% in other non-degree programs (2014c).

Figure 1. Number of new international students in the United States from 2004/05 – 2013/14 (IIE, 2014c)

From the perspective of places of origin, the proportion of East Asian international students has become the largest group in the whole international student population in the past decade. According to IIE, the number of East Asian students in the United States has grown from 189,371 in 2000/01 to 393,205 in 2013/14. In 2013/14, it accounted for more than 44.2% of the international student population. In the Top 25 place of origins, China with an increase of 17% than 2012/13 ranked in the first place (31.0%). Although negative
growths appeared in the number of South Korean, Taiwanese, and Japanese students in recent years, the three countries still respectively ranked in the 3rd, 6th, and 7th place in 2013/14. Hong Kong with 1% increase ranked in the 17th place (see Figure 2) (IIE, 2014c; IIE, 2014e). Except Japan, the number of OPT students from other East Asian countries also increased compared with the previous year, which might suggest that more East Asian students stayed in the U.S. to find internships or jobs after graduation (IIE, 2014e).

Figure 2. East Asian student enrollment in U.S. 2012/13 – 2013/14

Due to the large number, East Asian students have become an essential part in the international student population in US. It is important to understand the reasons why they choose to study in US.

Reasons for Studying in the United States

The push-pull model. There are many factors that affect international students’ decisions to study abroad and their destination choices. First developed by Lewin (1951), the push-pull model was prevalently used as a framework in previous research to explain
international students’ decisions to study abroad (Lee & Morrish, 2012; Baruch, Budhwar, & Khatri, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Mazzarol, Soutar, Smart, & Choo, 2001; Mazzarol, 1998; Mazzarol, Savery, & Kemp, 1996). Mazzarol et. al. (1996) explained that in the context of international student mobility, the push-pull model meant that students’ decisions were pushed by the factors involved with their home countries and pulled by the factors involved with the host countries. They found six push-pull factors that would affect international student’s choice of host countries: 1) the knowledge that the student knew about the host country and the host country’s reputation in the student’s home country, 2) the influence from parents, friends, and other peers, 3) how much it cost in the host country, 4) the environment of the host country, 5) the distance between the student’s home country and host country, and 6) the family ties and social connections that the student had in the host country (1996).

Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) conducted three surveys among students from four countries to examine the factors that affected student choice on host country. They found that students were more likely to choose the countries which had better reputations in their home countries. This finding explained why the United States became a popular host country for international students. They indicated that the U.S. influence on news, film, television, and other media in the world since 1950s had built positive reputations of the country, which help increase students’ desire to study in the United States (2002).

A preference to American universities. For the above reasons, the United States became the first preference to study abroad for East Asian students. Several surveys showed that the United States was the most popular study abroad destination country for Chinese
students (China Education Online, 2014). Another survey showed that in 2014, the United States remained the most popular study abroad destination for South Korean students. According to the survey, over 30% of South Koreans students abroad were in the U.S. ("Thinking the long view," 2014). Lee et. al. (2013) conducted both quantitative and qualitative research on students in the international schools in China. Most participants in their research were students from Asian countries or Chinese with non-Chinese citizenship. They found that an essential factor which affected the Asian students in Chinese international schools to choose to study in the U.S. was that pursuing high test scores and going to elite universities were highly valued in Asian societies and cultures (2013). Yen and Stevens (2004) reported that Taiwanese considered the quality of American degrees better than that of Taiwanese degrees. According to Academic Ranking of World Universities 2014 (2014), the United States has 146 of the Top 500 universities in the world, the largest numbers of any country and almost four times as many as those in the United Kingdom.

**An Overview on the Characteristics of Schooling and English education in East Asia**

Most current East Asian undergraduate students in the U.S. completed primary and secondary education in their home countries before they started their academic adventures in the United States. Thus, in order to explore how they fared in American universities, it is necessary to first understand their previous educational experience in their home countries. In this section, the first part reviewed the similarities in the primary and secondary education and English learning in East Asian countries and areas, i.e. China, South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. The second part separately reviewed the characteristics of schooling and English
learning in each country and area.

**Similarities in Education in the Four Countries and Areas**

The school setting, teaching styles, and students’ learning styles in primary and secondary schools in China, Hong Kong, South Korea, and Taiwan are highly similar. The similarities can be summarized in four aspects. First, previous studies describe that the class instructions in East Asia are very structured and test-oriented, which lead student become passive learners (Flaitz, 2003; Hui, 2005; Fraser & Lee, 2009; Chan, 2014). According to Flaitz (2003), in East Asia, students seldom actively engage the knowledge and the practice together. They usually passively memorize the teachers’ instruction and also use memorization as a main strategy when preparing for exams. Second, examinations are the most essential part in East Asian education systems. Choi and Nieminen (2013) describe that for East Asian students, their main goals in school is to gain high scores in the exams and receiving admissions from elite universities. Third, academic achievement, particularly getting high exam scores, involves with a lot of extra efforts after school (Sliver, 2002; Flaitz, 2003; Chou & Ho, 2007; Nuffic, 2013). A plethora of book chapters and articles have described the popularity of studying in commercial cram schools for exam preparation in East Asia (Flaitz, 2003; Chou & Ho, 2007; Park, 2009). Fourth, education is highly valued in these countries and areas (Choi & Nieminen, 2013). Researchers found that most East Asian students believed the better the universities they went to, the better professional positions they would gain in the future (Choi & Nieminen, 2013; Mitsui, 2009).

There are also similarities in English education in these four countries and areas. For
example, English education begins at an early age. East Asian students have strong demand to learn English. Test-oriented teaching approach is commonly used in English education in East Asia. In China, South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, English is a required subject since primary school, and it is also one of the required subjects in college entrance exams (Wang, 2007; Jo, 2015; Zhou & Ho, 2007). Previous research found that East Asians had a strong demand to learn English, because they believed that mastering English would help them find better jobs (Choi, 2012). David (2005) addressed the “English fever” which started in 1980s and continued to the present in China. However, the main purpose of learning English in primary and secondary school is exam-oriented. Zhou and Ho (2007) reported that the goal for many Taiwanese students who attended private language schools was to improve their skills in taking English exams instead of improving their communication skills in English.

Due to these similarities, there is some overlapping information in the review of each country and area.

China

**Characteristics of teaching and learning in primary and secondary education**

**levels.** The primary and secondary education in China involves three levels: primary (Grade 1-5/1-6), junior middle (Grade 6-9/7-9), and senior high (Grade 10-12) levels (MOE, 2014). A master teacher (*ban zhu ren*) is assigned for each class in every grade. The teacher is in charge of the whole class and responsible for the student academic achievement, student life, etc. (Flaitz, 2003). The curricula in public schools are controlled by the government, and teachers give very structured instructions in class. According to Flaitz (2003), didactical
games are usually considered as useless activities by Chinese teachers and are seldom
conducted in class, especially in secondary level. An average class size is traditionally much
larger than that in Western countries. One class can have 50-60 students, and class
participation and discussion are often not expected (2003). In Lee et. al.’s study (2013), they
found that Chinese parents expressed satisfaction with their children’s silence in class, even
though the teachers had spoken to them about their children’s low level of participation in
school.

Chinese students are usually passive in the learning process. Hui (2005) described that
Chinese students considered class lectures and textbooks to be authoritative sources and were
not expected to doubt teacher’s instruction. The author also indicated that Chinese students’
abilities in creativity, critical thinking, and problem solving were often ignored. Instead,
memorization became the most essential learning strategy for most Chinese students (2005).

In this test-oriented education system, examination is highly involved with schooling
in China. Students have to take quizzes in class, monthly exams, midterm exams, final
exams, graduate exams, etc. Kirkpatrick and Zang (2011) reported that in China, the higher
grade the students were in, the more examinations they had. They describe that although
primary and middle school education was compulsory, usually many students still need to
take the entrance exams if they want to study in advanced class or better schools. According
to Flaitz (2003), exam score usually is the only standard for high school and college
admission. Students are assigned to do numerous exercises for exam preparation. Previous
research found that in order to achieve higher scores, many middle school and high school
students attended after class tutoring (bu xi ban) to supplement their school lessons in the subjects of Chinese, English, Mathematics, which were the three main subjects in school (Zhao, 2007).

College admission is very competitive in China. The National College Entrance Examination, commonly known as Gaokao, is a nationwide academic standardized test held annually in China. This national examination system conducted by the Ministry of Education of China is used to admit students into colleges and universities. It is the primary tool for higher education institutions to select undergraduate students. Most admission decisions are made only based on the exam scores (Yangguang Gaokao, 2014).

**English education in primary and secondary level.** In September 2001, English became a required subject in the primary school curriculum from grade three in primary school (MOE, 2001). According to Wang (2007), most primary schools especially in the cities, provide English class in early grade. Learning communicative English has been emphasized in the reform of the English curriculum in basic education since 1993. These reforms gradually changed the English class in Chinese schools from teacher-centered to student-centered (2007). A previous research, however, showed that English was taught in a grammar-translation approach by most teachers in schools (Cheng, 2004). Sliver (2012) explained that since English was one of the three main subjects in high school and college entrance examinations, students had to spend more time on grammar and reading comprehension practices and vocabulary memorization rather than using the language in communicative ways.
Furthermore, extracurricular English classes are very popular in China. Operated by private companies, foreign companies, and individuals, these classes include English vocabulary, TOEFL/IETLS/SAT/GRE test preparation, oral English, business English, and other types of English class (Davis, 2005).

South Korea

Characteristics of teaching and learning in primary and secondary education levels. The basic education in South Korea includes primary school (6 years), middle school (3 years), and high school (3 years). An average class size in primary school is 35, and it is 40-45 in middle school and high school (Flaitz, 2003). A homeroom teacher is assigned for each class since the first year of school. The Korean education system is also highly examination oriented. The purpose of education emphasizes passing and achieving highly in examinations, going to college and receiving job offers with high salary. Examinations highly influences teachers’ teaching style. According to Fraser & Lee (2009) and Flaitz (2003), Korean teachers believed that the expository approach to instruction was efficient to meet the examination requirements, and teachers were usually very strict to students and gave them heavy class practice and homework to help them achieve high scores in exams. Even though students are welcome to ask questions in class, few students do so. Flaitz (2003) describes that when the students do not understand the lecture, they may still nod their head or smile to pretend that they understand it, which is a way to show their respect to the teacher.

Memorization is one of the main learning strategies. Fraser and Lee (2009) found that teachers in secondary schools in South Korea often gave model answers to each questions
and students used these models to reproduce their answers in the exams.

Students take the college entrance examination which is called the College Scholastic Aptitude Test (CSAT). The college admission is very competitive in South Korea, so it is common for high school students to attend cram schools and take private tutoring classes in order to achieve high scores in CSAT. Most Korean students spend a significant amount of time studying and have very limited time to attend extra-curricular activities (Nuffic, 2013).

**English education in primary and secondary education.** Since 1997, formal English education has started in Grade 3 in primary school. English classes in primary school is only one to two hours per week and in middle school and high school is about four hours per week (Jo, 2008). Although the implementation of English teaching reform since 1992 has influenced English teachers changing the teaching style from grammar-translation method to communicative method, Mitsui (2009) stated that communicative approach was not widely implemented in Korean classrooms, since most English examinations did not test students’ oral English skills. In addition, Park (2009) reported that many students also learnt English in private cram schools and language schools, as English they learned in school is limited. Furthermore, South Korean students spent a large amount of money learning English. According to Park’s study (2009), more than half of Korean students’ educational cost was for English education.

**Taiwan**

**Characteristics of teaching and learning in primary and secondary education levels.** The basic education in Taiwan includes primary school (6 years), junior high school (3
years), and senior high school (3 years). An average class size in primary school, junior high school, and senior high school is 40-50 students. Teacher make lesson plans only based on the content, practices, and activities in the textbooks. Innovation in lesson planning is not necessarily expected of teachers. Students seldom challenge teachers, and the class environment is usually quiet. Teachers often teach extra hours in the evening or in the summer to help their students prepare for exams. (Flaitz, 2003).

According to Flaitz (2003), Taiwanese students prefer to do written assignments and work individually. Memorization is commonly used as a tool for learning by students in all grades. In Taiwan, students have become very competitive due to the number of examinations they must take and pass.

Many Taiwanese students study at cram schools which are test-oriented private institutions helping students prepare high school and college entrance exams (Zhou & Ho, 2007). There are also oral English class and science laboratory experiment classes. Parents have to pay approximately NT$2640 (US$80) per subject per month. Zhou and Ho (2007) argued that the cost of taking multiple subjects would stress the budget for an average family in Taiwan.

**English education in primary and secondary education.** English used to be compulsory subject only in secondary school, but since 2001 English instruction has started in Grade 5 in Taiwan (Zhou & Ho, 2007). Similar to the English education in China and South Korea, according to Wu’s research (2014), Taiwanese students reported that oral English was often neglected in school. Students who wanted to improve their English,
especially oral skills, often took private English tutoring and English classes in cram schools (2014).

**Hong Kong**

**Characteristics of teaching and learning in primary and secondary education**

Levels. The primary and secondary education in Hong Kong is divided into three levels: Primary school (Primary 1 to Primary 6), secondary school (Form 1-6 or Secondary 1-6). The instruction language in local primary schools in Hong Kong is Chinese. Students are admitted by secondary schools based on the results of three exams taken in Primary 5 and 6. Parents expect their children to achieve high scores and go to top schools, thus the admission is extremely competitive (Law, 2007).

The instruction language in local primary schools. In secondary education, local schools can give both Chinese-medium and English-medium instructions in Hong Kong (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2014). Students in local schools take the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE) for college admission after completing Secondary 6. The international schools in Hong Kong follow curricula of foreign countries. Students studying in international schools do not need to take HKDSE (Law, 2007).

Similar to students in Mainland China, research found that students in Hong Kong also heavily relied on memorization and following strict structures (Sit, 2013). Although the ability of critical thinking was emphasized in the curriculum in Hong Kong secondary schools, teachers reported that they did not know how to teach this ability to students
Another study also found that in the schools where the instruction language switched from Chinese to English after Secondary 7, students found it harder to participate in class, since the instruction language was not their first tongue (Lo & Macaro, 2012).

**English education in primary and secondary education.** English is a compulsory subject since Primary One. In 1999, task-oriented curriculum was introduced to Hong Kong secondary schools by the Hong Kong government. The curriculum emphasized learning communicative and authentic English. Previous research found that some English teachers used the task-oriented teaching approach, while more teachers combined it with other approaches or followed other approaches (Chan, 2014). Different from other East Asian countries and areas, many secondary schools offer English-medium electives, thus students in Hong Kong relatively used in English more often than those in East Asian local schools.

**Influence of Confucianism**

Confucian culture is the core to understanding East Asian education. The Confucian thought system, developed based on Confucius’s teaching practice (551-479 BCE), has greatly influenced on education in China and Chinese neighboring countries, such as Japan and South Korea (Choi & Nieminen, 2013). It laid a foundation of the traditional pedagogies and education values in East Asian countries (Starr, 2012). The key concepts of education in the Confucian principles highlighted the importance of educating the young, the importance of examination, and the idea that everyone can gain the same ability through practices and hard work, which are still followed in Modern East Asian countries (Kim, 2009).

Two essential Confucian principles, *filial piety* and *guan*, highlighted the importance
of respecting and obeying parents and teachers (Lee & Morrish, 2012; Ho, 1996). Filial piety referred to respecting and honoring parents and ancestors. Achieving success in school and career was considered as one way to honor the family and ancestors (Rogoff, 2003). Thus, as reviewed, achieving highly in school is the main goal of most East Asian, which is considered as a way to show their filial piety to their families. Guan in Confucian principles, which referred to “teaching or educating children in appropriate or expected behaviors” without “care and concern for children” (Chao, 1994) deeply influenced the teaching practice in East Asia. In prior research, Tobin, Wu, and Davidson (1991) translated this word into "to govern." They defined Guan as a positive word, because Guan could imply the care and love of teachers, parents or the elder. Asian parents and teachers believed that children’s positive development depended on their efforts, so Guan was considered as a necessary way of guiding children’s development and success (Kim, 2012; Mori, Liu, Otsuki, Mochizuki, & Kashiwabara, 2012). Thus, as reviewed, master teacher or homeroom teacher is assigned to guide students’ study and life in the schools in China and South Korea. In regular class, students follow their teachers’ instruction most of the time and rarely challenge their teachers.

The importance of examination. Historically, traditional education in East Asia was test-oriented. The “test” tradition can date back to Sui Dynasty in the 7th century when the imperial examination (Keju) started to be conducted by the central government to select scholars and officials in China. It was used to eliminate unqualified participants and select best participants among the whole country. It was considered as a professional, systematic, precision and efficient procedure of selection, and part of Chinese culture (Suen & Yu, 2006).
Later, it was introduced to Japan in 701 CE and Korea in 958 CE. Keju in China lasted till 1905 CE when Qing government abolished this system.

Although this ancient selection systems were abolished, East Asian countries still keep the tradition of examination, and examination is the main tool in college admissions. As reviewed, examination is usually used as the sole criterion of different types of selection, especially in college admission (Choi and Nieminen, 2013). Thus, gaining high score in examination is an essential goal for students in East Asia.

**Value of education.** Historically influenced by the Confucian culture, education is highly valued in East Asian countries and areas (Choi & Nieminen, 2013). Asians believed that education has long been the primary path to wealth and higher status. In China, higher academic degrees, especially foreign degrees which helped people easily find desired jobs, have been highly valued by Chinese since late Qing Dynasty (Lew, 1998; Choi & Nieminen, 2013). Korean students believed that students who studied prestigious Korean universities or foreign universities would have more and better opportunities in job hunting (Mitsui, 2009).

**High expectation on academic success.** East Asian students are expected to gain high scores and enter top universities. Since the college entrance examinations are held annually, students in South Korea who failed to enter their choice universities might attend cram schools for another year to retake the college entrance examinations (Nuffic, 2013). Rosen (2004) reported that Chinese students in this situation might repeat their last year of high school. Fong (2007) explored the reasons why Chinese students wanted to go to elite universities. She argued that due to the only child policy in China, Chinese singletons could
receive more care and concern from their parents than those with siblings, but at the same
time singletons shouldered more responsibilities for their families. As the only hope in the
family, they were supposed to be success in both academics and career in order to support
and honor their families in future (2007). Choi and Niemen (2013) indicated that even though
after school tutoring fee was high, many East Asian parents were still willing to pay as long
as the tutoring would improve their children’s scores in the exams. Research found that over
60% of Chinese families spent one third of their family income on their children’s education
(Bodycott, 2009). In South Korea, parents, especially mothers, liked to share their experience
in finding cost-effective cram schools and other education services which were considered as
the most efficient way to improve their children’s grades (Park, Byun, & Kim, 2011).
According to Flaitz (2003), it was common in Taiwan to hear parents discussing their
students’ grades and college plans with other parents.

**A Brief Overview on the Classroom Communication in U.S. Universities**

When East Asian students begin their undergraduate studies in the United States, the
school and classroom environment may be very different from that in their homelands.
Previous studies indicated that although the teaching styles might vary from types of
institutions, professors, class size, and other factors, classrooms in U.S. universities in general
tended to be more interactive (Ferris & Tagg, 1996; Kim, 2006; Lee, 2009). In Ferris and
Tagg’s research (1996), they found that professors at various universities expected that
college students should have certain speaking skills to participate in class. The expectation is
completely different from the one of East Asian teachers and parents, as reviewed. Therefore,
for the East Asian students who complete their primary and secondary education under East Asian education systems, they may face many challenges to adapt to their academic life in the U.S.

**Preparation for Studying in American Universities**

According to IIE (2014d), the number of East Asian students in American universities was much larger than the number of East Asian students in American high schools, which indicated that most current East Asian undergraduate students received their secondary education out of the U.S. Thus, as reviewed, when they prepare to study in American universities, they may face a series of problems, such as the language barriers, the different college admission requirements, the different pedagogies in American education, and so forth.

There are many different ways to crack these difficulties. Some students may choose to study in American high schools; some students study in exam preparation programs for the TOEFL and SAT tests; some who planned earlier to study abroad may go to international high schools in their home countries; some enroll in study abroad preparation programs in their home countries; some attend bridge programs in American universities before their undergraduate study; some study in ESL programs in US to learn English and adapt life in America and so forth. The following paragraphs reviewed the common programs that East Asian students choose for their study abroad preparation.
Test Preparation Programs

American universities require international applicants from non-English speaking countries to provide proof of English proficiency. TOEFL is the most common English proficiency test taken by international students who apply to American universities. Many universities also require applicants to submit SAT scores. Although many studies have found that test preparation programs could not significantly affect students’ performance in TOEFL, IELTS, or SAT tests (Liu, 2014; Green, 2007; Brown, 1998; Power & Rock, 1999), many students in East Asia countries and areas still attend TOEFL/SAT preparation programs.

In China, private cram schools that specialize in study abroad test preparation are everywhere. The most well-known language school in China, the New Oriental (xin dong fang) which provides various English training programs had 2.7 million students enrolled in 2014 (New Oriental Education & Technology Group, 2015). Through the internet, Chinese test takers also discuss test taking strategies and post the test questions that they remembered in the previous tests, like Gter BBS (ji tuo tian xia) and Taisha BBS (tai sha wang). As a result, the tests were no longer a good measure of Chinese students’ English proficiency (Davis, 2005). In addition, according to the post on the online forums, many Chinese students repeat to take tests for several times to achieve higher scores. Roberts (2002) reported that Koreans preferred to attend coaching programs for TOEFL preparation, because they believed that taking preparation courses might dramatically improve their test results. The cram schools in Taiwan post their students remarkable improvement in TOEFL and SAT tests on their website to attract new enrollments. The cost of English training is very high in East
International High School Programs

Although the majority of schools in East Asia follow the curricula controlled by their governments, some high schools offer Advanced Placement courses, A Level courses, etc. as electives. These English-medium courses with college credits are widely recognized by a plethora of universities around the world. Usually students who start earlier to prepare for studying in foreign universities may choose to take these courses. The following paragraphs reviewed three most common programs in East Asian countries and areas.

Advanced Placement (AP). In 1955, the College Board created Advanced Placement (AP) courses, which was a transition programs helping high school students transit from high school to college. Currently there are 37 courses and exams following college-level curricula in AP program. The AP exams which students take after finishing the courses are scored on a 1-5 scale, and many universities and colleges may offer credits for AP scores over 3 (Camara & Michaelides, 2005). Later, AP programs started to be introduced to other countries. There were over 1000 schools in 116 countries out of the United States offering AP courses in 2009 (Murphy & Dodd, 2009). In 2013-2014, over two million students from over 19,000 high schools in the world took the AP exams (College Board, 2014).

In 2010, the College Board established cooperation relationship with the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China to introduce AP courses to Chinese high schools (Xie, 2011). There were 125 high schools offering AP courses and 124 AP test centers in China (2011). The American schools in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan and international
schools in Hong Kong also offer AP courses to students.

**The General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced Level.** The General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced Level, commonly known as the A Level, is an academic qualification offering to students who complete secondary or pre-university education (Cambridge International Examination, 2014a). A level courses are designed for students to prepare for their college study. Provided by Edexcel and Cambridge International Examinations, the A level courses in East Asian schools are the international version of the British A Level (2014a). The curriculum of A Level is flexible that schools can freely choose from 55 courses offered by CIE or 8 subjects offered by Edexcel, and develop their individualized curricula. Students spend two years taking two parts of the program: the Advanced Subsidiary Level (AS Level) and the A2 Level. Students who complete both AS Level and A2 Level receive the A Level qualification. According to Cambridge International Examinations (2014), over 450 universities in US recognize A Level qualifications.

There were 1600 institutions in China offering A Level courses and tutoring (Cambridge International Examination, 2014b). The standard examinations for college admission in Hong Kong were designed based on A Level models (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2014).

**International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme.** First developed in Geneva in 1968, the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) is a two-year program for high school students aging from 16 to 19. It is recognized by worldwide universities as a transition program that develops high school students’ academic abilities before they go to
college. Until December 2014, there were 4972 programs offered by 3968 schools across the world (IBO, 2014). It provides “six subject groups and the DP core, comprising theory of knowledge (TOK), creativity, action, service (CAS) and the extended essay (IBO, 2015).”

The three IBDP core elements in the curriculum are respectively aiming to help students gain the abilities of deeply understanding knowledge, writing research papers, creativities, and practical skills in conducting research projects. A previous study on IBDP students in Canada, US, and UK showed that the extended essay improved their academic competence in college (IBO, 2014).

Currently there are 67 schools in China, 26 schools in Hong Kong, 8 schools in South Korea, 19 schools in Japan, and 4 schools in Taiwan offering IBDP (IBO, 2015). According to IBO website, 63% of IBDP graduates in 2011 and 2012 were from East Asian countries. A study found that 72% of students who studied in IBDP in China went to the world’s top 500 universities (Lee et al., 2013).

**Bridge Programs for International Students**

Bridge program or academic pathway program is a type of college preparation programs that help high school students finish their transition from high school to college. Researchers found that students studied in bridge programs had higher GPA than those who had never studied in similar programs before (Santa Rita & Bacote, 1996).

There are a number of universities in the United States that offering summer bridge programs to conditionally-admitted international students. The programs aim to help international students improve their academic English, communication skills, presentation
skills, etc. For example, the University of San Francisco offers a summer bridge program to Chinese students. This program not only provides academic English courses but also help students adapt American culture and get involved with the local community (Bergenfeld, 2011). Usually the study duration for bridge programs is only a few weeks. Students in these programs are expected to be ready for college. Therefore, this type of programs only accept students whose TOEFL scores are slightly lower than the score for direct admission. Even in some schools, only direct-admitted students can apply for the bridge programs. In Drexel University, only students who receive the university admission can apply to the University Preparation Summer Program (Drexel, 2015).

**ESL Programs in the U.S.**

ESL programs is another option for international students to improve their English, especially for those whose English proficiency is poor. According to ESL dictionary.com (2014), there are over 800 ESL centers in US offering academic English classes for international students. Many centers are operated by universities directly; some are affiliated to universities but run by language companies; some language companies also open their ESL centers overseas; others are independent language centers in the United States. According to IIE (2014e), 5% of the international students in US were enrolled in intensive English programs. Many of them continue to study in undergraduate programs in American universities after completing the language programs. Usually international students study in these programs for three months to two years or more until their English proficiency meets the undergraduate admission requirement. Students who complete the ESL program may be
directly admitted without TOEFL scores at some universities, while other universities still require official TOEFL scores for admission, even the students has complete the highest level of their ESL programs.

**Agency Help in the Application Process**

The application and admission procedures to universities in East Asia and the United States are very different. In international undergraduate admissions, American universities require application forms, standardized test scores, English proficiency test scores, high school transcripts, recommendation letters, personal statements and other documents, while as noted previously, most East Asian universities admit students solely based on the scores of college entrance exams.

Thus, due to the different university application procedures, agency help is commonly used by the applicants from East Asian countries. These study abroad agencies have helped thousands of students select schools that fit their academic goals, prepare application materials, and/or prepare visa applications, and charge students high service fees. In China, some agencies even required students who received admissions from top ranking schools even needed to pay a bonus (Winn, 2012). In 2013, 27,000 first-year international students from 48 comprehensive universities in Australia, the UK and the United States participated a survey on their usage of agency in university application, with 32% of the participants reporting that they had used agency service (“The agent question,” 2014). The results also showed that students applying to undergraduate level programs were more likely to use agency service than others, and students in major Asian countries are among the most likely
to use agents (2014). Another survey found that nearly half of all Korean students who planned to study abroad used agent (“Nuffic publishes two,” 2014b). According to Hagedorn and Zhang (2011), 69% of the Chinese participants reported that they used or would use agency service to apply to undergraduate programs in US. They found that students chose agency help because of their lack of knowledge in the application process, visa application methods, and general information about foreign institutions. Some students believed that choosing agency improved their chances of being admitted. However, those students who did not use agency help believed that they had time and the ability to complete university applications on their own, and they also expressed mistrust in the agencies, and that the expense for the service was too high (2011).

**Chapter Summary**

In sum, the group of East Asian students is an essential part in American universities. Before they came to the United States, most of them studied in exam-oriented systems whose teaching and learning styles are completely different from American’s. They had many options to prepare for study abroad before they started their undergraduate study in US. Each individual’s experience before they studied in American universities might be different. Thus, this study will use a qualitative research method to explore their experience in preparing for study abroad and investigate how the preparation for study in US will affect their academic success in US and find optimal preparations that fit for East Asian students.
CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

This study used a grounded theory to examine the research question. This chapter describes the research purpose, research design, research process, and data analysis, starting with 1) research questions, 2) research methodology, 3) permission from Human Subjects Research Board (HSRB), 4) participant selection, 5) interview protocol, 6) data analysis (open coding, axial coding, and selective coding), and 7) trustworthiness.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to find how the preparation for study abroad that East Asian international students made would affect their academic success in American universities. Many factors, such as English proficiency, social economic status, and academic performance in high school, which were commonly used to examined international students’ academic success in college (Wan, et. al., 1994). However, few studies have investigated the relationship between international student’s pre-departure preparation and their academic success in American universities. It is hard to find a conceptual framework which is proper to analyze the research question. Thus, to explore how East Asian students’ preparation will affect their study in American universities, the grounded theory pertained to this research. As addressed in the introduction chapter, the research questions in this study are as follows:

1. How did East Asian students prepare to study in American universities?
2. How did their preparation affect their academic success in American universities?
3. What are challenges they are still facing in American universities?
Research Design

Research Methodology -- Grounded Theory

Glaser and Strauss (1967) first defined grounded theory as a theory that fit one
research situation and could be applied to further research. Later, other researchers provided
different definitions of grounded theory (Neuman 1997; Strauss & Corbin, 1994; Chenitz &
Swanson, 1986). Based on these definitions, Ritchie & Lewis (2003) summarized grounded
theory as a research approach to develop theories of social phenomena through the categories
which were formulated in the process of data analysis.

Although both quantitative and qualitative research could be conducted to generate
theories, researchers argued that the relationship between quantitative research and grounded
theory was unclear (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Glaser, 1992). According to Berg and Lune
(2004), most previous studies using grounded theory as a framework were under qualitative
approach. Thus, this study used grounded theory under a qualitative approach.

Grounded theory research does not verify existing theories, test hypothesis, or predict
results (Berg & Lune, 2004). Instead, grounded theorists understand and interpret the
phenomena and experiences of the participants (2004). The phenomenon researched in this
study was that many East Asian students had spent much time and effort preparing to study in
American universities before they were accepted by the universities in the United States. It
was unknown if their preparation would made their academic life in college any different.
Thus, grounded theory would be suitable to explore the answers to the research question in
this study.
According to Glaser (1992), the process of grounded theory research contains three main steps: defining research questions, collecting and analyzing data, and grounding the theory. Figure 3 showed the research process of this study.

Figure 3. The research process of this study

Permission from Human Subjects Research Board (HSRB)

I submitted the HSRB documents including protocol, recruitment letter, consent form, demographic form, and sample interview questions in August 2014 and received the approval on September 4, 2014 (see Appendix A & B). The interviews were conducted from mid-
September 2014 to late December 2014.

**Participant Selection**

I used purposive sampling method to select participants. The criteria for the participants were current undergraduate students in American universities who were from East Asian countries and areas and over 18 years old. Creswell (2007) suggests that the sample size of research using grounded theory should be 20-30, but due to the limitation of time, there were only twelve participants, six male and six female, in this study. The participants, whose ages ranged was from 19 to 27, were all from East Asian countries and areas, i.e. seven from Mainland China, three from South Korea, one from Hong Kong, and one from Taiwan. They studied in two public universities in the West Coast, two public universities in the Midwest, and one private university in the Midwest. The five universities were all four-year research universities; the four public institutions were large-sized universities with population from approximately 20,000 to 40,000, while the private one was medium-sized with population around 10,000. The reason for conducting research in various universities was to recruit participants with diverse experiences in preparing to study abroad. Detailed description of each participant is addressed in Chapter 4 Finding and Discussion.

In the process of recruiting, I first posted recruiting information on “campus update” in one university, but received no response. At the same time, I used snow-ball technique by sending recruitment emails to the international East Asian students I knew and the supervisors of East Asian clubs, and asking them to forward the information to their East Asian friends. Twelve eligible participants responded to voluntarily participate in this study in
the fall of 2014.

**Interview Protocol**

**The role of researcher.** In qualitative methodology, researcher is an essential part in the data collection and analysis process (Fraenkel et. al., 2012). I am an international graduate student from Mainland China. The participants and I have many similar experiences in cultural background, schooling, and English language learning. Because of this, the participants were comfortable to share their experience and opinions during the interviews, which increased the validity of this study.

**Demographic form.** The demographic form (see Appendix C) was designed to collect the basic descriptive information of participants, which included age, gender, ethnicity, native language, year of high school graduation, year when coming to US, current year of college, major and minor, year when taking TOEFL/IELTS, living status (alone or with roommates), the languages their roommates speak. Each participant was identified by numbers. Their English proficiency test scores were presented in score ranges to protect the confidentiality of the participants’ information. The demographic information of the participants is listed in Chapter 4 Finding and Discussion.

**Interview questions.** During the 25-70-min semi-structured individual interviews, both closed-ended and open-ended questions (see Appendix D) were asked. Some closed-ended questions were asked at the beginning of the interviews to make the participants comfortable to talk in English, and the open-ended questions asked later were focused on their previous and current study experiences.
Examples of interview questions:

Closed-ended questions:

1) When did you first learn English?
2) Do you know other languages rather than English?
3) Is this your first time to go abroad?

Open-ended questions:

1) How did you prepare to study in the United States?
2) Would you tell me something about the program you studied before?
3) What are the difficulties for you to become a better student?

Interview settings and tools. All interviews were conducted in the places which were chosen by the participants. Eight face-to-face interviews were conducted in public areas on participants’ campuses, such as dormitory lobbies, university libraries, student unions, and other public places on campus. The other four interviews were conducted via Skype when the participants were in their bedrooms. A password-protected iPad was used to record all the interviews. In grounded theory research, researchers should finish transcribing the interview before conducting the next one (Burg & Lune, 2004; Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In this study, each interview was transcribed before the next interview. All the transcriptions were saved in a password-protected computer.

Memoing. During the process of data collection and analysis, researchers should take memos which help develop codes and emerge theories (Glaser, 1992). I took notes about the interview settings, key words of their answers, the words they emphasized, the participants’
reactions on interview questions during the interviews. To keep the flow of the interviews, I did not interrupt the participants when they misunderstood any questions or did not clearly express themselves. Instead, I wrote down these problems and verified their answers with them after the interviews to keep the accuracy of their answers.

Interview reflections were written after each interview. Memos about codes, the themes, sub themes, categories, and other ideas on the interviews were also made after the transcription. All the memos taken during the interview and data analysis process were parts of the data in this study.

**Member Checking**

Since English is not the first language neither of the researcher nor the participants, there might be some misunderstanding on some interview questions. To avoid this bias, sample interview questions were shown and explained to the participants before the interviews began or during the interviews. The unclear answers were verified with the participants after the interview. I checked the interview transcripts twice by concurrently reading the transcriptions and listening to the records after transcribing each interview.

**Data Analysis**

After transcription, two scholars helped me interpret the data. According to Glaser (1992), to develop and generate the theories, grounded theorists analyzed the transcription and memos of the very first interview before they conducted the second interview. Thus, in this study the data analysis started simultaneously with the data collection process and
continued after the completion of data collection.

Data coded in this study included the interview transcriptions, notes taken during the interviews, researcher reflections on the interviews, and memos made during transcribing. In grounded theory, the coding process which include three steps: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, is iteratively conducted to increase the reliability of the analysis (Berg & Lune, 2004). All data in this study were coded by following the three steps in an iterative manner. The data of each interview were separately coded in the data collection process, and some memos were taken during this process. After the completion of all the interviews, all data were coded again to increase the reliability of the results. In the process of theoretical analysis, data were repeatedly coded, categorized, and constantly compared to develop the theory.
Open Coding

Open coding is the primary step of data analysis in grounded theory research, which discovers the themes and categories of the data (Glaser, 1992). It is a coding procedure to conceptualize categories.

Researchers used different strategies of coding to generate, name, and develop categories in this step (Berg & Lune, 2004). In this study, every unit in the written data were labelled at the beginning. Symbols in Table 1 were used in the coding process to facilitate statistics and code analysis. In this step, 298 units were labeled. The units were generated into 38 concepts.
Table 1. Symbols used in the coding process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, …</td>
<td>Participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1), 2), 3), 4), …</td>
<td>Number of questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>Completion of participants’ incomplete sentences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a1, a2, a3, …</td>
<td>Label</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1, A2, A3, …</td>
<td>Unit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. An example of open coding in this study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcription</th>
<th>Open coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11-5): I did by myself (a1). I used collegeboard.com (a2) and the teacher from that institute recommend me the score should….which university (a3). They have a consultant through a company (a4). I just applied 35 universities (a5). I applied 7 of the Ivy Leagues, 7 or 8, and I applied universities in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Du Bai, London, and America.</td>
<td>a1: by myself; a2: collegeboard; a3: teacher from institute; a4: consultant through a company; a5: number of the schools they apply to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Axial Coding

Axial coding, the second step of coding, is to find connections among the categories and link main categories and sub-categories through reexamining the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The procedure of comparing categories and linking them is very complex. Strauss & Corbin (1990) proposed the paradigm model to help researcher systematically consider the data. According to Glaser’s improvement on the explanation of this model, the model presented the phenomenon generated from the causal, contextual, and intervening conditions, action or interaction strategies from the reflection of the phenomenon, and the results of action or interaction (See Figure 4) (Glaser, 1992).

*Figure 5. The paradigm model of axial coding (Burg & Lune, 2004)*

In this study, the ten subthemes are generated from the axial coding process, which are 1) apprehensive feeling toward their English proficiency, 2) test preparation, 3)
preparation programs in their homelands, 4) preparation programs in their host countries, 5) challenges of self-preparation for university applications, 6) role of agencies, 7) the importance of high GPA, 8) the role of English proficiency in academic success, 9) limitation of English, and 10) an “outsider” on campus. Four themes were developed based on the connections among the subthemes: a) English learning in their homelands, b) study abroad preparation program, c) challenges of completing university application, and d) academic success and challenges in U.S. universities. Figure 5 shows the paradigm model in this study.
Selective Coding

Selective coding is the process to reveal the core category (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

In this process, Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest that researchers demarcate the concepts and categories which are unrelated to the core category. Then, researchers should use the core category and the related categories to ground the theory. In the selective coding process in this study, the core category, the knowledge of English language and American culture, was
integrated based on the analysis of the four themes and ten subthemes.

**Trustworthiness**

The trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to the degree of consistency between the collected data and the reality in the data collection process (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). To increase the reliability of this study, first I provided the detailed descriptions of instruments, interview setting, data collection process, and coding procedure. Second, I clarified the answers with the participants after the interviews, and checked the transcriptions to confirm the interviews were transcribed in verbatim.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter describes the research procedure of this study. Under the approach of grounded theory, data collection and data analysis were concurrently conducted in this study. Grounded based on 12 participants’ study experiences, a theory which explained how East Asian students’ preparation would influence their study in US universities was gradually developed in the process of interviewing, coding, and analyzing.
CHAPTER IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter includes two parts. The first part states an overview of participants, which includes their demographic information, educational background, and study abroad experience. The second part addresses the results and discussion of this study. The findings are emerged into four themes and ten subthemes and are discussed under each theme.

Overview of Participants

This section provides each participant’s demographic information and describes their experiences before they started their undergraduate study in the United States. Table 3 listed each participant’s age, gender, ethnicity, native language, year of high school graduation, current year in college, year of coming to the United States, English proficiency test scores, whether they lived alone or with roommates, and the language their roommates speak.
Table 3. Demographic information of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Native Language</th>
<th>Year of HS graduation</th>
<th>Current Year of school</th>
<th>Year when came to U.S.</th>
<th>English proficiency Test time</th>
<th>Live alone/ with others</th>
<th>Languages roommates speak</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>Mandarin Chinese</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mainland China</td>
<td>Mandarin Chinese</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>101-120</td>
<td>others Mandarin Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Mainland China</td>
<td>Mandarin Chinese</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>others Mandarin Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
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<td>Mainland China</td>
<td>Mandarin Chinese</td>
<td>2009</td>
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<td>2010</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>below 60</td>
<td>others English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>Mainland China</td>
<td>Mandarin Chinese</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>101-120</td>
<td>others Mandarin Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mainland China</td>
<td>Mandarin Chinese</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>others English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Mainland China</td>
<td>Mandarin Chinese</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>First year</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>First year</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>79-100</td>
<td>others English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>Cantonese</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>6.5-7.0**</td>
<td>others English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>others Korean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>101-120</td>
<td>alone</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mainland China</td>
<td>Mandarin Chinese</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>61-78</td>
<td>alone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* TOEFL iBT total score: 0-120; IELTS total score is 1-9
** IELTS score; the rest are TOEFL iBT scores

The following paragraphs describe more detailed information about each participant’s previous and current experience in schooling, English learning, studying abroad, university application, and other relevant aspects.

Participant 1

Participant 1 was a junior year student in a public university in Midwest when she participated in this study in the fall of 2014. Before she came to the United States, she had...
never gone abroad. She started to learn English when she was in kindergarten in Taiwan. She finished her whole primary and secondary education in Taiwan. She decided to study in the United States when she was in high school. She prepared TOEFL and university applications all by herself. As her TOEFL score was not high enough for the direct admission, she studied in an ESL program in a community college in the U.S. for one semester. Later, she studied the community college for two years, and then transferred to her current university.

Participant 2

Participant 2 was a sophomore year student in a public university in the West Coast when she participated in this study in the fall of 2014. Before she came to the United States, she had never lived abroad. She studied in public schools in China from Grade 1 to Grade 11. She started to learn English when she was in Grade 5. She completed all her high school courses in Grade 11, so she did not go to school in her last year. Instead, she took two-month TOEFL preparation courses in her hometown, which is a major city in Shandong province, during the summer break of Grade 11. Then she studied in a study abroad preparation program at a university in Beijing for one year. She took TOEFL and SAT preparation courses for the first half year and some introductory-level university courses for the second half year. These courses were taught in English by native English speakers. She took both TOEFL and SAT twice. As there is no SAT test center in mainland China, she went to Hong Kong twice to take SAT tests. She completed her university applications under the help of her teachers in that program.

Participant 3
Participant 3 was a senior year student in a public university in the West Coast when he participated in this study in the fall of 2014. He finished his primary and secondary education in China. He started to learn English in primary school. He had never been abroad before he came to the United States. He used agency service for university and visa applications. He did not take TOEFL when he applied to the universities. He studied in an ESL program in his current university for half a year before he started to take college courses.

Participant 4

Participant 4 was a senior year student in a public university in the Midwest when he participated in this study in the fall of 2014. Before his school provided English classes, he took English classes in a language company when he was in primary school. He finished his primary and secondary education in China. He took Gaokao and was admitted to a Chinese university. He decided to transfer to American universities during his freshman year. He took two to three sessions of TOEFL preparation courses in a most popular Chinese language company to prepare for the TOEFL test. He applied to his current university by himself. His TOEFL score was very low (below 61), so he received conditional admission from his current university. He studied at an ESL program for three months in a language company which was connected to his current university. After his completion of the ESL program, he started his undergraduate study in his current university. Some of the credits he gained in his previous Chinese university were transferred to his current university.

Participant 5

Participant 5 was a sophomore year student in a private university in Midwest when
she participated in this study in the fall of 2014. She finished her primary and secondary education in China. She started to learn English in primary school. In Grade 11, she exchanged to an American high school for one year. She had never studied in any English language training programs. She prepared the TOEFL test and university applications by herself. Her teacher in the American high school she studied before helped her polish her application essays.

Participant 6

Participant 6 was a junior year exchange student in a public university in the Midwest when she participated in this study in the fall of 2014. She finished her primary and secondary education in China. She started to learn English when she was around 10 years old. She studied in a Chinese university and came the American university through an exchange program provided by her home university. She prepared the IELTS by herself and received a decent score. She had never been abroad before she exchanged to the American university. At the time she participated in this study, she had been studying in the U.S. for 9 weeks.

Participant 7

Participant 7 was a first year student in a public university in the Midwest when he participated in this study in the fall of 2014. He started to learn English in primary school. He finished his primary and secondary education in China. Before his study in the U.S., he had never been abroad. He started to take TOEFL preparation courses after he took Gaokao in China. Simultaneously, he used agency service to apply to language programs and universities in the U.S. He did not take TOEFL test, because he received the admission from
an ESL program in the U.S. before he registered for the TOEFL test. He studied in the ESL program for six months. He started his undergraduate study in the spring of 2014.

Participant 8

Participant 8 was a transfer student in a public university in the Midwest when he participated in this study in the fall of 2014. He did not learn English until he went to an English program in Australia in 2012. He was born in South Korea and grew up in Japan. He went to school in Japan for six years, and moved back to South Korea with his family. After graduating from high school in South Korea, he studied in a Korean university from 2008 to 2010. Then he did his military service for two years. After that, he went to Australia to learn English for a year and a half. In 2013, he came back to South Korea and took TOEFL preparation courses for two months. He completed the university applications all by himself. Some of his credits he gained in the Korean university were transferred. At the time he participated in this study, he had been studying in the U.S. for 10 weeks.

Participant 9

Participant 9 was a senior year exchange student at a public university in Midwest when she participated in this study in the fall of 2014. At the time she participated she has studied in the United States for 11 weeks. She went to primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong, and started to learn English since Grade One. When she was in secondary school, she took three courses in Chinese and five A-Level courses in English. Exchanging to the American university was her first time to go abroad and leave her family. Before coming to the U.S., she completed three years college courses taught in English at a university in
Hong Kong. She took college English courses in her home university. She had never taken any English-test preparation courses.

**Participant 10**

Participant 10 was a senior year student at a public university in Midwest when he participated in this study in the fall of 2014. He went to primary and secondary schools in South Korea. When he was in the second year of middle school, he studied a middle school in Australia for half a year. After graduating from high school in South Korea, he was admitted to a Korean university in 2006. He served in the army for two years after he finished his sophomore year study in the Korean university. In 2010, he came to the U.S. to study English in a language company. He applied to his current university when he was studying in the English program.

**Participant 11**

Participant 11 was a junior year student at a public university in Midwest when he participated in this study in the fall of 2014. He went to primary school and middle school in South Korea. He started to learn English in 2005 when he moved with his family to an American northeastern city for one year and a half. Then he moved to Russia with his family. He lived in Russia for five years and finished his secondary education in Russia. The instruction language in his high school was English, and he took AP courses there. He did not take any TOEFL preparation courses, but he returned to South Korea to take SAT preparation courses in a private institution after graduating from high school. The institution also provided consultant service in study abroad, which helped him select overseas universities to
apply to. He also searched online for more information about university application and finished the university applications by himself.

Participant 12

Participant 12 was a senior year transfer student at a public university in Midwest when she participated in this study in the fall of 2014. She had never lived abroad before she came to study in the United States. She went to primary and secondary school in China, and started to learn English in primary school. She was admitted to a Sino-American undergraduate program through Gaokao. The program was run by a Chinese university and an American university together. The curriculum was designed by the American university, and all the courses were taught in English. Students study two to three years in the Chinese year and study in two to three years in the American university. After studying in this program for three years, she did not pass the English proficiency test provided by the American university so that she was not able to study in the American university. After that, she prepared TOEFL test by herself and used agency service to apply to other universities in the United States. Some of her credits gained in the Sino-American program were transferred to her current university.

Findings and Discussion

Following a grounded theory’s coding process, four themes with ten subthemes were generated in order to answer the research questions in this study (see Table 4). Theme One: English Learning in Their Homelands includes one subtheme, which introduced Subtheme 1. Their apprehensive feeling toward their English proficiency when they learn English in
homeland. Subthemes 2. Test preparation: high cost and low efficiency, 3. Preparation programs in homeland: advantages vs. disadvantages, 4. Preparation programs in host countries: advantages vs. disadvantages: are classified into Theme Two: Study abroad preparation program; Subtheme 5. Challenges of self-preparation and 6. Role of agencies are classified into Theme Three: Challenges of Completing University Applications. These three themes explain the first research question: how East Asian students prepared for their undergraduate study in U.S. universities. Subtheme 7. The importance of high GPA, 8. the role of English proficiency in academic success, 9. Still not easy: limitation of English, 10. An “outsider” on campus are classified into Theme Four: Academic Success and Challenges in U.S. Universities. This theme answers the second and third research questions: how their preparation affect their academic success in U.S. universities and what the challenges are in their current undergraduate study.

Table 4. Themes and subthemes in this study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme One: English Learning in Their Homelands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subtheme 1: Apprehensive feeling toward their English proficiency</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Two: Study Abroad Preparation Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subtheme 2: Test preparation: High cost but low efficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtheme 3: Preparation programs in homeland: Advantages vs. disadvantages</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subtheme 4: Preparation programs in host countries: Advantages vs. disadvantages</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Three: Challenges of Completing University Applications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subtheme 5: Challenges of self-preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtheme 6: Role of agencies: Advantages vs. disadvantages</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theme Four: Academic Success and Challenges in U.S. Universities

Subtheme 7: The importance of high GPA
Subtheme 8: The role of English proficiency in academic success
Subtheme 9: Still not easy: Limitation of English
Subtheme 10: An “outsider” on campus

Theme One: English Learning in Their Homelands

Subtheme 1: Apprehensive feeling toward their English proficiency. In this study, most participants reported that although they had learned English since primary school, English proficiency was the main worry when they recalled their preparation for studying in the U.S. Except Participant 8 who learnt Japanese as a foreign language in primary school and Participant 11 who did not learn any foreign language until middle school, ten participants started to learn English in primary school. They reported that they had learned English for at least eight years when they graduated from high school. Among the ten participants, however, only Participant 5 and 9 addressed their confidence in communicating with native English speakers. Participant 5 did not highlight her English learning experience in her Chinese primary and secondary schools. She emphasized that her English, especially speaking, dramatically improved during her exchange year in an American high school: “coz’ I stayed with an American host family, and the surrounding area, actually there is no Chinese besides me. I speak English like all the time. And everything I see I translate into English.” Participant 9 attributed her English fluency to attending bilingual secondary schools:

[When I prepared to study in the U.S.,]...I think it's not mainly for language, because I am used to use English as a learning language. In Hong Kong, we have class
conducted in English. Even for the university level, it is all in English. In high school, we can choose our selective, and some of my selectives are in Cantonese, and some of them are in English. I have eight subjects and then I have two conducted in Cantonese, and the remaining six are conducted in English...

More participants in this study, however, did not have experience in studying in bilingual schools or in English-speaking countries during their primary and secondary education. For them, English became one of the biggest obstacles to apply to American universities. When asked about their English learning in primary and secondary school, Participant 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10, and 12 all agreed that although they had been learning English in school for years, they found that their English was not communicative at all. They needed to take extra English programs before they took TOEFL or study in ESL programs before they began their undergraduate studies in the U.S. Participant 8 explained “studying English in school in Korea is not really helpful for students to speak and communicate with people who speak English.” Participant 10 who is also from South Korea said “when I just came to America, I cannot even speak a sentence as I told you.” Participants from China also had similar difficulties. Participant 3 stated the reason why he did not take TOEFL when he was preparing to study in the U.S.: “…after I graduated from high school, my English was too poor to pass TOEFL ... We do not learn speaking [English speaking] in China, coz there is no speaking in exams”

Participant 12 added:

Yeah, I learn English every day. [I have English class in high school every day.]
English is for Gaokao. You know, there are three main subjects, Chinese, Math, English. You study English to pass Gaokao, not for [communication.] We study grammar, words…uh…for exams.

Participants also reported that they attended English classes after school to achieve higher scores in examinations. Participant 12 recalled that “I took tutoring in English to get high scores in exams.” Participant 8 described that “In Korea, half [high] students study [English] by themselves. Half take classes in language schools.” However, after school courses did not help them improve their English proficiency to be as high as American universities require. Participant 4 said that he started to take after school English courses since primary school: “In primary school, I started to English a language company in my hometown, to learn from zero.”, but when he applied to American universities, his TOEFL score was still too low to be directly admitted. As a result, he had to study in an ESL program.

The statements of the participants are consistent with the literature review about the characteristics of schooling in East Asian countries and areas. Even though most East Asian schools offer English class since early grades in primary schools (Wang, 2007; Park, 2009), learning English under examination-oriented education systems does not make the students gain enough English skill for studying in American universities. According to the participants, attending cram schools or taking private tutoring classes to learn English is still popular among East Asian students, while these courses cannot improve their English skills but test taking skills. As a result, they have to seeking for various programs to improve their
English proficiency in order to meet the international admission requirements of American universities.

In addition, the findings show that speaking is a neglected skill in English learning in East Asia. English education starts in primary school in East Asian countries and areas, and using communicative approach in English teaching is advocated by the Ministry of Education in most East Asian countries and areas (Flaitz, 2003; Wang, 2007; Park, 2009). According to the participants, however, they seldom practice speaking in class as speaking is not part of any test. Instead, they practice a large number of English exercises on grammar and reading which are commonly tested in their exams in high school. Thus, when they apply to American universities, communicative English becomes one of their biggest barriers. At the same time, the findings also indicated that if students have more chances in practicing English speaking, such as being an exchange student in English speaking countries or taking English-medium courses in their homeland, students feel less worried about their English when they apply to American universities.

**Theme Two: Study Abroad Preparation Program**

**Subtheme 2: Test preparation: High cost and low efficiency.** When asked about how they prepared to study in American universities, nine of the participants also described the strategies they used to take English proficiency tests, such as TOEFL and IELTS, even though not all of them eventually took the tests. According to the participants, in China and South Korea, although most students started to learn English in primary school, TOEFL test, especially the speaking section, was still a challenge for them.
When preparing for TOEFL or IELTS test, three of them chose to prepare by themselves and five of them took TOEFL preparation courses. The participants who prepared by themselves complained that it was not worthy to spend so much money on the TOEFL/IELTS preparation courses. When asked about why they did not take any test preparation program, Participant 6 replied shortly “Because I’m poor!” Participant 5 repeatedly mentioned the high cost of TOEFL preparation programs in China during the interview:

No, I didn't take any TOEFL courses, because I think it's too expensive…Like I said, all the classes I know about TOEFL training in China are really expensive. Like you have to pay thousands of money for just...you know. And I don't want to spend that much money on that.

Even the participant who studied in these training courses would also complained the price: “If you prepare TOEFL in China, you also need to spend a lot of money.” told by Participant 7. He also mentioned that some international students paid other people for TOEFL answers: “[In U.S.] if you buy TOEFL answers, you need to pay $2000. That is a lot!”

According to the four participants who took TOEFL preparation courses, these courses mainly provided test-taking skills in reading and writing and exercises in speaking. They spent two to six months on these courses. Participant 8 described:

I just focused on the test. I learnt the exam in the courses. I think it’s not really helpful for my speaking and communicating with other people. But the skill is very helpful to
get a high score in the exam.

However, not all the participants were satisfied with their TOEFL scores after taking the preparation courses, especially the speaking part. Participant 4 took three sessions of TOEFL preparation courses in a famous language school in China, but his TOEFL score did not meet the English proficiency of direct admission:

I actually register in the language school. It is a very popular language school in China. I had some probably two or three sessions about TOEFL and just general speaking ability exercise there. I also took the TOEFL test, but got a very low score at that point.

Even the participants who achieved decent TOEFL scores through TOEFL training classes, they found it hard to adapt to their academic study in the U.S. As Participant 2 said, “I think the TOEFL courses I took were very important, because it helped me have a good score. Otherwise I won’t be here. But most I learnt [in the TOEFL courses] is not useful for my study here.” She reported that her current university only offers direct admissions, thus her university did not offer ESL speaking class for international students. However, she found some of her Chinese friends who had never studied in English-medium courses before they went to college experienced a hard time to give preparations in class. After taking both TOEFL training courses in China and ESL courses in the United States, Participant 7 commented that TOEFL training courses only trained him how to answer questions in the test but not communicative English.

Besides taking in TOEFL preparation courses, six participants also shared their own
strategies for TOEFL/IELTS preparation, such as memorizing vocabulary and writing templates, doing test practices, practicing speaking with native English speakers, etc. Memorization was the main strategy highlighted by them. Most of them spent a large amount of time to memorize the vocabulary. Participant 5 who received a decent TOEFL said “I spent most of time to do with the vocabulary part. I think vocabulary is very important in the test.” Participant 12 also believed that memorizing a large number of words and essay templates could help dramatically improve TOEFL scores:

I just memorized the vocabulary books and to memorize the writing models and vocabulary words. I just memorized one thousand. There has ten thousand, but I just memorized one thousand. So my score is lower. My friends say if you can remember ten thousand words, your TOEFL score will be high...Yeah, I think the models I memorized let me write faster in the exam.

Furthermore, doing a large number of exercises, such as TOEFL mock practices was another strategy. Participant 2 descried “I practiced old TOEFL exams to improve my listening for one month…For the writing, I think I write one essay per day for several weeks. And I think I practice with what will be on the exam.” Participant 5 also practiced a lot before she took TOEFL:

I took the exam in mid-September. So starting from the beginning of the September, I have like 15 days to prepare for the exam. So I don't know what is called. It's like a package that you can get online for like 200 RMB (32 US dollars). I think it's 24 or 20 something packages exam. And I chose to do it every day, just keep doing, keep
They also emphasized that talking to native English speakers would help them improve their speaking. Participant 2 mentioned “My TOEFL teacher is an English speaker. I can practice [speaking] with her after class.” Participant 5 found an online chatting program to practice her oral English:

I think it's like 15 RMB (2.4 US dollars) for 50 minutes to talk to a foreigner online. Like a website you can pay every time and they will be a foreigner who speaks English. You just talk to them. Yeah, I practiced for the speaking session [of TOEFL], because I heard that the speaking is the hardest part for Chinese.

Participant 12 had a language exchange partner when she was preparing for studying in the U.S. She addressed the benefits of language exchange:

Last year I have a language exchange friend. It's a man. He wants to study Chinese and I want to study English. So we have language exchange. I think it's very helpful for yourself, because when you told the Chinese, the foreign people cannot understand a lot of things, because they have very base words and you will explain the words. This is very helpful for you, because you can translate this and you can practice your speaking and your vocabulary.

During interviews, participants not only described how they prepared TOEFL but also imparted some TOEFL cheating phenomena around them. Participant 7 narrated how his friend cheated in TOEFL when he studied in an ESL program in the Midwest:

Do you hear about the TOEFL cheating? That problem happens in my language center...
very very often. In the United States, there are some underground companies, like black companies. They are very huge, very large. They have many people. We say "gun man" like that. They take the TOEFL test from the East part of U.S. and the students go to the West part [to take TOEFL]. So they play with the time differences…And I have a classmate last semester cheated in the TOEFL test when she was Level 6 in the language program. [There are 12 levels in total.] Actually her English skills is very poor but she goes to the school [her current undergraduate college]. What happened is that she can only get 20 for the exam [in college]. Some students in this language center, they think the language center is the biggest mountain in front of them. In fact their college life is very hard than ESL programs. The language center is only for language. The college is other than language. So some students [who cheated in TOEFL] go to school and their GPA is pretty low.

He also noted that some universities had noticed this problem and stopped accepting TOEFL scores from the students who had enrolled ESL programs:

When I study in the ESL program, at first was in another Midwest university. That university have a limit that you only use ESL score to go to this school, not use TOEFL anymore. That is a limit to stop this. But what the problem is these part of students they go to other schools.

The findings first show that East Asian students use various ways to prepare for the English proficiency test. Taking TOEFL training programs is a common strategy among them. The most useful part they learn in these programs is test-taking strategies instead of the
English language itself. Although Liu (2014) argued that using strategies to take TOEFL tests would not significantly affect the scores, participants in this study believe that the strategies are helpful for them to achieve higher scores in TOEFL.

Second, when preparing for TOEFL and IELTS, the main strategies they use, such as taking training courses, memorizing vocabulary, and doing a large number of exercises, are commonly found in the studies on cram schools, examinations, teaching styles in East Asian education (Flaitz, 2003; Sit, 2009). Although these strategies were not recommended by ETS (Liu, 2014), according to the participants in this study, these strategies are considered as efficient ways to achieve high scores in TOEFL tests.

Third, ETS and university admissions should also be aware the TOEFL cheating phenomenon mentioned in this study. In 2013, ETS in China adjusted TOEFL test time from 9:30 to 8:30. A large number of Chinese test takers guessed this change was aimed to prevent the leak of test answers from the test centers in South Korea and Japan, because due to the time difference, TOEFL tests in Japan and South Korea began one hour earlier than those in China.

Fourth, students do not have to retake TOEFL if they complete the ESL programs in the U.S. This should be noticed by future research on the relationship between language proficiency and academic performance. Most research used the TOEFL scores that students submitted when they applied to universities, but they did not clarify if there was any participant who was conditionally admitted at first and who had taken any ESL courses after admission. Since after completing ESL programs, the students’ English may improve, their
previous TOEFL scores cannot reflect their English proficiency in college any more.

Subtheme 3: Preparation programs in their homelands: Advantages vs. disadvantages. Participant 2, 9, and 12 attended preparation programs for study abroad in their homeland. They all mentioned that being taught by English speakers help them improve their English and get prepared to study in the U.S. Participant 2 who studied in a college preparation program in China addressed her reasons why she chose to study there:

I chose that school, also because the school has some native [English] speakers, native professors, so I can prepare my speaking skills. Also I think at that school we can say what we think, what we say frankly. In other schools, you just listen. And I think that school is a preparation for me to enter American schools, because all of the teachers speak English instead of Mandarin.

Participant 9 was taught by professors from English speaking countries when she studied in her university in Hong Kong, which helped her adapt her academic study in the U.S.: “I think actually in Hong Kong…some of the professors are foreign professors and some would teach in American style. I experienced American teaching style before coming here. One class only. And I know a little bit about it.”

Participant 12 who studied in an international cooperation program in China described her advantages in class, compared with other Chinese students who had never studied in English-medium programs in China:

Because in my program I studied, the textbook is English, the test is English, the teachers speak in English. And the others, my friends, maybe freshmen here, I have a
lot of friends that are freshmen or exchange students. When they study in their cities, they just use the Chinese. So they cannot adapt the English. But I can adapt this [undergraduate courses in the U.S.]. So I think it is good.

Although they often interacted with native English speakers in these programs and found they could better understand the professors’ lectures than other international students who never studied in any of these programs, they reported that when they first came to the U.S. they also faced culture shock. Participant 12 said “Here is different from what I learnt in China. I don’t have problem in class, because some class, like Economics, I learnt in China before. But I need help in a lot of things in life. My English is very low…”

According to the participants, studying in study abroad preparation program, A-Level courses in high school, attending English-medium college, and international cooperation program in their homeland may help them better prepare their college life in the United States. The most useful aspect in these programs is being taught by native English speakers. As discussed in Theme One, East Asian students hardly have any chance to speak English in traditional schooling. Even though they may achieve decent TOEFL scores and receive direct admissions without attending any preparation programs, when they first started their college life, it might be hard for them to adapt to their new life both academically and culturally. Studying in preparation programs in homeland is able to help the students adapt to their academic life, but since they have never lived abroad, it may be difficult for them to adapt to their American life at the beginning.

Subtheme 4: Preparation programs in their host countries: Advantages vs.
disadvantages. Six participants who studied in ESL programs as full-time students, when they planned to apply to or had applied to American universities. Their English proficiency did not meet their universities’ English proficiency requirements for international students. As a result, they chose to study in ESL programs first. Participant 4 explained “I took TOEFL, but the score was low at that time …I studied in a language company before I went to college. I spent 3 sessions which is a three-month session.” Participant 1 who also took TOEFL when she applied to American universities, but “at that time I took a placement test [in the community college], and it makes me only take one ESL courses and then I move on, moved to English class.” Participant 7 further elucidated how he came to study in the U.S. without taking any English proficiency test:

Because my English was poor before, then the agent company told me there is some schools that don't need TOEFL or other like SAT. You just need to go abroad and have some classes [ESL courses] then you can go to the college. So I think that will be easier. So [I studied in the ESL program]…

Although they studied in different ESL programs, most of the courses they took were similar, such as academic reading, writing, speaking, and grammar. Participant 3 studied in the ESL program in his university: “I took two classes in that program. Two courses in one semester. One is called oral skill, which is like practice your speaking and listening. Another one is called GWR, which is grammar, writing, and reading.” Similarly, Participant 7 who studied in a language company in the U.S., had comparable courses:

That's not the course you pick. That course has already been set up for everyone. They
have SSP for daily talking and sentence structure, something like that. Also we have vocabulary class. We have writing class, computer practicing class for every day. [In each level,] the courses [course names] are totally the same, the levels is different.

Participant 10 described his ESL program:

I cannot remember the name of the class. It’s 5 years ago. I learnt grammar first. At five and six level, I learnt grammar. I didn’t learn vocabulary. We don’t need to learn or memorize any vocabulary. I learnt speaking, writing and a little bit of grammar...

When asked about their satisfaction of the ESL programs, five of the six participants were satisfied with the ESL programs. Participant 1 spoke highly of the ESL program she studied in:

I think everything [in the ESL program] is helpful as long as it's in English. [Before I started my ESL program,] I hoped to improve my writing skill, coz at that time I didn't know anything about how to write a formal paper in university. And also improve my oral skill. At the beginning, I am not quite confident with my English skills, not only speaking but also writing, but my professor [in the ESL program], he encouraged me a lot. I think that is very important. I took only one semester English class, and then I started regular college classes.

Participant 3 expressed his agreement on the English-speaking environment in ESL courses: “I think the class is helpful, because the environment in the two classes, I have to speak English, no other language.” According to Participant 10, studying in ESL program in the U.S. also gave him opportunities to make English-speaker friends, which helped him
improve his oral English:

At that time I tried to make a lot of friends and most of them are Americans. They help me practice. Every time I hear a sentence and I decided to use this sentence tomorrow. And I used it. For like three months, I can speak English fluently, but not that fluently you know, not like native American [native English speakers]. But after six months, I can pretend I speak like Americans.

Besides of their improvement in English, most participants also emphasized that their previous experience in English-speaking countries helped them adapt to the life in American colleges. Studying in an ESL program in Australia, Participant 8 found himself easily adapt to his college life in U.S.:

I think the most advantage for me studying in Australia is that I could learn the culture. Coz Australian culture is very similar to American, so I could learn the U.S. culture easily, and I could know how to communicate with people here… I think international student like me have to get along with American people and speak a lot, communicate with people a lot, because we come here to study English and get a degree. This helps me succeed in future.

Yet, Participant 4 expressed his dissatisfaction of his ESL program. Although he successfully completed the program in three months, his English improvement did not meet his expectation:

Before I started my learning at the ESL program, I thought it will be a great improvement for me in all the aspects of English, such as writing or speaking that
help me to get too quickly used to the pace of college, but it turned out that it was not as much as I expected from the learning at the ESL program in such a short (period), three months. So I thought I could be very fluent in speaking English at that point after the three-month session. But actually not that fluent… You know, the ESL program is ok. I wouldn't say it's the least or the worst, but it's just alright. The price is very expensive, but you learn short term session. They help you improve somehow, but ...

Apart from studying ESL programs, study abroad experience in middle and high school was also considered as an efficient way to improve English. Participant 5 and Participant 11 recalled their study abroad experience in the United States when they were in middle and high school. Participant 5 shared her exchange experience in an American high school: “It was pretty cool, coz’ I stayed with an American host family, and the surrounding area, actually there is no Chinese besides me. I speak English like all the time. And everything I see I translate into English.” She found that she better adapted to college life than other new international students:

Well, I think yeah, definitely at the beginning I had advantages than others [international students]. Well for now everybody has been living here for a year, so pretty much [the same] I would like to say. But at the beginning people are scared, because they have never been away from their parents and their home, and they are unfamiliar with the rules, how American people talk. Because I lived in America and I have a lot of American friends when I was in high school so I am really comfortable
staying here.

Participant 11 who lived in America for one year and a half with his family when he was in middle school, added “Now for me, I was speaking English when I was young, so for me communication is not a problem. … [When I prepared for university applications,] I didn’t really focus on TOEFL. TOEFL wasn’t really hard for me.” He later added that he gained more common sense about American education so that he was able to save time and money to finish his undergraduate study:

Because education is really about how many things you know. It’s about the knowledge power. If you know something, you can graduate maybe in two years. Someone graduates in four to five years, so you can use the time. It’s just time management. You can use or spend you’d better know before you come to the university or you choose the university or the field or area you are going to study in. For example, some classes you can take in community college nearby. Some classes you have to take in the university. So if you know the information, you can save your money, as the community college is 50% cheaper than here. And it is not that hard. You can pass the class easily and you can keep the GPA high. You can save your money.

Although they claimed that TOEFL/IELTS test scores were important for them to receive direct admissions from American universities, the preparation for the TOEFL/IELTS tests did not bring them any benefits in their undergraduate study. The participants who studied in the ESL programs mentioned that if they successfully complete their ESL
programs, they do not have to need TOEFL score for university admission. Moreover, some participants even found that they could participate and perform better in class, comparing with the students who took TOEFL when they applied to universities. Participant 3 who took ESL courses in the U.S. expressed that in class his English was much better than other Chinese students who took TOEFL and received direct admission:

Because some students they take TOEFL test, so they do not need to take language classes. But you know, Chinese student is really good at take test, and I don't think sometimes they really learn English. So I think the English class [ESL course] is helpful. I think my listening and speaking is no problem for me. Maybe reading and writing I still have little problem, but I think I am still better than the students who didn't take the language classes.

Participant 10 also compared himself with other students who used TOEFL score to apply to his current university. He expressed that his English, especially speaking, was much better than the “TOEFL takers”:

Yeah. I also have a friend whose TOEFL score is 96, but his speaking is not as good as mine. Because he only studied grammar, reading skills, and listening. They can listen whatever they hear, but they cannot speak English as good as me. Speaking is like 90% in our life. So I think I am better….. I am more comfortable in class and I can participate more than they do.

Moreover, Participant 9 noticed some of her classmates who were directly admitted with satisfying TOEFL scores had to read translated textbooks:
I may have some advantage compared with other international students who had never studied in English environment. Maybe I can understand the professors and the students more and easier. And that helps me to learn better. Some of my friends are struggling, and I know that they have to buy Chinese books. Because they have English readings and they have to read English versions and they buy Chinese book. It's the same book, but it's Chinese version. It's really hard for me to read twice. I don’t know how they have time to do it.

The findings indicate that adapting English speaking environment before undergraduate study in English speaking countries may positively affect their academic performance in their American universities. In this study, participants who adapt to English-speaking environment before their undergraduate study are more academically successful in college than those who never studied in any English-medium programs or those who only studied in TOEFL training programs before. Through studying in English-speaking environments, i.e. studying in ESL programs and secondary schools in English-speaking countries, they are more confident to participate in class and talk to native English speakers, compared with other East Asian students who only study for TOEFL when they prepare for studying abroad. However, not all participants are satisfied with their ESL programs. Future research may focus on evaluating different ESL programs to help ESL teachers and administrators to adjust their programs to be more suitable for East Asian students.
Theme Three: Challenges of Completing University Applications

Due to the language barriers and different university application requirements between the U.S. and their home countries, not all international students could complete their university applications by themselves. Instead, some of them used agency service to complete their applications. In this study, six participants who had relatively higher TOEFL/IELT scores and two participant who had lower TOEFL scores applied to American universities by themselves; four participants who had lower TOEFL scores or did not take TOEFL used agency help to complete their university and visa applications.

Subtheme 5: Challenges of self-preparation. Eight participants who applied by themselves described how they completed their university applications, which was a challenging process for them. With little assistance from their schools, they mainly searched all the information online. Participant 1 who spent a long time to finish her university applications said “I prepared by myself. I searched everything online It took me for a year to prepare TOEFL and university application.” Participant 2 narrated the details on how she selected universities to apply to and how her teacher helped her in the application process:

I think first I need to do research about different universities and think about the major I want to apply. Because I am interested in painting and drawing, and my father is an engineer, so I choose to major in landscape architecture. So I applied to several universities that can offer this major. Then I do research about the application process. I wrote my personal statement and some writing assignment. Also I compared the location of different university and safety issues and also the transportation and
atmosphere.

Besides searching online, some participants were able to receive help from their teachers from their preparation programs. Participant 2 later mentioned: “And I asked my teacher [in the language program] the potential of different universities, the potential of after you graduate, what is the percentage, what's the rates of employment after graduation.” Participant 4, 5, 6, 9, and 11 also received help from their teachers and peers. For example, Participant 4 described “I think I have asked some questions to some professors who had studied in the US.” Participant 5 asked her teacher in American high school to polish her application essays: “I sent all my essays to one of my English teacher that I had when I was in America to kind of correct my grammar problems for sentence structures to making sure everything make sense.” As an exchange student, Participant 9 learnt how to prepare the university and visa applications from “the peer students who came here before.”

Although applying to U.S. universities is a challenge for East Asian students, it is still possible for them to complete the applications by themselves and successfully receive admissions. However, these students’ English proficiency is relatively high, and they often apply for direct admission. In this study, expect Participant 1, all the participants who applied to the universities by themselves were directly admitted by their U.S. universities.

Subtheme 6: Role of agencies: Advantages vs. disadvantages. The participants using agency service described agency as a convenient tool to study abroad. According to Participant 3, he did not need to do anything after they paid to the agency: “I didn't prepare. I used agency. I used agency to do my application. I just followed their suggestion.” Participant
7 further explained why many Chinese used the agency service:

Every student choose agent companies, because they do not know about the foreign countries. They have no experience for that. The parents also do not have experience. Most of the students they choose agent company, because the company says we do everything for you.

Participant 10 and Participant 12 told that agency help was widely used in South Korea and China. “I used agency service…It's common. My friends all use agency, so I also use the [agency.]” told by Participant 12. Participant 10 also recalled how he used the agency service in South Korea:

Actually there is a large group of agencies in South Korea. They are everywhere. I kind of hired them to prepare the application and visa form for me. And it was like this. Before I came to the U.S., I knew nothing about here. They just recommend me. They said this city is very nice to study English, because there are a few Koreans here. Only one, two, three. Actually they first recommend me to go to LA or New York, but my mom wanted me to go to here. That’s why I am here. I didn’t search any information about my language program. No. (Laugh)

However, some participants, not only those applied to universities by themselves but also one who used agency help, expressed that they distrusted the study abroad agencies. According to Participant 8, during the application process the agency in South Korea would not tell their client nothing but the application results:

I could get help from agency, but I thought if I get help from agency, I don't know
anything about the information. So...I thought I have to do it by myself. If somebody was on behalf of me, if I don't know the information, I cannot have them. The service is not that experience. They can get help from the agency, but they cannot get help forever.

Participant 7 regretted to use the agency service, because it was the agency’s fault that delayed his enrollment in the ESL program:

They don't manage that very well, coz you can start the ESL programs in any month. But they don't tell us. They just tell us spring semester or fall semester. They told me I can only start in the next spring, so I waited for about half a year.

Later, he continued to describe the agency service in China based on his own experience and observation:

The agent company in China I think it's very hmmm....I use the word "bad", because sometimes they only do the things for the basic apply for the schools. They do not know specific things for the specific student for their need for the specific course. Like why I go to this ESL program is that they just tell you there is a way you can go abroad. I think that is the very big problem in China right now.

The findings showed that it was not easy for East Asian students to complete the university applications all by themselves. For the students who completed their applications by themselves, they received assistance from their teachers, peers, and others. The results also confirmed that agency help was widely used in China and South Korea. However, different from the quantitative result in Zhang & Hardon’s research (2013) which indicated that most
Chinese students were satisfied with the agency service they used, participants in this study were not fully satisfied with the agency service and would not recommend their friends to use agency help. After studying in the U.S. for a while, they realized the agents’ knowledge was not more than what they could find online. They recommended future international applicants to complete their applications by themselves.

**Theme Four: Academic Success and Challenges in American Universities**

**Subtheme 7: The importance of high GPA.** When asked about their understanding on academic success, all the participants narrowly construed academic success as achieving high GPA. Most of them stressed the importance of high GPA to themselves and their parents due to their time and money consumption in the United States. “Very important!” Participant 6 responded to the importance of GPA without thinking. Participant 1 addressed academic success as a “kind of like an achievement.” She explained the meaning of gaining high scores in college: “Because I spent a lot of money, time, I need to be success.” Participant 4 also mentioned that academic performance was essential to him, as his parents paid much money for his tuition:

> It is very important to me because my parents already spent so much money on this program and I've conquered so much challenges. And I think the result, the big result comes from academic performance, so that's extremely important to me. I consider that academic result to reflect my overall efforts that I made here in the US.

Academic success was not only important for the participants themselves but also their parents. Participant 12 indicated that “I think it [academic success] is important,
because, as you know, the Chinese family very... They just see your grades. Your graduate GPA, they saw this as the most important thing.” She added that if she received high GPA in school, she would receive rewards from their parents: “it’s like scholarship, not scholarship, you know....some goods, or something. Maybe they can give your airplane ticket. You can come back your home. This is... I think is...you know, rewards.”

Furthermore, some participants believed that good academic performance showed their abilities to employers when they applied to jobs. In Participant 8’s opinion, “academic success is important. The most important thing! GPA can say how I study hard in college, and the company I will work in can see this what kind of people I am.” Participant 9 and 11 also agreed with the same view. Participant 11 perceived that academic success was important in business career:

Academic is important to everyone if you want to a high position. I don’t know other area, but if you want to be success in business area, you need higher education in my opinion. The only thing you can show on your resume is your high GPA. You are just a student. What you can do is just keep your GPA high and look for other course or work if you want to study.

Participant 9, however, also noted that even though she believed high GPA would help her better prepare for entering the society, future development needed more than GPA:

“When you do more, you can do better in the future and you can have a better plan for your future. Not just about the GPA.”

High GPA was also essential for further education. Participant 2 described her future
plan that if she could not find a job in the United States, she would apply to a graduate program, which had requirements on applicants’ GPA:

I will study for a master degree if I cannot find a job, I think. My parents also want me to go to graduate school. Knowledge can offer me more opportunities to meet better job, better salary, to better take care of myself. But if my GPA is low, I cannot go to graduate school. Thus, academic success, high GPA is important to me.

Participant 5’s future goal was to be a doctor in the United States. Due to the competitiveness in medical school, she emphasized that the importance of high GPA to herself: “It's really important. Apparently it's on the top, because it's really hard for international students to get into medical school. You have to have a really high GPA... So I do really care about my grades in school and all academic stuff.”

Yet, for other participants, like Participant 3, 7, and 10, they did not consider GPA as the most important thing in their college life. Participant 3 acknowledged that there was a minimum GPA requirement in his program, but he said he was content as long as his GPA met the minimum requirement: “Like in my school, if we want to go to Business College, we have to have a more than 3.0 GPA. Otherwise we cannot go to Business College. So we have to more than 3.0 GPA. Besides that, I don’t think it [GPA] is important.”

Although Participant 7 had to keep his GPA higher than 3.2 to maintain his scholarship, he claimed that GPA was not the most important achievement in college:

I think the academic achievement is not the only thing for us. When you go to the society, you go to work, you are learning, but not only for study. You should have
more skills to solve other problems, because when you get a job, you can’t just only think for the academic. The high GPA...You have to get that score. Like we have scholarship. In our school is 3.2 to keep that. You have to study hard for that. I think GPA is that...I am not very care about GPA, but I will try my best.

Participant 10 said that in his field, professional certificate was more important when applying to jobs:

Just graduation is very important to me. Most companies need at least a bachelor degree. GPA is not that important. Because in my major, there is a SOA that is approved by the government. It is an important thing for us. It’s like a professional certificate. I need that for jobs. It’s very hard. I need a few months to pass these exams. Seven exams in total.

The findings in this sub-theme first indicate that high GPA is extremely important to most East Asian students, which corresponds to the value of education in East Asia. In the reviewed literature, scholars demonstrated that achieving success in school, particularly gaining high grades in the exams, was highly valued in East Asian culture (Choi & Nieminen, 2013). Although there are many aspects that represent academic success, most participants in this study defined academic success simply as gaining high grades in school. Originally from the countries and areas whose education is test-oriented, score is the core aim in their study. They believed that high GPA would help them find better jobs in future. This belief can be widely found in previous research (Mitsui, 2009; Choi, 2012; Choi & Nieminen, 2013). Even they have studied in U.S. universities in which gaining high GPA is not valued as the most
important goal of education, they still consider their educational outcomes under East Asian values.

Second, the results in this study show that East Asian students need to achieve academic success to meet their parents’ expectations. Participants expressed that their parents had high expectation on their study in the U.S. Some mentioned that they might go to graduate school by following her parents’ willingness. Participant 12 described that whenever she received high scores in school, her parents would gave her gifts as rewards. She generated that most Chinese parents would do so. According to Rogoff (2003) and Lee and Morrish (2012), in Confucian culture, academic success was considered as an honor for the whole family. The participants’ description on their parent expectation on their academic success exactly reflected this value in the Confucian culture.

**Subtheme 8: The role of English proficiency in academic success.** When asked about how their English proficiency affected their academic success, most participants agreed that their English proficiency and grades were positively correlated. According to Participant 3, “I think my English skill is related to my GPA, because some class, if your English is not good enough, you just cannot understand the class. It is really important that you have really good English skill.” Participant 1 described English as a hero in her academic study in the U.S.; “Everything is about English. If you want a great grade in America, English is the hero.” Participant 5 replied “I think it's a really essential role, because if I really want a high GPA, I need to have really good English.” Moreover, Participant 9 found:

English is really...help... (Laugh)...because people...the professors teach in English. If
my English skills are bad, I can barely listen to them. If I have better English skills, I
can get the points more easily. It's really important, because if your English is bad,
English will affect your performance in class and your learning process, if you have
some difficulties in your English skills.

In addition, Participant 4 explained in details how English influenced his academic
study:

I think English plays 75-80% of the importance, because everything is based on
English. Although I study computer science, we do have a lot of code or script in
computer that please consider that as a language to achieve certain tasks. But we still
need to use English to communicate with colleagues or the classmates to express how
you did that task, how you write code. So clearly in communication, English is so
crucial that it really determines how much confidence you have for your job or it
reflects how much you know in your technical skill.

Other participants also expressed that the fluency of English made them easily
communicate with people from different countries, which indirectly affected their
performance in school. For example, Participant 6 mentioned that because of her fluent
English, she was able to conduct a research project by interviewing international students:

English is really helpful. There are so many people speaking different languages, and
we can still communicate just by English. I think that's really awesome. With this, I
can do my research [on international students, which was a class assignment]. We can
communicate well.
The findings showed that English was essential for them in academic success. The participants perceived that their English proficiency would negatively affect their performance in class. This result kept the consistency of the results of pervious research which measured the relationship between English proficiency and academic performance. However, most previous studies were only conducted among international students. In this study, when asked about their academic success, all participants would compare their performance with American students instead of other international students. This may indirectly reflect that East Asian students’ high expectation in academic success which was widely addressed and found in previous research (Flaitz, 2003; Rogoff, 2003; Fong, 2007; Park, Byun, & Kim, 2011)

**Subtheme 9: Still not easy: Limitation of English.** Even though they made huge improvement in English during their study abroad preparation and current undergraduate study, English was still the main challenge they faced in college. Limited writing skills and vocabulary were frequently mentioned by most participants. They perceived that the limitation in writing skills and lack of vocabulary negatively affected their grades and performance in class. Participant 5 found that compared with American students, it took her longer to write papers: “I spend a lot of time writing papers and the grade I get is ok, but I think I spend longer time than Americans on a paper.” Participant 9 reported that she wished she would have taken academic writing courses in American college:

> I would have definitely taken it without the credit barriers. Although I took college English courses in Hong Kong, I just learnt summary writing. I feel my English level
stays in middle school. I am not very confident with my English ability because I have very weak foundation. My grammar skills are not good. When I write, it's terrible. I can make many many grammar mistakes.

Both Participant 1 and 4 mentioned lack of vocabulary affected their performance in class. Participant 1 expressed that lack of vocabulary limited her writing: “I want to learn more vocabulary to improve my writing. In some of the classes, it requires high writing skills as American students, so I think that’s hard to get a high [grade].” Participant 4 explained that although he wanted to join a brainstorm game in class, lack of vocabulary led him to spend longer time understanding the game and giving answers:

I have telecommunication class which is script writing, and now we have a, play a broad game in class to help brainstorm the idea. So in that class we played "Belasco" that really requires you to quickly come out with an idea, description of a role you played a character, what the story development can be, but I feel, sometimes I don't know what to say, because of two reasons. First I don't really understand what is the rule of the game, although I tried my best to read through the description. I still can see some new vocabulary there. Also even though I understand some concept, it takes me a while to say what I think.

He continued to comment that English was one of the challenges for international students. Even though he had been studying in the United States for four years and received decent grades in most of his classes, he still struggled with expressing his opinions in class:

I think it's getting a little bit better year by year, but it's not a dramatic improvement.
So I think it's still a barrier when we come to communication or any other affair if it's involved...I still..... but I think obviously English is one of the disadvantages when you comes to academic performance, because in the class probably you need to use English to express, to quickly summarize your opinion and express that in front of people. And that's sometimes a challenge to me because I don't.... what I had in my thought, I have to think about how to express it in English, what vocabulary I should use, and sometimes the concept is complicated so I have to use terminologies, some very accurate words to describe that, the knowledge you are learning, and that requires kind of quick reaction, so you can bring that on table fast enough before some others already get the answer.

In addition, some participants, like Participant 2, 4, 5 and 9 mentioned the slangs and idioms in English often confused them. Participant 2 found in daily conversation and class there were many words that she had never seen in her textbooks. Participant 9 also experienced “sometimes in my business class, the professor and my classmates will use some….oh, I think it’s slang, slang, and some names of local brands in their examples. I have never heard them before, so that's difficult.” Similar problem also bothered Participant 5:

…because it [English] is not my native language and when I take to American people they all sometimes they have a new language come out that is not in the dictionary or are not relevant to , so it kind of making…it’s hard to understand them.

Results in this sub-theme find that English writing and American culture are East Asian students’ biggest barriers in American universities, no matter how long they have
studied in the U.S. First, According to the participants, even though the participants had finished ESL programs and general writing class for undergraduate students, they still struggled with their writing abilities. For the participants who were directly admitted to the university, they were usually required to take one ESL writing class in college. Although they acknowledged that they learnt the rules of academic writing, the learning outcomes were not as satisfying as they expected. They complained that the grammar they learnt in ESL classes was too easy, although they admitted that they still made many grammar mistakes in their writing. Participant 8 reported that he was arranged into an academic writing class based on his TOEFL score, but what he learnt in that class was the same as he learnt in the ESL program in Australia. Participant 11 also mentioned that he had taken an ESL writing class to improve his writing skills. However, he found that his writing was not improved after completing that class.

**Subtheme 10: An “outsider” on campus.** Although all the participants reported that they received satisfying grades in class, most of them felt isolated on campus. On one hand, some of them wished they could get involved with as many university and community activities as possible. On the other hand, according to Participant 2, she found that when she attended some events, she did not enjoy them as American students did: “I tried to join community services, but I don’t know why I am doing that. (Laugh)” Moreover, it was hard for them to balance the time they spend on their study and the activities. She further added:

Yes, getting involved on campus should make me more successful in college. But I know that you have to spend time and efforts on these activities. Sometimes you don't
get the expected results from the activities. Probably just waste of time, probably just know people to say hello, say nice to meet you, but no longer really anything else happens beyond that, so in terms of that division, I think that it is really important for me to improve the academic performance, but is not to be more involved in ...

Participant 6 also struggled with spending proper time on her study and hanging out with her American friends:

Sometimes I hang out with my friends too much because I want to learn American culture. Then I don't have enough time to study. Actually I can find enough time, but the bad thing is I will panic to feel that I didn't spend enough time on my study. But if I just focus on my study, it will feel like kind of awful, because I don't want to just stay in the library and study all day long. I like to hang out too…

When asked about why they felt that they were not involved on campus and community, many participants complained that they were not able to learn authentic American culture before they came to the U.S. and their university did not offer useful courses or supports to help them adapt American culture. Participant 12 reported that she took one course about American society and culture when she was in China, but what she learnt was not the same as what she experienced:

I studied a course USA.....I don't know how to say it in English, the course's name. I studied the history, the politics, and cultures. I think the book, what in the book, it hasn't happened in my life. Because it's history and about big cities. And my current college town maybe it's very far from a big city….it’s different.
According to Participant 2, 3, 4, and 11, many universities offer ethnic courses which introducing American immigration history, American society, and social issues in the United States. They considered these courses as methods to learn American culture. However, what they learnt was not as useful as they expected. According to Participant 3, in his university international students were required to take at least one ethnic course, but he did not think that course would help him understand American culture: “And I took international culture or American culture. I don’t think it’s helpful, because I am not interested in these courses. I think those classes are so boring. Maybe they are a little bit helpful, but not much.” Similarly, Participant 2 took one course about Asian Americans: “I was hoping to know more American culture from that class, but I learn nothing. It’s not related to my life. I just learnt some Asian American history, something like that.” Agreeing with Participant 2 and 3, Participant 4 added his feelings after taking the ethnic course:

I took Ethnic 1010. It should be helpful, but in that class I didn't experience… From the description of the class, it sounds that you are learning the culture, the US culture here within different race, people in different races, and how they work together, what history the encounter had been through, but after learnt that, I still feel that it's kind of a distance for international students to really get involved to understand the concept from first hand, because we kind of focus on academic study, that we don't... or I don't as much as involved on campus as much as normal American students do. Even that course taught about the American personalities, but what does that mean to international students? It's not directly related. It's just somehow...they give you the
concept that you don't....you can see the concept, but you don't know how is that to you as an international student.

Despite of the lack of American culture courses in college, some participants also found ways to learn and adapt American culture. Studying in American high schools was considered as an efficient way to adapt American culture by Participant 2 and 5. Participant 5 recalled her exchange year in her American high school:

And I tried to join cheer leading team and top team, and academic group, and take courses from other American, join the homecoming dance, and ...I kind of joint a lot of high school activities and tried to learn how American high schools do. Yeah, that's pretty about it. It's about culture exchange. I think my one exchange experience is really adequate [to adapt American culture], because I am alone in the States, and it's all depends on myself, to challenge myself to speak English, to talk to people, so I really think this is even better than a course [American culture course].

Participant 2 also reported that she knew many Chinese students who came to the U.S. in their high school years. She found that these students could adapt college life better than she did:

I can tell who had high school in the United States, they perform better in college. Those students are more involved in native speaker environment. They are more likely to with the native speak, native student. I think first they speak English more fluently, so they are more confident to speak. Also I think they went to high school and they knew some students already. Most of them were in high school in the city
which is very near to our university. They already have some friends here.

Including Participant 2 and 5, nine participants found that making friends with American students would also help them learn American culture. For example, both Participant 1 and 8 described that they played sports games with Americans and learnt American culture from them. Participant 1 recalled how she learnt American culture when she first came to the U.S.: “Actually when I was in community college, I joined the volleyball team. So they are all Mexican American girls in my team, so I learned most of the American culture from them.”

More frequently, most participants mentioned that hanging out with American students would not only improve their English but also learn and adapt American culture. Participant 11 suggested “If you want to adapt American culture or if you want to speak English, I will say go out. Don’t stay at home. Go to meet your friends. You can only learn English and culture if you speak with others.” Participant 4 who lived with an American student narrated how he learnt American culture from his roommate:

It’s helpful to get to know the culture and also practice English all the time with a native English speaker, my roommate. Because very often he would help me like what's the norm of the society here. It can be how people react or how people...or even some jokes they tell, even details of jokes but sometimes international students don't react with, because they don't understand some even phrases or words or idiom.

For example, we have a movie criticism course and there are some, a lot of the visual cue involved in the movie, as a very strong academic culture background or American
background or American culture based behaviors or the way how they think. It can be interpreted by my roommate sometimes, because he may have been in a similar situation. When I hear his experience and compare that with some movie, some scenarios in the movie, I can see oh that's how the react with that in the condition.

Besides hanging out with American students, Participant 7 was also active in creating new student organizations to help more international students get involved on campus:

Now what I think is a good student is not only with good academic then I must something is good for the society or other students. So I start to create an [Chinese student] organization that I spend a lot of on that help freshmen before they come to the United States. I think we should do something more to make our college life more ....to speak to more people.

As some participants reported, however, many East Asian students only hanged out with people from their own countries. “Some of my friends play games all night and sleep all day. They are lazy. They live with Chinese and don’t go out.” Participant 11 mentioned it based on his observation in class and dormitory:

Some Chinese students they only hang out with their own country people. They only speak Chinese. Japanese are the same, too. And Koreans are the same too. Class participation, 70% of the Chinese students are quiet, but other students ask questions, participate in class.

Participant 3 also admitted that he only talked to his Chinese friends after class: “And another thing [I need to improve] is talk more with native speakers, don't stay all the time
with Chinese speakers. Participant 12 even found that her English speaking was worse than when she was China: “Last year [when I was in China], [because] I have my language exchange friend. I think last year my speaking is higher than here. Now I cannot practice.”

She further explained:

I am not good at communicate with Americans, because they speak too fast and they have a lot of accents. Because their culture is different. They can laughing, and I don't know why they are laughing. This is very funny, but I can't know it. A lot of difference.

The results first show that most East Asian students do not learn and understand as much American culture as they expect. In the study, many participants addressed their willingness to join campus activities, but they did not know how to. According to the participants, there is lack of cultural adaptation courses for international students in American universities. Only ethnic courses are related to American culture, but they do not find it helpful for them to adapt American culture. The majority channel for them to learn American culture is to make friends with American students. However, some participants, such as Participant 2 and 3, expressed that it was not easy to hang out with American friends. Participant 12 also argued that as she experienced a hard time to join her American classmates’ groups, she ultimately only hanged out with her Chinese friends.

Second, the study finds that students who studied in secondary schools in the U.S. are much easier to learn American culture and culturally adapted to their college life in the U.S. Participant 5 mentioned that she learnt American culture when she studied in American high
school. Similarly, Participant 2 also found that international students who studied in American high schools were much more involved on campus than other international students who went to high school in their home countries. However, there is less research exploring how studying in U.S. high schools would influence their further education in the U.S.

Last, besides lack of cultural adaptation support from universities, many East Asian students do not seek ways that will help adapt to American culture by themselves. According to the reviewed literature, Educated in test-oriented educational systems, East Asian students become passive learners and prefer to learn knowledge through teachers’ instruction (Flaitz, 2003). Thus, many East Asian students in American universities may not learn or know how to adapt to a new culture without formal instructions in class. They wish to take one course about authentic American culture and how to adapt college life as an international student, not as an undergraduate student in general. The results find that some East Asian students prefer to stay at home all the time and never attend any university event. It is hard to tell whether it is because they are not willing to adapt to American culture or they tried before but failed. There is less research on exploring the reason why some East Asian students isolate themselves in new cultures. Further research may focus on this aspect.

**Core Category: The Knowledge of English Language and American Culture**

The core category, the knowledge of English language and American culture, is underscored in the raw data, data coding and analysis, and the findings and discussion. English proficiency affects East Asian students’ choices on the study abroad preparation programs, the ways to complete university application, and their academic success in U.S.
universities. After they begin their study in U.S. universities, not only academic English but also the slangs and idioms of American English are still barriers for them to understand their professors and American friends. While, the knowledge of U.S. culture is often ignored by East Asian students until they start their undergraduate study. They find that they are lack of background information in many scenarios on campus, which leads them hard to participate in campus activities with American students. Thus, on one hand, the preparation for studying in U.S. universities help East Asian improve their English and performance in college. On the other hand, the neglect of learning U.S. culture during their preparation makes them unprepared for adapting to college life in the U.S.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter reported the results of data analysis and findings in this study. First, it provided a detailed overview of each participant’s background, including their demographic information, previous educational experience in their homelands, and their educational experience in the U.S. Second, it provided the findings of each theme and subtheme. Third, the discussion part was followed after the finding of each subtheme.
CHAPTER V. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study is to explore how the preparation for study abroad will affect East Asian undergraduate students’ academic success in American universities. Under a qualitative research approach, this study describes various experiences of East Asian students before they formally started their undergraduate studies. It also explores the benefits they gained from these experiences, the difficulties that they cannot overcome through preparation, and the challenges they are facing on campus. This chapter is organized as follows: 1) summary of findings, 2) conclusion, 3) evaluation of the theory, 4) limitation of the study, 5) implications, and 6) suggestions to future research.

Summary of Findings

The findings of this study identifies four themes and ten subthemes by using grounded theory to code and analyze the transcriptions and memos. One core category is emerged after the data analysis. The four themes respectively describes the 12 participants’ experiences in learning English in their homeland schools, attending different preparation programs, completing university applications, and studying in American universities. After analyzing the four themes, a core category of knowledge of English language and U.S. culture, is integrated, which is related to all the themes and subthemes. Figure 6 shows the paradigm of the findings in this study.
The findings first show that the main goal of English learning in formal and shadow education in their homelands is not for communication but examination. Thus, they have to attend college preparation programs, take TOEFL/IELTS training courses, and study in ESL programs in order to improve their English and meet the English requirements of American universities’ admission requirements.

Second, during the process of preparation, there are various options for East Asian students to prepare their study in U.S. universities, such as ESL programs in U.S. and other English-speaking countries, international high school programs, high school exchange programs, college preparation programs, and test preparation programs. Interestingly, some students do not take test preparation courses due to the high cost. Furthermore, East Asian students face many challenges in the process of university application, due to their
uncommunicative English skills and the differences in application requirements between East Asian countries and the U.S. Students with lower English proficiency are more likely to use agency to complete their university applications. However, students report that not all agency provides professional services, which may negatively affect their admission results. Students who study in international high schools and college preparation programs do not use agency, because their teachers in this programs usually offer help and guidance for them to complete their applications, and their English proficiency is high enough to search admission requirements online all by themselves.

Third, East Asian students can benefit from all the preparation programs which are held either in their homelands or the host countries. However, students who attend the preparation programs in the host countries, such as exchange programs in high school and ESL programs, have less difficulties in adapting to college life in the United States than the students who attend the programs in their homelands. The findings also indicate that studying in high schools in host countries can help East Asian students better adapt to the life in the host countries than studying in ESL programs in the host countries or studying in preparation programs in their homelands, as studying in high schools in host countries give East Asian students more opportunities to interact with local students.

Fourth, no matter how long and how well East Asian students are prepared before they start their undergraduate studies in the U.S., they always feel English as a foreign language is a barrier that they can never overcome and find it hard to be engaged on campus. Even though most East Asian students are active to learn American culture, they find that
there is less support on cultural adaptation for international undergraduate students in American universities, which make them feel isolated on campus.

English proficiency highlighted by the participants through the entire interviews. It is related to all the four themes and ten subthemes in this study. East Asian students consider English as an essential language tool that may affect their academic performance in the U.S. and employment in the future. Even though their English proficiency has met their universities’ requirement, they notice that they need more support in academic writing and writing. Even after studying in American universities for a few years, English is still one of the biggest problems that bother them to perform better in college.

Another aspect that is frequently mentioned by East Asian students is cultural adaptation. Learning American culture is often neglected when they prepare to study in American universities. According to the participants, neither the preparation programs in their homelands nor ESL programs in the U.S. offer courses that are related to American culture. Most students will not realize the huge cultural gaps between their home countries and the United States until they start their undergraduate study. Talking to local American students is the most common way for them to learn American culture. However, not all of them are willing to make friends with American students. They often find that they cannot participate as many campus activities as American students. They try to take courses that seem to be related to American culture. However, they find that there is no course or seminar that directly help them adapt to American culture.
Conclusion

In conclusion, this study finds that the English proficiency of East Asian students affect their choices on the preparation programs, the time they spend on their preparation, the ways to complete their university applications, and their academic success in U.S. universities. Due to the differences in language, schooling, and culture, East Asian undergraduate students who study in American universities start to face difficulties ever since they plan to study abroad. Although attending preparation programs both in their homelands and the host countries will help them perform better in college than other international students who had never attended these programs, the challenges in language and cultural adaptation may last through their four-year undergraduate studies in the United States.

When preparing to study in the United States, East Asian students mainly focus on the language preparation. Although they do not find the strategies they learn in the TOEFL training programs are helpful for their academic studies in the U.S., they still believe that it is necessary to learn these strategies in order to obtain higher scores in the TOEFL test. Furthermore, after they begin their undergraduate studies, they realize the importance of learning American culture. However, most universities do not provide enough support on cultural adaptation for international students.

The findings of this study enrich the knowledge about how East Asian students prepare to study in American universities, how the preparation helps them achieve academic success, and the challenges they face as international students on campus. The study provides insights into ways and strategies which future East Asian students who are interested in
studying in the U.S. may refer to.

**Evaluation of the Theory**

According to Creswell (1998), researchers should verify their grounded theory as the last step of their research process. Strauss and Corbin (1998) provided four criteria, *fit*, *understanding, generality, and control*, for researchers to judge the applicability of a theory to a phenomenon, and another seven criteria for a grounded theory.

The first criterion, *fit*, means that the theory is “faithful to the everyday reality of the substantive area and carefully induced from diverse data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 23). This theory, concerning East Asian students’ preparation for study abroad, is grounded in data from East Asian students who were originally from East Asian countries and areas and completed their primary and secondary education in East Asia. Three participants, two from China and one from South Korea, helped review the themes and core category in this study to verify the results fit with their own experiences.

The second criterion, *understanding*, holds that the theory should make sense not only to the participants in the study, but also to those who have the same experience of the phenomenon. A few East Asian students who did not participate in this study were asked if they could understand the theory and if they had similar experiences.

The third criterion, *generality*, refers that the theory is “abstract enough and includes sufficient variation to make it applicable to a variety of contexts related to the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.23).” The data collected on East Asian students’ experience in study abroad preparation applies to a general understanding of how they prepare and how the
preparation affects their academic life in U.S. universities. The participants not only described their own experiences but also shared their observations and stories of other East Asian students, which supports sufficient variation of this study.

Strauss and Corbin suggested that, for the last criterion, control, “the theory should provide control with regard to action toward the phenomenon (p.23).” The subthemes of this study were generated from the raw data, and the findings reflected the previous studies in English education and the influence from Confucianism in East Asia (Flaitz, 2003; Fong, 2007; Kim, 2009; Starr, 2012; Choi, 2012; Choi & Nieminen, 2013).

Another seven criteria for grounded theory are used to further evaluate the quality of a theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The criteria are as follows:

1) How was the original sample selected? On What grounds?

The sample was selected from East Asian undergraduate students who were studying in five U.S. universities. Participants voluntarily participated in this study.

2) What categories/themes emerged?

Four themes were emerged: English learning in their homelands, study abroad preparation program, challenges of completing university applications, academic success and challenge in American universities, which all support the core category of knowledge of English language and American culture. Ten subthemes were organized under the four themes: apprehensive feeling toward their English proficiency, test preparation, preparation program in their homelands, preparation program in their host countries, challenges of self-preparation, role of agencies, the importance of high GPA, the role of English proficiency in
academic success, limitation of English, and an “outsider” on campus.

3) What were some of the events, incidents, or actions (indicators) that pointed to some of these major categories/themes?

The four main themes were generated based on the participants’ interviews and memos. Most of the information shared by the participants was their own experiences, but they also talked about their friends’ stories, their observation in life, and news they read online.

4) How representative of the data did the categories/themes prove to be?

The themes were representative of the data. As described in the data analysis section, the subthemes were generated based on the frequency of the codes. The themes were developed based on the connections between each subtheme.

5) What were some of the hypotheses pertaining to conceptual relations (i.e. among categories/themes), and on what grounds were they formulated and validated?

To maintain the results objective, I did not propose any hypothesis when I started the study. According to my work experience in China, I knew that some students could adapt well in U.S. universities without any specific preparation, while some could not even with previous study abroad experiences. Thus, I could not predict the results.

6) Were there instances in which hypotheses did not explain what was happening in the data? How were these discrepancies accounted for? Were hypotheses modified?

There was no hypothesis to explain the phenomenon in this study.
7) How and why was the core category selected? Was the collection sudden or gradual, and was it difficult or easy? On what grounds were the final analytic decision made?

The core category was developed at the end of the data analysis process by comparing the raw data, codes, emerged themes, and findings again and again.

Thus, using the two sorts of criteria to evaluate the theory verifies the applicability of the theory.

**Limitations of the Study**

There are three limitations in this study. First, participants from Japan, Macau, Mongolia, and North Korea were not recruited in this study. Especially, the group of Japanese students is also an important part of the East Asian students’ population in the United States. The findings of this study may not be representative to all East Asian students. Second, the sample size in this study is small, which is hard to generalize any result. There are only 12 participants in this qualitative study. Moreover, not all the preparation programs were explored in this study. Thus, the findings are not able to compare all the preparation programs, and the results cannot be generalizable to all East Asian students, either. Third, participants in this study might not be able to fully express their opinions. Due to the limitation of their English proficiency, the participants sometimes were not able to exactly express what they thought.
Implications to Practice

The results of this study may suggest the preparation programs for study abroad and ESL programs in both East Asian countries and the United States add cultural adaptation in their program design. Students may benefit from the knowledge of American culture they gained before they start their undergraduate study, which may help them better adapt to college life in U.S. As the results of this study show that students who know more American culture feel more comfortable and confident to interact with Americans and actively participate in class activities.

The results may also suggest American universities develop specific courses, seminars, or events about cultural adaptation for international students. Besides international student orientation, international students need further support which guides them learning how to participate in class and be engaged on campus. For example, American universities may help international students establish learning communities or study groups to exchange their knowledge about learning strategies, languages, and cultures.

For future East Asian students who plan to study in the U.S., the results may suggest that when preparing for study abroad, improving communicative English skills and learning American culture are two essential parts in the preparation process. Current results show that usually East Asian students spend most time on English when they prepare for study abroad. They will not realize the importance of knowing American culture until they come to the U.S., thus future students should also seek ways to learn American culture during their preparation period.
One additional concern in this study is that American universities should be skeptical of the truthfulness of East Asian students’ applications. As participants mentioned in the interviews, some East Asian students may cheat in the TOEFL tests. Adding Skype video interview in the admission procedure may help the universities test the English proficiency of the applicants. Furthermore, TOEFL score may not represent equivalent English proficiency. Participants in this study admit that even though their TOEFL scores meet their universities’ admission requirement, they still have difficulties in writing academic essays, giving presentation, and so forth. Therefore, direct admitted international students with satisfied TOEFL scores may also need ESL support on academic writing and speaking during their undergraduate study.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

First, future research needs to investigate the relationship between East Asian students’ study abroad preparation and their academic success in American universities on a larger scale. Researchers should recruit participants from all of the main East Asian countries and areas, such as China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. Increasing the sample size will also help researchers study on the participants with more diverse experience.

Second, this research topic needs to apply to some Southeast Asian countries, such Vietnam and Thailand, which have some similarities in educational systems and culture with East Asian countries and areas. Researchers should investigate and compare how international students from different countries and areas prepare their study in the U.S. differently. The research results may guide American universities better help their current and
future international students.

Third, future research needs to particularly focus on the transfer international students. Whether the college experience in the international students’ homeland will affect their academic success in American universities need to be tested in a larger sample size.
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DATE: September 4, 2014
TO: Meiren Chen
FROM: Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board
PROJECT TITLE: [611961-3] Graduation Thesis
SUBMISSION TYPE: Revision
ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE: September 2, 2014
REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # 2

Thank you for your submission of Revision materials for this project. The Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board has determined this project is exempt from IRB review according to federal regulations AND that the proposed research has met the principles outlined in the Belmont Report. You may now begin the research activities.

Note that an amendment may not be made to exempt research because of the possibility that proposed changes may change the research in such a way that it is no longer meets the criteria for exemption. A new application must be submitted and reviewed prior to modifying the research activity, unless the researcher believes that the change must be made to prevent harm to participants. In these cases, the Office of Research Compliance must be notified as soon as practicable.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records.

If you have any questions, please contact Kristin Hagerty at 419-372-7716 or khagerty@bgsu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board's records.
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Educational Foundations and Inquiry Program

Informed Consent

A study of how the preparation for studying abroad affects the academic success of undergraduate students from East Asian countries in American universities

Meiren Chen, M.A. student in Cross-cultural and International Education in Bowling Green State University, invites you to participate in a study on how the preparation for studying abroad affects East Asian undergraduate students’ academic success in American universities.

The purpose of this study is to find if different types of study-abroad preparation programs are helpful for East Asian students to achieve academic success in American universities. There are no benefits to you for participating in this study; however, the information gained from this study may help educators and administrators understand their programs better from students’ perspectives.

Your participation involves filling out a demographic questionnaire (e.g., student status, major, years of learning English, years of living in English speaking countries, TOEFL/IELTS scores) and answering a few questions (e.g., Why do you choose to study in US?, what is your current education goal?, what are the most helpful parts in your ESL programs?, how do you become successful in your academic career?) during the interview. It should take approximately 40-60 minutes in total. Interviews will take place in-person at a mutually agreed upon time and location or near (within 3 miles) your campus or via Skype video call. Interview will conducted at your convenience.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate and you may withdraw your consent to participate at any time. Whether or not you choose to participate will not influence your future relationship with the researcher or Bowling Green State University. You will not be penalized in any way should you decide not to participate or to withdraw from this study. There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study.

Responses to the demographic form and interview are confidential. No identifying information such as your name or date of birth will be obtained in the questionnaire and the interview. Your identity will be protected. Your responses to the demographic form and your interview records and transcripts will be carefully stored in a locked private room (my apartment) and on a password protected computer and ipad. Quotations from the interview will be used for analysis in my thesis. Your name and other personally identifying information will never be made public.

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EFFECTIVE: 01/02/2014
If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact Meiren Chen at Bowling Green State University at (419)819-5803/mchen2@bgsu.edu. You may also contact my advisor Dr. Bang at Bowling Green State University at (419)372-4251/hbang@bgsu.edu and/or the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board at (419)372-7716/hsrb@bgsu.edu, if you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research.

Agreement

I have been informed and fully understand the consent form. I have been informed that all information I provide is strictly confidential and will be used for this study’s purpose only. I have been informed that I will remain confidential throughout the course of this study. I am free to discontinue participation during data collection at any time. My agreement to participate in this study is signified by my participation.
APPENDIX C. DEMOGRAPHIC FORM

Demographics Questionnaire

Direction: The following questionnaire will provide some general information about who is participating in this study. All information collected here will be confidential, and will be used for descriptive purposes. Please fill out the following questionnaire completely. Please do not write your name on this form.

1. Age: __________

2. Gender: _______

3. Ethnicity:
   [ ] Chinese (Circle one: Mainland, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, other: __________)
   [ ] Japanese
   [ ] South Korean
   [ ] Other: __________

4. Major(s): __________________________

5. Minor(s): __________________________

5 Years in College
   [ ] First year
   [ ] Sophomore
   [ ] Junior
   [ ] Senior

[ ] Other: __________

6. Your native language(s): __________________________

7. Did you take TOEFL/IELTS before? If so, when did you take it and what is the score?
   __________________________

8. When did you graduate from high school? Year: __________________________

9. When did you come to the United States to study? Year: __________________________

10. Do you live alone or with others? What languages do your roommates speak?
    __________________________
APPENDIX D. SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

These questions will be selectively asked in each interview based on each participant’s different study experience. Conversations will be allowed to develop as a natural and inevitable part of the interview process.

1. Where and when did you first begin to learn English as a second language?
2. What other languages do you speak other than English?
3. Have you ever lived abroad before coming to the United States?
4. Have you ever studied in any other institution whose primary language of instruction was English?
5. Why did you choose to study in US?
6. How did you prepare for TOEFL/IELTS/other English language tests?
7. Have you ever been enrolled in any program for studying abroad?
8. What was your expectation for these programs?
9. Assess your language skills in terms of reading, writing, listening and speaking. What are your strengths and weaknesses?
10. Were there any courses related to cultural adaption?
11. What were the courses in these programs that were most (and least) important to you?
12. Do you think that you are in a better position than other students you know who did not take these programs? Why?
13. If you have never studied in any program, do you think such a program would have helped you?
14. How much is academic success important to you and why?

15. What are your current educational goals?

16. What role does English play in your goals?

17. How do those programs you were in before helpful for you to achieve your goal?

18. What are some disadvantages for you to be a more successful student?