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Out-of-classroom experiences and academic discourse socialization among international graduate students in South Korea

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Research Article

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Abstract

Despite a surge of studies on international students' academic discourse socialization (ADS) over past decades, insufficient attention has been paid to the interplay between their out-of-class experiences and ADS. Grounded in affordance theory perspective, this study explored how international students in South Korea actively shaped their academic engagement beyond formal instruction. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and participants' reflective journals and then analysed thematically to identify patterns of strategic agency, collaborative learning, and evolving discourse practices. The results indicated that the participant expanded her academic participation by leveraging peer networks, digital platforms, and extracurricular activities. These insights extend ADS scholarship by demonstrating how agency enables individuals to transform environmental affordances into meaningful learning opportunities. Especially in non-Anglophone countries like South Korea, international students need to leverage affordances linguistically and culturally to meet both local and global academic conventions. Pedagogically, the findings underscore the importance of constructing an affordable learning environment and encouraging the multicompetence of multilingual students.

1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, the international student population has grown substantially, as studying abroad offers access to prestigious institutions and specialized skills not always available at home [1]. According to the OECD[2], 7% of all tertiary-level enrolments now take place outside students' home countries. In response, a substantial body of scholarship has examined international students' experiences in higher education. With the turn toward individual-centeredness in applied linguistics research[3], researchers have explored how students negotiate identities and resources to facilitate academic discourse socialization (ADS) in both formal and informal settings from students' perspective. These works reconceive ADS not as a passive, deficit-driven process of cultural reception but as a dynamic, context-sensitive practice in which learners strategically perceive and mobilize affordances [4–6].

Despite most student mobility remaining regionally bound [2], existing ADS research has focused predominantly on East Asian students in Western, English-medium contexts, leaving intra-regional study abroad underexplored. South Korea has recently emerged as a regional educational hub, offering lower tuition and living costs alongside cultural and geographic proximity, and even expanded its international enrolment from 99,000 to 119,000 between 2019 and 2021, when traditional destinations such as the United States, Australia, and Canada experienced declines [2]. Although studies have addressed international students' motivations [7], acculturation [8], and psychological adjustment [9] in South Korea, few have probed how they holistically negotiate out-of-classroom resources to facilitate ADS.

Affordance theory has been an important inspiration for ADS research, and it is generally considered well suited for explaining how individuals perceive useful resources across contexts to appropriate certain discursive practices for their academic participation. Through this theoretical lens, this study will

investigate how international students in South Korea enact agency to identify and leverage out-of-class learning opportunities—and how these informal experiences interact with formal ADS—thereby illuminating the dynamic self-sustaining nature of ADS in a non-Anglophone, transnational context.

2. Literature review

2.1 Language socialization and academic discourse socialization

Educational research now emphasizes that learning is a social and dynamic process of *becoming* that unfolds over extended periods and across diverse contexts [10]. Language socialization theory similarly approaches language acquisition from a social perspective, arguing that language both enables socialization and is itself acquired through social interaction [11]. Language socialization examines "the process by which novices or newcomers in a community or culture gain communicative competence, membership and legitimacy in the group"([12], p. 310).

Academic discourse socialization, as a subfield of language socialization, exhibits unique characteristics within academic discourse. Academic discourse encompasses the specialized forms of communication expected within higher education, reflecting institutional and disciplinary norms, ideologies, and epistemologies [13, 14]. Becoming a member of an academic community therefore requires students to master not only disciplinary content and linguistic skills but also to adopt the community's social practices, identities, and stance-taking [14, 15]. This process extends beyond learning vocabulary and grammar to include understanding the "proper" ways of speaking, writing, and reasoning that grant legitimacy within the field.

Newcomers typically acquire community conventions through participation with experienced members of the community [16]. Historically, the classroom has been viewed as the primary site for ADS, since it provides structured opportunities for formal interaction with professors, peers, and instructors [14, 17]. Consequently, much research on international students has focused on classroom-based ADS. However, learners frequently move between classroom and other settings. This suggests that their understanding of how to act and who to be in academic contexts may also develop through experiences beyond formal instruction. Emerging studies show that students prepare to appropriate academic ways of speaking, acting, and being by building personal networks, constructing support "safe zones," and leveraging more experienced peers as "literacy brokers" [17–22].

Despite these insights, relatively few studies have examined the dynamic *interplay* between formal classroom learning and informal out-of-class experiences in ADS. A holistic understanding of ADS requires viewing it as a multi-layered, ongoing process in which learners reflect on and integrate diverse learning opportunities across contexts [4]. In sum, the literature suggests that, in addition to instruction in the classroom, it is vital to investigate how international students negotiate their out-of-class experiences into their process of becoming members of academic communities.

2.2 Out-of-class experiences and academic discourse socialization

A substantial body of research in education and language learning has established that learning occurs both inside and outside schools, and that the boundary between these contexts is permeable. Classic work by Scribner and Cole [23] contrasted classroom learning (often decontextualized and lecture-based) with out-of-class learning (mediated by real-world observation and imitation). Subsequent studies confirm that classroom activities can be practiced in everyday contexts and vice versa [24, 25].

For example, research in higher education indicates that out-of-class experiences such as residence life, employment, and peer interactions often contribute significantly to students' academic learning and development [26]. In language education, Hwang and Lai[27] observed that students brought notes, annotations, and questions from outside the classroom into class discussions when circumstances allowed. Similarly, Lai [28] and Lai et al. [29] found that language learners tend to perceive in-class instruction and out-of-class study as complementary parts of their education. Kashiwa and Benson [30] also reported that classroom learning can stimulate further practice outside class, as students seek opportunities in their community to apply new knowledge. Likewise, Sung [31] documented that students' out-of-class communication about English as a Lingua Franca increased their motivation and enriched their in-class learning.

Taken together, this evidence suggests that out-of-class experiences contribute substantially to learners' development in terms of knowledge, skills, and affect, consistent with the view that learning is inherently social and dynamic [30, 32]. It follows that examining learners' informal experiences alongside their formal studies is important for understanding their overall learning trajectories, including their process of socialization into academic communities [33].

Building on these general findings, several studies have investigated how out-of-class experiences influence ADS specifically. Morita [19], for instance, found that informal conversations with local students outside the classroom helped a Japanese doctoral student in Canada clarify his professors' expectations and better understand academic norms. Zappa-Hollman and Duff [21] applied the *Individual Network of Practice* framework to Mexican exchange students in Canada, showing that these students built multiple social networks (involving program instructors, peers, family, and others) which together influenced their experiences and perspectives on academic life. Seloni [20] similarly found that multilingual doctoral students in the U.S. created "safe zones" through interactions across sites, facilitating their legitimate participation in the academic community. In non-Anglophone context, Li and Gong [22] studied multilingual graduate students in China and observed that social networks supported ADS by enabling students to negotiate academic norms, develop expertise, and create spaces for multilingual competence.

Other research highlights the role of dedicated support spaces [34–37]. Okuda and Anderson [36] examined Chinese graduate students in Canada using a university writing center and found that these

students actively sought out such support. Their writing-center experiences, mediated by consultations with tutors, elicited diverse agentive and affective responses that shaped the students' ADS. Soltani [37] investigated a Chinese student navigating multiple environments (second language and mainstream classrooms, as well as online communities like Facebook), demonstrating that each social context shaped the student's investments and negotiations in the process of ADS.

These studies collectively illustrate that experiences beyond formal classrooms can play a crucial role in students' academic discourse socialization. However, most research has not fully explored how students intentionally orchestrate resources across different contexts or exercise agency to leverage these experiences holistically. Anderson [4] is one of the few exceptions: studying seven PhD students in Canada, he showed that learners integrate both in-class and out-of-class resources agentively, demonstrating that ADS emerges from students' multifaceted experiences.

To summarize, existing research demonstrates that ADS comprises students' agentive, multifaceted experiences both inside and outside the classroom. However, few studies examine the interplay between in-class and out-of-class ADS—an approach that would illuminate how learners navigate multiple contexts and exercise agency. Moreover, most research focuses on academic English socialization; investigations of learners of languages other than English (LOTEs) and studies in diverse regional settings are needed to expand our understanding of ADS [15, 38]. Research in LOTE contexts can reveal "the means by which socialization is institutionally and culturally organized" ([38], p. 250).

To address this gap, the present study centers on international graduate students in South Korea, a non-Anglophone context, to explore how they draw on resources across multiple environments beyond the classroom in their ADS. Furthermore, we will examine the dynamic interplay between in-class and out-of-class experiences (OoCEs), using affordance theory and individual agency as our theoretical framework.

3. Theoretical framework: Affordance and agency

The term affordance was first introduced in Gibson's [39] work, implying that "the affordances of the environment are what it offers the animals, what it provides, or furnishes, either for good or ill" (p. 127). Van Lier [40] adopted Gibson's idea for language learning, believing that learning emerges from engagement with environmental resources in these settings. By focusing on the learner, van Lier [40] emphasized that the learner "is immersed in an environment full of potential meanings" (p. 246). The learner selects affordances and creates meaningful signs for specific purposes [41]. Notably, however, not all resources can be utilized as affordances and resources must be perceived by individuals who are aware of their potential for learning [30]. Perceptions of affordances offer learners a condition for intentional behavior, such as choosing certain learning materials [32]. In other words, affordance allows for further actions but does not trigger or cause these [42]. An individual's range of affordances can be expanded by changing the environment or improving access to internal resources [43]. However, whether affordance can be perceived as essential for learner development depends not only on the environment but also on the learner's awareness of their potential for learning [30, 44].

To convert resources into affordances that benefit their learning, learners must exercise agency to reconstruct their learning environments [10, 45]. According to social theorists, agency is concerned with the “capacity to act” and “the self-conscious reflexive actions” [46]. Agency is also considered an important ability for managing learning, particularly informal learning. Benson [47] viewed agency as the origin of autonomous development. Considering the social and ecological aspects of learning and development, agency, as the capacity to learn, began to be considered as contextual embeddedness. In this view, agency tends to be seen as “the action” to choose or optimize the conditions and resources for personal learning [48, 49]. With agency, learners can actively construct their learning conditions and terms. Furthermore, humans choose to employ semiotic resources to realize their goals and multiple dimensions of the self and identity [50]. From this perspective, combined with the lens of affordance, how learning occurs during interactions between individuals and the environment, and how students negotiate their development with context and the environment, could be perceived.

Realizing the perspective of affordance and agency’s potential in describing the self-initiated development process across contexts, scholars have begun to adopt it as a framework to investigate students’ language-learning experiences beyond the classroom in both English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and study abroad contexts. Previous studies have indicated that students who enact their agencies differently can capitalize on their affordances for different learning opportunities and resources [44, 51, 52].

The integration of affordance and agency has the potential to perceive the self-initiated development process occurring across contexts as a new opportunity for activity and knowledge-building. With the help of this framework, the interplay between out-of-class experiences and in-class learning, as well as the inner worlds of students tackle with challenges during ADS can be understood from a more dynamic and holistic perspective.

To guide this study, the following research questions are posed:

1. What kinds of affordances did the participant perceive out-of-class? How did she use these affordances in her ADS to execute her agency?
2. How did the participant negotiate her in-class and OoCEs in her ADS?

4. Method

4.1 Narrative inquiry

This study employs an in-depth qualitative case analysis of a single participant, Yujin (pseudonym), whose life narrative was selected as an information-rich case [53]. While the particularity of Yujin’s story limits broad generalizability, it affords a richly detailed examination of the unique complexities and defining characteristics of her academic discourse socialization [54].

Narrative inquiry was chosen as the methodological approach because it foregrounds “lived experience—that is, in lives and how they are lived” ([55], p. xxii) and brings theoretical insights about human life to bear on educational phenomena ([56], p. 3). Storytelling, as a fundamental unit of human experience, enables participants to reflect upon and reconstruct their personal, historical, and cultural journeys [57]. In this study, Yujin’s story provided a vehicle for capturing her agency in perceiving and enacting affordances within her ecological learning environment. We organized our analysis around three dimensions of experience—sociality (relationships with mentors, peers, and others), temporality (evolving engagement over time), and place (classroom and out-of-class contexts)—to trace how she negotiated in-class learning and out-of-class experiences [58]. This narrative approach thus illuminates the dynamic interplay between context, agency, and academic discourse socialization.

4.2 Context and participant

This study was conducted at Hankook University (pseudonym), a prominent private research institution in Seoul, South Korea. Depending on the discipline and instructor preference, courses are delivered in either Korean or English, although outside-class communication is predominantly in Korean. The Department of Digital Business, our site of inquiry, enrolls primarily Korean working professionals of varied ages, backgrounds, and occupations, most of whom attend graduate courses during evenings or weekends to accommodate daytime employment. This flexible scheduling afforded our participant ample access to diverse academic and professional resources.

The focal participant, Yujin, was one of the participants who participated in the first authors’ doctoral thesis project on ADS. The reason to choose Yujin as participant in the present study is because Yujin has the willingness to share her experiences and generated the most amount of data among participants. Moreover, her positive attitude towards exploring possibilities and resources for her development makes her more suitable for this study. At the time of data collection, Yujin was in her early twenties and pursuing a graduate degree in Digital Business.

Born and raised in eastern China in a lower-middle–class family, she completed her undergraduate studies in Korean linguistics and literature. A year as an exchange student in Seoul solidified her interest in Korea’s language and culture. When Anglophone graduate programs proved financially prohibitive, she chose South Korea and shifted her major to Digital Business, supplementing her studies with beauty-academy training to broaden her professional skill set.

The first author established strong rapport with Yujin—essential for “reciprocal and coordinated interactions” in narrative research [59] —and obtained institutional ethical approval from researchers’ University as well as Yujin’s written informed consent.

4.3 Data collection

Data were collected over two academic periods. The data were triangulated by collecting in-depth interviews, writing journals, and field notes during home visits.

As a narrative inquiry into Yujin's ADS beyond classroom, we drew on learning narratives collected via interviews with her as the primary data source. In-depth interviews enable researchers to understand participants' actions in specific situations and explore their emotions in a broader context [60, 61]. We conducted three in-depth interviews. Each interview lasted for approximately one and a half hours. The first interview elicited Yujin's personal history and educational background in China. The second and third interviews were conducted at the end of the semester. Interview prompts were used to elicit changes in Yujin's learning experiences (both outside and inside class) and attitudes towards her experiences and academic activities in Korea. This allowed us to compare, from a holistic and comprehensive perspective, Yujin's conceptions and attitudes towards affording her perceived and understood actions of utilizing affordances during ADS. The interviews were conducted by the first author in Chinese, audio-recorded under the consensus of Yujin, and transcribed verbatim.

Yujin was encouraged to write reflective journals on her daily activities under these guidelines (see Appendix B). Yujin sent her reflective journals to the first author every week and gradually viewed such journals as a way to express feelings and attitudes towards academic and daily life in South Korea. Through Yujin's journals, we could elicit Yujin's vivid changes in learning experiences and her emotional response to life in South Korea. Thirty-six writing journals with 29,462 Chinese characters were collected during this study.

Finally, the first author conducted two home visits to Yujin's residential house in South Korea. Two home visits were conducted during the second semester of her graduate school life, when her university changed its mode of class to online owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. Home visits were conducted on the day Yujin attended class, so both in-class and out-of-class activities and efforts for class could be observed simultaneously. Field notes were taken during the home visits, which focused on Yujin's preparation for and responses to the class. Although the home visits were limited in time and frequency, they provided rich complementary data on the interaction between in-class learning and OoCEs.

4.4 Data analysis

In line with narrative inquiry, the interview and reflective journal data were compared, contrasted, and clarified, followed by categorical content analysis [62] and the constant comparative method [63].

First, the transcribed data were read thoroughly to obtain an overall impression of the participant's learning experiences in South Korea. Second, we conducted the initial coding iteratively and grouped the codes into categories related to the research questions, with a focus on affordances and individual agency. An iterative process of finding links between categories was conducted, and the categories were grouped into themes related to ecological affordances and the participant's agency to utilize those affordances. During this step, several themes emerged, such as strategic agency and self-initiated affordances, collaborative agency and socially negotiated affordances, and evolving agency and expanded affordances. Third, a narrative report for the focal participant was generated, which detailed the participant's individual agency in utilizing ecological affordances and negotiating learning

experiences. Last, the transcribed data, codes, and narrative reports were returned to Yujin for her validation.

5. Findings

5.1 Strategic agency and self-created affordances in OoCEs

After entering the academic community in Korea, Yujin felt several constraints (e.g. a deficiency in content knowledge and no guidance from experienced members) while socializing during the academic discourse shared by community members. For her difficulty and helplessness, Yujin narrated as "*I have to depend on myself*". To overcome the constraints in formal learning environments and classrooms and to get accustomed to academic life in Korea, Yujin strategically enacted her agency and constructed affordances beyond the classroom.

From the formal classroom experience, Yujin gradually learned of her gaps in academic experience and obstacles to her ADS. Therefore, Yujin took deliberate and proactive steps to initiate learning that was not provided by her formal academic setting and shaped her learning outside the classroom.

Yujin reported that the biggest obstacle was content knowledge. As a Korean major and international student, content knowledge in Korean digital marketing enlarges the gap with other local students. However, her multilingual linguistic repertoire enabled her to perceive affordances and construct her own learning ecology.

Excerpt 1

Although my textbook is in Korean, theories of digital marketing have not been discussed by Koreans. Therefore, I searched for textbooks in Chinese and watched online lectures on *Bilibili (a video website in China).* The contents were the same. (…) If I do not do so, I cannot follow them. I read the Korean characters slowly. (Interview 1)

The resources provided in the classroom were all in Korean, which made it difficult for Yujin to make full use of them. Yujin knew that relying only on in-class learning made it difficult for her to catch up with her Korean peers and obtain sufficient disciplinary knowledge. In this case, Yujin did not passively perceive affordances in the classroom but engaged herself with affordances outside of the classroom in China and the cultural capital that she already had [64]. By strategically accessing diverse resources beyond the classroom, Yujin developed her learner autonomy (Little, 2004) towards lectures in digital marketing [65].

By applying her learner autonomy towards disciplinary content and daily lecture, Yujin made clear what was deficient and what was necessary for her to practice in the academic community. She could

regulate her learning process at her pace and negotiate more affordances outside classroom contexts to facilitate her formal ADS [66].

Excerpt 2

I am not good at memorizing. Therefore, I asked the professor about the midterm range and started to memorize them two weeks before the test. I recited them every day and tried to write them from memory three days before the test. On the test, even if I wrote something wrong, it was OK for me. (Reflective journal)

Excerpt 3

Until the midterm test, I eventually got to understand what I was learning and began to know what I really did not know. To prepare for the test, I must ask my Korean peers and professors. Once I saw them on campus, I asked them questions. On Monday, I asked a Korean man who worked at an IT company in the Kakao business mode. After the class, I asked my professor many questions. I think the classroom atmosphere improved thanks to my questions. (Reflective journal)

Once she entered the academic community, Yujin thought she was very different from her Korean peers regarding educational and social background. She experienced difficulties constructing her identity as a legal member of the community; thus, it was difficult for Yujin to perceive the social resources around her as useful affordances. She believed that she would be considered a “strange girl” if she talked to busy Korean peers. Professors and Korean peers were once regarded by Yujin as “two kinds of people”: gradually Yujin began to strategically treat them as useful human affordances for her. Yujin actively initiated her access to Korean peers and professors outside of class; through this, not only did her academic knowledge improve but it also helped create a positive environment for formal learning.

By enacting her agency, Yujin developed her autonomy towards learning, was able to construct various learning ecologies outside the classroom, and perceived more valuable affordances. They enabled Yujin to negotiate her identity from a “helpless international student” to a “legal community member”. Furthermore, rather than being a passive recipient of institutional structures, Yujin could exercise agency strategically by identifying, accessing, and shaping affordances that support its integration into academic discourse communities.

5.2 Collaborative agency and socially negotiated affordances in academic discourse

At the beginning of the semester, Yujin’s obstacles in her ADS process, mainly owing to the difficulty of lecture content, led her to strategically enact her agency at the personal level to negotiate resources and affordances in various out-of-class contexts. Yujin felt the necessity to behave as a member of the academic community and engage in several academic activities. Intrapersonal resources alone may be insufficient for her to become ready to practice highly ordered academic activities. Therefore, Yujin consciously negotiated many social affordances outside of class to facilitate ADS. Collaborative agency

emerged when Yujin constructed knowledge and rapport through peer interaction, mentorship, and group work. This involved socially negotiated affordances that enabled Yujin's learning to occur through structured and unstructured discussions, feedback exchange, and collective meaning-making.

Yujin's narration shows that Chinese and Korean peers were utilized as vital social resources. *Coin Noraebang (Karaoke)* with Chinese peers and group meetings with Korean peers were Yujin's critical informal contexts for her to perceive affordances.

Yujin reported that the proportion of Chinese students was 50% in her major. However, like her, most Chinese students struggle to engage with the digital marketing academic community. Most lack background knowledge or Korean proficiency. The classroom context was a high-pressure aspect for Chinese students to communicate or interact with each other for both emotional and academic purposes. Under the heavy load of academic tasks, Yujin emphasized the experiences of going to *Coin Noraebang* multiple times in her narration and regarded them as critical events for her academic and social life in Korea.

Excerpt 4

During the midterm test week, the laboratory was cancelled. Therefore, we had four hours before the afternoon lecture. Someone suggested going to the *Coin Noraebang.* I thought it was a little embarrassing because we never even had lunch together before that. That day, we had lunch together and went to the *Noraebang* for one hour. That was so funny. I thought that we would get closer because of this. (Interview 2).

Meeting with international students is a vital social space for international students to obtain information about academic conventions and valuable community information that will help them socialize in the academic discourse community [20]. Yujin reported that they began to use *Coin Noraebang* as a meeting site, and they could express their emotions freely without feeling embarrassed. Although Yujin did not report that she could get specific information from Chinese peers, through the experience in *Coin Noraebang*, she could release her pressure that she has to "fight on herself" and got increasing comfort to reduce her anxiety towards the academic community. By mitigating anxiety and building rapport with Chinese peers outside of class, a supportive learning ecology can be formed both in-class and out-of-class [67].

Yujin also actively joined group meetings initiated by Korean students. Group meetings with Korean peers apparently socialized Yujin into disciplinary knowledge and the academic conventions of the community. Furthermore, this experience helped Yujin negotiate her identity as an ordinary member, as that of Korean students.

Excerpt 5

Korean students formed a study group, and I joined them. Our first discussion was last Tuesday. We talked from 1 pm until the evening. Although my brain almost exploded, the discussions were

successful. I gained a different viewpoint and a deeper understanding towards the question. Although I face language barriers, they are easy to overcome. I think that it is good to communicate with people who share these goals. (Reflective journal)

Excerpt 6

After today's lab meeting, the Professor and Korean students said that they would have lunch in the school canteen. Food in the canteen tastes so bad. I don't want to go. However, this was a good opportunity to become familiar with Korean students and professors. I would like to hear their suggestions for my thesis topic. This was a valuable opportunity, so I went with them. (Reflective journal)

At the beginning of the semester, Yujin lacked basic digital marketing knowledge. By utilizing her linguistic repertoire as an affordance, she filled this gap. However, as graduate students, a critical perspective and the conventions of academia are necessary. By joining group studies outside of the classroom, Yujin could get the chance to observe and even participate with central members of the community. Thus, Yujin was able to interact with Korean seniors and meet their expectations and those of professors. In other words, she could get access to "mutual engagement", "joint enterprise", and "shared repertoire" sharing by the Community of Practice [68], which will help her to negotiate her individual membership in the academic community.

The critical role of group study as a social affordance as Yujin perceived was that she could form emotional bonds with Korean peers.

Excerpt 7

Today, our study group met to discuss articles designated by the professors. Another Korean man who passed by took our picture and shared it in the group chat room. It was so interesting. I thought that Korean peers knew everything and could handle it all well. However, they also have things they do not know and are anxious about exams and presentations. They should also study while working. However, this is tiring and difficult to do. At the very least, I was able to focus on my studies. (Reflective journal)

Before she interacted with a central member of the academic community, Yujin regarded Korean peers, especially Korean doctoral students, as experienced and perfect at everything. After her interactions with Korean peers outside of class, Yujin began to understand them as normal students. They are also involved in learning and development. The image change towards Korean peers enabled Yujin to form identification and emotional bonds with experienced community members. Previous studies have argued that emotional support from international peers can provide ADS [18, 20]. However, in Yujin's case, interactions with local peers helped remove their veil; it was helpful for Yujin to build a more equal and easy learning ecology for herself and negotiate her identity as a legal member of the community.

By interacting with local and international peers in an out-of-class setting, Yujin collaboratively enacted her agency. The social affordances both constructed and perceived by Yujin were actively negotiated in

her learning and helped her to construct a more supportive and equitable learning ecology with less pressure.

5.3 Evolving agency and expanding affordances in ADS

Yujin's agency developed over time while understanding community expectations, negotiating identity, and refining academic strategies. Meanwhile, as she developed her agency, she could construct her own learning ecology, and affordances expanded.

While Yujin's agency is evolving, she can utilize the affordances from her learning ecology more untrammelled for her own purpose.

Excerpt 8

It is very fortunate that I can study with peers who share the same goals. It is much better than to fight by myself. Now, I have gradually noticed that for some skills, I need a group to study with others, and there are some things I must study on my own after class. (Interview 2).

Yujin showed her agency towards building social relationships with Korean peers after class, which benefited Yujin both emotionally and academically. Yujin participated in a group study to build closer relationships with Korean peers. At first, she did not show active engagement towards the study group but just followed the group's schedules. However, as she gained regulation and autonomy towards her ADS, she could actively engage more in OoCEs and negotiate the most efficient affordances in her ADS.

Yujin not only negotiated OoCEs into in-class learning but also began to navigate social experiences and negotiate them into her life-long development.

Excerpt 9

I did nothing except study this semester. I must get a scholarship because of my economic budget. However, our grades remained similar throughout the semester. I think I do not need to completely dedicate myself to school. After the winter holidays, I plan to find a job. I do not have lectures during the daytime, so I could find a full-time job. Simultaneously, I can earn money and gain experience. (Interview 2).

The ADS process is not only the developmental progress of newcomers to socialize themselves into the knowledge of discipline and the convention of community but also the progress of becoming a member of the academic community and society. Beyond passively absorbing knowledge in an academic context, Yujin expanded her learning ecology into a social context that could afford her social experience in her future development.

After deciding to expand social experience, Yujin enrolled in a beauty academy to learn make up and beauty skills. Yujin explained her considerations as follows:

Excerpt 10

You know, I do not have a specific goal. I want to try everything I can, and I have time. I am interested in beauty skills. I want to obtain a beauty certificate. Therefore, I enrolled in the class and practiced extensively. The teachers and classmates were nice. I will have more opportunities in the future. In the near future, I will get a part-time job at *Pibu-kwa (Dermatology)*. (Interview 2).

After refining her understanding of the community's expectations, Yujin began her practice on a broader social level. Yujin's ongoing participation in both academic classes and the beauty academy indicates that her agency is evolving and the affordances are expanding. As she gained skills from the academy, she not only enhanced her employability but also enriched her ability to articulate and integrate practical experiences into her academic work. This evolution reflects an expanding range of affordances that supports her development as a well-rounded individual who bridges academic theory with professional practice.

6. Discussion

While the findings of a single case study cannot be easily generalized, the case study reported here contributes to a nuanced understanding of the complex and dynamic relationship between ADS and OoCE, highlighting the role of agency and affordances in this process. Rather than being a passive recipient of institutional structures, Yujin actively exercised her agency to shape her learning environment by identifying, accessing, and transforming affordances. Yujin's case suggests that affordances are not simply provided but must be perceived and activated by the learner. Her agency was central to Yujin's ability to actively construct her learning ecology.

The findings demonstrate that Yujin's ADS is not confined to the classroom but is dynamically shaped by her OoCEs. The interplay between in-class and out-of-class contexts is mediated by how she enacted her agency and negotiated affordances, forming a circular reciprocal relationship. Upon entering the academic community, Yujin faced content-related barriers in the classroom but actively sought external learning resources (e.g. Chinese textbooks and *Bilibili* videos) to reinforce her understanding of content knowledge. The bidirectional knowledge flow indicates that Yujin's OoCEs are not supplementary but are essential components of academic development. Yujin's story of her ADS and OoCEs aligns with previous studies [4, 35, 44] that ADS and learning are not linear processes confined to the classroom but occur across multiple sites and are shaped by external social and spatial interactions.

Yujin's case confirmed the critical role of emotional affordances in peer interactions in ADS. Yujin initially perceived Korean peers as unapproachable and was under pressure of fighting alone while studying in Korea. However, through group study and informal gathering (e.g. lunch meetings), she changed her impression of Korean peers from "superior experts" to ordinary "fellow learners". This change helped her build emotional connections with Korean peers, thus lowering her anxiety about formal academic engagement. Most research on ADS focuses on the role of information and knowledge change in peer interactions [22], but Yujin's experience highlights the emotional affordances of peer engagement,

particularly in reducing her anxiety and enhancing belonging. In Seloni's [20] study, informal interactions with peers could serve as a "safe space" where students could develop confidence in high-stakes academic activities. Li et al. [67] and Kobayashi [18] emphasized that peer support is crucial in emotional well-being and identity negotiation. Yujin's case supports this research, demonstrating that social affordances are not only academic but also deeply emotional and psychological. From a positive psychology perspective, emotional affordances constructed a more supportive ecology for Yujin and enabled her to gain enjoyment so she would be more willing to communicate in the academic discourse community [69].

Yujin's evolution of academic and social engagement demonstrates how agency develops over time. Initially, she was hesitant to engage with Korean peers, but over time she actively participated in group study sessions and sought feedback from professors. This supports the idea that agency in a multilingual academic context is iterative and requires repeated exposure and adaptation [70]. While Yujin's agency is evolving, she gradually forms regulations towards her ADS and can gain experience, confidence, and strategic awareness to expand affordances. For instance, after checking her first semester grade, Yujin decided to balance academic and professional experiences (by enrolling in a beauty academy), illustrating an expansion of perceived affordances, where she could integrate her ADS into broader career-oriented goals.

Along with agency development, Yujin self-created and socially negotiated affordances to keep affordances outside of class, expanding to support her ADS. This aligns with previous studies showing that students utilize different resources in affordances for several purposes [44, 71]. This can also be interpreted from the perspective of capital and investment [72]. When it was valuable, Yujin negotiated affordances with her ADS, which was also her investment. From this investment, Yujin obtained cultural (Korean language), social (human resources), and economic capital (work skills) that would be valuable for her ADS and development [72]. Although Yujin acquired various affordances at different stages of her life in Korea, not all affordances could be valuable in academic discourse. However, she could convert the affordances into economic and social capital on a lifetime scale.

Unlike most ADS studies in English-speaking contexts, Yujin had to navigate both Korean and English academic expectations academically and socially, showing that multilingual academic socialization involves complex cross-linguistic and cultural affordances. The premise for this is that Yujin has the ability to "leverage her cultural and linguistic advantages" ([73], p. 9) across contexts. For academic purposes, Yujin showed her strategic engagement with multiple linguistic and disciplinary resources and negotiated them as affordances for ADS, such as using *Bilibili*, Chinese, and English textbooks, and professor consultations. Yujin also enacted her agency to form the habitus valued by peers, such as lunch meetings and Karaoke meetings, by negotiating her linguistic repertoire. These became social and emotional affordances for Yujin to build a supportive learning ecology. This aligns with Chen's [73] finding that successful academic and social life in non-Anglophone countries for international students relies on the habitus shared by the community and the ability to utilize linguistic and cultural capital.

Based on the case study findings, an integral model of the reciprocal interaction between ADS and OoCEs was generated (see Fig. 1). This highlights how ADS and OoCEs dynamically inform each other. Once students perceive gaps in ADS, they begin to seek external affordances. Affordances perceived through OoCEs are negotiated back into ADS. Through continuous engagement with academic and out-of-class contexts, agency is evolving and could expand and refine affordances for students' future ADS and individual development. ADS is well-accepted as a socially mediated process. When considering the learner's agency in negotiating out-of-class affordances, ADS could also be a learner's self-sustaining process mediated by an evolving agency.

7. Conclusion

This single case study reports how Yujin, a Chinese student in South Korea, negotiated her OoCE with her ADS, which was mediated by agency and affordances. A complex interplay exists between Yujin's ADS and OoCEs, emphasizing the mediating role of agency and affordances. Moreover, Yujin's ADS is not a linear process confined to the classroom but rather a dynamic, recursive engagement in which she actively navigates and constructs her academic pathways.

Theoretically, this study incorporates the affordance theory with agency in ADS to provide a more nuanced and situated understanding of how students engage in learning opportunities beyond formal academic spaces. By demonstrating that affordances are not merely static external conditions but are dynamically perceived and enacted through agency, this research challenges traditional views of academic socialization as institutionally driven. Instead, it positions students as active agents who strategically activate and shape affordances in the sociocultural and institutional contexts. Additionally, by situating ADS within a transnational and multilingual academic environment, this study offers a globally relevant understanding of how discourse socialization unfolds across diverse linguistic and cultural settings.

This study has several pedagogical implications for students in multilingual, transnational, and non-English-speaking contexts. First, students should be encouraged to value their multilingual repertoire. In South Korea, as a monolingual country, Korean is the main daily language, and English is an academic language; thus, the mother tongue of international students could be unvalued. However, multi-competence is an essential factor in the emergence of affordances [74]. Specifically, international students from non-Anglophone countries tend to ignore their multilingual competence. Yujin noticed that her multicompetence could be valuable to her academic performance, and her linguistic repertoire offered her access to various resources that she could negotiate, as affordances facilitated her ADS. Second, considering Yujin's OoCE, formal and informal academic contexts for multilingual students should be constructed to be more affordable. A learning ecology that encourages multilingualism should be designed with the emergence of affordances such as being learnable, understandable, transferable, explorable, and as usable in the future as possible [43]. Faculty members can construct more affordable learning environments for multilingual students by incorporating collaborative assignments, peer mentorship, and interdisciplinary workshops. Finally, local Korean students should change their attitudes

towards international students. Yujin obtained vital emotional support from informal interactions that helped in building a supportive learning ecology with her Korean peers. However, most Chinese students reported experiencing prejudice from Korean peers. It is important to consider that international students who are multicompetent individuals could form reciprocal relationships, rather than students with insufficient Korean competence.

This study has a limitation. It conducted a single case study during the first year of studying abroad. It would be insightful to conduct a cross-case analysis by investigating how students make different choices when enacting their agencies and navigating affordances in a similar context. Furthermore, investigating digital learning spaces in ADS can also yield valuable insights into how students agentively negotiate OoCEs in their formal learning. By exploring these dimensions, our understanding of the dynamic interrelationship between agency, affordances, and ADS in globalized contexts can be furthered.

Declarations

Author contributions

Peng Luo is the sole contributor to the drafting, writing up and all the stages of this paper.

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Data availability

The data are not publicly available due to participants' privacy concerns and adherence to research ethics regarding sensitive personal information.

Code availability

Not applicable

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Institutional Review Board of Korea University (Date: 15 September 2019; Number: N/A). The approval form is available upon request. Written informed consent to participate in this study was obtained from the participant. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participant retained the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Consent for publication

Written informed consent for publication was obtained from participating student. All data presented in the study were anonymized to ensure confidentiality and privacy.

Competing interests

The author declare no competing interests.

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Figures

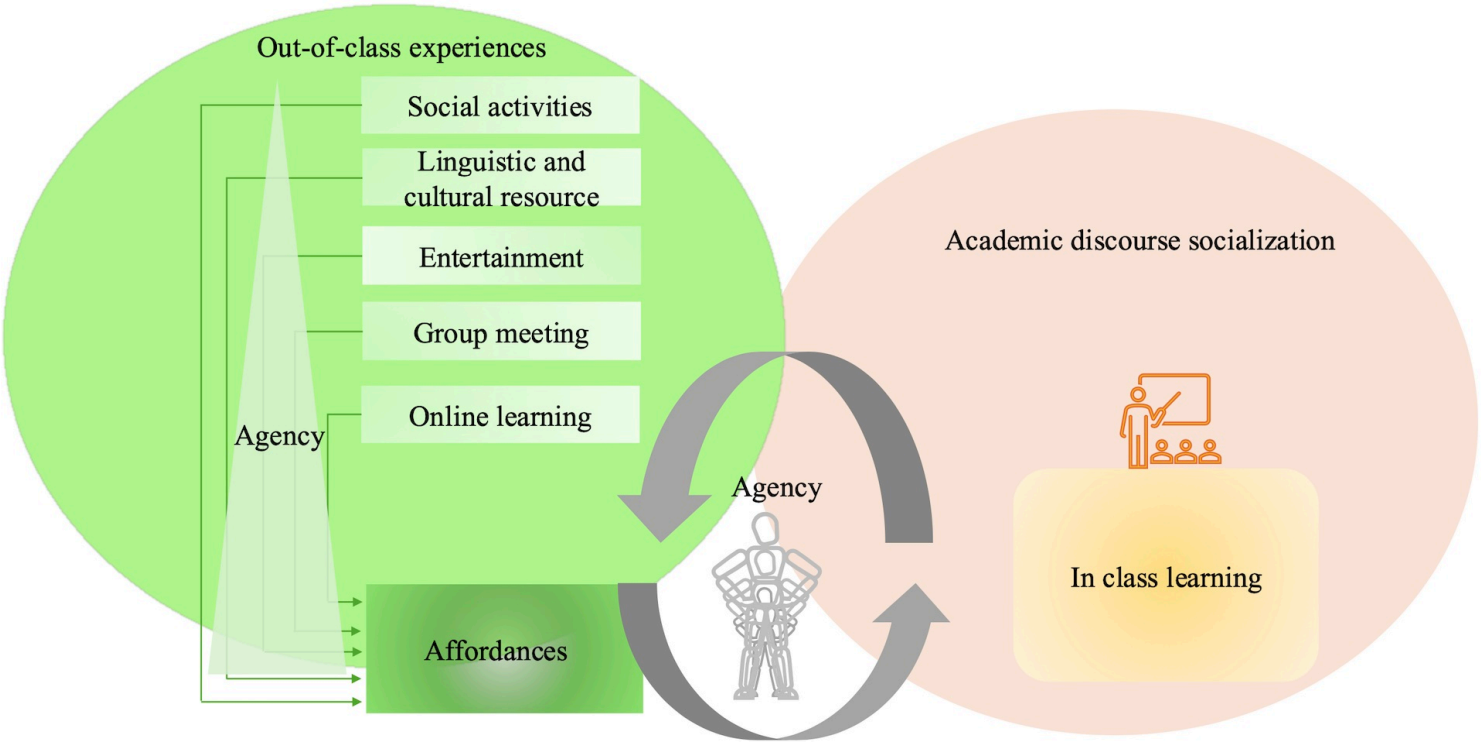


Figure 1

A self-sustaining model of ADS

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- Appendix.docx