

The Effects of Overseas Internships on Development of English Competence

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해외인턴십의 영어능력 발전에 미치는 영향

차미양

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Abstract In an attempt to shed light on the effects of overseas internships on foreign language development, this study investigated the differences in English compositions written by 10 Korean university students who joined an overseas internship program for 15 weeks. For data collection, the participants each wrote an English composition before and after the internship. Data collected was analyzed to discern differences in the two writings, and statistical analyses were carried out of the results. Results showed that the participants appeared to have attained lexical fluency, generating longer sentences embedded with multisyllabic, more diverse types, more complex and less redundant words in more complicated structures after the internship. This study revealed that overseas internships facilitated the growth of linguistic abilities. Korean SMEs need to enhance the global capacity of their human resources via overseas internships to strengthen their global competitiveness, apart from improving their industrial competencies such as productivity and product quality.

Key Words : SMEs, Global Competitiveness, Human Resources, Overseas Internship, English Competence

요 약 본 연구는 해외인턴십의 외국어능력 발전에 미치는 영향을 고찰하기 위해 15주간 해외인턴십 프로그램에 참여한 10명의 한국대학생들이 작성한 영작문의 변화를 조사하였다. 자료수집을 위해 참여학생들은 인턴십 전후로 영작문 하나씩을 작성하였다. 수집된 자료를 이용해 두 영작문의 구성요소 및 어휘 사용면의 변화들을 분석하였고, 이어 통계분석도 실시하였다. 본 논문의 결과에 의하면, 참가자들이 인턴십 이후에 더 많은 수의 문장들을 사용하였고, 문장들이 더 길어졌으며, 아울러 더 복잡한 구조의 문장을 생성한 것을 알 수 있다. 또한 어휘의 유창성과 사용능력이 증가하였고 문장 내에 다음절의 다양한 유형의 단어들이 사용되었다는 것을 알 수 있다. 본 연구는 해외인턴십이 외국어능력 향상에 유용하다는 것을 나타낸다. 따라서 글로벌 경쟁력 제고를 꾀하는 중소기업들은 생산성, 품질 등 산업적 능력 제고뿐만 아니라 해외인턴십과 같은 훈련프로그램을 통해 인적자원의 글로벌 역량도 강화할 필요가 있겠다.

주제어 : 중소기업, 글로벌 경쟁력, 인적자원, 해외인턴십, 영어능력

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1. Introduction

In the slow growth paradigm of the New Normal era where job creation has become a major issue in the global economy, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have become the key for Korea in creating jobs. This is because the domestic production of large corporations has been steadily decreasing, and their growth can no longer be expected to lead to employment growth in Korea. This means that the leading role of economic growth and job creation has shifted from large corporations to SMEs[1].

How can SMEs then take an active part in job creation? The answer is 'globalization'. Companies are expanding into overseas markets through globalization, and consumers are using products and services produced in other countries[2,3]. In the New Normal era, domestic market-oriented strategies are no longer effective in increasing the size of the pie of the economy. When more Korean SMEs enter overseas markets, Korea's economy will grow and the employment rate will increase[4]. Therefore, strengthening the global competitiveness of SMEs is the top priority to create jobs in Korea, which has a high level of dependence on foreign countries.

One such strategy is to provide an adequate supply of workforce. Although government subsidies do exist, many SMEs lack the human resources to efficiently operate their business utilizing the subsidies[5]. The world is rapidly changing, and the economic boundaries between nations are collapsing. In order for SMEs to remain competitive and keep their growth momentum in the rapidly changing corporate environment, it is important to secure globally competitive manpower that can adapt to these changes. Human resources development is emerging as one of the effective ways to strengthen the

global competitiveness of SMEs as many companies currently struggle with hiring and training manpower[6].

Global competency refers to the knowledge, skill, and attitude that enable one to perform tasks in the global business environment, and it largely affects the job performance of employees working overseas. The global competence of a company's human resources will have a significant impact on strengthening and maintaining its global competitiveness[7,8]. Since global competency can be developed through education, there are many companies that have training programs aimed at enhancing global competitiveness in employees. Therefore, it is meaningful to examine whether on-the-job training such as overseas internships can lead to significant development of global competency in employees.

Overseas internships provide job seekers the opportunity to work in companies overseas and help them understand and adapt to other cultures and form a global mindset[9]. Competence in foreign languages can also improve, which can increase the possibility of overseas employment[10,11]. Overseas internships can be beneficial both to companies and job seekers. Companies are able to secure globally trained manpower while job seekers gain overseas work experience, personal growth, and a global perspective[12]. It can also be greatly advantageous to the company in terms of costs of hiring and training. The company can hire a skillfully trained workforce that can be immediately utilized in the field. Since overseas internships can cultivate manpower with practical skills, many companies now deem it as one of the important criteria for recruitment[13].

In recent years many universities have

established partnerships with companies for overseas internship programs to help increase employment chances after graduation in their students. In an attempt to shed light on the effects of overseas internships on foreign language development, this study examines the linguistic aspects of students who have participated in such programs.

2. Overseas Internship Programs of N University

N University in Korea runs overseas internship programs with the aim of enhancing students' global competency by providing them with opportunities to experience working abroad and equip them with qualities and skills required for future employment. The university has established collaborative relationships with institutions, companies, and hotels overseas. Students in the third to seventh semesters are eligible for the programs. In addition, only engineering related majors can join the internship program in the USA as it is specialized in the automobile field.

The programs consist of activities such as job training, work, language training, and field trips. Job training, allocated about 10 hours per week, trains the students to acquire business skills such as presentations, group discussions, interviews, apart from dealing with practical issues such as cross-cultural differences, work environment, safety precautions, public transportation, dormitory life, etc. Work takes about 20 hours per week, but it is subject to the company's situations. Language training for those with a language barrier takes about 20 hours per week.

3. Research Methods

3.1 Participants

A total of 10 students, consisting of 7 male and 3 female students, participated in this study. All the participants were majoring in engineering related fields. They were relatively homogeneous in terms of age and English proficiency level. The participants ranged 22–26 years in age. The students had been learning English for about 9–12 years, with an intermediate level of English proficiency. The students joined the overseas internship program in SMEs in Alabama, USA for 15 weeks. The students took 4 hours of language training a day, 5 days a week. They had extensive opportunities to practice the language in their workplaces as well as their surrounding environment. They attended language training sessions in the morning and worked in the afternoon.

3.2 Composition Writing

Students wrote a short text in English before and after participating in the internship program. The topics (prior text: *Campus Life*, post text: *Overseas Internship*) were prepared so as to pose little difficulty in writing, considering their English proficiency levels as well as the psychological burden in students participating in their first internship program abroad. Each composition took approximately 30 minutes.

3.3 Data Analysis

Written data gathered was analyzed to discern differences in English composition before and after the internship. First, the components of the overall writing were measured, such as the average length of compositions and sentences, and the number of sentences. Second, the number of four content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs), the ratio of the content words to the

total number of words, and the number of errors in content words were counted. Then, tokens, types and a type-token ratio of each content word were measured. Next, statistical analyses were carried out using the SPSS version 21 to examine the means of all the counts and verify the significance of the differences between the two compositions.

4. Results and Discussion

In order to compare the differences in English compositions prior to and following the internship, overall writing components such as the number of words in compositions and sentences, the number of sentences, the ratio of the content words to the total number of words, and the number of content errors were examined. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of Writing Components

	Prior Text	Post Text
Average length of compositions (words)	185.3	215.0
Average length of sentences (words)	10.8	14.4
Number of sentences	21.47	17.81
Ratio of content words	57.16%	50.41%
Number of errors in content words	5.87	4.53

As seen above, overall, a significant improvement was seen in their English writing skills after the internship. There was a 16.02% increase in the average length of compositions from the pre-internship text (185.3 words) to the post-internship text (215.0 words). Average sentence length increased by 33.3% in the post text (14.4 words) compared to the prior text (10.8 words), while the number of sentences decreased by 17.0% from the prior text (21.47) to the post text (17.81). Also, the t-test between the two texts showed a significant

difference within the alpha level of .05 in the average sentence length (.001) and the number of sentences (.037). This means participants produced longer compositions and embedded more words in a sentence, indicating they attained lexical fluency over time. Furthermore, longer sentences often imply a more complicated sentence structure, indicating that the participants attempted to write more complicated sentences in the post text.

There was a reduction in the ratio of content words to the total number of words (prior text: 57.16%, post text: 50.41%). This means that the students expanded their use of function words in the second composition, reflecting an increased awareness of grammatical elements after the internship period. The erroneous use of content words was also reduced in the post text (4.53) compared to the prior text (5.87). Students appeared to have a better control of words after their internship abroad.

Next, tokens (or frequencies), types and a type-token ratio (TTR) of the content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) in the pre- and post-internship texts were measured. A TTR shows the extent of lexical variation and is used to measure the diversity of vocabulary in the text. A high TTR means that various words were used, whereas a low TTR indicates repetition within the text. Table 2 presents the comparison of content words between the two writings.

As a whole, the students made a notable improvement in utilizing content words after the internship period. The tokens and types of all four content words increased in the post text. Noun frequencies increased from the prior text (46.71) to the post text (52.43), and types of nouns, from 25.21 to 29.96. An increase in the TTR of nouns from the prior text (53.97) to the post text (57.15) indicated

that students avoided the repetitive use of nouns in their latter writings. Students were found to have utilized a higher number of nouns with more diverse types with less repetition in their post-internship writing.

Table 2. Comparison of Content Words

Content Words	Prior Text	Post Text
Noun	Token	46.71
	Type	25.21
	TTR	53.97
Verb	Token	33.83
	Type	17.09
	TTR	50.51
Adjective	Token	12.98
	Type	9.73
	TTR	74.96
Adverb	Token	10.15
	Type	7.73
	TTR	76.15

There was an increase in mean scores of verbs in the post text (36.19), compared to the prior text (33.83). The students also utilized more diverse types of verbs in the post text (19.02) than in the prior text (17.09). Consequently, the TTR of verbs rose after the internship (prior text: 50.51, post text: 58.57), meaning that there was less verb repetition in the post text. An analysis of the adjective usage revealed that the students showed a larger vocabulary in the post text (14.63) than in the prior text (12.98). The types showed to follow the trend, in that it increased from 9.73 to 11.37, resulting in an increase in the TTR between the prior text (74.96) and post text (77.72). It indicated that the students used more diverse adjectives with less repetition over time. The use of adverbs also showed a marked difference between the two writings. The students averaged 10.15 in the prior text and 14.26 in the post text. Types of adverbs also increased from 7.73 to 11.06 after the internship period. The adverb TTR means increased from the prior text (76.15) to the post text (77.91).

All results presented revealed that the students appeared to have gained a better control of the content words, utilizing higher frequencies of words of more diverse types with a high TTR in sentences after the internship. Moreover, the results of the t-tests showed that the differences between the two writings in the use of the words were significant ($<.05$). It seems obvious then that the internship appeared to have facilitated the growth in their abilities to use words. It is interesting to note that there was no difference in the amount of the four content words between the two texts.

5. Conclusion

In an attempt to shed light on the effects of overseas internships on foreign language development, this study investigated the differences in the components of English writings and the use of the four content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) by students after a 15-week internship abroad. The results of the study showed noticeable differences in the constituents of English texts written before and after the internship, and statistically significant differences in the average length of sentences and the number of sentences.

Participants appeared to have improved their vocabulary use, generating higher frequencies of words of more diverse types with a high type-token ratio in sentences. There were also qualitative differences observed in the vocabulary use between the two writings. The participants generated longer sentences embedded with multisyllabic, more diverse, more complex, and less redundant words in more complicated structures after the internship abroad.

The findings revealed significant differences in the use of the content words between the two writings. This indicated that the overseas internship facilitated the growth of the foreign language vocabulary repertoire. Such participants' linguistic gains in foreign language can be attributed to their experience in the overseas internship program which provides extensive amounts of language input and opportunities to use the language in real-world environments.

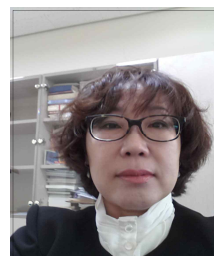
Therefore, in order for Korean SMEs to strengthen their global competitiveness, it is important to enhance the global capacity of their human resources via training programs such as overseas internships, apart from improving their industrial competencies such as productivity and product quality. The results of this study can provide useful implications for policy making and operating overseas internship programs.

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