

## A STUDY ON STUDENT AGENCY OF COLLEGE STUDENTS WHO PARTICIPATED IN NON-FACE-TO-FACE CLASSES

Choi SooAn<sup>1</sup>, & Kim YoungSoon<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Doctoral student, Dept. of Multicultural education, Inha University (South Korea)

<sup>2</sup>Professor, Dept. of Multicultural education, Inha University (South Korea)

### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to look at the student as agency who leads the class, and to examine the experience of mutual communication as agency. For this purpose, 4 students who took the social education and major compulsory classes at University A in South Korea were selected as research participants. In order to increase the coherence of the research purpose, in addition to the interview data, the class impressions and midterm and final test assignments written by the students were supplemented. The research results according to this study are as follows. First, the non-face-to-face discussion class allowed students to experience both fear and unfamiliarity from the non-face-to-face environment at the same time. In particular, the non-face-to-face environment made people hesitate about how to communicate. Second, group discussion improved communication between theory and reality by analyzing textbooks based on class theory and sharing the analysis results among students. Third, field trip facilitated the connection between online and offline, allowing them to look back on their own world of life and build confidence as a future teacher. The following are the suggestions accordingly. First, it should promote interaction with students and teachers. Second, the class should provide various connections outside the class. Third, strong motivation for class is required. This study does not suggest a universal law of student agency in that it only targeted students from the College of Education of A University in Korea. However, it is meaningful in that by exploring the process of developing student agency, it gave hints on what direction to take in the future.

**Keywords:** *Non-face-to-face classes, student agency, qualitative study, college student, South Korea.*

---

## 1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way we live around the world. In particular, with the advent of the era of untact, which means non-contact, a paradigm shift is taking place rapidly. In particular, the field with the most significant change in daily life is the education field. Although Korean studies on non-face-to-face classes have been steadily conducted, existing studies mainly show that teachers or schools need to reconsider their class satisfaction through improving the class environment, the necessity of interaction between instructors and learners, and the need for active class participation by learners. In other words, this study can be said to be an early stage study to respond to the rapid change in the educational environment caused by COVID-19, and has limitations in that students cannot be actively treated as subjects of education.

The student needs to be viewed as a subject that can change through interaction, not just accepting the environment as the subject of education (Lee, Seung-min, Min, Deok-gi & Shim, Gyu-nam, 2013; Choi, Sun-ju, 2020). In this regard, this study aims to view students as agency who can lead the class, and to examine experiences of mutual communication as agency. However, this study has limitations in that it is a social education and major class at a specific university in Korea along with the special context of COVID-19. Nevertheless, it is different from previous studies in that it discusses students as agency in the class. Accordingly, the research question of this study is “How is the experience of student agency of college students who participated in non-face-to-face classes?”

## 2. Background

### 2.1. Non-face-to-face classes

During the COVID-19 period, non-face-to-face classes were one of the surest ways to deal with academic deficits. Korean studies on non-face-to-face classes mainly focus on the current status and current status of classes (Kim, Yun-Min, 2020; Lee, Heon-Soo, 2020), and satisfaction and perception of classes (Kim, Dong-hun, Jiang, Ting & Zhu, Yong-jun, 2021; Oh, Seung-Min, 2021; Song, Sue-Yeon,

Kim, Hank-young, 2020; Lee, So-min, Kim, Kyung-lee, 2021), Exploring professors and classroom environments (Choi, Dong-Yeon, Kim Ji-Un, 2021), student experience (Song, Eun-hwa, Kim, Myeung-chan & Im, Seon-mi, 2021; Jun, Joo-ram, Choi, Kyoung, 2021; Cho, Seung-hui, 2021; Choi, Ra-young, 2021; Choi, Hyeon-Sil, 2021), etc. have been the focus of research.

The preceding research is meaningful in that it suggests a direction for improving non-face-to-face classes by examining the various levels of students' experiences in non-face-to-face classes. However, it is necessary to remember that students are not just objects of experience in the classroom environment, but the subject of education that creates experiences (Lee, Seung-min, Min, Deok-gi & Shim, Gyu-nam, 2013; Choi, Sun-ju, 2020). Thus, in this study, based on the recognition that the student is the subject of education, we want to examine what kind of experiences students have and what kind of experiences they create in non-face-to-face learning. Through these attempts, we intend to overcome the limitations of previous studies and suggest implications for student's agency in non-face-to-face classes.

## 2.2. Student agency

The discussion on the *Agency* has been developed in various ways. Bandura (1982) defined agency as the ability to act according to an individual's sense of self-efficacy in a complex context from a sociocognitive perspective. Emirbayer and Mische (1998: 973) argued that the temporal factor should be considered in understanding agency. Considering the orientation (past) of the action and the possibility of the action (the future), it was considered that the present agency appears. Ahearn (2001: 112) emphasized the socio-environmental aspect of agency and defined it as "socioculturally mediated behavioral ability". Biesta and Tegger (2006) also defined agency as the ability to act and achieve in 'specific circumstances'. On the other hand, Burkitt (2016) emphasized the process of interaction between actors and stated that no person can be a complete agency or a complete conformer at the moment of interaction. In his view, agency is a concept that can be defined based on reflection and reflection.

Student agency is influenced by autonomous goal setting, interaction with various contexts, and peer and peer relationships (Arnold, Clarke, 2014; Klemenčič, 2015; OECD, 2021). It was revealed that the dispositional dimension, the motivational dimension, and the social context dimension are complexly intertwined. Learner agency is often used interchangeably with student autonomy, which needs to be clearly distinguished. The main difference between the two concepts lies in "consideration of the effects of complex social formation" (Abrams, 1999, p. 825). While the necessity of self-directed learning (Little, 1991) is mainly proposed as an alternative to maximizing student autonomy, student agency is a complex combination of orientation and possibility, individual temperamental dimension, and recognition of social structure. should be considered (Ahearn, 2001; Arnold & Clarke, 2014; Lindgren & McDaniel, 2012). Thus, student agency can be defined as a complex and multi-layered concept that requires consideration of individual aspects as well as external aspects of environmental context and interaction with teachers and other students.

## 3. Methods

### 3.1. Research design

In this study, a qualitative study was conducted to examine how the student agency behavior appears in the subject studies who participated in non-face-to-face classes. The study participants were selected from 4 students who are taking the major compulsory classes in the Department of Social Education, A University in South Korea<sup>1</sup>. Students participating in this class have a clear sense of purpose as social studies teachers. Thus, it was judged that it was a context in which student agency could appear well, and the students of the relevant class were selected as the research participants. The individual characteristics of the research participants are illustrated in the Table 1.

Table 1. Individual characteristics of the research participants.

No.	Gender	Age	Year of admission	Major
1	Male	21	2020	social education
2	Female	21	2020	social education
3	Female	21	2020	social education
4	Female	21	2020	social education

<sup>1</sup>Based on cultural anthropology, this class was operated non-face-to-face (zoom) for a total of 16 weeks from September to December 2021. Instructors provide theoretical lectures in real time, and students conduct team discussions with reference to class materials and theory lectures conducted in advance. The midterm exam was replaced with a field trip report. Field trip is to select a site for each student in the area where they live, conduct direct data research, interviews, etc., and develop research activities in the field of social studies. Before Corona 19, face-to-face classes were operated in the form of selecting a field to visit near the school by group, but they were conducted individually considering the difficulty of group classes. Students can use the online class management site to download class materials, upload assignments, and send and receive questions and answers.

After reviewing the class participation observation log written by the researcher, the research participants selected students who were deemed appropriate as the research participants and confirmed their intention to participate in the research. In order to comply with research ethics, a consent form for research participation was drawn up, and a predetermined case fee was paid.

### 3.2. Data collection and analysis

In this study, data were collected from various angles to enhance the consistency of the research purpose. First, in the first week's class orientation, it was informed that research could be conducted in relation to this class, and consent was obtained from the students. In order to collect data according to the purpose of the research, the class participation observation log prepared by the researcher, the class impressions prepared by the students before the end of each class, alternative assignments for the mid-term exam, and answers for the final exam were used. In addition, interviews were conducted with some students to ensure the students' vivid voices.

Individual interviews were conducted using semi-structured questionnaires. The main questions were about access to information about classes, experiences of non-face-to-face classes, experiences of discussion classes and field trips, mutual communication between instructors and students, and personal changes before and after class. After the individual interview, the transcripts were reviewed and additional questions were judged to be necessary, so a written interview was conducted using a structured questionnaire. The main questions are: *Why did you want to become a social studies teacher? What you think are important and most memorable discussions in the discussion class? The positive and negative aspects of the field trip, What you learned from the field trip, and what to do when you hire a teacher in the future?*

The collected data was analyzed within the case in the form of open coding, and then the student agency was described through analysis between cases. In addition, in order to secure the validity and reliability of the research, the research results were regularly discussed with the co-researcher at least once a week, and the results of discussions held at regular seminars were reflected in the paper.

## 4. Results

As a result of the study, there were three themes: *meet with class*, *group discussion: connection between theory and reality*, and *field trip: connection between online and offline*.

### 4.1. Meet with class

The study participants were experiencing the fear of the discussion class and the unfamiliarity of the non-face-to-face environment at the same time. In particular, as non-face-to-face classes started due to Corona 19 at the same time as admission, they expressed a sense of pressure about how to interact with students and professors. In particular, this class was “a burdensome class” (Participant 2's 9/1/2021 class review) in that the discussion class required active interaction between students. Also, when interacting with the instructor, he ponders how his image will be received in non-face-to-face situations.

Since it was online, we had to conduct a discussion without knowing each other so well, so I think there were a lot of cases where we spent time looking out for each other. -Interview with Participant 2

I really don't know if it's just me because I got the Corona class number at the same time I enrolled, but I think it was unfamiliar or very uncomfortable, or rather, there were few things like that. In my case, I started non-face-to-face from the beginning, so there is no comparison... - Interview with Participant 3

It's a little bit, but it's still going on non-face-to-face, and I met professors face-to-face like this and didn't do it, so I think it's a little difficult to ask a question first or something like that. In a non-face-to-face delivery situation, there may be other errors in delivery, so I think I hardly thought of asking. -Interview with Participant 4

### 4.2. Group discussion: connection between theory and reality

By interacting with students in group discussion, understanding the curriculum in general, and comparing each task, it becomes “an opportunity to instill a new experience” (Participant 3's 9/8/2021 class review). Doing different analyzes with the same textbook works as a major motivation for discussion.

As I start the group activity, I present the results of my textbook analysis and hear about the assignments of other members of the team, and I say, ‘Oh, the method of doing the assignments is different for each person. Each person is really different in the direction of analysis and in organizing the directions. There is no distinction between a correct method and an incorrect method.’ I thought. -Interview with Participant 2

At the same time, “a personality that does not like to hear bad stories from others” (interview with Participant 4) also acts as a motivating aspect of discussion learning. Research participants receive their own motivation and strive for better learning. In particular, they feel that time is tight for a smooth discussion, and they promise to “make an effort to supplement this in the next group activity” (Participant 2's 11/11/2021 class review), and hope for an appropriate intervention by the instructor.

It was short. So, if you take the wrong direction, there will be fewer things to talk about in that short time, so that time will be shortened, so I think the desire to have a clear direction and have a conversation is greater. - Interview with Participant 1

### **4.3. Field trip: Connection between online and offline**

The biggest advantage of field trip is “unusual discovery of ordinary places” (Written interview with Participant 1). Although it is a place that students have always encountered in their life world, the place is newly connected through class. In addition, all the process of field trip is connected to classes. Although it is an online class, students use what they have learned in the offline field and act as active agency.

The positive aspect of the field trip was that it was possible to put the learned knowledge to practical use. It was enjoyable to see all the learning elements I had taken in all parts of the process of selecting a location, conducting a literature search, and writing a report with expert advice, rather than just studying at my desk. Field trips are considered an essential activity in anthropology lectures such as <Culture and Society>. - Written interview with Participant 3

These activities are a process of “continuous training and realization with the teacher’s ability” (Participant 3's 10/28/2021 class review) outside of class time. It is also a time to think about how to overcome these difficulties in one's own class in the future while feeling the difficulties faced during the field trip. This is the power that comes from the experience that students have actually done something.

I think the biggest advantage is that I can convey my experience to others in a much more vivid way. As I have experienced it myself, I was able to convey in detail what points to consider and what process to go through. I think this experience is an experience I want to pass on to my students even after becoming a teacher in the future. -Written interview with Participant 1

## **5. Conclusion**

In order to actively treat the student as the subject of education in the educational context of non-face-to-face class, this study looked at the student as agency who leads the class, and intended to examine the experience of mutual communication as agency. The results of this study are as follows.

First, the students met with the class by experiencing the fear of the discussion class and the loneliness that comes from the non-face-to-face environment at the same time. Second, discussion classes connected theory and reality, reflecting on other students or changing their personal tendencies. Third, the field trip was an opportunity to expand the online class to the world of one's own life, and to draw a picture of future development as a teacher. Recommendations based on the above research results are as follows.

First, it should promote interaction with students and teachers. This is something that has been consistently mentioned as important in previous studies as well. In a face-to-face environment, it's easy to feel more intimate through body-to-body communication, but communication difficulties arise in non-face-to-face classes. Thus, in order to promote mutual communication with students and professors, it is necessary for teachers and educational institutions to provide an environment in which communication is ‘forced’. Second, it is necessary to provide an opportunity for the class to be connected in various ways, not just the class. For example, as in this study, it is necessary to analyze what has been learned through discussion and to increase the opportunity to share the results between students or to use what has been learned in the offline field. Through this process, students naturally demonstrate their agency. Third, strong motivation for class is very important. The research participants of this study were students enrolled in the College of Education and participated in this class with a firm goal and vision to become teachers. Consequently, it seems that the agency is more actively expressed. Thus, the instructor should consider what kind of motivation can be provided in demonstrating student agency.

This study does not suggest a universal law of student agency in that it only targeted students from the College of Education of A University in Korea. Nevertheless, it is meaningful in that by exploring the process of developing student agency, it gave hints on what direction to take in the future.

## References

- Abrams, K. (1999). From autonomy to agency: feminist perspectives on self-direction. *William & Mary Law Review*, 40, 805–846.
- Ahearn, L. M. (2001). Language and agency. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 30, 109–137
- Arnold, J., & Clarke, D. J. (2014). What is ‘agency’? Perspectives in science education research. *International Journal of Science Education*, 36(5), 735-754.
- Bandura, A. (1982). Self-efficacy mechanism in human agency. *American psychologist*, 37(2), 122.
- Biesta, G., & Tedder, M. (2006). *How is agency possible? Towards an ecological understanding of agency as achievement. Learning lives: Learning, identity, and agency in the life course.*
- Burkitt, I. (2016). Relational agency: Relational sociology, agency and interaction. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 19(3), 322-339.
- Cho, Seung-hui (2021). A Study on the Real-time Non-face-to-face Participatory Classes Experience of University Students. *The Journal of Humanities and Social science*, 12(4), 1131-1143.
- Choi, Dong-Yeon, Kim Ji-Un (2021). Analysis of learner's learning interest and learning experience forelaboration of real-time non face-to-face music class atcyber university in the contact-era. *Journal of Music Education Science*, 49(), 95-115.
- Choi, Hyeon-Sil (2021). A Study on the Non-face-to-face Teaching Experience of College Freshmen due to Covid-19. *Korean Journal of General Education*, 15(1), 273-286.
- Choi, Ra-young, (2021). Qualitative Exploration of Experiences in Non-Face-to-Face Class: Focusing on University Students at Advanced Course for Bachelor’s Degree in Early Childhood Education. *Journal of Public Society*, 11(4), 116-142.
- Choi, Sun-ju (2020). Understanding the Agency of Cooperative Members Through the Concept of Learner Position: A Narrative Analysis of YMCA Cooperative Members. *The Korean Journal of Cooperative Studies*, 38(1), 185-206.
- Emirbayer, M. & Mische, A. (1998) What is agency?. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 103, 962-1023.
- Jun, Joo-ram, Choi, Kyoung (2021). A Study on the Experience of College Students in Non-face-to-faceClasses during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Photovoice Study. *Culture and Convergence*, 43(5), 65-85.
- Kim, Dong-hun, Jiang, Ting & Zhu , Yong-jun (2021). Exploring Opinions on University Online Classes During the COVID-19 Pandemic Through Twitter Opinion Mining. *Journal of the Korean Library and Information Science*, 55(4), 5-22.
- Kim, Yun-Min (2020) Correlation between Psychosocial Well-being, Resilience, and Self-directed Learning of Freshman Nursing Students in Non-face-to-face Lectures during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Culture and Convergence*, 42(12), 295-318.
- Klemenčič, M. (2015). What is student agency? An ontological exploration in the context of research on student engagement. Student engagement in Europe: *Society, higher education and student governance*, 11-29.
- Lee, Heon-soo (2020). A Study on the Perception of Professors and Learners on the Remote Learning of University Education - Focused on the Cases of M University - *Journal of the Korean School Mathematics Society*, 23(3), 377-395.
- Lee, Seung-min, Min, Deok-gi & Shim, Gyu-nam (2013). Effects of using an educational robot on interactional aspects in group-based communicative activities. *Journal of the Korea English Education Society*, 12(2), 61~80.
- Lee, So-min, Kim, Kyung-lee (2021). A Study on Factors Affecting the Satisfaction of Non-face-to-Face Class in a University: Focusing on the Mediating Effect of Class Participation. *The Korean Journal of Educational Methodology Studies*, 33(2), 341-361.
- Lindgren, R., & Mcdaniel, R. (2012). Transforming online learning through narrative and student agency. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, 15, 344–355.
- Little, D. (1991). *Learner autonomy I: definitions, issues and problems.* Dublin: Authentik.
- Oh Seung-Min (2021). A Q Methodological Analysis of Types of Working College Students’ Perception Toward Online Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journal of Learner-Centered Curriculum and Instruction*, 21(11), 673-693.
- Song, Eun-hwa, Kim, Myeung-chan & Im, Seon-mi(2021). Focus group interview on non-face-to-face class experience due to COVID-19. *Journal of Learner-Centered Curriculum and Instruction*, 21(22), 531-549.
- Song, Sue-Yeon, Kim, Hank-young (2020). Exploring Factors Influencing College Students’ Satisfaction and Persistent Intention to Take Non-Face-to-Face Courses during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Asian Journal of Education*, 21(4), 1099-1126.
- Vaughn, M. (2020). What is student agency and why is it needed now more than ever?. *Theory Into Practice*, 59(2), 109-118.