

My experiences at IEA

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I feel lucky to have received the opportunity to participate in the visiting scholar program at IEA in Hamburg Germany.

Before my arrival at IEA, I had my own set of goals. Most of all, I wanted to work independently during my time there, because I was taking a sabbatical from my university and I wanted to think deeply about my research agendas and future direction. Time like that is hard to come by for an academic with a busy schedule filled up by regular teaching, administrative duties and research supervision of several PhD students. My plans also included a desire to learn about the technical aspects of the IEA's large-scale international assessment projects. While working at the university, I had limited opportunities to learn about recent developments related to large-scale international assessments. The field is ever-evolving, and I knew I needed to catch up with the changes. IEA is one of the world's oldest and best institutions for developing and implementing large-scale international assessments. In addition, I was hoping to develop new network connections to enrich my professional and personal lives.

Looking back, I can honestly say that the IEA academic visitor program met all my expectations. For the most part, I was able to work independently, and I had a chance to think about my identity as a researcher and the direction of my future research. This type of reflection led me to set up a research project during my time at IEA, which aimed to explain student academic performance across different countries by a broader set of societal and cultural influences. The project was small enough to complete in 7 weeks and, more importantly, reflects my research interest. I am deeply thankful to have been given such an opportunity.

I also learned about technical aspects of the IEA's current projects. IEA regularly hosts a series of workshops and I was able to attend a 3-day workshop on sampling. It was very useful to learn in-depth technical aspects of some of the large-scale sampling methodologies. I wish to recommend to future visiting scholars that they should look at the IEA's workshop schedules. Furthermore, what turned out to be the best outcome for me was the opportunity to observe in person what types of software programs IEA researchers and staff routinely use to generate their official reports. I had stopped using the IDB Analyzer about 10 years ago because the software program was too limited to conduct advanced statistics for research papers. Thankfully, my IEA visit allowed me to take another look at this program, and I have found out that it is now sufficiently developed and can serve many of my research needs!

One of the most exciting aspects of being in an institution like IEA was that I was surrounded by the people who share the same interest and passion for work on large-scale international assessment! A new project was set up with IEA researcher, Minge Chen. We are currently examining TIMSS' non-cognitive scales as predictors of students' mathematics

achievement based on TIMSS 2015 data. I also had a chance to meet another visiting scholar, Tatiana Khavenson from the Higher School of Economics in Moscow, Russia, during my time there. The three of us have designed and are currently working on a couple of joint-publications. One project aims to examine characteristics of students who respond to the TIMSS questionnaire items with “I don’t know”. The other one investigates the accuracy of students’ responses to a question about their mothers’ educational level in large-scale international questionnaires. I hope to be able to maintain this network to collaborate and continue to learn from each other!

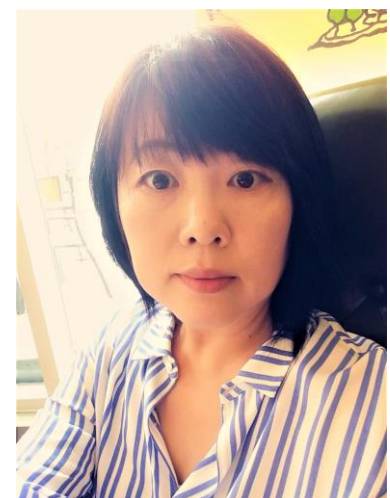
I also enjoyed the opportunity to build further networks. There were several social events, some of which seemed to be taking place on a weekly basis (e.g., work lunch), and some of which appeared to be one-off events (e.g., bowling outing). IEA staff invited me and the other visiting scholar to all of their social events, and we were able to feel like part of their group and had a chance to mingle with others outside the office.


As a visiting scholar, I was expected to present my research upon my arrival and towards the end of my stay. It was a perfect way to introduce myself and to get to know the research interests of the IEA staff. I also volunteered to conduct a workshop on the topic of questionnaire design for IEA staff, as part of my thank-you gesture. I had a great time sharing and communicating on this topic with IEA staff. I hope to be able to come back one day and present a fuller version of the workshop on the same topic in the future. I wish to express special thanks to Aysel Gojayeva, the administrative support staff member who took the role of communicating with me before my arrival, introducing me to everyone in the office, checking with me on and off to see if I need anything further to support my research, and inviting me to social as well as other official events at IEA. I’ve had plenty of experiences at different work places and I know how important it is to have such welcoming and warm people to greet you at the beginning and continue to take care of you on a daily basis. I was able to freely express what my needs were to conduct my research as efficiently as possible, and Aysel was able to provide me with all the information and resources. The IEA visiting program also assigned me to a host person, Falk Brese. I was able to ask him any questions, and he was willing to help and responded quickly in an easy-going manner.

Last, I would like to give my deep and sincere thanks to Dr Sabine Meinck, Head of the Research, Analysis and Sampling Unit at IEA who was willing to accommodate me in the visiting scholar program. Her kindness and easy-going attitude will be remembered for a long time. Thank you.

About the Author

Jihyun Lee holds a Ph.D. in Educational Measurement and Applied Statistics from Columbian University in New York (2003) and a Master of Education in Human Development from Harvard Graduate School of Education.





She was a post-doctoral fellow at the Educational Testing Service (ETS), Princeton, New Jersey (2004-2006) and continued to work at the ETS in a few different roles. Her main work at ETS focused on the development of non-cognitive assessments for large-scale, national and international projects such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

Before joining the UNSW in 2013, she worked at the National Institute of Education in Singapore (2010-2012). More recently, she was a visiting academic researcher at IEA Hamburg, (September – October 2017), a visiting Scholar at the Collingwood College, Durham University, UK (September 2017), and a visiting Associate Professor in the School of Education in the Seoul National University, Korea (May – December 2017). She is currently a Thomas J. Alexander (TJA) Research Fellow at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in Paris, France.