

## **Integrated or Detached?: Korean Culture Education for Filipino KFL Learners**

---

Kyungmin Bae  
University of the Philippines

### **ABSTRACT**

It is clearly noted that culture is an inevitable part of language learning and teaching. Numerous empirical studies have claimed that many students' motivation to start learning a foreign language is rooted on understanding a target culture. Cultural elements are not always explicitly learned as a part of curriculum but rather embedded throughout the course. As Brown (2007) puts it, culture is "a way of life" which reflects how certain people "think, feel, and relate to others" expressed by distinctive ideas, customs, skills, and so on.

Based on Kang's (2011) extensive study on conceptualizing Korean culture education program, this study will investigate Filipino KFL students' perception on Korean culture and which programs they would prefer to enhance their intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1989). It will be examined what Korean cultural components should be critically considered for Filipino students. The study will primarily utilize questionnaire and Focus Group Discussion (FGD).

**Keywords:** intercultural communicative competence, Korean culture education, KFL in the Philippines

### **INTRODUCTION**

It is unarguable that culture is one of the essential parts of a foreign language learning. This claim has been advocated by many scholars in foreign language education field. Amidst globalization, the importance of adequate cultural competence is more frequently discussed in terms of integrating in a language education, as it is believed to be closely related with a wider cultural knowledge, proper attitudes, tolerance, and so on.

Toyoda (2016) identified the organic benefits of foreign language learning:

"Learning a foreign language exposes students to alternative worldviews and it enables people to absorb a target cultural information directly from original sources and by communicating with native speakers of the target language." (Toyoda, 2016: 505)

The notion of culture is very broad and thus defined in various ways. Cultural assets are generally defined into tangible and intangible. The first includes cultural heritages such as geographical, historic, political achievements and artworks. The latter covers the knowledge, practices, skills, and expressions

that a certain cultural domain represents. According to Brooks (1975), this is defined into Big C and Little C. While Big C is closely related to knowledge transfer, Little C enables successful cross-cultural communication. Hammerly (1982) proposed a model of Behavioural culture, Informational Culture, and Achievement culture. In his model, behavioural culture represents the sum of everyday life and, therefore, is closely related to communicative competence.

Kang (2010) pointed out that it is not easy to define the scope and range of culture in language education. It is commonly seen that the quality of culture education in the field was determined by the teachers and thus, their knowledge and experiences influence what are taught in the language classroom. Song (2015) noted that culture education has become important in terms of target language communicative competences yet approaches and methods how the cultural elements should be taught in language classrooms are not yet fully discussed. In addition, the outcome of culture education in KFL is rather considered incidental to language components. Culture is not acquired by mere rote learning and it is crucial to consider student's indigenous first culture (C1) and target culture (C2) together.

Based on this discussion, this study will attempt to examine what Filipino KFL learners' perceptions Korean culture are and what cultural elements they are interested to learn.

## **PARTICIPANTS AND RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS**

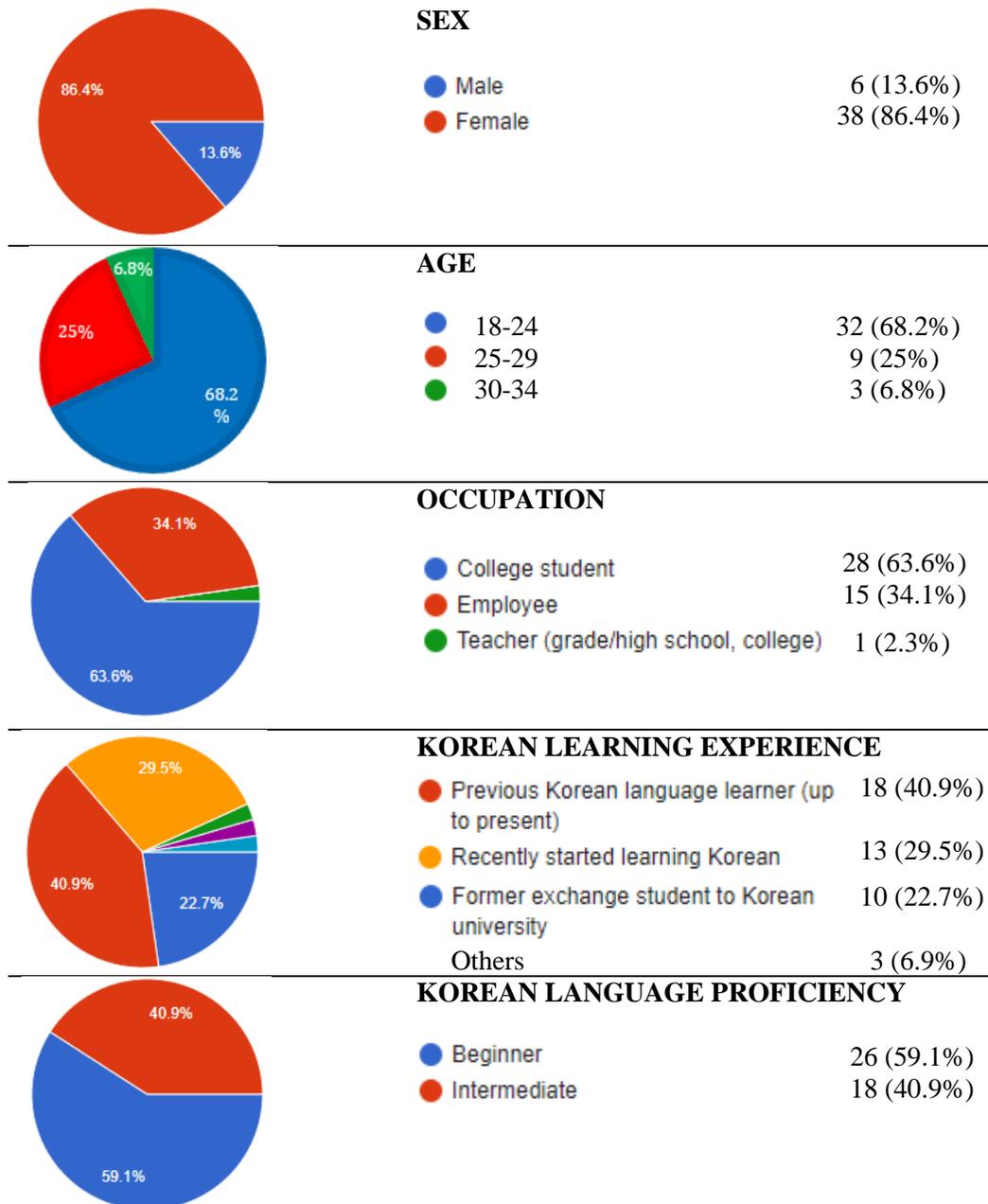
The participants for this study were recruited by snowball sampling (N=44) because the study believed randomized responses would give diverse voices. The initial participants were sought among previous and current Korean language students, as well as former exchange students from the Philippines to Korea. Other participants were purposively referred by them and invited to answer the online questionnaire.

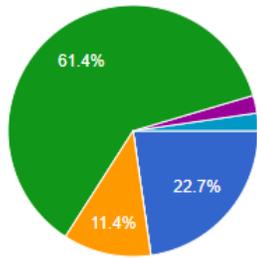
The research methods employed for this study are questionnaire and focus group discussions. The questions are adapted from Kang (2011) to ask the participants' preferred Korean culture contents and the type of programs they wish to participate in. The questionnaire was distributed through major social media sites. Focus group discussion (FGD) was held to complement the data that the survey may have missed to add on to. Participation in this FGD was on a voluntary basis. In FGD, one generic question

was about the impact of first-hand cultural experiences and the role of C1 (Filipino culture) to understand C2 (Korean culture).

The demographics of the participants are described as follows:

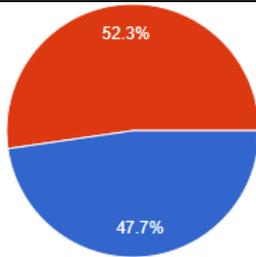
**[Figure 1] Demographics of the Participants (N=44)**





**PURPOSE OF LEARNING KOREAN LANGUAGE**

● Hobby and pleasure	27 (61.4%)
● Applying for Korean graduate schools or universities	10 (22.7%)
● Communicating with Koreans	5 (11.4%)
Others	2 (4.5%)



**VISIT TO KOREA**

● I have been to Korea.	21 (47.7%)
● I have not been to Korea yet.	23 (52.3%)

**ANALYSIS**

***Impact of media on shaping Korean image***

To the question how they have encountered Korean culture first time, majority responded that it was through Korean TV dramas and K-pop. The following responses were Korean food, Korean films, and the least answered it was their Korean friends whom they learned about Korean culture. This clearly shows that many Filipino students’ cultural contingency relies heavily on the Korean media that mediates shaping certain images about Korean culture. It was consistent that the participants responded that the primary image of Korea is Korean dramas and K-pop.

For some participants, Korean dramas portray that Korean culture is well-preserved and at the same time still reflects the modern society. One stated that “I find the Asian component and how it is carried out in Korean culture to be very interesting, like how the respect system and conservative aspect for females is prevalent.” It is also mentioned that Korean mainstream media displays traditional culture “really showing how much they value their heritage. I wish I could see that in my own country.”

While similarities to Filipino culture are also frequently found such as valuing seniority, emphasizing hierarchy in daily life were widely mentioned, some unfamiliar points were raised too. The participants observed in Korean media, mostly Korean TV dramas, some unacceptable cultural phenomenon. It

involved hierarchy such as “younger ones cannot really defend their side to the older people because of the age gap” and “teachers hitting delinquent students”.

### *Lived Experiences and Critical Cultural Reception*

One respondent who have been to Korea shared her observation from TV dramas and her first-hand experience in Korea:

“I found it interesting (and surprising) how Korean culture portrayed in TV dramas was actually very close to how the culture actually is. Koreans really value their appearances. I also find it interesting how everything seems to be so conveniently tailored to their needs. For example, how there are mirrors as you leave cafeterias, how shower heads are connected to the sink to wash hair separately and how convenience stores are literally within 500m from each other.”

This is observed as an interesting anecdote how real lifestyle was depicted in Korean TV dramas. Like this statement shows, there are recurring points what participants experienced in Korea and indirectly acquainted by Korean media are relevant to each other. For instance, it was mentioned that “Korea’s beauty standards” seem strange and difficult to understand why Korean women on TV tend to excessively value beauty and consider plastic surgery. Also, Korean culture is interpreted based on differences from their own cultural perceptions and practices in the Philippines. Some responses show critical view on Korean culture and society:

“Korea can be highly misogynistic and sexist probably due to Confucian teachings that most still interpret traditionally.”

“They are not yet very accepting towards the LGBT community.”

“It is patriarchal and hierarchical and really difficult to be different and to express yourself because most people are accustomed to getting into the trend.”

These are not only constructed by the media, but rather critically formulated after their lived experiences in Korea. Whereas Korean cultural value in earlier analysis showed generally positive reception, these responses strongly expresses their critical point of view with some unwelcoming sentiments.

### *Preferred Korean cultural topics*

Based on the survey items from the Korean Culture Education (Kang, XXXX), this study presented questions to the participants asking to select preferred Korean cultural topics that they wish to learn. The original questions from Kang (ibid) were thematically divided (e.g. traditional culture, language elements, etiquettes, etc.) so that participants will find easy to determine. There was no restriction to choose only one item and the participants were free to select multiple items. The total population who responded to each questionnaire item is 44.

In Kang (2011), the questions are categorized into achievement culture, behavioural culture, and informational culture following Hammerly (1982). Focusing on these three types of culture, the current study will limit to discuss selected questions from Kang (2011). The results that will be presented are: (1) traditional culture, (2) society, (3) contemporary lifestyle, and (4) language and literature.

#### *Traditional culture*

The achievement culture was broken down into the various Korean cultural heritages. Majority of the participants chose ‘historic heritage’, ‘traditional social class system’, and ‘traditional holidays’. During the FGD, it was found that this is because of what they see in Korean soap operas and films. They have observed in many historical or fantasy drama that past society maintained the social class system. They are also familiar with some festive traditional holidays such as Seollal and Chuseok, so it made them more curious about what they previously known about. Table 1 – 3 show the results.

[Table 1] Traditional Arts (N=44)

Cultural heritage	<b>Historic heritage</b>	Traditional performance	Traditional games	Traditional martial arts	Traditional dance	Traditional fine arts	Traditional music	Modern theatre arts
24	<b>36</b>	23	23	16	28	16	25	28

[Table 2] Traditional Life (N=44)

Traditional housing	Traditional costumes	Traditional ornaments	Traditional dining & dietary life	Traditional agricultural equipment	Traditional transportation	Traditional educational institutions	<b>Traditional social class system</b>
28	31	17	34	10	17	30	<b>37</b>

[Table 3] Traditional Events (N=44)

Dating and marriage	Fun anniversary	<b>Traditional holidays</b>	Traditional customs	Life events
30	32	<b>36</b>	31	34

### *Language*

Language is categorized under the behavioural culture while item-related to literature fall under the achievement culture. It is noted that 40 out of 44 chose nonverbal language is the most interesting to learn about. The opinion was shared in the FGD that the textbook they use do not explicitly handle it and the lessons do not give emphasis although “it is part of how people communicate in Korea.” As the original questionnaire (Kang, 2011) defined, behavioural culture is considered important because of applying communicative competence in daily life.

[Table 4] Korean Language (N=44)

Honorifics	Descriptive adjectives	Speech act	<b>Nonverbal language</b>	Proverb	Loan/ buzz words	Dialects	Addressing terms	Online language	Korean names
41	33	29	<b>40</b>	32	33	35	36	37	38

### *Contemporary lifestyle*

Out of the total participants, 41 participants expressed their stronger interest to learn about contemporary Korean culture. It includes daily life etiquette, dining trend, and entertainment industry. These cultural items are part of behavioural culture that students are expected to be equipped with more comprehensive understanding for successful intercultural acquisition. It is understandable that behavioural culture, which is equivalent to Little C, is correlated with students’ cultural perspectives and practices. However, as seen in Table 7, it seems that entertainment industry (Hallyu) is an outlier itemized in the named category.

[Table 5] Etiquettes (N=44)

Family event etiquette	<b>Daily life etiquette</b>	Traditional life etiquette	Dining etiquette	Drinking etiquette	Ancestral rituals
37	<b>41</b>	38	40	39	30

[Table 6] Contemporary trends (N=44)

Internet trend	Daily life information/ media	Shopping venue	<b>Dining trend</b>	Fashion trend
33	22	33	<b>36</b>	30

[Table 7] Life tips and information (N=44)

Housing types	Leisure types	Information for using banks	<b>Entertainment industry</b>	Investment
27	35	14	<b>36</b>	14

### *Society*

Most participants expressed relatively lower interests in political system and conditions in Korea. They are rather interested in social rules and laws such as regulations, transportation rules. It is also interesting to see three highest marked items in Table 10 and such includes Korean emotions, gender discrimination, and “*Bali-bali* (빨리 빨리)” culture. In the FGD, the participants who have been to Korea as exchange students and interns strongly expressed that gender inequality and hierarchical system are so prevalent in Korea. In terms of gender issues, they found resentment towards homophobia particularly unpleasant.

[Table 8] Lifestyle (N=44)

Education	<b>College life</b>	Interpersonal relationship	Social gathering	Military service	Jobs/ job seeking
35	<b>41</b>	38	38	25	33

[Table 9] Politics (N=44)

Inter-Korea relations	International relations	Democracy	Election system	<b>Social rules &amp; laws</b>
34	25	25	24	<b>38</b>

[Table 10] Korean sense of values (N=44)

<b>Korean emotions</b>	Collectivism	Authoritarianism	homogeneity	<b>Gender discrimination</b>	Gender gaps	Individualism	<b>“Bali-bali”</b>
<b>36</b>	24	20	29	<b>36</b>	31	29	<b>36</b>

### *Cultural experiences in Korean language institutions*

Out of the total participants, 17 (38.6%) have previously participated in Korean culture education/ training program. The type of programs they have participated in includes exchange student program, exhibit, elective course at the university in the Philippines, summer session in Korean university, conference, seminar, among many. In general, majority of them expressed their satisfaction (very

satisfactory 55.6%; Satisfactory 27.8%) and they chose first-hand participation, performance, event, exhibit, and lecture in order of preferences.

***Korean language textbook, classroom practices, and suggestions***

For the materials to be used for culture education, majority preferred visual material (79.5%) and next ranked was realia (13.6%) with a relatively big gap. Among classroom materials, they still prefer one main textbook more than internet resources. The textbooks participants currently use or used greatly vary, but overall satisfactory rate for cultural components in the textbook show positive. Some pros and cons of the textbook are as follows:

[Table 11] Participants' perception Korean Textbook

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It provides a quick view of the language patterns and new vocabulary is also constantly presented.</li> <li>• The textbook is in Korean and includes cultural references, examples and dialogues that forces me understand the culture it is expressing.</li> <li>• Almost every lesson is infused with Korean culture.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some of the elements in the textbook are already outdated.</li> <li>• It is quite generic and does not show up-to-date trends.</li> <li>• It is more of just language learning, but not culture as a whole.</li> <li>• It could have more English explanation, so it can be studied on my own.</li> <li>• There are no English translations and we reply on our Korean language teacher.</li> </ul>

**DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION**

The results of this study are similar to Kang (2011) which concluded that KFL students prefer learning modern Korean culture to traditional culture as a form of achievement culture. They also preferred necessary practical knowledge on contemporary Korean daily culture that they can make use of in the everyday communication. There was no correlation in the responses between former exchange students to Korean university and other language learners regardless of their experience in Korea.

It was clear that Korean media played an important role to influence students to grow interested in Korean culture and mediately experience various types of culture. Hardly any of them have been to Korea, yet the image about the country they developed is unduly shaped by soap operas, films, and commercials they contact via media.

Despite that questions were thematically presented, and cultural components were categorized, the questionnaire could have entailed more guiding information for participants to more adequately select their answers. For instance, Kang (2011) questionnaire categorized large and small categories (e.g. History > Ancient/ Medieval/ Modern) and a couple of examples of each category are presented. In this way, students may comprehend the type and content of certain culture and select what they really prefer to learn.

As it is evident that students are more inclined to learn about Korean daily culture yet still find some peculiarity, intercultural perspectives should be considered between C1 and C2. This is expected to help students develop critical perspectives to see their own culture and also to comprehend target culture and create their own frame. Lastly, culture education should be designed to gauge students' communicative competences rather than passing down informational cultural knowledge. The well-designed extracurricular activities should be incorporated into the language program, and cross-cultural experiences should ultimately be able to contribute to enhance students' cultural competence.

## REFERENCES

- Brooks, N. (1975). The analysis of foreign and familiar cultures. In R.C. Lafayette (ed.) *The culture revolution in foreign language teaching* (pp. 19-31). Skokie, Ill: National Textbook Company.
- Brown, H. D. (2007). *Principles of language learning and teaching*. New York, NY: Pearson Education.
- Byram, M. (1989). *Cultural studies in foreign language education*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.
- Byram, M., & Esarte-Sarries, V. (1991). *Investigating cultural studies in foreign language teaching: A book for teachers*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.
- Hammerly, H. (1982). *Synthesis in Second Language Teaching*. Second Language Publications, Blaine, WA: Second Language Publications.
- Toyoda, E. (2016). Intercultural knowledge, awareness and skills observed in a foreign language classroom. *Journal of Intercultural Communication* Vol. 27, Issue 6. 505-516.
- 강현화 (2010). 『문화교수의 쟁점을 통해서 본 문화교수의 방향성 모색』. *한국언어문화학* 제 7 권 제 1 호 국제한국언어문화학회. 1-30.
- 강현화 (2011). *한국어 확산 문화 프로그램 연구*. 문화체육관광부.
- 송예림(2015). 스페인어 학습자의 의사소통능력 발달을 위한 문화 교육. *Revista Iberoamericana* 26.3 (2015): 205-234.