

# A Study on Korean Language Learning and Healing of Kenyan Korean Learners

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the current state of Korean language education in Kenya and identify the positive effects of Korean language learning on mind healing for Kenyan Korean language learners. Unlike in other countries, the majority of Korean language learners in Kenya are motivated by hobby and interests rather than employment or academic purposes. In this study, a survey was conducted among Kenyan Korean language learners to investigate the mind healing effects of learning Korean language. The survey results confirmed that Korean language learning has a positive psychological impact and leads to transformation of values. Furthermore, it was observed that not only the teacher-led classes and learner interactions but also the self-study and cultural education contribute to the healing process. Learners who experienced these positive effects expressed willingness to recommend Korean language learning to other people for healing purposes. These results show a significant positive correlation between language learning and healing. Also provides a direction for expanding Korean language education for healing purposes. Subsequent research, involving clinical trials, could provide more definitive evidence regarding the healing effects of language learning.

**Keywords** Korean language learning, Language education and healing, Cultural education and healing, Korean language education in Kenya, Hobby purpose learners

## INTRODUCTION

Kenya is located in Central Africa, where English is used as an official language. One of the key characteristics of countries with English as an official language is their relatively lower interest in learning other foreign languages compared to regions with distinct language backgrounds. Consequently, Kenyan Korean language learners have the advantage of approaching Korean from a perspective not primarily focused on employment or academic aspirations.

Unlike learners in Asian nations such as China<sup>1</sup> or Vietnam<sup>2</sup>, where Korean language learning often intertwines with academic and employment objectives, Kenyan Korean language learners do not commonly associate their studies with college or employment. This suggests that they might be pursuing different goals through their Korean language learning. In this context, this study aims to investigate the potential therapeutic effects

embedded within language education where employment and academic objectives take a back seat. The following two aspects will be primarily examined:

Firstly, the current status of Korean language education in Kenya is analysed briefly. This examination sheds light on the purposes and environments of Korean language education in Kenya. Presently, Kenya can be regarded as a hub for Korean language education within Central Africa. A visiting professor from the Korea Foundation is also dispatched, contributing to the establishment of a relatively structured Korean language education.

Secondly, the study seeks to survey Kenyan Korean language learners to determine whether their language learning experiences contribute to mind healing. Given the humanistic nature of this study, clinical experimentation has inherent limitations. Thus, the survey serves to outline a holistic direction for further exploration. Results of the survey conducted on Kenyan Korean language learners overwhelmingly indicate a notable higher level of healing effects compared to learners from other regions.

In Cho(2023), a study on the healing of Korean language education in the Middle East and Africa, including the survey

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results of this study, 53.5% of learners responded “very much so” when asked whether studying Korean made them feel better, but when examined by country, 85.7% of Kenyan learners responded with “very much so.” This is a far higher ratio than Egypt’s 35.7% and the United Arab Emirates’ 58.7%. Likewise, responses indicating a willingness to recommend Korean language learning for mind healing also stood out. Remarkably, 66.1% of Kenyan learners responded “very much so,” which is overwhelmingly high compared to 21.7% in Egypt and 19.6% in the United Arab Emirates. When combined with responses indicating “yes,” a staggering 87.5% of Kenyan learners expressed their inclination to recommend Korean language learning for mind healing.<sup>3</sup> In this study, it aims to focus exclusively on the results from Kenya, where the healing effects were observed to be overwhelmingly high, among the results discussed in Cho(2023).

## **CURRENT STATUS OF KOREAN LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN KENYA**

Located in East Africa, Kenya is the first nation in the region to introduce a major in Korean Studies, signifying a country with promising prospects for the expansion of Korean language education. Within Kenya, currently University of Nairobi and Sejong Institute are engaged in Korean language education as a foreign language. The University of Nairobi provides Korean language education in Kenya, featuring degree and non-degree courses in Korean studies. And the Sejong Institute in Nairobi is operated by Kenyatta University and the Korean Embassy.

As of July 2022, the University of Nairobi has 26 undergraduate students and 35 non-degree students enrolled. Mainly comprising female students in their twenties. Learners are primarily interested in Korean culture or studying Korean language for the purpose of studying abroad, and the course is taught by one Korean faculty member. The curriculum mainly comprises function-oriented lessons, encompassing aspects such as Korean grammar, listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

The Sejong Institute registers approximately 120 students per semester, largely consisting of female students in their 20s. Approximately 50% of students are motivated by Korean overseas study or employment prospects, with a further 40% showing interest in Korean culture. The Sejong Institute employs two Korean instructors, offering regular courses based on the Sejong Korean Textbook. Moreover, special courses encompass TOPIK (Test of Proficiency in Korean) and Korean culture classes.

In contrast to the general situation in other African countries,<sup>4</sup> the number of Korean language learners motivated by employment objectives is relatively low in Kenya, whereas those who engaged for hobbies or academic pursuits are more

prevalent. Unlike other countries like Egypt, where initial interest in Korean originated from the fascination with Korean culture and subsequently shifted towards employment or academic pursuits, Kenyan learners tend to maintain their consistent motivation and objective throughout the Korean learning journey.

The allure of learning Korean as a hobby in itself could be inferred as a source of joy for learners. Therefore, this study endeavors to comprehend the significance of Korean language learning for Kenyan learners, aiming to explore how this learning process positively influences their psychological well-being from the perspective of therapeutic dimensions. In this study, the term “mind healing” encompasses a range of outcomes from feeling better to changing one’s values. It is not intended as a clinical diagnosis but rather as a positive psychological change based on the learner’s subjective assessment.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

A survey was conducted targeting 56 Korean language learners in Kenya to examine the mind healing effects of Korean language learning. The respondents primarily consisted of women in their 20s who were learning Korean language at university and institutions, with the majority of them having studied for less than a year. The basic information about the respondents is presented in Table 1.

The survey utilized a 5-point Likert scale and comprised 10 questions. The questionnaire included 3 questions to assess the healing effects of Korean language learning, 5 questions inquiring about healing effects based on learning methods, and 2 questions examining the influence of learning for therapeutic purposes.

To ascertain the healing effects of Korean language learning, participants were asked whether learning Korean helped heal emotional wounds and led to changes in sense of values. Learning methods were divided into textbook, teacher, learner interaction, course content, and self-study, and their respective effects were explored. Additionally, respondents were asked whether the purpose of learning Korean also included healing and whether they would recommend Korean language learning to others for therapeutic reasons.

For evaluating the reliability of the survey questions, the internal consistency of the items was measured using SPSS, as shown in Table 2. The Cronbach’s alpha value for the entire set of questions related to Korean language learning and healing was .887, indicating a high level of internal consistency. This value being above 0.7 suggests that the survey questions effectively measured the intended constructs with reliability and consistency.

**Table. 1.** Respondent information

|                    | Division                              | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Gender             | Male                                  | 10        | 17.9       |
|                    | Female                                | 46        | 82.1       |
| Age                | In one's teens                        | 14        | 25.0       |
|                    | In one's twenties                     | 41        | 73.2       |
|                    | In one's thirties                     | 0         | 0          |
|                    | In one's forties                      | 1         | 1.8        |
| Duration of study  | Less than 1 year                      | 31        | 55.4       |
|                    | More than 1 year - less than 2 years  | 14        | 25.0       |
|                    | More than 2 years - less than 3 years | 7         | 12.5       |
|                    | More than 3 years - less than 4 years | 3         | 5.4        |
| Source of learning | 4 years or more than 4 years          | 1         | 1.8        |
|                    | University                            | 55        | 98.2       |
|                    | Graduate School*                      | 1         | 1.8        |

\* Currently, there is no graduate school offering Korean language education in Kenya. Therefore, students who responded with "Graduate School" to the question regarding the learning institution have misunderstood the survey question, erroneously interpreting it as an inquiry about their educational background.

**Table. 2.** Analyze the reliability of survey questions

|    | Item                                                                                | Scale Mean if Item Deleted | Scale Variance if Item Deleted | Revised Item-Total Correlation | Cronbach's $\alpha$ if Item Deleted | Cronbach's $\alpha$ |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1  | I feel better when I study Korean.                                                  | 33.80                      | 28.197                         | .619                           | .881                                | .887                |
| 2  | When I study Korean, I feel that the wounds in my mind are healed.                  | 34.46                      | 23.999                         | .703                           | .869                                |                     |
| 3  | My behavior or values change while studying Korean.                                 | 34.43                      | 25.049                         | .635                           | .875                                |                     |
| 4  | The content in the Korean textbook helps heal my mind.                              | 34.66                      | 25.501                         | .668                           | .873                                |                     |
| 5  | Lessons from Korean language teachers help heal my mind.                            | 34.30                      | 24.252                         | .824                           | .859                                |                     |
| 7  | Interactive activities between Korean language learners help heal my mind.          | 34.21                      | 26.499                         | .595                           | .878                                |                     |
| 8  | Self Korean-Study Time helps me heal my mind.                                       | 34.30                      | 25.961                         | .517                           | .886                                |                     |
| 9  | There is also a healing of my mind among the purposes of learning Korean.           | 34.55                      | 25.233                         | .608                           | .878                                |                     |
| 10 | I am thinking of recommending learning Korean to people around me for mind healing. | 34.13                      | 25.202                         | .674                           | .872                                |                     |

## RESULTS

The results of the investigation into the correlation between Korean language learning and mind healing are presented in Table 3. The average mean for the response indicating that they feel better when studying Korean is ( $M=4.80$ ,  $SD=.519$ ), and the average mean for the response indicating that they feel the wounds in their mind are healed is ( $M=4.14$ ,  $SD=.999$ ), and also they responded that their behavior or values changed while studying Korean.

Through these findings, it can be inferred that Korean language learning has a positive effect on mind healing and lead to tangible positive changes. This highlights that the language education can serve not only as a means of communication but also as a method of mind healing.

Moving on to the results regarding the healing effects based on learning methods, respondents indicated that the

content of Korean textbooks contributes to mind healing with an average of 3.95 ( $SD=.840$ ). The response about the effectiveness of teachers' lessons had an average of 4.30 ( $SD=.851$ ), while the response concerning interactive activities between Korean language learners had an average of 4.39 ( $SD=.779$ ), and the response about the effectiveness of self-study had an average of 4.30 ( $SD=.952$ ).

The item with the highest average was related to interactive activities between Korean language learners, indicating that the process of mutual exchange in language learning plays a positive role in mind healing. This suggests that engaging in communication and sharing thoughts and experiences with fellow learners during the language learning process has positive psychological effects. To gain a deeper understanding on which specific activities

contribute to learners' mind healing, further in-depth research on the correlation between learner activities and mind healing is warranted.

Subsequently, the items with the highest averages were related to teachers' lessons and self-study. The finding that teachers' lessons contribute to learners' mind healing suggests a positive psychological impact resulting from interactions between teachers and students. However, more specific investigations are necessary to identify and know the exact nature of these interactions leading to positive effects. Further research in this regard could explore the correlation between teachers' teaching methods, student-teacher relationships, feedback processes, and learners' mind healing.

Not only teachers' lessons and interactive activities between Korean language learners but also the response indicating that self-study of Korean language is also helpful. It confirms the positive psychological effects of Korean language learning itself and suggests that the language learning itself holds inherent positive effects on mind healing.

Learners were surveyed to determine and identify the effective factors which contribute to mind healing. The responses revealed that "culture" was the most frequent

response, with 22 participants indicating so. "Speaking" received responses from 13 participants, "Listening" from 10, and "Reading" and "Writing" from 5 each, while 1 participant chose all the aspects, as shown in Table 4. These findings indicate that cultural education can play a positive role in promoting mind healing, thereby potentially exerting positive effects on learners' behaviors and values. In a similar context, Byram emphasizes intercultural competence in foreign language education. It is believed that as individuals delve deeper into language acquisition, it can significantly impact their social identity. In essence, foreign language education based on intercultural competence can contribute to either adding a new dimension to one's identity or facilitate meaningful identity transformation.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, through the questions about Korean language learning for healing purposes, it was confirmed that learners perceive the inclusion of mind healing in their Korean language learning objectives with an average of ( $M=4.05$ ,  $SD=.942$ ). Moreover, the response related to the willingness to recommend Korean language learning to others for healing purposes had an average of ( $M=4.48$ ,  $SD=.874$ ). This indicates that the effects of mind healing extend not only to an individual's realm but also influence others, underscoring the potential impact on others' well-being.

**Table 3.** Correlation between Korean Language Learning and Mind Healing

| Item                                                                                    | N  | Average | Standard Deviation |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|---------|--------------------|
| 1. I feel better when I study Korean.                                                   | 56 | 4.80    | .519               |
| 2. When I study Korean, I feel that the wounds in my mind are healed.                   | 56 | 4.14    | .999               |
| 3. My behavior or values change while studying Korean.                                  | 56 | 4.18    | .936               |
| 4. The content in the Korean textbook helps heal my mind.                               | 56 | 3.95    | .840               |
| 5. Lessons from Korean language teachers help heal my mind.                             | 56 | 4.30    | .851               |
| 7. Interactive activities between Korean language learners help heal my mind.           | 56 | 4.39    | .779               |
| 8. Self Korean-Study Time helps me heal my mind.                                        | 56 | 4.30    | .952               |
| 9. There is also a healing of my mind among the purposes of learning Korean.            | 56 | 4.05    | .942               |
| 10. I am thinking of recommending learning Korean to people around me for mind healing. | 56 | 4.48    | .874               |
| Total                                                                                   | 56 | 4.2897  | .62735             |

**Table 4.** Contents of Korean Language Learning and Mind Healing

| 6. Among Korean language education, what classes are mainly useful for healing the mind? | N  | %    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|------|
| Listening                                                                                | 56 | 17.9 |
| Reading                                                                                  | 56 | 8.9  |
| Speaking                                                                                 | 56 | 23.2 |
| Writing                                                                                  | 56 | 8.9  |
| Culture                                                                                  | 56 | 39.3 |
| All of the above                                                                         | 56 | 1.8  |
| Total                                                                                    | 56 | 100  |

## CONCLUSION

A noteworthy trend in recent Korean language education is the diversification in learning objectives. While the primary focus used to be on achieving fluent communication in the target language, now the goals have expanded to encompass practical purposes such as studying abroad or seeking employment using the target language. More recently, these objectives have even extended to include the purpose of mind healing. As evident from the research findings, Korean language learners in Kenya are closer to studying Korean out of genuine interest rather than for practical purposes, compared to other countries. Kenyan learners have indeed experienced positive psychological changes through their engagement with Korean language education, which have translated into shifts in values and behaviors.

During this process, various elements such as textbooks, teacher's lessons, interactive activities among learners, and self-study were found to contribute positively to mind healing. Additionally, the role of cultural education in fostering mind healing was also confirmed. Based on these observations, the following suggestions for promoting mind healing in language education are proposed.

Firstly, it is necessary to incorporate topics and content in the textbooks that can facilitate mind healing for learners. In fact, books provide effective results for a number of disorders such as depression, anxiety, bullying, grief, behavioral disorders and so on.<sup>6</sup>

The response indicating that teachers' lessons contribute to mind healing also appeared prominently, signifying a correlation between teachers' abilities and the therapeutic effects. In bibliotherapy as well, the effectiveness of therapeutic outcomes is highly dependent on the therapist's competence. This competence entails selecting materials that align with participants' desires and interests, providing appropriate and empathetic interpretations of participants' responses, and facilitating deep self-understanding through discussions on literary works.<sup>7</sup> Applying this to language learning, the teachers' competence in language education would involve selecting educational content that aligns with learners' interests and providing suitable feedback based on learners' responses.

Furthermore, responses regarding interactive activities among learners were highly positive. To enhance and maximize the healing effects, it will be essential to have activities and interactions that align with these responses. Research findings suggests that more significant changes in groups engaging in discussions, as opposed to those solely reading books, underscore the importance of such activities in bolstering the efficiency and magnification of healing effects.<sup>8</sup> Hynes & Hynes-Berry, who emphasize interaction, stated that in interactive bibliotherapy, trained therapists guide participants to integrate emotional and cognitive responses by facilitating discussions on selected literary works, printed texts,

audiovisual materials, and participants' own creative writing pieces.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, therapists should engage in interactions such as empathy and acceptance to facilitate the integration of emotional and cognitive responses in participants. This, in turn, signifies the significance of the teacher's role in learner interactions.

Furthermore, careful consideration is needed for cultural education methods based on the premise of mind healing. As Wohl points out, no two people have internalized identical constructions of their cultural worlds, all psychotherapy is "cross-cultural."<sup>10</sup> In this context, considering the cultural background is necessary whether the therapist is treating a patient, because every patient is different in their cultural perspective.<sup>11</sup> Applying this to Korean language education, in situations where Korean native speakers teach Korean to foreigners, such as in Kenya, there is a necessity for cultural education that approaches teaching from an intercultural perspective based on an understanding of different cultures.

This study conducted a survey targeting 56 Korean language learners in Kenya to explore the mind healing effects of learning Korean. The results confirmed the positive impact of Korean language learning on mind healing. This finding is significant in demonstrating the positive correlation between language learning and mind healing. Furthermore, this study offers meaningful insights into the expansion of Korean language education with healing purposes. In the future, if the correlation between factors such as 'textbooks, instructors, learner interactions, self-study, cultural education are verified through clinical experiments, it could lead to more definitive evidence regarding the healing effects of language learning.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There are no other relationships or activities that could appear to have influenced the submitted work.

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