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German Language as L3 in South Korea*

All around the world, there is a perception that German proficiency brings better employment capabilities and class mobility. South Korea is no exception to this belief, with German language being used all over the country for white-collar job employment or even promotions. Over the years, the study of the German language has been enhanced by the country's Ministry of Education by aggressively developing policies to support this course. To make sense of the situation of the German language in South Korea, and extensive information about the education system, German schools in South Korea and the status of German in foreign language learning is given. This article expounds on the past, recent, and future situation of German language learning in South Korea as well as brief history of the German language learning, policies surrounding the language and educational practices in South Korean schools. The article gives a clear perspective on how various factors have led to the promotion of German language and culture in South Korean society.

Keywords:

language policies, foreign language education, South Korea

Introduction

According to Risager (2018), the German language is among the top ten widely spoken languages across the world. Nearly 180 million individuals around the globe talk to German, which is attributed to the ease of learning the communication among different nations and places (Rabanus 2020). According to Kim and Kim (2019), people in the Republic of South Korea have shown their interest in learning because it makes communication easier. Many nations, such as the US and the UK, among others, have opted to study the German to diversify foreign language learning, as well as its ease in communication protocols.

Therefore, this study sought to understand the general situation of learning German as L3 in South Korea. In this article, Korean is referred to L1 or as a native language, English as L2, as this is a compulsory subject in foreign language learning in the Korean education system, and L3 means second foreign language learning, which is optional and various choices can be given. In the study, the history of Germany language learning in South Korea will be discussed to understand how foreign language learning in South Korea evolved with a look at some contributing factors. Evaluation of the South Korean education system will also be offered to understand the

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incorporation or any kind of support for the learning of German. This extent is because any support offered through a recognized government institution is expected to contribute positively to the success of the foreign language. Preference of German compared to other foreign languages will also be investigated to understand how it ranks compared to other languages and to understand the factors behind the different levels of preference and achievement.

The History of Foreign Language Learning in South Korea

This section highlights the historical development of interest in foreign languages study in South Korea. According to Lee and Lee (2018), the history of foreign language learning in South Korea dates to the period of the three kingdoms between the 7th–8th centuries AD. The thirst for learning foreign languages was triggered by the close relationship between the empire and the Chinese Empire. Moreover, the interaction with the Japanese made the South Koreans to begin studying the Japanese language. By the end of the 19th century, South Korea adopted the learning of German, French, and English semantics (Lee & Lee 2018). It was prompted by the emergency of the diplomatic relationship between South Korea and other countries that used such languages as their official and national languages. Today, several foreign languages are being taught at universities and high schools in South Korea. English is used as the first foreign language that starts in the third grade at primary school as a compulsory subject. As we can see at Table 1, the students have more choices to choose from various languages including German, French, Japanese, Arabic, Spanish, Russian, and Chinese. As a subject matter for this research, German is given a consideration comparing the reasons for its development, with those of other foreign languages. According to SCMP (2017), about 60% of South Koreans can speak a foreign language with most of them being jobseekers. This proportion indicates one of the key reasons why people learn a second foreign language.

Another drive for foreign language development has been the inclusion of a second language requirement in the education system in South Korea. This inclusion has made it crucial for student to take a second language and the development of their interest. More students tend to take those second foreign languages with fewer students to get better grades with ease (Se-Hwan 2017). This strategy has an impact of increasing the number of second foreign languages taken in the country as students attempt to beat the system by taking very less popular languages (Se-Hwan 2017).

Foreign Language	Number of Students enrolled
German	6,524
French	8,136
Spanish	2,760
Chinese	96,143
Japanese	173,373
Russian	257
Arabic	12

Table 1: High school students learning second foreign languages in South Korea (2012), Source: Statistical Yearbook of Education (2012)

The Education System in South Korea

The public education structure in South Korea is divided into three significant categories. Primary school takes six years and middle school another three years. High school education lasts for three years. Only five percent of high schools in South Korea were offering coeducation in 1996 (Bizzell 2017). Today, the number of coeducational schools has increased by 10%. Although in many coeducation schools' classes are divided along with the gender disparities, the standardization of the curriculum has ensured that both boys and girls study foreign languages, domestic science, and technology (Al-Alawi & Alkhodari 2016). The curriculum at the primary school level entails nine subjects: Korean language, moral education, social studies, science, music, fine arts, practical arts, mathematics, and physical education.

Allotment of Germany Language Learning in the Education System in South Korea

Just like many other foreign languages, German language has been incorporated in the education systems in South Korea. The incorporation is shown by the fact that students are required to choose foreign languages at some point in their training. It is also evidenced by the existence of departments in schools and especially in higher institutions. The learning system within the state is seen to take a partisan stand on German as a second foreign language (L3), where a fair chance has been offered to anyone interested in studying German. With the support provided by the state in the year 2017 where members of the state were encouraged to take German as a foreign language, its impact is expected to be long felt so long as the two countries do not change their

current relations (Seal & Shah 2017). This situation can be interpreted as one of the main contributors to the adoption of a language, for this case, German in the country under this study. The South Korean Ministry of Education supervises the textbooks and course contents of learners in high schools. The ministry assigns a team of educational experts to author their foreign language textbooks. The Department later approves the manuscripts if they meet the Ministry's guidelines. Although foreign language textbooks previously focused on grammatical aspects, the grammatical elements have currently been focused to conversational needs by integrating active conversations, music, songs, and pictures. As for the teaching techniques, they still center on learning the grammar of German and translating texts. However, there is a need for introducing speaking and listening classes/lessons in teaching German, as it shall allow students to practice the content learned in class.

Schools Teaching German Language

Seongnam High School is one of the best public schools situated in South Korea that specializes in teaching foreign languages. Moreover, the Seongnam High School incorporates four different second language programs. The foreign languages taught in this school are German, Japanese, English, and Chinese. The school's academic year starts in March, and the second semester opens in September (Horn & Moravkova 2018). One of the critical aims at Seongnam High School is to ensure that the students understand the essential elements of grammar and common sentence structures. The students study the four skills of the German language, together with a focus on speaking and listening ability (Sekiziyivu & Mugimu 2017).

Apart from Seongnam High School, over 20 schools in South Korea have incorporated the German language curriculum (Roos 2016). On average, most schools register a maximum of 170 students per admission. Furthermore, the students are prepared for the ZD and the SD tests through the academic programs, which include after-school activities and regular classes supervised by native German teachers (Estévez & Grossi 2019). The teachers encourage students to learn and understand foreign languages by encouraging them to speak foreign languages during the school days.

Hanyoung foreign language high school has been recognized to be the most prestigious foreign language school in South Korea. It was founded in 1990 to teach and lecture more than six foreign languages in the country. Some foreign languages lectured in this school include; Chinese,

Spanish, Japanese, German and French. However, the primary language of instruction in this school is Korean. Students are admitted from areas around Seoul and around the country through online and offline applications. Students' applications are then vetted based on their previous transcripts and then an interview is done later. However, students must choose their majors before they choose the school.

According to Sundqvist (2019), learning the German language in South Korea is now prevalent because apart from high schools and universities, other tertiary institutions have been licensed to teach. As Kim and Han (2019) note, the teaching at all levels is conducted through the private language learning institution with learning conducted normally in the evening or early in the morning. Thus, it has become easy for adult learners who have other commitments to enroll for the evening classes and pursue their studies besides undertaking other duties during the day (Fariss 2017).

German Language at University Levels

At the University level, students take German as either a major or as a second language when studying other courses. For students who do not major in German, the learning of the languages can be linked to the courses they do. However, students who take German as their major undergo a thorough study of the coursework where they are prepared for future careers in the German language. These students are guided to understand the German culture, German linguistics and German religious studies. These students are provided with stipends and scholarships if they perform to allow them to further German language studies. The primary goal for the department of the German language in universities is to cultivate students to be competent in German – as it shows at Table 2 below, German is not yet as popular as Japanese or Chinese among university students. The curriculum pushes the students to have both basic communicative and written German language skills. The German language curriculum in the universities needs to be streamlined in the future to incorporate the German language to core subjects such as law and philosophy. For example, the Department of the German language at universities should link their content to other disciplines, such as music, philosophy, and law, or establish viable inter-departmental links (e.g., economics, politics, and the German culture) to enable students to prepare for their careers in the future. That said, the Department of foreign languages in South Korea should revise its contents of languages (Kwang-Sook, 2015). Many graduates from the German

language universities have advanced to various fields later after graduation. Common fields involved in include; media, journalism, cultural studies and education.

	English	German	French	Spanish	Japanese	Chinese	Arabic
Number of Students	7,222	1,188	1,169	510	3,006	3,844	643

Table 2: University students taking foreign languages in South Korea (2014). Source: Statistical Yearbook of Education 2014.

Requirements for the German Language Teachers

Teachers and lecturers of the German language in South Korean institutions are required to have an excellent academic qualification. The South Korean Ministry of Education has put in place guidelines for those who want to teach the German language in the country to ensure that only qualified individuals can teach. First, the basic requirement for a German language teacher is a minimum of MA in the German language. Secondly, one is supposed to have teaching experience in the German language (Kalaja & Melo-Pfeifer 2019). Finally, the German language teacher should also possess language skills in the Korean language (Luef et al. 2019). Most of the teaching positions offered are part-time with salaries for German language tutors at about 18.91 euros per hour (Hogan 2016). Most institutions require a teacher to work from Monday to Friday. The reason for such strictness in the selection of the German language teachers in South Korea is based on minimal opportunities. Thus, the few available chances are given to the most qualified teachers. Some of the private high schools and the middle schools try to ensure their best level by employing native German speakers (Kalaja & Melo-Pfeifer 2019).

According to Seals and Shah (2017), the South Korean government prioritized learning German as a foreign language in 2017. Majority of the students learning the German language are enrolled via their domestic admission systems. Currently, some disciplines, such as social sciences, medicine, and law use German as a primary language. A vast majority of individuals in the European Union countries use German as their mother tongue (Ennser et al., 2017). This is because many employers are recruiting employees with the ability to communicate in German, for it gives

their organizations a competitive edge in the scientific community, the business world, teaching, and even translation-based careers.

The Achievement and Preference of German as a Second Foreign Language in South Korea

It can be noted that the German language has recently developed to be one of the most preferred foreign languages in South Korea. Some universities such as Hanyang University of foreign languages, has twelve professors in the field of the German language. (Hanyang University, n.d). The university has been teaching German since 1989 and has become one of the most successful languages in the university. Considering that most of these professors are South Korean natives and not from Germany, shows how German has had its root deep in the university system.

According to Chun and Cho (2018), 25% of the approximately 180 million fluent speakers of German as a foreign language are South Koreans. In South Korea, it is the National Centre on Education and the Economy (NCEE) that provides both private and public institutions with the right to teach German as a foreign language. The South Korean Ministry of Education regulates these institutions by ensuring they adhere to a standard teaching curriculum and a framework. The Ministry revises the curriculum every ten years – the curricula were last revised in 2015 (NCEE, n. d). Students can select some of their courses as soon as they join a lower secondary level. At this level, the learner may consider a non-traditional program, other than Mathematics, English, History, and Arts.

According to NCEE (n.d), students are only allowed to take the German language at the upper secondary level. Similarly, students are allowed to learn German as a second foreign language upon admission to vocational institutions. In the Seoul National University, students can only be allowed to study German as a foreign language in tertiary institutions upon completing the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT). Students interested in exploring the German language at the university have to meet the requirements outlined by their respective departments of German literature. The university curriculum entails important subjects as German, subject-oriented curricula, and attachment programs. Each of these is aimed at equipping the learners with the necessary skills (Chun & Cho 2018). By design, the program is aimed at cultivating excellent German language skills among the students. Practical German pedagogy programs, like teaching practices, enhance the efforts even further.

Learning German is mostly conducted through a conversational exchange and grammatical rules (Lee 2019). The primary objectives of studying foreign languages, as explained by the Ministry of Education in 1996, includes improving the essential skills and attitudes, developing the civic morality, and the language ability required to live in the society. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education explains that studying a foreign language improves the spirit of cooperation and fosters the skills of scientific observation and the necessary arithmetic skills. Consequently, it promotes the good life understanding and enhances the harmonious growth of the mind and the body.

According to TestDaf (n.d), there are nine test centers in South Korea for the German language proficiency exam. Comparing this number of centers with some other countries like the USA with seven, Turkey with eight and Ukraine with 5, it can be seen that there is a high preference of this exam than most of the other economies. The presence of these test centers in the country is a good indication of the achievements made so far in learning German, and it also shows that the trending language is still one of the preferred foreign languages in the country. It is important to note that the test centers are different from the centers for training of the language. It is also crucial to note that there are other internal test centers which are incorporated on the country curriculum and test centers are only for those requiring international recognition of proficiency.

In the recent past, multilingual thought has become more common in South Korea with employers preferring multilingual employees. The study by Zhang and Wang (2010) established that South Korea had made some attempt to internationalize their education concept with the introduction of foreign languages in their curriculum. However, the existing evidence shows that foreign languages other than English has not been given the expected consideration with policies favoring the English language, which is preferred as a second language worldwide and as a communicative language by the state (Ellis 2012).

According to Park and Seong (2014), even though several South Korean residents wanted to take German as a second foreign language choice, their linguistic and cognitive system which was influenced by their accent was considered as a drawback. According to Ennsner, Escobar and Bigelow (2017), German was becoming a common language in some fields of study in the entire world more so in the scientific world. That fact has given German a better hand in the context of South Korea ranking second after English. According to Lee (2015), the German language was becoming more popular in South Korea due to its compatibility with some fields of study like philosophy, law and music.

According to Mani and Trines (2018), there seems to be a growth of learners of foreign languages. In general, foreign teachers have been on the increase from a percentage of 2.5% in the year 2000 to 7.1% in the year 2013. The number is expected to continue to improve based on the trend. With more foreign instructors within the nation, there will be likely been an improvement in German being among them.

Summary of Research Findings

The analysis of various articles explaining the situation of German language in South Korea shows with no doubt an improvement in the state of the language. The South Korean Ministry of Education has played the biggest role in ensuring that there are policies that will help put German language learning in South Korea at the highest quality. They have set up a very high standard required for the employment of German language teachers. The ministry has also provided the necessary facilities and materials for teaching German. The other major player is the employment sector. The employment sector in South Korea has emphasized the need for an extra language so that job seekers can improve their chances of employability.

The long-term and continued political ties between Germany and South Korea are also factors in the growth of popularity of German language in South Korea. Just like other traditionally prominent languages like Chinese and Japanese, German seems to have developed roots and will remain among the preferred languages and proposed changes in the education system will limit its choice as a language designed to beat the scoring system. It is not grounded on the sustainable ground, but it is rare, and the probability of higher scoring exists.

Conclusion

German language being among the top foreign languages taught and spoken in South Korea plays a big role in society. The German language has helped various companies in South Korea to gain a competitive edge while competing with others in the region. The German language has improved the county's intellectual capacity because many students have been able to study in Germany and around the world. The German language has brought cultural diversity and richness in our societies. Thus, it is important for South Korean citizens to learn German, so that the language barrier can be eliminated.

Factors that have brought about the development of the language include the continued ties between South Korea and Germany, the huge support received by the public instructions from the South Korean Ministry of Education and also the need for the German language by employer. If this trend continues in the country, German can be the most spoken foreign language in the country. There is need for the citizens of South Korea to support this language in order to further develop the country.

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