

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE: AN ASSESSMENT OF PUTTING LEARNING INTO PRACTICE AMONG ALUMNI OF KOREA STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA¹

*Asmadi Hassan,² Tan Soo Kee,³ Muhammad Muhsein Kamarudin,⁴
Rohayati Paidi⁵*

Abstract: This article examines the application of learning among Korea Studies alumni, Department of East Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya. Among those are the application of Korean language at the work place, the application of Korean language in the higher degree programme and the application of Korean language in everyday life. In order to answer these questions, survey question method was adopted in this study to glean data for analysis and findings. Questionnaires were distributed to Korea Studies alumni from the first batch of graduates in 1999 until the recent one. The studies found that both knowledge of Korea Studies and language are important. Korean related course influences their way of thinking, open their mind and contributes to positive behaviour. The skills allow them to interact cross-culturally and understand the Korean mindset and their way of life. A good command of the language opens wider opportunities in career development as well. Currently, there are many employment opportunities for students proficient in Korean, from market research companies to social media outfits. Furthermore, post covid witnessed the rapid economic reconstruction of both Malaysia and South Korea and this resulted in the implementation of Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) which opened more job opportunities in Malaysia. Therefore, graduates with Korean language skills can seize this opportunity and help the students to be competitive in the job market. The respondents suggested that students who wish to work with Korean companies be prepared with various language skills, such as taking a course in TOPIK Korean language before stepping into the real world.

Keywords: Korea Studies, Alumni, Putting Learning, Practice

INTRODUCTION

¹ This research was supported by grants 2022-2023 The Korea Foundation, Tracing of Korean Studies Alumni and Analysis of the Student's Practice of Korean Knowledge after Graduation (IF022-2022).

² First and Corresponding Author: Asmadi Hassan, Senior Lecturer, Department of East Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 50603, Malaysia. Email: madisan@um.edu.my.

³ Second Author: Tan Soo Kee, Senior Lecturer, Department of East Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 50603, Malaysia. Email: chensk@um.edu.my.

⁴ Third Author: Muhammad Muhsein Kamarudin, Post Graduate Student, Department of East Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 50603, Malaysia. Email: muhseinkamarudin@yahoo.com

⁵ Fourth Author: Rohayati Paidi, Senior Lecturer, Department of East Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 50603, Malaysia. Email: rohayatipaidi@um.edu.my

The application of learning is a type of research that evaluates how learning is put into practice either at a work place, at the higher degree programme or in the daily life. Students at school are taught various subjects, from simple science to complex calculations in addition to geography, history, languages and mathematics. It is expected that knowledge gained from these would contribute to the student's reasoning power and problem-solving skills.⁶ Shopping would require some knowledge of simple arithmetic so as not to be cheated, while learning history allows knowledge of the past and to learn from the mistakes to build a better, harmonious and peaceful nation. The grasp of life skills ensures the student acquires basic skills that would enable them to manage one's emotions, health, finances, relationship and independence.⁷

In university, students are taught professional courses, such as engineering, medicine, dentistry and law. There are also non-professional courses in pure science, such as physics, chemistry, biology and so on. In social sciences and humanities, the non-professional courses are history, geography, literature, media, international relations and also area studies courses, such as Southeast Asia and East Asian Studies.

This article examines and discusses ways students apply this theoretical knowledge. The sample population is alumni of Korea Studies, Department of East Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya. The paper begins with a discussion of related literature and its main findings, followed by an overview of Korea Studies programme in University of Malaya, research methodology, survey findings and finally the application of knowledge at the work place, at the higher degree programme and daily lives of the alumni. A discussion of main findings is the highlight of the paper before it is concluded.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hwang and Lee in their work on Korea-Malaysia Relations found that in the 1960s and 1970s, in the early stages of their relationship, Malaysia and Korea did not view each other as significant political or economic allies.⁸ However, this changed in the 1990s when their bilateral relations grew stronger as a result of increased Korean investment in Malaysia. This also led to a consolidation of political and economic ties. In Malaysia, there has been increased demands for local Korean expertise, especially local Korean speakers. The Korea Studies programme was introduced in 1996, pioneered by University of Malaya to train locals in the Korean language and Korean related subjects.

The development of Korea Studies was captured in a number of studies, such as a paper authored by Md Nasrudin and Tan Soo Kee published in *International Review of Korea Studies*. It discussed the history and challenges faced by the Korea Studies programme.⁹ Kim Keum Hyun wrote the *Role and Importance of Korean Cultural Education in Korean Language Education: A Case Study of Malaysian Universities* which focused on the Korean language education in Malaysia¹⁰ while Kim Keum Hyun and Rou Seung Yoan in 2017 wrote

⁶ Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2014, *Curriculum Standards and Historical Assessment Document Year 6*, Curriculum Development Section.

⁷ Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2002. *Integrated Curriculum for Low Schools Huraian Sukatan Life Skills Lessons for Low Schools Year 6*, Center for Curriculum Development.

⁸ Lee Kyungchan, Hwang In-won, "The Evolution of Korea-Malaysia Relations: From Low-key to an Interdependent Relationship," *The Southeast Asian Review*, Vol. 25, No. 3, 2015.

⁹ Md.Nasrudin Md.Akhir, Tan Soo Kee, "Education and Research on Korean Studies in Malaysia," *International Review of Korean Studies*, Vol. 4, No.1, 2007.

¹⁰ Seung Yoan Rou, Kim Keum Hyun, "Role and Importance of Korean Cultural Education in Korean Language Education: A Case Study of Malaysian Universities," *Journal of the International Network for Korean Language and Culture*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2010.

“Korean Language Development in Malaysia”, in Journal of International Network for Korean Language and Culture.¹¹ Meanwhile, Larisa, Fumitaka and Nurliana in their recent article “Language attitudes and L2 motivation of Korean language learners in Malaysia”, examined motivation among Malaysians to learn Korean language and the impact of Korean cultural influences on the learners.¹² Other studies include “The government and cultural industries: The cases of Korea and Malaysia” by Hamzah, Mustafa and Kwon, which is a book chapter published by Korean studies association of Southeast Asia.¹³ Cho and Jang authored “Comparing Malaysian youths and adults toward Hallyu consciousness”, in Journal of the Korea Contents, which examined the level of consciousness of Malaysians toward Korean wave, particularly Korean dramas and Kpop.¹⁴ Ariffin et al, in “Korean Media Strategies in Promoting Korean Dramas in Malaysia” discussed how Korean media broadcasters promoted Korean drama in Malaysia.¹⁵ Teh and Goh in “Does Korean drama have a real influence? An analysis of Malaysia outbound tourist to South Korea”, examined the motivation and satisfaction level of Malaysian tourists in South Korea.¹⁶ Gan in “Soft power of Korean popular culture on consumer behavior in Malaysia” explored the impact of Hallyu (Korean Wave) on consumer behavior in Malaysia while Cho discussed the impact of Hallyu on Korea-Malaysia relations published in Malaysian Journal of Media Studies.¹⁷ Hwang and Lee presented an overview of Malaysia-Korea relation in “The evolution of Malaysia-Korea relations”. They focused on the areas of economy, politics and culture. Miyoung and Sivachandralingam in “Malaysia-South Korea economic relations: Mahathir Mohamad made the difference”, published in Journal of Department of History. examined the period between 1980s and 1990s and the impact of former PM Mahathir Mohamad’s reign on the relationship between these two countries.¹⁸ Ting and Ying in “Culture dimensions’ comparison: A study of Malaysia and South Korea”, used Hofstede’s cultural model to compare cultural values between Malaysia and Korea.¹⁹ Rou Seung Yoan and Kim Keum Hyun in “A Comparative Study on Idioms of the Human Body Parts in Korean and Malay Languages”, published in International Review of Korean Studies (IROKS) examined the differences and similarities between idioms in Korean and Malay languages.²⁰

KOREA STUDIES PROGRAMME IN UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA

¹¹ Kim Keum Hyun, Rou Seung Yoan, “Korean Language Development in Malaysia,” *Hankuk Munhwa Kyoyuk Yeonku*, 2017.

¹² Nikitina Larisa, Furuoka Fumitaka, “An assessment of Language Attitudes as a Mediator in the Stereotypes-L2 Motivation Linkage,” *Linguistics Vanguard*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2020.

¹³ Hamzah Mustafa, Kwon “The government and cultural industries: The Cases of Korea and Malaysia,” 2012.

¹⁴ Cho Kum-Ju, Jang Won-Ho, “Comparing Malaysian Youths and Adults toward Hallyu Consciousness,” *The Journal of the Korea Contents Association*, Vol. 13, No. 9, 2013.

¹⁵ Julina Tajul Ariffin, Hassan Abu Bakar, Nor Hafezah Yusof, “Korean Media Strategies in Promoting Korean Dramas in Malaysia,” *International Journal of Innovative Research in Engineering & Management*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2018.

¹⁶ Pek Yen Teh, Hong Ching Goh, “Does Korean Drama have a Real Influence? An Analysis of Malaysia Outbound Tourists to South Korea,” *Tourism, Culture & Communication*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2016.

¹⁷ Cho Chul Ho, “Korean Wave in Malaysia and Changes of the Korea-Malaysia Relations,” *Jurnal Pengajian Media Malaysia*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2010.

¹⁸ Song Miyoung, Sivachandralingam Sundara Raja, “Malaysia-South Korea Economic Relations: Mahathir Mohamad Made the Difference,” *Sejarah*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 2018.

¹⁹ Shirley Ken Tzu Ting, Cheah Yeh Ying, “Culture Dimensions Comparison: A Study of Malaysia and South Korea,” *Review of Integrative & Business Economics Research*, Vol. 2, No. 1.

²⁰ Seung Yoan Rou, Kim Keum Hyun, “A Comparative Study on Idioms of the Human Body Parts in Korean and Malay Languages,” *International Review of Korean Studies*, 2014.

Korea Studies program was first offered in 1996 follow by the establishment of the Department of East Asian Studies; together with the Japan Studies and China Studies. All three programs were placed under the Department of East Asian Studies with the degree of the Bachelor of Arts (East Asian Studies) and later changed to Bachelor of East Asian Studies. Students are given the option to specialize in any program throughout the three years of study.

The rationale behind the program offer is because of the important role of the three countries at the international level and to Malaysia in particular. China, Korea and Japan are Malaysia's strategic partners in trade and investment as well as political and cultural allies. The graduates of these studies are expected to have an in-depth knowledge in their subject to meet the demands of the job market. Students who specialise in Korea Studies for example, are expected to know language, political, economic and social issues related to Korea as well as its international relations. Students in the programme are also equipped with knowledge on East Asian region, particularly China, Japan and East Asian Regional, offered as elective subjects. University of Malaya is the only public university that is offering a comprehensive programme in East Asian country studies.

This study focuses on alumni of Korea Studies from University of Malaya. It is a very popular course and it is hoping the current paper will contribute to attracting more students to study here.

Table 1 indicate the Programme in Korea Studies produced its first batch of graduates in 1999, with a total of 3. In 2000 and 2001, the graduates were 2 and 5 in 2002. Japan Studies introduced earlier than Korea Studies produced more graduates, 32 in 1997, 55 in 1998, 48 in 1999 and 28 in 2000. The popularity of Japan Studies was due to its greater exposure compared with Korea and China studies. However, since 2007, the number of graduates in the latter two studies has been almost equal due to the increasing popularity of Korean popular culture as well as establishment of Korean companies in Malaysia.

Table 1: Number of East Asian Studies Department's Graduates

	Japan Studies	Korea Studies	China Studies
1997	32	-	-
1998	55	-	-
1999	48	3	0
2000	28	2	1
2001	22	2	1
2002	30	5	1
2003	31	3	0
2004	21	3	0
2005	29	0	0
2006	24	6	10
2007	14	11	0
2008	5	11	1
2009	11	4	8
2010	26	11	1
2011	11	6	0
2012	11	5	0
2013	3	4	0
2014	12	13	11
2015	12	7	6
2016	10	10	8

2017	11	11	3
2018	8	10	2
2019	8	5	7
2020	12	10	6
Total	474	142	66

Source: Compilation of Universiti Malaya Convocation Ceremonies from 1997 to 2020.

Table 2 shows the latest courses offered to students specialising in Korea Studies for 2021/2022 intake/cohort. Although every five years the courses will be reviewed, overall, many of the contents are still maintained due to their relevance. Therefore, the curriculum structure remains almost the same.

Table 2 shows that students specialising in Korea Studies are required to enrol for all the subjects in the Core Course Package and Core Course Programme. They are also required to take three electives from Programme Course as well as university courses. The compulsory subjects for students specialising in Korea Studies are: AIG1017 Korean Language 1, AIG1018 Korean Language 2, AIG2037 Korean Language 3, AIG2038 Korean Language 4, AIG3043 Korean Language 5, AIG3044 Korean Language 6, AIG1010 Korean Culture and Society and AIG2022 Political Economy of Korea. As for the elective subjects, they can choose AIG1021 Korean History, AIG2023 Korean Civilization, AIG2024 Korean Economy among others.

It can be concluded that there are two important parts to the course in Korea Studies: Korean language and Korea related subjects, such as East Asian Region and country study of Korea. However, for the purpose of the current study, the researcher has focused only Korean language and Korea related courses as they are specialised.

Table 2: List of Korea Studies courses for the cohort/intake of 2021/2022

Core Course Package	Program Core Course
AIG1017 Korean Language 1 AIG1018 Korean Language 2 AIG2037 Korean Language 3 AIG2038 Korean Language 4 AIG3043 Korean Language 5 AIG3044 Korean Language 6 AIG1010 Korean Culture and Society AIG2022 Political Economy of Korea	AIG1011 East Asia Through Digital Lens AIG1012 Research Methodology for Regional Studies AIG2007 East Asian International Relations AIG3010 East Asian Economy Development AIG3037 Research Project AIG3038 Research Seminar AIG3011 East Asian Security Issues AIG4001 Industrial Training
Elective Program Course	
AIG1021 Korean History AIG2023 Korean Civilization AIG2024 Korean Economy AIG2025 Globalization and Pop Culture of Korea AIG2026 South and North Korea Relations AIG2027 Modernization Process of Korea AIG2028 Social Transformation of Korea AIG3027 Entrepreneurs and Corporate Management of Korea AIG3028 Korean Organization Cultural AIG3029 Korean Foreign Policy	

AIG3030 Korea-ASEAN Relations AIG3031 Political Contemporary of South Korea AIG3032 International Trade of South Korea AIG2031 Contemporary East Asia AIG2032 Digital Approach in East Asian Research AIG3013 Political Issues in East Asia Since 1900 AIG3036 East Asian and the World	
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Source: Basic Degree Handbook 2021/2022, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Survey question method was adopted in this study to glean data for analysis and findings. Questionnaires were distributed to Korea Studies alumni from the first batch of graduates in 1999 until the recent one. The questionnaire was divided into seven parts (see Table 3). The first part is the background of the respondents, the next part poses questions related to application of the Korean language course and Korea related course in the respondent's daily life. Three parts of the survey questions for the Korean language course centred on the application of Korean language at the work place, the application of Korean language in the higher degree programme and the application of Korean language in everyday life. While the later three questions posed in the Korea related courses were similar, the focus of all the questions were on applications of the alumni's learning at the work place, higher degree and their daily life.

Table 3: Questionnaire Framework

Korean language	Korea related courses
respondent background	
Application of the Korean language at work	Application of Korean related course in the work place
Application of Korean language in higher degree programme	Application of Korean related course in higher degree programme
Application of Korean language in daily life	Application of Korean related course in daily life

Findings

Tables 4 and 5 show 63 alumni were chosen as the final respondents. The first part of the survey contained questions on the alumni's personal information, namely gender, year of admission and graduation, occupation and monthly income.

The majority of respondents, 50 (79.40%), were females, majority (19 or 30.15%) were admitted to the programme between 2006 and 2010. This is followed by alumni who were admitted between 2011 and 2015 with 16 people (25.35%) and those from 2016-2020 15 people (23.80), 2001-2005 with 11 people (17.46%). A total of 21 (33.33%) people graduated between 2016 - 2020, followed by those who graduated between 2006 and 2010 with 19 people (30.15%), and six respondents (9.25%) who graduated in 2021; the rest graduated between 1996 and 2000 and 2001-2005.

Table 4: Total Number of Respondents by Year of Admission to University of Malaya

1996-2000	2001-2005	2006-2010	2011-2015	2016-2020	Amount
2 (3.17%)	11 (17.46%)	19 (30.15%)	16 (25.35%)	15 (23.80%)	63 (100%)

Table 5: Total Number of Respondents by Graduation Year

1996-2000	2001-2005	2006-2010	2011-2015	2016-2020	2021-	Amount
1 (1.58)	1 (1.58)	19 (30.15%)	15 (23.80)	21 (33.33)	6 (9.52%)	63 (100%)

Table 6 describes the current professions of the alumni. A total of 22 people (34.92%) are employed in companies, organisations or departments in international companies which deal specifically with Korean affairs. Choosing to work in a Korean company, organisation or Korean affairs department in an international company is the best choice because the alumni can apply their knowledge. This also suggested that graduates of Korean studies are most sought-after candidates by Korean companies. The survey found that 17 people (26.98%) work in non-Korean companies, 9 (12.28%) in the government sector, 8 (12.69%) are self-employed while 7 (11.11%) are housewives. Those who are not employed by Korean organisations or companies are still involved in Korea-related affairs, such as being lecturer in Korea Studies or Korean language teacher.

In terms of employment, most alumni work at par with the qualifications. The standard employment for those with a degree is in professional work that require important planning and decision-making skills. The findings of the study suggested that alumni hold high positions in large companies, such as managers, executives, data analysts, customer service representatives (Korean speaking) and government officials. Some are lecturers, content moderators, translators and Korean language teachers. There are also those who business owner.

Table 6: Current Professions of the Alumni

Employed in a Korean Company/ Organization or Korean Related Affair	22 (34.92%)
Employed in a Non-Korean Company/ Organization	17 (26.98%)
Employed in Government Sector	9 (12.28%)
Running Own Business/ Self Employment	8 (12.69%)
House Wife	7 (11.11%)
Total	63 (100%)

Table 7 shows the majority of alumni, 33 (52.38%), earn between RM2000 and RM5000 per month, which is the standard salary of fresh graduates with bachelor's or master's degrees. This also shows that graduates of Korea Studies are paid based on their qualifications. A total of 7 people (11.11%) earn a monthly income of less than RM2000. Most of them are fresh graduates and are looking for a better-paying job and which is in line with their interest and qualifications. A total of 7 (11.11%) respondents earns between RM5001 and RM7000. A monthly income of RM5001 - RM7000 is considered moderately high and reflects a decent standard of living in Malaysia. A monthly salary of RM7000 and above is categorised as high-income category. Although the number of high-income earners is small (RM11,000), 4 respondents (6.34%), RM9001-RM11,000, 2 respondents (3.17%), RM7001-RM9000, 3 respondents (4.76%), but most of them are alumni who graduated more than 10 years. Alumni who are housewives did not state their monthly incomes as many depend on their spouses or parents. Choosing to be a housewife is mainly driven by the need to take care of their children or their ageing parents.

Table 7: Monthly Income

More than RM11,000	4 (6.34%)
RM9001 - RM11,000	2 (3.17%)
RM7001 - RM9000	3 (4.76%)
RM5001 - RM7000	7 (11.11%)
RM2000 - RM5000	33 (52.38%)
Under RM2000	7 (11.11%)
No answer	7 (11.11%)
Total	63 (100%)

USING OF KOREAN LANGUAGE AT THE WORK PLACE

The second part of the questionnaire was aimed at finding out the extent of use of Korean language at the work place. The findings are described in Table 8. In response to the first question, it was found that 24 people (38.09%) were appointed to their current positions because of their Korean language skills. Therefore, the mastery of the Korean language is considered important for employment in the related field.

Table 8: Appointed to Current Positions Because Korean Language Skills

Yes	24 (38.09%)
No	39 (61.91%)

The second question was on the use of the Korean language at the work place whereby 10 people (15.87%) of alumni said they "always" and regularly use the language at their work. These respondents are mostly employed as translators and language teachers which require regular communication with Koreans. Six respondents (9.52%) said they "often" use Korean language at work while 13 (20.63%) answered "sometimes". This shows that the Korean language skill is useful in their work. Only 12 respondents (19.24%) said they rarely use Korean; 22 (34.92%) answered they never use Korean and they are housewives, government officials and alumni who work in companies that do not involve use of Korean language (refer Table 9). The findings of this study show that proficiency level of the Korean language is significant for job employment and helpful in work.

Table 9: The Use of the Korean Language at the Work Place

Item	Number/Percentage
Always	10 (15.87%)
Often	6 (9.52%)
Sometimes	13 (20.63%)
Rarely	12 (19.04%)
Never	22 (34.92%)
Total	63 (100%)

The third question attempted to examine the level of importance of Korean language skills at the work place. The result is shown in table 10. It was "very important" to 15 respondents (23.80%), "important" to 23 (36.50%), "less important" to 11, "not important" to 3 (4.76%) and "irrelevant" to the rest (17.49%). Those who answered "very important" and "important" are employed in Korean companies or Korean language related job. According to in-depth interviews with alumni, their role as intermediary between employers and companies

from Korea is very important. They noted the language is useful in managing the activities of the companies. Therefore, the company is willing to pay high salary in line with their skills as they are much in demand. Most of the Korean language teachers work with the government. Possessing Korean language skills therefore, has helped them to get teaching job. In-depth interviews also revealed that the alumni suggested the use of language is very important for career development. This is because most employers or companies look for candidate who has the ability to speak a third language instead of second language. Based on alumni's working experience, Korean language terms related to accounting jobs, administration such as air ticket purchase, accommodation and human resource administration must be mastered by the student who wish to work in Korean company.

In terms of salary, it was found that Korean language skills are "very important" to 12 respondents (19.04%), "important" to 21 (33.33%), "less important" to 13 (20.63%), "not important" to 2 (3.17%) and "not relevant" to 15 (23.80%) alumni. It also shows that mastery of the Korean language is very significant for the alumni's income. Based on the in-depth interviews with alumni, it was found that they received an allowance as a result of their Korean language ability. The allowance was paid because the alumni have the prerequisite Korean language proficiency skills that are difficult to obtain which is an important asset for their employers. This led to a suggestion by the alumni for the East Asian Studies Department to increase the teaching hours allocated for the Korean language. They also recommended that the learning and assessment method for the Korean language be made consistent with the Test of Proficiency in Korean (TOPIK) module. Students with a certificate in TOPIK Grade 5/6 for example have an advantage when seeking jobs with companies requiring Korean-speaking candidates. They are also able negotiate with for a better salary.

The next question was the level of importance of Korean language skills for job promotions. It was found to be "very important" to 6 respondents (9.52%), "important" to 18 (28.57%), "less important" to 24 (36.50%), "not important" to 4 (6.34%) and "not relevant" to the rest of the respondents (22.22%). The result indicated that improvement of Korean language skills is important for promotion, and some of them continue their studies either to an advance level, join advanced classes or learn by themselves using YouTube platform.

Regarding the importance of Korean language skills for communication with Korean colleagues and superiors, it was found that Korean language skills was "very important" to 10 respondents (15.87%), "important" to 23 (36.50%), "less important" to 10 (15.87%), "not important" to 5 (7.93%) and "not relevant" to the rest (20.53%) of the respondents. Those who answered "very important" and "important" accounted for more than 50% of the respondents as they are employed by Korean companies, Korean affairs department and those who often deal with Koreans. From the in-depth interviews with alumni found that Korean colleagues and superiors being excited to communicate with those who can speak Korean which contribute to their improvement of the language. In sum, Koreans are more comfortable speaking in their mother tongue, even with people who are less proficient in the language. The alumni advised that if the prospective graduate plans to work in a Korean company, the language ability would greatly help to reduce the language barrier among colleagues and management.

Regarding the importance of Korean language skills for completing assignments, it was found that it was "very important" to 15 respondents (23.80%), "important" to 16 (25.39%), "less important" to 14 (22.22%), "not important" to 6 (9.52%) and "not relevant" to the rest (20.63%) of the respondents. Those who answered "very important" and "important" made up almost 50% of the respondents. This suggested that the alumni regularly use their Korean language skills in their daily work. An in-depth interview with the respondents found that translating documents from Korean to English required a good command of both languages. The respondents who work as Korean language teachers

appreciated importance of the language proficiency in explaining grammar, correcting students' essays and sentences as well as listening, conversations and other teaching and learning activities. Therefore, it can be concluded that a good command of the Korean language has a high potential for career development.

The next question was on the importance of Korean language skills in dealing with companies and organisations. It was found to be "very important" to 10 respondents (15.87%), "important" to 24 (38.09%), "less important" to 10 (15.87%), "not important" to 5 (7.93%) and "not relevant" to the rest of the respondents (22.22%). Those who answered "very important" and "important" accounted for almost 50% and most of them work in Korean companies or multinational companies that require them to deal with other companies. An in-depth interview with the respondents who work in companies that deal with Koreans found that language skills very helpful, especially for the purchase of electronic materials, such as computer chips, shipping, making a booking and so on.

Therefore, mastery of the Korean language has made work easier for the respondents, especially in communicating with Koreans or dealing with Korean-owned businesses.

Table 10: Level of Importance of Korean Speaking Skills

Occupation/Career	Very important	15 (23.80%)
	Important	23 (36.50%)
	Less important	11 (17.46%)
	Not important	3 (4.76%)
	Unrelated	11 (17.46%)
Salary	Very important	12 (19.04%)
	Important	21 (33.33%)
	Less important	13 (20.63%)
	Not important	2 (3.17%)
	Unrelated	15 (23.80%)
Promotion	Very important	6 (9.52%)
	Important	18 (28.57%)
	Less important	24 (36.50%)
	Not important	4 (6.34%)
	Unrelated	14 (22.22%)
Communication with Korean colleagues/superiors	Very important	10 (15.87%)
	Important	23 (36.50%)
	Less important	10 (15.87%)
	Not important	5 (7.93%)
	Unrelated	13 (20.53%)
Completing assignments	Very important	15 (23.80%)
	Important	16 (25.39%)
	Less important	14 (22.22%)
	Not important	6 (9.52%)
	Unrelated	13 (20.63%)
Helping to deal with external companies/organizations	Very important	10 (15.87%)
	Important	24 (38.09%)
	Less important	10 (15.87%)
	Not important	5 (7.93%)
	Unrelated	14 (22.22%)

APPLICATION OF KOREAN RELATED COURSES AT THE WORK PLACE

The third part of the questionnaire was aimed at identifying the extent of the use and application of knowledge gleaned from the following courses at the respondent's workplace, namely Politics Economy of Korea, Korean Popular Culture, Korean International Relations, North and South Korean Relations, Korean Entrepreneurship and Corporate Management, Korean Modernization Process, Korean Organizational Culture and Korean Culture and Society.

The findings are described in Table 11. The first question was related to how the respondents were appointed to their current job. A total of 20 respondents (33.33%) answered it was mainly due to their extensive knowledge on Korea while majority noted their appointment was not based on knowledge of Korea solely. This suggests a knowledge of Korea and Korean issues was an important factor in recruitment,

Table 11: Appointed to Current Positions Because Extensive Knowledge on Korea

Yes	20 (33.33%)
No	43 (68.25%)

The second question was on the application of related knowledge at the work place. The findings are described in Table 12. Korean ethics encompasses work ethics, positive work behaviour, hard work, healthy lifestyle, aesthetic values, thinking and philosophy. 10 respondents (15.87%) answered "always," 19 (30.15%) answered "often," 18 (28.57%) "sometimes," 9 (14.28%) "rarely", and the rest "never". The in-depth interview with the respondents suggested that they became more disciplined in every aspect of life, especially in their careers a result of practising Korean work ethics and values that emphasise a harmonious relationship at the work place was particularly important. Maintaining a harmonious climate at the workplace was predicated on understanding good values that nurture mutual respect and effective cross-cultural communication. When faced with contradictions in terms of lifestyle and culture between Malaysia and Korea, the respondents observed that their understanding of Korea ethics which is founded on tolerance and respecting differences enabled them to minimise frictions at the workplace.

On the question related to practising Korean organisational culture at the work place, such as respecting senior – junior relations, punctuality among others, 17 respondents (26.98%) answered "always," 26 (41.26%) "often," 10 (15.87%) "sometimes," 5 (7.93%) "rarely" while the rest answered "never." The findings suggested that majority of the respondents practise Korean organisational culture at their workplace. The in-depth interviews further revealed that this practice cultivated a harmonious work environment. One interesting finding is that respondents who are not employed in a Korean company also practised this culture at their work place.

Table 12: Level of Importance of Knowledge Learned from Korea Studies Courses

Practising good Korean values at workplace	Always	10 (15.87%)
	Often	19 (30.15%)
	Sometimes	18 (28.57%)
	Rarely	9 (14.28%)
	Never	7 (11.11%)
Practising Korean	Always	17 (26.98%)

organisational culture at workplace	Often	26 (41.26%)
	Sometimes	10 (15.87%)
	Rarely	5 (7.93%)
	Never	5 (7.93%)

Table 13 describes the importance of knowledge gained from Korean related courses to secure employment. 11 (17.46%) respondents answered "very important", that their extensive knowledge on Korea helped them to secure the position, while 23 (36.50%) felt it was "important," the rest answered "less important." Therefore, it can be said that proficiency in Korean language and the country was significant in securing employment.

On the question regarding salary and promotion indicated a balanced percentage. Eight (12.69%) and six (9.52%) respondents respectively stated salary and promotion are "very important" for those who have extensive knowledge of Korea. While 21 people (33.33%) and 18 people (28.57%) alumni said that knowledge on Korea is "important" for salary and promotion. While "less important" were answered by 16 people (25.39%) and 19 people (30.15%) respectively. It can be concluded that the proficiency level of the Korean language, and extensive knowledge on Korea contributes significantly to the increase in salary and chances for promotion.

In terms of communication with Korean colleagues and superiors, 10 respondents (15.87%) said "very important" and 21 (33.33%) said "important" and they work with Korean companies, and Korean related affairs and government employees who are dealing with Korean. In-depth interviews with respondents suggested that extensive knowledge on Korea is crucial in facilitating communication between the respondents and Korean colleagues and superiors. They are able to exchange views, make comparisons when discussing current issues, and provide critical inputs. Therefore, with extensive knowledge on Korea, the respondents are able to exchange views with their superiors on current, economic and political issues.

For the last two questions, i.e. completing assigned tasks and helping with dealings with companies and external organizations, extensive knowledge about Korea is "very important" to 11 (17.46%) and 9 (14.28%) respondents respectively. "Important" to 18 people (28.57%) and "less important" to 17 (26.98) and 12 (19.14%) respectively. The in-depth interviews revealed those who have knowledge on Korea are sent to Korea, become a tour guide, or a treasure trove related to Korea. Since most alumni have lived in Korea either for a long or short term and have extensive knowledge about Korea, such tasks are easy to complete.

Table 13: The Importance of Knowledge Gained from Korea Related Courses to Secure Employment

Job /Business	Very important	11 (17.46%)
	Important	23 (36.50%)
	Less important	14 (22.22%)
	Not important	3 (4.76%)
	Unrelated	12 (19.04%)
Salary	Very important	8 (12.69%)
	Important	21 (33.33%)
	Less important	16 (25.39%)
	Not important	4 (6.34%)
	Unrelated	14 (22.22%)
Promotion	Very important	6 (9.52%)

	Important	18 (28.57%)
	Less important	19 (30.15%)
	Not important	5 (7.933%)
	Unrelated	15 (23.80%)
Communication with colleagues/ with Korean superiors	Very important	10 (15.87%)
	Important	21 (33.33%)
	Less important	11 (18.33%)
	Not important	5 (7.93%)
	Unrelated	15 (23.80%)
Completing assignments	Very important	11 (17.46%)
	Important	18 (28.57%)
	Less important	17 (26.98%)
	Not important	4 (6.34%)
	Unrelated	13 (20.63%)
Helping to deal with external companies/ external organizations	Very important	9 (14.28%)
	Important	25 (39.68%)
	Less important	12 (19.14%)
	Not important	4 (6.34%)
	Unrelated	13 (20.63%)

USING KOREAN LANGUAGE IN HIGHER DEGREE PROGRAMME

The fourth part of the questionnaire attempted to understand the extent of application of Korean language in the higher degree programme. The results are described in Table 14. A total of 14 respondents (22.22%) answered they undertook research related to Korean language while the rest did not. However, only 6 respondents (9.52%) published a paper in Korean language while the rest did not. On the question of using Korean language as reference material, 21 respondents (33.33%) answered yes.

Therefore, only a minority of the respondents use Korean language in the higher degree programme. However, the majority of 50 respondents (79.36%) indicated they were still interested in continuing study Korean language. The respondents understand that the skills gained from the Korean language are still useful for deepening their knowledge related to Korea.

Table 14: Use of Korean Language in Higher Degree Programme

	Yes	Nope
Doing research related to Korean language	14 (22.22%)	49 (77.77%)
Publish studies in Korean	6 (9.52%)	57 (90.47%)
Using Korean in higher degree learning	18 (28.57%)	45 (71.43%)
Using reference materials in Korean	21 (33.33%)	42 (66.66%)
Interested in continuing to study Korean	50 (79.36%)	13 (20.63%)

HIGHER DEGREE PROGRAMME ON KOREA RELATED STUDIES

The fifth part of the questionnaire attempted to identify the application of higher degree programme on Korea related studies for respondents who are currently or have completed their Master/PhD degrees. Table 15 shows that 17 respondents (26.98%) undertook research related to Korea, namely cross-cultural study of Korean teaching in Malaysia, halal certification of Korean food product in Malaysia, multicultural marriage in South

Korea, Korean corporate culture, South Korea and the global halal market, Kpop dance, and ROK cultural activities in Indonesia cultural diplomacy. A total of 14 respondents (22.22%) published their research studies. The majority 44 respondents (69.84%) expressed interest in continuing their study. In-depth interview with the respondents showed there are time constraints for them in efforts to continue their higher degree despite their strong interest.

Table 15: Higher Degree Programme related to Korea

	Yes	No
Further study on Korean politics, economy, international relations and culture	17 (26.98%)	46 (73.01%)
Publish research related to Korea	14 (22.22%)	49 (77.77%)
Interested in studying about Korea	44 (69.84%)	19 (30.15%)

APPLICATION OF KOREAN LANGUAGE IN DAILY LIFE

The sixth part of the questionnaire aimed to identify the application of the Korean language in everyday life. Table 16 shows 13 respondents (20.63%) answered "always" and 5 (7.93%) answered "often" in teaching basic Korean words to family members or friends. A majority, 32 respondents (50.79%) answered "sometimes". Although the level of practicing is different, but from the three answers obtained shows that the amount of practicing Korean language through teaching is high. This indirectly contributes to the spread of the Korean language to the surrounding people and indirectly creates a feeling of interested to deepen the language among them.

Seven (11.11%), four (6.34%) and 28 respondents (44.44%) answered "always," "often" and "sometimes" respectively in using basic Korean words with family members or friends. This shows that alumni's contribution to the spreading of language and terms through communication is important even if it is only a few basic words. In-depth interviews with the alumni showed the basic and most common words used in communication with people around them are: thank you (*kamsahamnida*), hello (*anyeonghaseyo*), sorry (*jwesonghamnida*), excuse me (*jeogiyo*) and quick (*ppali*).

The respondents also indicated their Korean language skills allow them to watch dramas, news, documentaries and reality shows in Korean. A total of 27 people (42.85%) answered "always," 17 people (26.98%) "often" and 15 people (23.80%) "sometimes" for the question on enjoying Korean television shows. Therefore, it is very useful for alumni who study Korean up to a high level because they can understand the content to be delivered. In fact, the more important thing is to understand the content of the news directly from the television so that distortion of news from third parties can be avoided. Therefore, the news received directly can be verified for its truth instead of depending on a third party.

On the question if the respondents use Korean language when they meet Koreans on an informal basis, 15 (23.80) answered "always," 19 (30.15%) "often" and 19 (30.15%) answered "sometimes." The knowledge of the language is also advantageous for the respondents who travel to Korea as they can shop and travel better. For alumni who are in Malaysia, they can help Koreans who need help due to the language barrier they face in Malaysia.

Table 16: Application of the Korean Language in Everyday Life

Teaching basic Korean language or words to family members/friends	Always	13 (20.63%)
	Often	5 (7.93%)
	Sometimes	32 (50.79%)

	Rarely	12 (19.04%)
	Never	1 (1.58%)
Using Korean language or words to communicate with family members or friends	Always	7 (11.11%)
	Often	4 (6.34%)
	Sometimes	28 (44.44%)
	Rarely	23 (36.50%)
	Never	1 (1.58%)
Watching a program (drama / news / documentary / reality show) in Korean	Always	27 (42.85%)
	Often	17 (26.98%)
	Sometimes	15 (23.80%)
	Rarely	4 (6.34%)
	Never	0
Using Korean when meeting Koreans	Always	15 (23.80%)
	Often	19 (30.15%)
	Sometimes	19 (30.15%)
	Rarely	3 (4.76%)
	Never	7 (11.11%)

APPLICATION OF KNOWLEDGE FROM KOREAN RELATED COURSE IN THE DAILY LIFE

The last part of the questionnaire attempted to identify the application of theoretical gleaned from the courses. The questions were related to the ability of the respondents to comment or explain to people around them on Korea related political issues, its international relations as well as its economy, socio-cultural issues, its history and civilisation and Korean popular culture.

The results of the seven questions are shown in Table 17. A total of five respondents (7.93%) answered "very able," 24 (38.09%) answered "able," while the answered "moderately able" in relation to comments about Korean political issues. The results suggested the respondents keep themselves up-to-date on current political issues concerning Korea. In-depth interviews also supported this whereby the respondents were aware of latest political happenings in Korea, such as news of arrest of top political leaders linked to corruption as well as the frequent demonstrations in Seoul. Therefore, it can be surmised the respondents act as 'mediators' in delivering information related to Korea to the people around them.

Six respondents (9.52%) answered "very able," 33 (52.38%) answered "able" and 19 (30.15%) "moderately able" with issues related to Korea's international relations. In-depth interviews with the respondents further revealed that North and South Korean relations, relations with Japan, the United States and Southeast Asian countries receive most attention. Malaysia's relations with North Korea is also keenly followed due to the absence of diplomatic relations between the Koreas. This information is then disseminated to the wider society by the respondents.

In the area of Korean political economy, six respondents (9.52%) answered "very able," 37 (58.73%) answered "able" and the rest "moderately able". In-depth interviews, further revealed that the knowledge gained from the courses on Korean political economy has helped the respondents to explain to their friends, relatives and people around them about the concept chaebol, large family-owned businesses conglomerates linked to government and which often interfere in government policy making. Therefore, once again, the alumni act as reference to the people around them on related issues.

On Korean social issues, 20 respondents (31.74%) answered "very able," 34 (53.96%) "able" and 5 (7.93%) "moderately able." On issues related Korean popular culture, 21 respondents (33.33%) answered "very able," 30 (47.61%) answered "able" and 11 (17.46%) "moderately able." Similarly, on Korean cultural issues, 22 respondents (34.92%) answered "very able", 33 (52.38%) "able," 7 (12.69%) answered "moderately able." The answers suggest the subject of Korean culture is very popular among students. One respondent who is a Korean language teacher, explained that he often discusses about Korean culture to his students. This is in line with the fact that the Korean popular culture, such as K-pop singers, actors, movies and dramas, are very popular among Malaysian.

On issues related to Korean history and civilisation, seven respondents (11.11%) answered "very able," 32 (50.79%) "moderately able" and 19 (28.57%) answered "moderately able." In-depth interviews revealed that respondents who teach Korean language often discuss about Korean history and its rich civilisation, such as its early kingdoms, namely Baekje, Goguryeo and Silla, to the students.

Table 17: Application of Knowledge from Korean Related Course in the Daily Life

Korean Politics	Very able	5 (7.93%)
	Able	24 (38.09%)
	Moderately able	30 (47.61%)
	Not able	2 (3.17%)
	No comment	2 (3.17%)
Korea's International Relations	Very able	6 (9.52%)
	Able	33 (52.38%)
	Moderately able	19 (30.15%)
	Not able	2 (3.17%)
	No comment	3 (4.76%)
Korean Political Economy	Very able	6 (9.52%)
	Able	37 (58.73%)
	Moderately able	15 (23.80%)
	Not able	2 (3.17%)
	No comment	3 (4.76%)
Korean Social Issues	Very able	20 (31.74%)
	Able	34 (53.96%)
	Moderately able	5 (7.93%)
	Not able	2 (3.17%)
	No comment	2 (3.17%)
Korean Culture	Very able	22 (34.92%)
	Able	33 (52.38%)
	Moderately able	8 (12.69%)
	Not able	0
	No comment	0
Korean History and Civilisation	Very able	7 (11.11%)
	Able	32 (50.79%)
	Moderately able	19 (28.57%)
	Not able	2 (3.17%)
	No comment	3 (4.76%)
Korean Popular Culture	Very able	21 (33.33%)
	Able	30 (47.61%)
	Moderately able	11 (17.46%)

	Not able	1 (1.58%)
	No comment	0

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

The main goal of this study was to examine and understand the application of learning among alumni of Korea Studies, Department of East Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya. This study consisted of two parts, Korean language and Korea related courses and the focus was on the application of learning at the work place, higher degree programme and everyday life.

The findings on the application of Korean language at the work place suggested its importance. For their career development, salary increase, promotion, smoother communication with Korean colleagues and superiors, completing tasks in time and helping to deal with other companies and organisations. The study also found that more than half of the respondents rated the application of the Korean language as "very important" and "important."

More than half of the respondents admitted to putting the knowledge learnt at university into practice; this includes Korean values and its organisational culture. They rated "very important" and "important". They reported that their knowledge boosted their salary, promotion, communication with Korean colleagues and superiors, completing assignments and assisting with dealings with foreign companies.

At the higher degree programme, the study found that only a small number of the respondents continued their studies using Korean language as the medium. It was also found that more respondents studied Korea related studies than the Korean language course. This could be due to the fact that most of the students at the undergraduate level conduct research related to Korea. An interesting finding is the desire of the respondents to continue their studies either in the field of language or Korean related studies. However, due to time and financial constraints, they chose to work.

The questionnaire findings also revealed that the respondents use the language regularly. with family members or friends, and it is useful when watching Korean dramas, news, documentaries, and reality shows as well as when meeting with Koreans. Although the level of application is different (as reflected in their answers - "always," "often" and "sometimes") on average more than 80% of the respondents use Korean in their daily life.

In terms of application of Korean related courses in the daily life, the results indicated that the respondents share issues related to politics, international relations, political economy, social, culture, popular culture and Korean history and civilisation with their friends and their community at large. The respondents rated its application as very high at 90% at different levels, such as "very able" "able" and "moderately able".

In conclusion, the study found that both knowledge of Korean related course and language are important. The respondents found that the course influence their way of thinking, open their mind and contributes to positive behaviour. The skills allow them to interact cross-culturally and understand the Korean mindset and their way of life. A good command of the language opens up wider opportunities in career development as well. Currently, there are many employment opportunities for students proficient in Korean, from market research companies to social media outfits. Malaysia and South Korea recently agreed to establish closer relations to overcome the economic recessions due to Covid-19 pandemic, and this resulted in the implementation of Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) which opened more job opportunities in Malaysia. Therefore, graduates with Korean language skills can seize this opportunity and help the students to be competitive in the job market. The respondents suggested that students who wish to work

with Korean companies be prepared with various language skills, such as taking a course in TOPIK Korean language before stepping into the real world.

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