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Does the attractiveness of K-culture shape the enjoyment of foreign language learners of Korean?

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Abstract

Attraction to the target culture can be a reason to study the language, especially in the case of languages other than English (LOTEs). Recently, the number of Korean language learners has surged alongside the growing popularity of Korean pop culture (K-pop). However, it is unknown whether the initial attraction to the culture and the first steps in that direction shape foreign language (FL) emotions in the longer term. To fill this gap, this mixed-methods study examined to what extent the attractiveness of the Korean Culture (K-culture) predicts foreign language enjoyment (FLE) after controlling for other established learner variables (i.e., the length of FL study, FL proficiency, frequency of FL use outside of class, and attitudes toward the teacher and FL) through sequential regression analysis. The quantitative findings are complemented by the open-ended responses to the sources of FLE using the American Council on Teaching of Foreign Languages 3Ps framework (products, practices, and perspectives) through NVivo. A total of 782 university students studying Korean as FL completed an online survey on the attractiveness of K-culture and FLE. The results showed that the attitude toward the teacher and attractiveness of K-culture are the strongest predictors of FLE.

외국어 대상 문화에 대한 매력은 특히 영어 외 언어를 학습하는 중요한 동기가 될 수 있다. 최근 한국 대중문화(K-pop)의 인기에 힘입어 한국어 학습자 수가 급증하고 있다. 그러나 문화에 대한 이러한 초기 관심과 그로 인해 시작된 학습 여정이 장기적으로 외국어 학습 과정에서 경험되는 감정, 특히 즐거움에 어떤 영향을 미치는지에 대해서는 아직 명확하지 않다. 이러한 연구의 공백을 메우기 위해, 본 연구는 한국 문화(K-컬처)의 매력이 외국어 학습자 변수(외국어 학습 기간, 외국어 능력, 수업 외 외국어 사용 빈도, 교사 및 외국어에 대한 태도)를 통제한 후 외국어 학습의 즐거움(FLE)을 예측하는 정도를 순차 회귀분석을 통해 분석하였다. 또한 통계적 결과와 더불어 외국어 학습의 즐거움에 대한 서술식 응답을 ACTFL 3P 이론적 프레임을 바탕으로 NVivo를 통해 분석하였다. 한국어를 외국어로 학습하는 대학생 782명이 K-컬처에 대한 매력과 외국어 학습의 즐거움에 관한 온라인 설문에 참여하였다. 연구 결과, 교사에 대한 태도와 K-컬처에 대한 매력이 FLE의 가장 강력한 예측 변수임이 밝혀졌다.

외국어 학습의 즐거움, 외국어로서의 한국어, 외국어 학습과 팝문화, 영어 이외의 외국어 교육, 긍정 심리학

1 | INTRODUCTION

Some people are engaged in language learning as a dedicated hobby driven by non-instrumental purposes, for example, intellectual stimulation, cultural curiosity, or attraction to the foreign language (FL) media products. Since the introduction of Positive Psychology in the field of Applied Linguistics, researchers have argued that the aim of FL teaching is much broader than language skills development (MacIntyre et al., 2019). The FL class is a unique place for learners to develop new interests, imagine new identities, come across new values and cultural artifacts, and thrive as a result (Mercer & Gregersen, 2023). The FL language classroom is a space that has the potential to open windows to the world outside the local context (Lvovich, 2013). One central positive emotion in that context is foreign language enjoyment (FLE), defined as "a complex emotion, capturing interacting dimensions of the challenge and perceived ability that reflect the human drive for success in the face of difficult tasks (…) enjoyment occurs when people not only meet their needs but exceed them to accomplish something new or even unexpected" (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016, pp. 216, 217). Previous studies have found that a combination of interacting learner-internal and learner-external variables predict FLE (for an overview, see Dewaele, 2022).

One independent variable that is of particular interest to the present study is the positive relationship that has been observed between FL learners' attitude toward the FL culture and their FLE (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019; Dewaele, Özdemir et al., 2022; Dewaele et al., 2018; Jiang & Dewaele, 2019). These studies used a single item to measure the attitude toward the FL culture, and no qualitative data were collected to throw light on what exactly learners found attractive in the target culture. In the present study, we propose to obtain more detailed quantitative information from FL learners on the cultural aspects that initiated and sustained their interest and engagement in the FL complemented by qualitative data to hear their unique voices about their perceptions of the richness of Korean Culture (K-culture) and their initiatives to learn more about it.

This study focuses on learners of Korean as an FL in six countries: France, Singapore, South Korea, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Vietnam. The reasons for studying Korean may vary but there is one consistent finding across different research contexts: Korean media and culture act as a magnet (e.g., Lee, 2018). Since the early 2000s, the South Korean government has sought to increase its soft power through the production of K-pop content that would resonate across its borders. The boy band BTS is a prime example of the success of this *Hallyu* (translation: Korean wave) policy. Not only have they contributed massively to the Korean economy through royalties and concert tickets, but they have also attracted more tourists to the country and established themselves as global influencers and cultural ambassadors (Suntikul, 2019). Recently, the boy group has been featured in Korean language textbooks, titled *Learn Korean with BTS!* and *Talk Korean with BTS!* (Kim, 2021). The involvement of K-pop stars in Korean language textbooks has become even more official since the government-authorized Korean language textbooks involved the boy group music video and lyrics as learning materials (Park, 2021).

The top-down governmental effort to promote pop culture and language learning is closely tied to the demand in the market. According to an informal poll on R/kpop (2019), a subsection of Reddit.com dedicated to K-pop fans, 46.1% of K-pop fans want to learn the Korean language but have not yet started, and another 12.3% are currently engaged in Korean language study. The global popularity of K-culture is often based on pop culture (i.e., entertainment, music, dramas, and films). However, Korean FL learners are likely to consider K-culture as a whole, rather than only specific cultural products (Kiaer, 2023). While it is beyond the scope of this paper to pin down what constitutes *culture*, we follow the framework of culture that emanated from the American Council on Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) standards, which are designed for modern language learners. ACTFL standard sets culture as one of the goal areas of language learning. As is usual in this area of research, snowball sampling was used to reach Korean FL learners across the world and invite them to fill out an online questionnaire on their views, opinions, and FLE in Korean FL classes (for more information on this approach, see Dörnyei & Dewaele, 2023). This study will seek to identify the cultural dimensions that attract FL learners of Korean and investigate whether these are linked to their FLE experience in class.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

A recent meta-analysis of FLE research showed a moderate positive relationship between FLE and the target language achievement and a strong positive relationship between FLE and willingness to communicate (Botes et al., 2022). Teacher-related factors (e.g., the frequency of a teacher's joking, the frequency of a teacher's using the FL in class, and teacher predictability) have been consistently correlated to FLE whereas the teacher's influence on foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) was much more limited (Dewaele et al., 2018, 2022). The findings are pedagogically encouraging as teachers and teaching practices can boost students' FLE.

With regards to learner-internal and demographic factors, the findings of previous research are somewhat inconclusive, although general patterns may be drawn. Overall, female students tend to experience more FLE and FLCA (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014), but the opposite pattern or no difference was found in some other studies (Dewaele, Özdemir et al., 2022). Older students reported higher FLE than secondary pupils (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Dewaele et al., 2018). More advanced learners who had been studying the FL longer have reported higher levels of FLE

(Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Dewaele & Meftah, 2023, 2024). Unsurprisingly, more proficient learners have also been found to experience more FLE (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Li, 2020; Inada, 2022; Piechurska-Kuciel, 2017). As for the language background, learners who know more languages typically reported higher levels of FLE (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Dewaele et al., 2024). FLE has been found to be positively linked to multiple learner-internal variables including self-perceived FL proficiency and the attitudes toward the teacher, the FL, and the FL culture, in addition to teacher characteristics such as enthusiasm, friendliness, and predictability (Li, 2022) and enjoyment in using the FL outside the classroom (Ross & Rivers, 2018).

Learners' attitudes toward the FL culture have been found to shape their emotions in the FL classroom. The 189 FL learners of French, German, and Spanish in two London secondary schools in Dewaele et al. (2018) reported significantly less FL classroom anxiety (a small effect size) and more FLE (a large effect size) when they had a more favorable attitude toward the FL. The attitude toward the FL had no effect on FLCA but emerged as a weak positive predictor of FLE in the international sample of 750 FL learners who studied mostly English, followed by French, Spanish, and German in Dewaele and MacIntyre (2019). The attitude toward the FL was the strongest positive predictor of FLE (explaining 18% of variance) in a more homogeneous group of 592 Kazakh learners of Turkish (Dewaele, Özdemir et al., 2022). The attitude toward the FL was a much weaker negative predictor of FLCA (explaining 0.7% of variance). In Li (2022), the attitude toward the FL emerged as the strongest predictor of FLE, followed by self-perceived FL proficiency, the attitude toward the teacher, and the attitude toward the FL culture. The latter is particularly interesting for the present study because it suggests that the target language and the target culture each explain variance in FLE.

It is not surprising that the positive attitude toward the FL culture is linked to FLE because FL classrooms offer learners opportunities to experience a form of very short immersion in a new cultural environment that can trigger excitement and challenge at the same time. The cultural element might be more salient in LOTEs classes than in "default" English classes because Global English has weaker ties with any particular Anglophone culture and could be treated as a culturally unaffiliated *lingua franca*. Also, past studies consistently showed that LOTEs learners in a wide variety of settings tend to develop a strong attachment to the FL culture (Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017). The attachment can translate into more positive emotions as well as motivation. Dewaele and Saito (2024) found that 360 Kuwaiti LOTE learners (who already knew English) reported significantly more FLE in their LOTE class (small-to-medium effect size) than 252 peers in English FL classes.

FL culture is viewed as a significant component of learning and teaching, reflected in ACTFL. According to the standard document, five goal areas of language teaching involve communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities (5Cs). The culture-related goal reflects the relationships among subdimensions of cultures, in particular, between: (1) practices and perspectives and (2) products and perspectives. Products refer to tangible and intangible items such as cultural artifacts, institutions, systems (e.g., K-dramas), and practices are patterns of social interactions such as customs and behavior (e.g., table manners represented in K-dramas). Perspectives represent the culture's view of the world, referred to as values and beliefs (e.g., respecting elders and social hierarchy).

FL instruction often involves visual and multimodal texts that refer to particular ways of life in the target language community. Teachers integrate multimodal cultural materials in class to create immersive learning environments in which students interact with the target culture and make meaning from understanding of products, practices, and perspectives of the target culture. However, there has been a mixed view on what kind of culture needs to be taught in class. In the case of the FL Korean, previous research found that both teacher and student communities have concerns about contemporary pop culture and hybrid language use, for example, the romanization of the Korean alphabet (hangul) or sporadic use of Korean terms within English sentences (Crow, 2019). Although language hybridization is a legitimate form of performativity, signaling a playful commitment to the fan community, those language users have been criticized by fellow fans for not properly using the Korean language. Teachers also have shown reluctance to use pop-culture materials due to the extensive teaching preparation time, lack of existing resources, and the incongruity between pop-culture materials and their teaching styles (Jung et al., 2022).

2.1 | The role of cultural exposure in psychological outcomes in FL

In and outside FL classrooms, students learn culture through intercultural contact with people from the community or cultural products. Even in contexts where direct contact with speakers of the FL community is minimal, the FL community may still be known to the learners through indirect contact—the learners' exposure to a range of FL cultural products and artifacts, such as films, videos, books, magazines, and music. Kormos and Csizér (2007) conducted an interview-based qualitative study with 40 school pupils aged 13–14, studying English or German in Hungary. From the interview data, the most frequent type of contact was with cultural products such as TV, film, internet, or magazines. Audio-visual cultural artifacts act as mediators of the target culture. Participants reported that such cultural contacts triggered positive attitudes, boosted motivation, and reduced anxiety. It confirmed previous research showing that contact with the target culture increases linguistic self-confidence, which in turn, strengthens motivation (Clément & Kruidenier, 1983).

In a later study, Csizér and Kormos (2008) explored the effects of direct and indirect cultural contact with FL English on the attitude toward the target language and motivated behavior through sequential equation modeling. Participants for the study were selected from a larger pool ($n = 237$, age = 13/14) who showed the highest level of cross-cultural contact with English. Cultural products accessed through media were the only significant contact variable predicting the positive attitude toward English, its culture, and its speakers, which was shown to predict motivated behavior.

2.2 | The role of FL media in FL learning

FL media products can be the initial contact point that attracts learners. Once they start learning the language, the attraction to media is likely to expand, including non-media cultural products, practices, or value systems. The influence of media products on language learning has been reported in many different geographical contexts. For example, Turkish soap operas have swept through the Arab world, offering glimpses of an idealized Ottoman past. As a result, viewers visited the filming locations in Turkey, and enrollments in Turkish language classes were up in Arab countries (Matthews, 2011). In the case of Japanese, the participation in online game guilds and watching anime have served as catalysts to study the language (Fukunaga, 2006; Wang, 2014). Another example is "Bronies" (i.e., older male fans of the children's animated show *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*) in Spain and Russia (Shafirova & Cassany, 2019). Their fan practice online (e.g., fanfiction, translation, fandubbing) enhanced English vocabulary acquisition and pronunciation. What remains to be investigated is whether and to what extent the attractiveness of the foreign culture is linked to FLE.

According to the culture as iceberg metaphor (Hall, 1976), the visible cultural products and behavior are only the tip of the iceberg anchored by invisible parts of the culture such as beliefs and value systems. The culture as iceberg approach has been criticized for the positivistic view and the oversight of the meaning-making process involved in culture (e.g., Bennett, 2013). Despite the ontological and metaphorical limitations, however, culture as an iceberg has some utility in explaining FL cultural learning that occurs coincidently with FL learning. Teachers tend to prioritize teaching the visible parts of the culture, which is only 10% of the iceberg (Cutshall, 2012). The heavy reliance on the product aspects of culture in FL class has been criticized for being too superficial. However, with increased proficiency learners become gradually better able to gain a deeper understanding of FL cultural perspectives and values. Also, it is through exposure to the visible products and practices that learners discover their way inside the iceberg.

Given the complex and multi-faceted nature of culture, measuring the attitudes toward culture using a single questionnaire item may be too simplistic to capture the aspects of culture that lead to FLE. The previous studies suggest that while abundant research has been carried out on the relationship between exposure to FL culture and FL learning, including attitudes and motivation, less research has been carried out on the link between attitudes toward specific parts of the FL culture and FLE, possibly because the existing studies only used a single broad measure of FL culture

(Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019; Dewaele, Özdemir et al., 2022; Dewaele et al., 2018). The present study proposes a more granular approach, using a multi-item measure of the attractiveness of K-culture in the context of FL learning.

We hypothesize that the attractiveness of K-culture predicts FLE, in addition to the attitude toward the teacher, the length of FL study, FL proficiency, and frequency of FL use outside class (RQ1). We chose these variables because they were identified as significant predictors of FLE in previous studies. Rather than replicating their predictive relationships with FLE, we aim to answer to what extent the attractiveness of the target culture uniquely contributes to FLE while suppressing the effects of said predictors since the focus of this study is the target culture's influence on FLE.

Aligned with previous studies on FLE, we will explore the responses to the open-ended question regarding the sources of FLE among Korean language learners, using NVivo. The research questions are:

1. Does the attractiveness of K-culture predict FLE after controlling for other established predictive variables (i.e., attitude toward the teacher, length of FL study, FL proficiency, and frequency of FL use outside of class)?
2. What are the sources of FLE among learners of Korean in relation to RQ2?

3 | METHOD

3.1 | Participants

The participants of this mixed methods study based on a convergent parallel design (Creswell & Clark, 2017) were undergraduate students studying Korean in France ($n = 135$), Singapore ($n = 24$), South Korea ($n = 287$), the United Kingdom ($n = 54$), the United States ($n = 91$), and Vietnam ($n = 191$). A total of 782 participants completed an online survey. The self-identified gender distribution of the participants was highly skewed toward females (Female $n = 643$, Male $n = 123$, Non-binary $n = 8$, Other $n = 2$, and Prefer not to say $n = 6$). The participants in South Korea came from all over the world; thus, the language background was varied. The Korean proficiency level ranged from beginner ($n = 136$), low intermediate ($n = 206$), intermediate ($n = 277$), high intermediate ($n = 137$), to advanced ($n = 26$). The length of Korean language studies varied from less than 1 year to more than 6 years, and the average was 3.03 years (SD = 1.52 years). Overall, the participants reported favorable attitudes toward the Korean language (very favorable $n = 275$; favorable $n = 347$; neutral $n = 151$; unfavorable $n = 5$; very unfavorable $n = 4$) and teacher (very favorable $n = 359$; favorable $n = 339$; neutral $n = 83$; unfavorable $n = 1$).

3.2 | Procedure

After the ethics approval was obtained from the first author's institution, the authors adopted a snowball sampling strategy, contacting Korean instructors via email, outlining the purpose of the study and link to the survey, and asking them to forward the call to colleagues. The email was then circulated among students who were enrolled in the Korean courses at the universities. The questionnaire was anonymous, and participation was on a voluntary basis. Participants ticked a consent box at the start of the questionnaire. After compiling the questionnaire data, open-ended responses written in Chinese, French, Korean, and Vietnamese were translated to English by professional translators and the first author for data analysis.

3.3 | Instruments

The 9-item short version of the *Foreign Language Enjoyment scale* from Botes et al. (2021) was used for the questionnaire but the phrase "foreign language" was replaced with "Korean." Items tap into three lower-order dimensions: teacher

TABLE 1 Pattern matrix (*n* = 390).

	Factor 1	Factor 2
I learn interesting things about Korean language and culture from Korean media (music, film, drama or TV show).	0.869	
It's cool to know Korean language and culture from Korean media (music, film, drama or TV show).	0.860	
The Korean music scene is exciting.	0.713	
I love Korean films, dramas and TV shows.	0.677	
Koreans have much to be proud about because they have given the world much of value.		0.826
Koreans are sociable and kind.		0.684
South Korea is becoming a major player on the world's literary scene.		0.533
Taekwondo is cool.		0.456
Korean culture is rich.		0.427

appreciation, personal enjoyment, and social enjoyment. Participant response was elicited through a 5-point Likert scale from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. The internal consistency was good (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.83$).

The *Attractiveness of the K-culture scale* was developed based on the open-ended data from Han (2023). We scrutinized the data, selecting recurring themes and wording them according to the attractiveness of K-culture. The final version was scrutinized by five Korean language specialists who are familiar with the learner populations to ensure face validity, clarity, readability, and relevance. To test construct validity, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were run with half of the participants, separately ($n = 390$), after removing two outliers.

EFA was chosen over principal component analysis because our primary goal was to discover underlying constructs around Korean culture rather than simply reducing variables. The Promax oblique rotation method was chosen since the psychological constructs were expected to be correlated. The data showed suitability for factor analysis based on the KMO and Bartlett's test. The KMO result (0.899) and Bartlett's test of sphericity [χ^2 (231) = 4073.484, $p < 0.001$] showed the adequate factorability of the data. The criteria for EFA retention of factors and survey items were dependent on extraction communalities (>0.3), eigenvalue (>1), factor loading (>0.4), cross-loading, and theoretical and statistical considerations. The Scree plot was taken into consideration on a supplementary basis. As a rule of thumb, we tried to keep a minimum of three items for a construct, following the guidance from Kline (1994). With the Maximum likelihood method and Promax rotation, two factors underlying Korean culture were extracted from the EFA: (1) fascination with K-media ($\lambda = 3.975$) and (2) first-hand cultural exposure and perceived values of Korean culture ($\lambda = 1.470$).

After the correlation and factor analyses, two items were deleted, and the final version contained nine items. Table 1 shows factor loadings and descriptive statistics of all items. The scree plot also supported the two factors in Figure 1. A 5-point Likert scale from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* was attached to the nine items. The CFA with half of the participants ($n = 390$) strongly supported the reliability of the model with excellent fit indices [$\chi^2 = 45.069$, $df = 26$, $p = 0.12$, RMSEA = 0.043, GFI = 0.975, AGFI = 0.956, RMR = 0.026].

The questionnaire items were originally developed in English and translated to Chinese, French, Korean, and Vietnamese by four professional translators in those languages and scrutinized by external reviewers for face validity and readability.[1] All participants were given the same questionnaire items in one of the languages. For the participants in Korea, many participants were L1 Chinese ($n = 176$) or Vietnamese speakers ($n = 56$), and all participants knew English and Korean language to some extent; therefore, Chinese, English, Korean, and Vietnamese versions of the
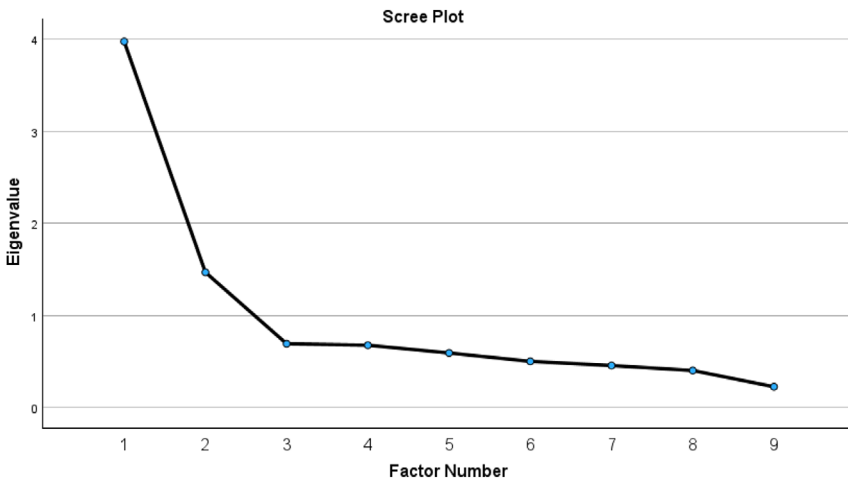
FIGURE 1 Scree plot. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]
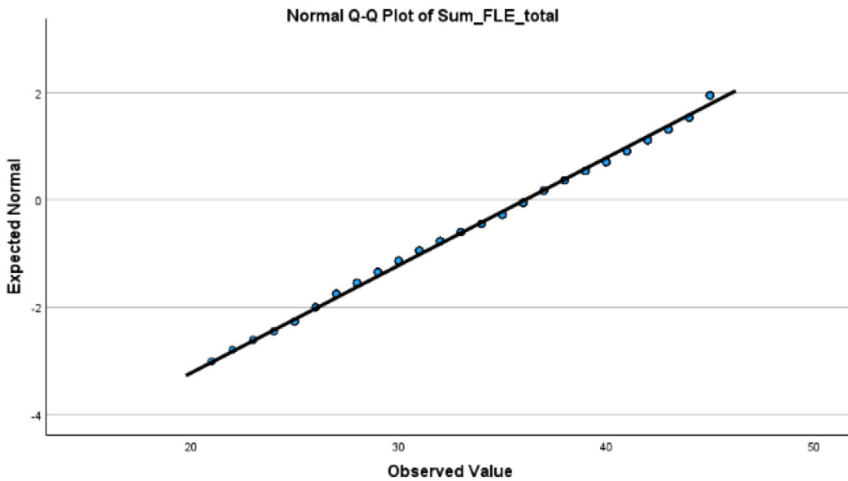

FIGURE 2 Q-Q plot for FLE ($N = 780$ excluding two outliers). [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

questionnaire were provided. The questionnaire was loaded on Microsoft Forms and the online link was created for each language version.

A normality check was conducted for FLE based on outliers, histograms, skewness, and kurtosis. The data were normally distributed but two outliers were excluded. Figure 2 shows the Q-Q plot for FLE and Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics for each variable.

3.4 | Data analysis

RQ1 was addressed by a sequential (i.e., hierarchical) regression analysis with other established predictive variables (block 1) and the attractiveness of K-culture, that is, the sum of nine individual questionnaire items (block 2) to predict

TABLE 2 Descriptive statistics for the variables.

N = 780 (excluding two outliers)	M	SD	Min	Max
FLE	36.095	4.977	21	45
Attitude toward the teacher	4.35	0.665	3	5
Length of FL study (in years)	3.03	1.523	1	8
FL proficiency	2.63	1.064	1	5
Frequency of FL use outside of class	3.09	0.905	1	5
Attractiveness of K-culture	35.624	4.837	17	45

Abbreviations: FL, foreign language; FLE, foreign language enjoyment.

FLE as a dependent variable after a preliminary correlation analysis. The variables that were significantly correlated with FLE ($p < 0.001$) entered into the regression model. RQ2 was answered by qualitative analysis of the open-ended responses to the question: *Please describe one specific event or episode in your Korean class that you really enjoyed and describe your feelings in as much detail as possible.* The analysis was based on the ACTFL 3Ps framework using NVivo. The software was chosen for systematic coding from the open data, enabling us to see recurring examples and patterns for the 3Ps categories. The coding process started with compiling the open-ended responses and reading the data by the first author. After the initial screening of the data, the responses were coded into three categories according to the 3Ps: products, practices, and perspectives. However, as the ACTFL 3Ps framework suggested, the components were interrelated. Some responses tapped into multiple components of culture and the following two themes emerged: (1) products and practices; (2) products and perspectives. Additionally, generic responses that mention culture without further elaboration were coded as General Culture. After the coding process, a research assistant independently coded 25% of the data to ensure interrater reliability, following the six themes identified by the first author. The two coders reached a 100% agreement rate after discussing the 3Ps framework and potential examples for each category before the coding process commenced.

4 | RESULTS

4.1 | RQ1: Identifying the predictors of FLE

As a primary analysis, a Pearson correlation analysis was run between independent variables and FLE. As shown in Table 3, all variables were significantly correlated with FLE ($p < 0.001$), with varying effect sizes. The attitude toward the teacher showed the highest correlation coefficient with FLE, followed by the attractiveness of K-culture. The length of the FL study, FL proficiency, and frequency of FL use outside of class showed weaker but still significant correlations with FLE. Among the predictive variables, none of them showed high correlation coefficients that cause concern for multicollinearity for the regression analysis.

The attitude toward the teacher, length of FL study, FL proficiency, and frequency of FL use outside of class were entered in the first block, followed by the attractiveness of K-culture in the second block in the sequential regression model with Enter method to determine if the addition of the attractiveness of K-culture improved the prediction. Table 4 displays the regression statistics. *R* was significantly different from zero at each step.

After Step 1, the attitude toward the teacher and the frequency of FL use outside of class predicted more than a third of the variance in FLE: $R^2 = 0.362$, $F(3, 776) = 147.054$, $p < 0.001$. The addition of the attractiveness of K-culture in Step 2 resulted in a stronger equation ($R^2 = 0.446$, $F(1, 775) = 117.111$, $p < 0.001$).

TABLE 3 Pearson correlation analysis between foreign language enjoyment (FLE) and independent variables (*N* = 780).

Attitude toward teacher	Length of FL study	FL proficiency	Frequency of FL use outside of class	Attractiveness of K-culture	FLE
−0.055	−0.123**	0.019	0.415**	0.561**
	0.600**	0.143**	−0.186**	−0.139**
		0.297**	−0.277**	−0.170**
			−0.017	0.165**
				0.519**

Abbreviation: FL, foreign language; K-culture, Korean culture; FLE, foreign language enjoyment.
**$p < 0.001$

TABLE 4 Regression model summary.

Variables	B	SE B	β	t	Mean	SD
FLE (dependent variable)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	36.095	4.977
(Constant)	8.672	1.312	n/a	6.609**	n/a	n/a
Attitude toward teacher	3.086	0.220	0.412	14.020**	4.35	0.665
Length of FL study	−0.164	0.109	−0.050	−1.498	3.03	1.523
FL proficiency	−0.251	0.166	−0.054	−1.507	2.63	1.064
Frequency of FL use outside of class	1.020	0.154	0.185	6.601**	3.09	0.905
Attractiveness of K-culture	0.337	0.031	0.327	10.768**	35.624	4.837
Adjusted $R^2 = 0.444$ $R = 0.669$**						

Abbreviations: FLE, foreign language enjoyment; FL, foreign language; K-culture, Korean culture.
**$p < 0.001$

4.2 | RQ2: Open-responses to sources of FLE

The RQ1 results show the significant and sizable effects of the attractiveness of K-culture on FLE after controlling for the established predictive variables. To better understand how FLE is shaped by culture in class, we selected open responses to an enjoyable episode from the questionnaire. As pointed out by Jiang and Dewaele (2019), the qualitative data coding process can be complex as some responses can be coded into more than one category, and a single participant could mention multiple themes in a single response. We extracted all sentences and phrases related to culture that are sometimes mentioned with a teacher and classified them into types of Korean cultural products, practices, and perspectives.

Table 5 shows a wide range of cultural products mentioned by participants, such as screen products (e.g., drama, music, film, and YouTube), food, street games, and calligraphy. As for cultural practice, most comments were related to contemporary practices ranging from everyday life tasks to some unique cultural practices (e.g., shamanism and plastic surgery). Participants showed awareness and interest in both historical and contemporary inequality issues in Korea, often introduced by contemporary materials (e.g., film). The selection of cultural materials in FL class mostly depends on the teacher's judgment on what is worth teaching, and the results of culture-related FLE episodes provide insights into the "types of K-culture."

TABLE 5 Culture-related foreign language enjoyment (FLE) episodes.

Nodes	Types and examples
Products	Idols Pop culture products News report Traditional cultural products (playing games, wearing traditional outfits, listening to music related to holiday celebrations) Literature Learning, tasting, and cooking Korean food Hangul (i.e., Korean alphabet) Tourist attractions in Korea
Practices	Everyday life in Korea Drinking and dining etiquette Religious practice Celebratory dates (Pepero Day or 100 days with your significant other, etc.) Game culture Study abroad-related topics Grocery shopping Idioms Regional dialects Use of honorifics
Perspectives	Social contexts and contemporary issues in Korea Gender perspectives
Products and Practices	Experience of Korean Culture day Korean regional dialects from K-drama
Products and perspectives	Understanding of social norms and values reflected in K-media

Out of 706 open-ended responses, 167 responses involved cultural elements. The culture-related responses were coded into six nodes using NVivo: (1) products, (2) practices, (3) perspectives, (4) products and practices, (5) products and perspectives, and (6) general culture. The general culture node included responses that involved the word *culture* without any further elaboration. A common response to general culture was *I enjoyed it when I learned Korean culture.* The most frequent node was products with 77 references, followed by general culture ($n = 49$), practices ($n = 18$), and products and practices ($n = 11$). The references for perspectives ($n = 9$) and the interaction between products and perspectives ($n = 3$) showed the least coverage, suggesting that the cultural components of FL class are highly skewed toward products among 3Ps, consistent with Cutshall (2012). Products are the visible and easily accessible form of culture, thereby often introduced by a teacher in class. Table 4 shows the types and example responses for each node.

The open-ended responses showed the positive loop of the active consumption of K-screen culture leading to the exposure to Korean language and enhanced confidence. Most activities related to K-screen or K-pop culture were planned and led by the teacher in class as shown in Excerpt 1.

Excerpt 1

There was a time that we were going over a drama in class and we were talking about this one specific character, the male lead. A lot of people did not like him because of the way he acted but there was one girl from my class who said that she really liked the character because he was good-looking, and everyone laughed and agreed. It was just funny how she nonchalantly said that and everyone agreed with her.

The exploitation of the idol examples and pop culture materials in class can bring fun and a sense of community that positively influences learner engagement. The participants acknowledged the cognitive benefits of K-pop materials such as recognizing and retaining vocabulary and grammar points as shown in Except 2.

> Excerpt 2
>
> The teacher made jokes using the grammatical structures we were focusing on during the class, as she would always do. This time, she was introducing the expression *because* [기 때문에] and comparative grammar *more than* [보다]. She explained that her favorite BTS member was RM because he's sexier than the others; it made me laugh so much! Now it became an inside joke that my friends and I use whenever we speak in Korean together.

The screen culture was found to be most common in class due in part to the easy access, but cultural products were not limited to screen products. The multimodality of culture introduced by the teacher provided hands-on experience of Korean culture, leading to FLE as shown in Excerpt 3.

> Excerpt 3
>
> When I first started taking Korean, the Lunar New Year happened to fall on a weekday, so in class we played a few traditional Korean games and watched videos. Our teacher even brought Korean snacks as prizes. It was fun to learn about Korean culture in a way that didn't involve the textbooks.

Students enjoyed being introduced to unknown cultural practices of Korea. Some students felt strongly about the demands of everyday life tasks such as grocery shopping and using public transportation in Korea, as they were living or expected to live in Korea at one point. Excerpt 4 describes a moment of laughter from a pair work exercise designed to practice honorifics.

> Excerpt 4
>
> There was one time where we were doing an exercise of a conversation between two people. One of the people in the conversation was a grandfather. The teacher asked me to say something to the grandfather and I ended up saying something that would be very rude to say to a grandfather. The teacher laughed really loudly and the class smiled. I felt really good for making everyone laugh.

The exposure to cultural products deepens understanding of practice and perspective as shown in Excerpt 5.

> Excerpt 5
>
> When discussing the film *Parasite*, my partner and I got into an in-depth discussion about unrealistic expectations, those who only study Korean for the chance of meeting certain celebrities, and the deeper meanings of the film and how that is presented in real life. This was a very interesting discussion as it showed me different perspectives on society and the different expectations we had going into this course/aimed for country.

Participants mentioned the interaction between products and practices or products and perspectives in the open-ended responses. Also, screen products are effective learning tools to introduce language-related practice such as regional dialects or honorific pragmatic usage as shown in Excerpt 6.

Excerpt 6

I really enjoyed the fun atmosphere of being able to share ideas and personal opinions in my class. I liked the activity where we recited lines from *Reply 1994* because it was in Korean (regional) dialects. I'm not that knowledgeable in Korean (regional) dialects so it was fun to read and try to decipher what the phrases meant.

Excerpt 7 shows how the perceptions of Korean people interact with willingness to communicate and enhanced learning opportunities. The participant acknowledged that having conversations with Koreans is the main reason to study the language.

Excerpt 7

Throughout my life, I have come across many Koreans whose diligence, intelligence, and good etiquette impressed me. As a student in the US, I have yet to meet a Korean who is not well-spoken, thoughtful, or hardworking. Also, whenever I tried to speak Korean with Koreans, they are always very kind and willing to engage in conversations. This is the main reason why I'd like to continue to learn Korean.

The perception of the Korean literary scene also contributed to the attractiveness of K-culture and FLE. In Excerpt 8, FLE arose from understanding small cultures and a range of emotions displayed in Korean literature.

Excerpt 8

I enjoyed learning the Korean letters (Hangul) for the first time. The letters are so aesthetic and cute. I enjoyed writing a sentence and reading it out. Also, Korean literature introduces a wide range of emotions that help understand Korea, since I can understand people and everyday small cultures in detail.

5 | DISCUSSION

Previous studies have shown that a range of learner-internal and -external variables shape FLE, including the attitudes toward the FL and culture (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019; Dewaele et al., 2018; Dewaele, Özdemir et al., 2022; Li, 2022). These attitudes were measured with a single, broadly formulated item. The current study introduced a richer, comprehensive measure of specific aspects and elements of Korean culture that FL learners might feel attracted to (Han, 2023; Lee, 2018). The current study confirmed that the attitude toward the teacher is a strong predictor of FLE, as well as FL use outside of class and that the attractiveness of K-culture explained an additional 9% of variance in FLE.

It is worth noting that a majority of the participants in this study have Asian backgrounds, which might explain the importance of attitude toward the teacher in their FLE. In previous studies with Chinese learners, teachers were found to play a particularly strong role in FLE, which was attributed to the traditional ideology of a teacher as an authority and the main source of knowledge in Asian contexts (Du et al., 2020). Teacher's compliments could be particularly powerful in such contexts, boosting FLE, reducing anxiety, and nurturing student progress and effort. (Jiang & Dewaele, 2019). The importance of teacher empathy, altruism, and compassion toward students also emerged from the qualitative data. A teacher's positive evaluation and validation of students' progress contributes to FLE, which expands the findings in the analyses of enjoyable episodes in the FL classes reported by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014, 2019). The Korean FL teacher might become the embodiment of Korean culture in the eyes of students, especially in environments with relatively few Koreans. The attitude toward the teacher might thus have a stronger effect on FLE than in

other contexts. Although more interventional studies are needed as to what the teacher can/should do to boost FLE in class (Dewaele et al., 2024), this study suggests that presenting some tasty cultural morsels in class might raise more general interest in the target culture.

The predictive power of frequency of FL use outside of class on FLE is a novel finding. Future research could explore the types of FL use outside of class and their effects on FLE. In this study, learners in South Korea presumably interact with local people on a daily basis while other learner groups study Korean either as a part of a degree program or as an elective course at university. In non-Korea contexts, the frequency and nature of FL use outside of class are heavily influenced by the purpose of studying the language. For example, the UK students in this study participate in a study abroad program in Korea as a compulsory component of the course. To prepare for the study abroad year, they may actively seek friendship with Korean international students in the United Kingdom and therefore have more authentic interaction than students who study Korean as an elective course in other countries. It is beyond the scope of this study to delve into the types of FL use outside of class, but it is possible that different types and intensity of FL use affect progress in language proficiency and the acquisition of cultural knowledge to varying extents, reshaping emotional experiences in the FL classroom. The findings of this study illustrate the importance of culture on the FLE of LOTEs learners. Some previous studies reported that LOTEs learners experience more FLE and flow experience and less anxiety and shame compared to Global English (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2022; Dewaele & Saito, 2024; Liu, 2022). The higher FLE experienced in LOTEs learning contexts may be partly attributed to the cultural dimensions of the target language. While Global English is considered the obvious gateway to international citizenship (Yang, 2009), many LOTEs learners have made an atypical choice for personal reasons and developed strong emotional attachment to the FL community (Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017). For LOTEs learners, the consumption and participation in the target culture are more than the initial attractor of the target language. In fact, culture shapes and infuses their emotional experience during the FL learning process. A culture may also be perceived to be attractive because it presents options for new imagined identities, ranging from singers, food experts, or martial artists (Lvovich, 2013).

Future research could explore intragroup differences among learners of the same target language. Emotions are by-products of interaction between individuals and society/culture; therefore, they are experienced differently across different contexts. Intragroup comparison of LOTEs also deserves more attention. Another potentially fruitful area to explore is the way to integrate different types of cultural material in the FL class and see how it affects learner emotions.

The focus on Korean FL learners in six different countries is both a strength and a limitation of this study. The large sample size allowed us to establish the relationship between the attractiveness of K-culture and FLE across very different countries of origin. Although the findings resonate with previous research on various target languages that used a single item to measure cultural attractiveness, we cannot claim that cultural attractiveness would have identical effects on FLE in classes of other target languages.

6 | CONCLUSION

We started the introduction by referring to the immensely popular seven-member South Korean boy band BTS who fit in the government's policy of boosting soft power through the development of cultural products that require relatively little investment and increase the influence of South Korea in the world. The current study shows that this influence extends across the world, where young people are seduced by K-culture and decide to start learning Korean. After passing the initial attractor point, the attractiveness of K-culture becomes one of the pillars on which FLE rests. Compared to the attitude toward the teacher, the attractiveness of K-culture was found to predict a relatively smaller amount of unique variance in FLE. However, we argue that the two predictors work in tandem as the FL class is a gateway to absorbing FL cultural materials, often introduced by a teacher who plays the role of a cultural ambassador. In this study, we focused on FL learners of Korean, but there is little doubt that the cultural attractiveness of the target

language will contribute to FLE in other FL contexts where learners fall in love with national authors, singers, artists, filmmakers, celebrity chefs, or martial artists.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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ENDNOTE

[1] The second option being back-translation (Dörnyei & Dewaele, 2023, p. 54).

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