

ARTS, CULTURAL STUDIES AND ETHNOGRAPHY

Formation of Cultural Competence in Students Through the Teaching of Korean Culture

Suleymanova Turkan Nuru¹

¹Student, Faculty of Oriental Studies (Korean Studies);
Baku State University; Baku, Azerbaijan

Abstract. The global circulation of Korean cultural products has expanded interest in Korean Studies, but familiarity with K-pop, drama, film, or food does not automatically produce cultural competence. This conceptual article examines how Korean culture can be taught as an interpretive, comparative, and interactional field rather than as a list of facts. Twelve peer-reviewed studies published between 2023 and 2026 were synthesised around cultural representation, learner motivation, intercultural pedagogy, and assessment. The article proposes the K-CULT sequence: Knowledge in context, Comparative inquiry, Understanding perspectives, Lived interaction, and Transfer through reflection. The model connects historical memory, everyday practices, language pragmatics, popular culture, and contemporary social change with observable student performance. It requires source triangulation, comparison with learners' own cultural frames, guided interaction, and reflection that makes stereotype revision visible. The framework is intended for university Korean Studies programmes outside Korea, including the Azerbaijani context, and offers a basis for future empirical testing.

Keywords: Korean culture; cultural competence; intercultural learning; Korean Studies; Hallyu; critical cultural awareness

1. Introduction

Hallyu has altered the starting point of Korean culture education. Students may enter university already familiar with music, screen narratives, food, and digital fan practices. Research shows that this exposure can initiate enrolment, sustain enjoyment, and connect learners to imagined Korean-speaking communities [3–5, 12]. Yet cultural consumption is not competence. Learners may still treat entertainment as social evidence, repeat stereotypes, or lack the pragmatic judgement required in interaction. Interest is therefore a pedagogical resource, not a sufficient learning outcome.

This article asks how Korean culture instruction can develop students' ability to interpret meanings, compare

ARTS, CULTURAL STUDIES AND ETHNOGRAPHY

without ranking, communicate flexibly, and revise assumptions. The problem is significant because textbooks may privilege particular historical, political, moral, or idealised national narratives [1, 2], while locally produced materials also vary in their capacity to support intercultural learning [8]. The aim is to connect recent evidence with a practical competence-oriented model for university Korean Studies.

2. Cultural competence as an educational outcome

Cultural competence integrates contextual knowledge, interpretation, curiosity, interaction, and critical reflection. Factual knowledge and etiquette rules remain useful, but they become misleading when detached from time, place, relationship, and internal diversity. A competent learner can qualify a claim, generate alternative explanations, ask what evidence is missing, and adapt behaviour when a familiar rule does not fit a particular person or setting. Competence is therefore relational and developmental rather than a fixed possession.

For Azerbaijani students, source-culture comparison is an analytic resource. Family relations, hospitality, holiday rituals, educational expectations, historical memory, and respectful address may appear familiar, but similarity should become a question rather than a conclusion. Intercultural comparison examines how a value is realised, who participates, where variation occurs, and how learners' own categories shape what they notice.

3. Korean culture as curriculum content

A balanced curriculum combines historical memory, everyday life, language pragmatics, popular culture, and contemporary social change. Hallyu should function both as an engagement resource and an object of inquiry. Instructors recognise its motivational and linguistic value, but also note problems of rapid obsolescence, level appropriateness, and distance from ordinary life [3]. The attractiveness of K-culture predicts enjoyment, although the teacher's role remains equally important [4].

Representational triangulation addresses this problem. Students compare a cultural product with an informational or scholarly source and a first-person voice. They ask what each source can show, whose position is absent, and how genre shapes the message. Textbook research demonstrates the need for such scrutiny because cultural values may be selectively emphasised or idealised [1, 2]. Critical reading does not

ARTS, CULTURAL STUDIES AND ETHNOGRAPHY

weaken appreciation; it turns admiration into evidence-based understanding.

4. Methodology

An integrative conceptual review was conducted using twelve peer-reviewed works from 2023-2026. Studies were selected when they addressed Korean cultural representation, Korean-language motivation, intercultural learning, or competence-oriented pedagogy. Each source was examined for its conception of culture, learner process, teaching condition, limitation, and possible evidence of competence. Recurrent categories were organised into a teachable sequence. The design is interpretive: it proposes a framework rather than reporting an intervention with human participants.

5. The proposed K-CULT instructional model

K-CULT comprises five recursively connected stages (Figure 1). It synthesises collaborative culture education [6], critical cultural awareness [7], internationalisation at home [9], reflective professional learning [10], and context-responsive Korean teacher competence [11]. Difficulty at any stage can return learners to an earlier one.

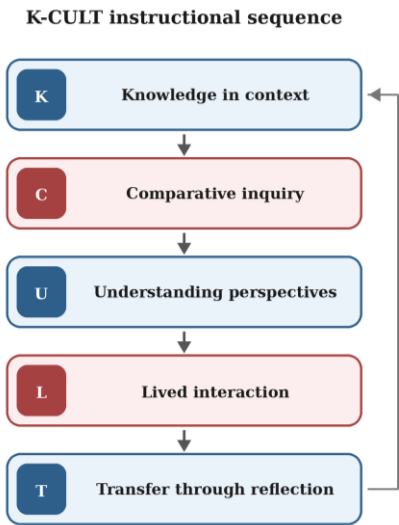


Figure 1
The K-CULT model for forming cultural competence through
Korean culture instruction (developed by the author)

5.1. Knowledge in context

Cultural claims are located in time, place, social position, and communicative setting. Students distinguish

ARTS, CULTURAL STUDIES AND ETHNOGRAPHY

description from generalisation and use qualified language rather than explaining all Korean behaviour through a single tradition or value.

5.2. Comparative inquiry

Learners compare a specific relationship or problem - such as welcoming a guest, refusing an invitation, or addressing an older colleague - rather than comparing whole nations. They document similarity, difference, variation, and evidence.

5.3. Understanding perspectives

Critical incidents require several plausible interpretations. Students rank explanations by evidence and identify what further information is needed. The goal is disciplined empathy, not certainty about another person's experience.

5.4. Lived interaction

Role-play, interviews, virtual exchange, and collaborative problem solving make students choose language and behaviour in real time. Tasks should require clarification, repair, or respectful disagreement rather than memorised dialogue [6, 10].

5.5. Transfer through reflection

Students revisit an initial assumption, identify the evidence that changed it, and apply the revised principle to a new case. Portfolios preserve first responses, revisions, feedback, and interaction records so that development becomes visible.

6. Content-task alignment in Korean culture teaching

Table 1 links cultural domains to student operations and observable evidence. The same domain can be revisited at increasing complexity: beginners notice address forms, while advanced learners analyse how age, status, intimacy, gender, and institutional role interact.

Table 1
Korean cultural domains, learning operations, and competence evidence
(developed by the author)

Cultural domain	Illustrative materials	Student operation	Observable evidence
Historical memory and public narratives	Textbook passages, museum pages, speeches, documentary excerpts	Compare accounts; identify viewpoint, omission, and temporal context	Evidence-based explanation that distinguishes event, memory, and narrative

ARTS, CULTURAL STUDIES AND ETHNOGRAPHY

Table continuation 1

Cultural domain	Illustrative materials	Student operation	Observable evidence
Social relations and hierarchy	Critical incidents about age, status, family, study, and work	Generate and test several interpretations before judging behaviour	Qualified claims; appropriate clarification questions; recognition of variation
Language pragmatics	Dialogues using speech levels, address terms, requests, refusals, and repair	Adapt language to relationship and purpose; explain pragmatic choices	Flexible role-play performance and successful repair of misunderstanding
Everyday life and ritual	Food, housing, school, leisure, Seollal, Chuseok, life-cycle practices	Compare products, practices, and perspectives with an Azerbaijani case	Comparison that avoids equivalence, ranking, and national generalisation
Popular and digital culture	K-drama, film, K-pop, webtoons, fan communities, platform content	Triangulate entertainment with research and first-person accounts	Genre-aware interpretation that separates representation from social evidence
Diversity and social change	Regional, generational, gender, migration, religious, and occupational voices	Map agreement, tension, and absent positions across sources	Recognition of within-culture diversity and ethically framed uncertainty

7. Teaching strategies

Three strategies are especially productive. Critical incidents slow interpretation by asking students to record an initial explanation, expose assumptions, request context, and revise. Comparative portfolios connect a Korean artefact with an Azerbaijani case and preserve changes after feedback. Media-text triangulation compares entertainment with research and personal accounts, retaining Hallyu's motivational value while preventing it from being treated as a transparent record of society [3–5, 12].

Guided intercultural interaction may use virtual exchange, invited speakers, or paired interviews. Preparation and debriefing are essential: questions should invite personal experience without making one participant represent

ARTS, CULTURAL STUDIES AND ETHNOGRAPHY

a nation. Structured internationalisation-at-home environments can support adaptability even without study abroad [9]. Multiple regional, generational, and social voices should be included so that Korean culture is encountered as internally diverse.

An illustrative unit on Korean speech levels shows how the sequence works. Students first annotate two short dialogues for relationship, status, age, and communicative purpose. They then compare the choices with forms of respectful address in Azerbaijani, noting where apparent similarity conceals different pragmatic meanings. A critical incident changes one contextual variable: a senior colleague invites a younger employee to speak more informally, but the employee remains cautious. Learners propose several explanations, ask what information is missing, and perform the scene with alternative responses. After peer feedback, they explain which language choice they revised and transfer the same reasoning to a university or online setting. The task therefore assesses contextual knowledge, comparison, perspective-taking, interaction, and reflection within one coherent learning cycle.

8. Assessment of cultural competence

Assessment should sample five dimensions: contextual accuracy, interpretation of perspectives, comparative decentring, interactional appropriateness, and reflective transfer. Evidence may include annotated media, comparative commentaries, role-play recordings, and journals. Submitting an initial interpretation, a revised version, and an explanation of the revision rewards intellectual movement rather than confident but unsupported claims. Assessment should value clarification and repair, never imitation of an imagined Korean identity.

9. Discussion

The literature converges on a central principle: cultural content forms competence only when it is linked to interpretation, interaction, and reflection. Textbook analyses reveal selectivity [1, 2, 8]; motivation studies demonstrate the value of K-culture [3–5, 12]; and intercultural research supports structured collaboration [6, 7, 9, 10]. The teacher therefore acts as an evidence curator and intercultural mediator. Non-native Korean teachers can be particularly effective when professional learning supports contextual adaptation [11]. The model remains conceptual and should be tested through performance tasks,

ARTS, CULTURAL STUDIES AND ETHNOGRAPHY

portfolio analysis, observation, and delayed transfer measures.

10. Conclusion

Korean culture education develops competence when culture is taught as lived, diverse, and open to revision. The K-CULT sequence moves students from contextual knowledge through comparison and perspective-taking to interaction and transfer. Its intended outcome is not a learner who claims to know how all Koreans think, but one who approaches unfamiliar situations with accurate knowledge, interpretive care, communicative flexibility, and the humility to revise an explanation.

References:

- [1] Choi, K. Y., & Lee, D. B. (2024). A critical analysis of Korean culture represented in the Korean language textbooks developed in Thailand. *Cogent Education*, 11(1), 2416805. doi: 10.1080/2331186X.2024.2416805
- [2] Choi, K. Y., & Lee, D. B. (2025). A critical analysis of cultural representation in the Korean language textbooks published in Korea and used in Thailand. *SAGE Open*, 15(3), 1-16. doi: 10.1177/21582440251363295
- [3] Harris, S., Chen-Wu, H., Sue, E., & Lee, J. S. (2025). Affordances, challenges, and possibilities of Hallyu in the classroom: Korean language instructors' perspectives. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 38(1), 38-56. doi: 10.1080/07908318.2024.2381447
- [4] Han, Y., Dewaele, J.-M., & Kiaer, J. (2025). Does the attractiveness of K-culture shape the enjoyment of foreign language learners of Korean? *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 35(1), 486-502. doi: 10.1111/ijal.12632
- [5] Wang, H.-S., & Kelly, K. (2023). Investigating Korean language learning motivations: Trend and implications. *The Korean Language in America*, 27(2), 152-181. doi: 10.5325/korelangamer.27.2.0152
- [6] Lee, H., & Cho, Y. M. (2024). Research on Korean culture education for intercultural competence improvement: With a focus on collaborative learning among foreign students in Korean universities. *Journal of Learner-Centered Curriculum and Instruction*, 24(3), 811-827. doi: 10.22251/jlcci.2024.24.3.811
- [7] Kim, E., & Sim, J. (2024). Incorporating Korean culture in English language teaching for intercultural communication: Adopting CCA approach. *English Language Teaching*, 17(5), 70-83. doi: 10.5539/elt.v17n5p70
- [8] Mecsi, B. (2023). Cultural education and intercultural competence in Korean language textbooks: Focusing on textbooks published in Hungary. *Journal of Multiculture and Education*, 8(3), 119-136. KCI article record
- [9] Luong, P. M., Tran, L. T., Nguyen, H. T., Tran, Y. T. H., Dang, G. H., & Vu, T. V. (2025). Intercultural adaptability development for students in internationalisation at home programmes in higher

ARTS, CULTURAL STUDIES AND ETHNOGRAPHY

- education in China and Korea. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, 15(2), 421-440. doi: 10.1108/HESWBL-10-2023-0284
- [10] Han, S., & Senyshyn, R. (2024). Dynamic intercultural learning and collaboration: Transforming language teacher perspectives and practices. *Journal for Multicultural Education*, 18(4), 569-586. doi: 10.1108/JME-07-2024-0081
- [11] Kim, S. E., Fraschini, N., & Park, H. (2025). Defining competencies for training non-native Korean speaking teachers: A Q methodology approach. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 63(3), 1769-1794. doi: 10.1515/iral-2023-0200
- [12] Park, M. Y., Ha, P., Jee, M. J., & May, S. (2026). Popular culture, language learning, and (de)motivation: The experiences of Korean as a foreign language students in Australia and New Zealand. *International Multilingual Research Journal*, 1-15. doi: 10.1080/19313152.2026.2687519