



Direction of Korean General Education Course in Thai Universities: A Needs Analysis of Students at the Hat Yai Campus of Prince of Songkla University

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Abstract

This research aims to assess the needs of students who enroll in Korean Language courses as a part of their general education curriculum at the Hat Yai campus of Prince of Songkla University (HYC-PSU). This descriptive quantitative research is designed to answer three questions: 1) What is the purpose for students to enroll in Korean general education course? 2) What courses should be included within the Korean general education courses? and 3) At what level should the *Basic Korean* language course begin? 229 undergraduate students who completed the *Basic Korean* language course in HYC-PSU participated in this study by filling out a questionnaire developed using Google Forms. Data collection was analyzed using percentages, mean and standard deviation. This research reveals that students enrolled in the Korean general education course for four main reasons: to understand Korean drama and songs, communicate effectively in Korean, travel to Korea and gain understanding of Korean culture. Therefore, the Korean general education course should be organized with the sequences of classes such as *Basic Korean*, *Korean Conversation in Daily life* and *Contemporary Korean Culture* emphasis given to learning Korean culture. Finally, students stressed that the *Basic Korean* course should start with lessons on Korean language characters. Findings from this needs analysis would allow educators to develop Korean general education course that would serve students' interest and practical needs, while meeting requirements of the Curriculum Standard Criteria for Higher Education (CSCHE) in Thailand and the International Standard Curriculum for Korean Language (ISCKL).

Keywords: Korean General Education Course, Needs Analysis, The Hat Yai Campus of Prince of Songkla University (HYC-PSU), Thai Universities, International Standard Curriculum for Korean Language (ISCKL)

Introduction

A curriculum is the general teaching plan that outlines the objectives, contents, teaching methods, and evaluation of learning for all education institutions. Stern (2015) noted that there are two types of curriculum: curriculum in broad meaning and curriculum in narrow meaning. Curriculum, in a broader sense, is related to the overall teaching plan for educational institutes such as universities and secondary schools (Stern, 2015). Curriculum in a narrow sense is a teaching plan for a subject or course, such as a Korean language course (Stern, 2015). The first step in developing a teaching curriculum involves conducting an educational needs analysis. According to Brown (1995), "needs analysis refers to the activities involved in gathering information that will serve as the basis of developing a curriculum, which will meet the learning needs of a particular group of students" (p. 35). Findings derived from needs analysis are then used to establish objectives, contents, teaching methods, and evaluating learning. Methods for conducting needs analysis include (1) questionnaires, (2) self-ratings, (3) interviews, (4) meetings, (5) observations, (6) learner language samples collection, (7) task analysis, (8) case studies, and (9) analysis of available information (Richards, 2015).

Since Korean Language education in Thailand was first introduced at PSU (Pattani Campus) as a free elective course in 1986, the number of Thai universities teaching Korean language have rapidly increased. As of 2019,



approximately thirteen Thai universities offer Korean as a major course, and many other universities teach Korean Language either as a minor course or a free elective course. Typically, Korean language classes offered in Thai universities are categorized into two types of courses: as major or minor courses, or as a free elective course for interested students. Recently, Thai universities have started teaching Korean language courses as a general education course, implying that knowledge in Korean language and culture have become an important competitive edge within the Thai and international societies. In addition to Japanese and Malay, HYC-PSU recently added Korean to its general education curriculum. The Pattani campus of Prince of Songkla University also began to open a Korean culture class as part of the general education curriculum. Normally, general education offers general knowledge to teach students on how to become good Thai citizens as well as healthy members of the global community. Therefore, offering Korean or Korean culture classes as part of the general education curriculum of a university means that Korean becomes a language to be learnt not only as an occupational training, but also for becoming healthy Thai citizens as well as members of the global community. Thai universities should follow the Curriculum Standard Criteria for Higher Education (CSCHE) given by Office of the Higher Education Commission when developing a curriculum.

According to the 2015 CSCHE in Thailand, a general education course should focus on “promoting human integrity through extensive knowledge and appreciation of oneself, society, arts, culture, and nature”. It should focus on “paying attention to the changes in everything, continually developing oneself, and for leading a moral life by helping people and being a valuable citizen in Thai and international societies”. Institutions of higher education may offer a course based on an individual subject, or a course made of combinations of subject areas such as social sciences, humanities, language, sciences, and mathematics accordingly to meet the CSCHE requirements (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2015, p. 5). Therefore, when developing general education classes, Thai universities should focus on course contents that would teach students on leading a moral life by helping others and being valuable citizens in Thai and international societies rather than offering courses as occupational training.

The general education curriculum in the HYC-PSU is comprised of seven categories: (1) the King’s philosophy and benefits of mankind, (2) citizenship and peaceful life, (3) entrepreneurship, (4) social and digital literacy, (5) systematic, logical, and numerical thinking, (6) language and communication, and (7) aesthetics and sports (Prince of Songkla University, 2018, p. 1). The general education curriculum consists of two types courses: required and elective courses. Undergraduate students must acquire 30 credits from the general education curriculum to graduate. Since 2018, the Korean language course at HYC-PSU is considered as a general education course for the “language and communication” category.

Table 1 General Education Course in the Hat Yai Campus of PSU

Course	General Education Course	Specific Education Course (Major/Minor Course)	Free Elective Course
Components	Required Courses (24 Credits) Elective Courses (6 Credits)	Core Course	Free Elective Course
		Specialized Courses	
		(Required/ Elective Major Courses)	
		Other Language Courses	

One factor for Thai universities to consider when creating Korean courses is the International Standard Curriculum for Korean Language (ISCKL). Since the ISCKL is developed in 2017, further research on how to



apply it to Korean learners in various countries are currently in progress. The ISCKL would be a valuable guideline to be used along CSCHE to develop Korean courses for general education curriculum in Thai universities.

Meanwhile, the National Institute of the Korean Language (NIKL) created the International Standard Curriculum for Korean Language (ISCKL) as a basis for providing detailed categories and items, as “standard reference” that can be transformed and applied according to the different Korean education environment (National Institute of Korean Language, n.d., p. 2). The level-based rating system of The ISCKL is set up as a ‘6+ Level’ rating system with beginner (1–2), intermediate (3–4), advanced (5–6) level, and 6+ (Open-ended) (National Institute of Korean Language, n.d., p. 2). The beginner level (1–2) includes subjects and topics related to daily life such as introducing oneself, greetings, and shopping (National Institute of Korean Language, 2017). The intermediate level (3–4) includes familiar social abstract topics, such as education and occupation (National Institute of Korean Language, 2017). Finally, unfamiliar social abstract topics such as economics, science and politics are discussed in the advanced level (5–6) (National Institute of Korean Language, 2017, p. 14). Educational hours allocated for each class are based on the minimum of 72 hours (12 weeks x 6 hours) in overseas institutes and maximum of 200 hours (10 weeks x 20 hours) adapted in institutes within Korea (National Institute of Korean Language, n.d., p. 3). This means that students need minimum of 72 hours and maximum of 200 hours to complete each level.

However, it is challenging for overseas universities to develop Korean language courses that utilize the exact level-based ISCKL rating system proposed above. National Institute of Korean Language (2017) suggested that Korean language major courses in overseas universities should be developed based on three criteria of the ISCKL to adapt the local situations: 1) setting the target proficiency level of the Korean language education, 2) level-based rating system of the curriculum and class hours for each level, and 3) the category and contents of educational materials. Moreover, the NIKL recommended that the Korean general education curriculum in overseas universities selectively utilize some contents from ISCKL, according to the characteristics and variables of learners within the larger framework of the Korean language major curriculum. It also noted that overseas universities should develop their Korean major curriculum to fit the characteristics, needs and variables of learners and tie the courses with their institutions’ overall curriculum framework. An (2019) stated that Thai universities should develop their Korean major curriculum based on the overall curriculum requirements set by the CSCHE, ISCKL and results of the needs and situation analysis of learners at their respective universities. Therefore, each Korean major language course should be developed according to the ISCKL level-based rating system as described above. The final target of language proficiency level for the major curriculum should be set at the ISCKL level four or five. In doing so, both students and teachers will share the same understanding of contents and proficiency level for each Korean language course.

HYC-PSU has started to offer Korean language courses as part of the university general education curriculum. There are three Korean courses offered as a general education course at HYC-PSU: *Basic Korean*, *Korean Conversation in Daily Life*, and *Korean Conversation in the Workplace*. Each class is worth two credits. *Basic Korean* has been offered as a general education course since the second semester of 2019, *Korean Conversation in Daily Life* has been offered since the first semester of 2020, but not many students enrolled for the course. *Korean Conversation in the Workplace* has not been initiated. In addition, the courses in the Korean general education courses at HYC-PSU are explained in Table 2.

**Table 2** Courses of Korean General Education Course at HYC-PSU

Course Name	Course Description	Class Hours
<i>Basic Korean</i>	Korean characters, sentence structures, and basic grammatical structures; listening, speaking, reading and writing Korean in everyday communication; Korean cultures in daily life.	2 hours per week
<i>Korean Conversation in Daily Life</i>	Communication skills, basic conversing, and exchanging information or opinions in provided situations; Korean cultures for proper and appropriate communication.	2 hours per week
<i>Korean Conversation in the Workplace</i>	Conversation and sentence structures for work; listening, speaking, reading, and writing in provided situations; Korean cultures in various situations.	2 hours per week

Teaching the basic Korean course presents some challenges due to varying Korean language proficiency level of students who typically enroll in the class. The *Basic Korean* class is usually taught beginning with Korean Hangul characters. However, some students who had prior knowledge of Korean characters or basic grammar felt that the class was too easy and hardly challenging. Meanwhile, students with no prior basic Korean language skills felt that the pace of the class was too fast for them to follow. Considering this, it is necessary to conduct a study to clarify and analyze the appropriate entry level of the *Basic Korean* general education course.

Previous studies on Korean language education in Thailand have focused only developing Korean language courses to satisfy academic requirements for university major courses. Little attention has been given to general education Korean courses. Findings from this need analysis would allow educators to develop Korean general education courses that would serve students' interest and practical needs while meeting requirements of the CSCHE general education course and ISCKL requirements.

Research Objectives

This research aims to assess the needs of students who enroll in Korean Language courses as part of their general education curriculum at the HYC-PSU. This descriptive quantitative research attempts to answer three questions:

1. What is the purpose for students to enroll in Korean general education course?
2. What courses should be included within the Korean general education courses?
3. At what level should the *Basic Korean* language course begin?

Methods and Materials

Participants

Participants of the study were HYC-PSU undergraduate students who have completed *Basic Korean* general education course in semesters 2/2019, 1/2020, and 2/2020. The sample size required for the study is 210 (out of the total 440 students who enrolled in the *Basic Korean* class) calculated based on Yamane's (1967) formula with 95% confidence level. There were 229 participants in the study, of whom 210 (91.7%) were female, and 19 (8.3%) were male.

Participants were recruited using the social media platform LINE. A general description of the study and informed consent to participate was posted on the LINE group chat created for students who completed the basic Korean class at HYC-PSU. Participants who indicated their consent on the initial posting are then provided with the electronic Google Forms link to access and complete the questionnaire.



Instrument

The instrument used in this study was a self-administered questionnaire re-created by modifying surveys used in two previous research studies (National Institute of Korean Language, 2017; An, 2019) by the author utilizing Google Forms. An expert panel consisting of linguists and professors of Korean language from various Thai and Korean universities reviewed all questionnaire items. Each item received an Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) value range of 0.8–1.00 point. The questionnaire received IOC value of 0.67, indicating excellent content validity.

The survey consisted of three sections: purpose of learning Korean, Korean language as a general education course and the level at which the *Basic Korean* course should begin. Survey questions were designed as multiple-choice questions and line items with Likert scale format. Objectives of the research study and sample questions within the questionnaire are included below as Table 3.

Table 3 Needs Analysis Objectives and Sample Questions

Objectives	Sample Questions
Determine the Purpose of Students to Study Korean General Education Course	1. What is your purpose of studying Korean general education course? (Duplicate responses) A. To communicate effectively with Koreans B. To understand Korean dramas and songs C. To communicate with Korean through the Internet (Facebook etc.) D. To enjoy Korean culture (food, fashion, cosmetics, etc.) E. To understand Korea (society, economy, geography, etc.) F. To travel to Korea G. To get a job related to Korea (company/ hotel/ guide/ interpreter/ translation, etc.) H. To have competitive edge in a job market I. To study in Korea J. To become a translator K. Others
Courses and Class Time for Korean General Education Course	1. How would you rate the necessity of the following courses? (5 for 'Very needed', 4 for 'Needed', 3 for 'Normal', 2 for 'No needed', and 1 for 'No needed at all') A. Basic Korean B. Korean Conversation in Daily Life C. Korean Conversation in the Workplace 2. How many Korean courses would you like to study as the general education course series? D. One course E. Two courses F. Three courses G. Four courses H. More than four courses 3. How many hours per week do you think is appropriate for studying Korean? A. One hour B. Two hours C. Three hours

**Table 3** (Cont.)

Objectives	Sample Questions
Level of <i>Basic Korean</i> General Education Course	1. Have you ever studied Korean before studying it at the university? A. Yes B. No
	2. If yes, where did you study Korean? (Duplicate responses) A. In secondary school B. Private language school C. King Sejong Institute D. Self-study E. Online (Korean dramas, songs, YouTube, etc.) F. Others
	3. At what level do you want to start learning Korean in the university? A. Basic level 1 with Korean characters B. Basic level 1 with the conversation C. Basic level 2 D. Others
	4. What is the final proficiency level of Korean language do you want to achieve with your university education? A. Basic level 1 B. Basic level 2 C. Intermediate level 3 D. Intermediate level 4

Data Collection and Analysis

The study was conducted from February 18th, 2021 to May 25th, 2021, after approval from Institutional Review Board of the Center for Social and Behavioral Sciences at PSU. Results of the survey were analyzed for percentage, mean, and standard deviation using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 software program.

Results**Purpose of Learning Korean**

Results from the survey indicate that the four most common reasons for learning Korean general education course are to understand Korean dramas and songs (79.9%), communicate effectively with Koreans (66.4%), travel to Korea (61.1%), and enjoy Korean culture (food, fashion, cosmetics, etc.) (54.6%). Other popular reasons include learning Korean to understand Korea (society, economy, geography) (41.9%) and communicate with Koreans via the internet (Facebook, etc.) (41.5%). Less common reasons for learning Korean include to gain competitive edge in a job market (27.5%), go to Korea to study abroad (21.4%), get a job related to Korea (21%), become a translator (19.7%) and others (5.7%). These results are reflected on Figure 1 below.

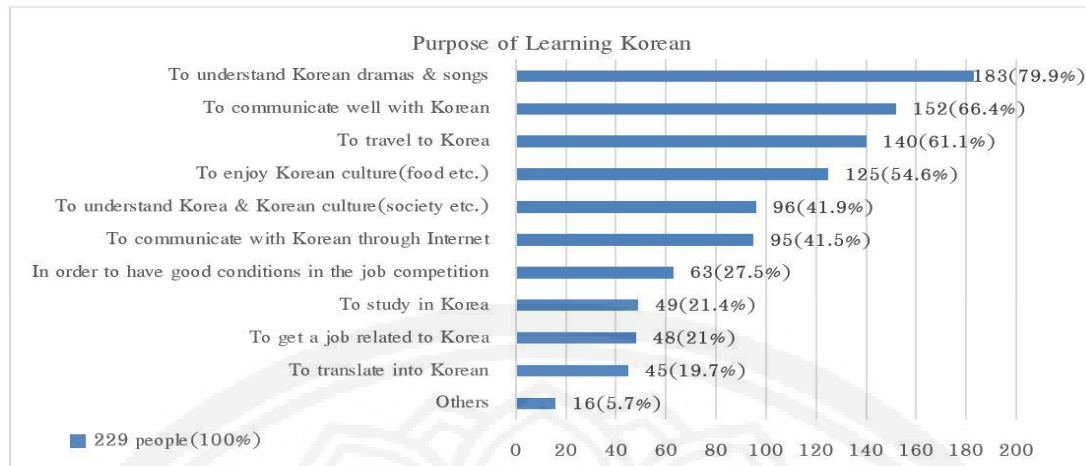


Figure 1 Purpose of Learning Korean.

Courses for the Koran General Education Course

Mean Likert scores for questions that assess the degree of need to offer *Basic Korean*, *Korean Conversation in Daily Life* and *Korean Conversation in the workplace* ranged from 4.35 to 4.79. Students noted the highest need for *Basic Korean* language class, with a mean score of 4.79 (SD = 0.46). Meanwhile, students noted the lowest need for *Korean Conversation in the workplace*, with a mean score of 4.35 (SD = 0.72). These results are reflected on Table 4 below.

Table 4 Likert Scores for Various Korean Courses

Courses	Num	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
<i>Basic Korean</i>	229	3	5	4.79	0.459
<i>Korean Conversation in Daily Life</i>	229	3	5	4.61	0.556
<i>Korean Conversation in the Workplace</i>	229	2	5	4.35	0.720

Number of Korean Courses that should be Offered as General Education Course

Results of the survey reveal that most students thought two Korean courses should be offered as general education courses (49.4%). This is followed by one course (24%), three courses (17%), four courses (5.2%), and more than four courses (4.4%) respectively. These results are illustrated in Figure 2 below.

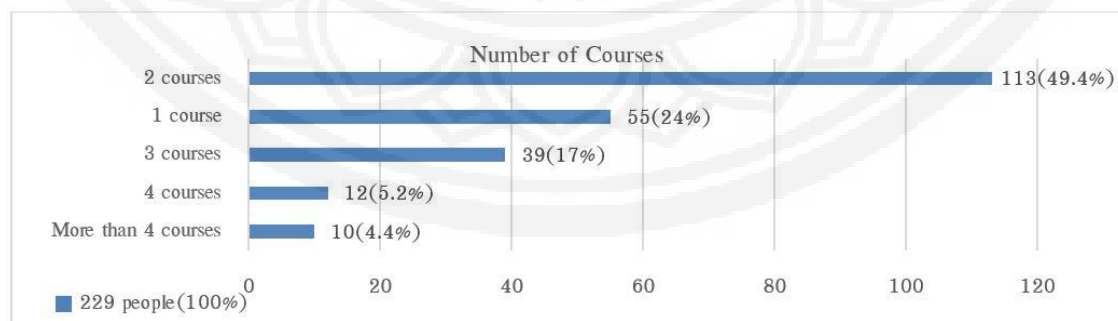


Figure 2 Number of Korean Courses that should be Offered as General Education Course.

Number of Class Hours per Week

Results of the survey indicated that most students preferred to attend two class hours weekly (59.4%). This was followed by students who preferred to attend three class hours per week (29.7%) and an hour of class per week (10.9%) respectively. These percentages are illustrated by Figure 3 below.

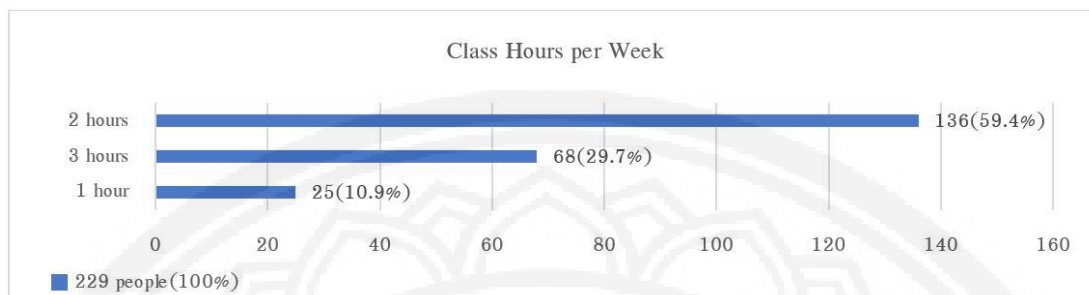


Figure 3 Number of Class Hours should be Offered Weekly.

Ways Students Learn Korean Prior to Entering University

Of the 229 study participants, 99 students indicated that they had previously studied Korean language prior to entering the university. The survey results noted that most students learned Korean via self-study (64%) and online study (63.6%). Other ways of learning Korean include learning while in secondary school (41.4%), other methods (6.1%) and private language school (3%). None of the students attended the King Sejong Institute (0%). These results are reflected in Figure 4 below.

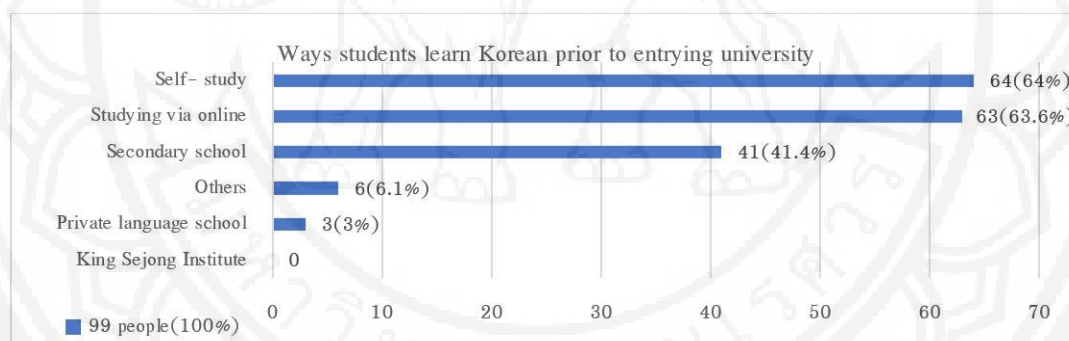


Figure 4 Ways Students Learn Korean Prior to Entering University.

Entry Level of the Korean Language as General Education Course

Based on the survey, most students preferred to start their university Korean language starting from Basic level 1 with Korean characters (64.2%). Some students prefer to start from Basic Level 1 with conversational Korean (27.1%). Meanwhile, not many students prefer to start from Basic 2 level (8.3%), and other levels (0.4%) respectively. These results are illustrated in Figure 5 below.

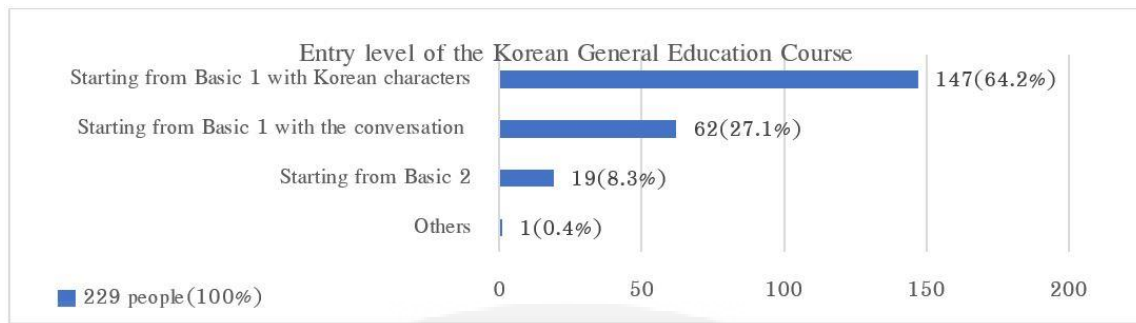


Figure 5 Entry Level of the Korean Language as General Education Course.

Final Goal of Korean Language Proficiency

As shown in Figure 6, the results of the survey noted that for most students, their final goal is to attain Korean language proficiency Basic Level 2 (41%). Other students aim to reach the Intermediate 1 level (25.8%) and Intermediate 2 level (18.8%). Only 14.4% of the students aim to complete only Basic level 1.

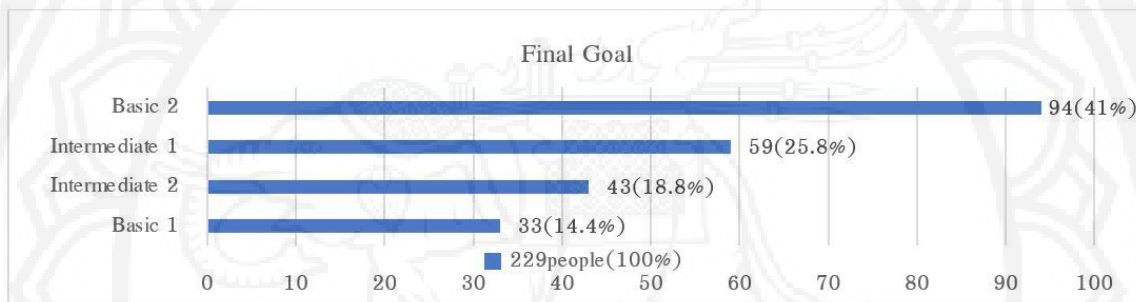


Figure 6 Final Goal of Korean Language Proficiency.

Discussion

This descriptive quantitative research attempts to answer the following questions: 1) What is the purpose for students to enroll in Korean general education course? 2) What courses should be included within the Korean general education courses? and 3) At what level should the *Basic Korean* course begin? Findings from this research study would allow educators to develop Korean general education course that would serve students' interest and practical needs, while meeting requirements of Curriculum Standard Criteria for Higher Education (CSCHE) in Thailand and the International Standard Curriculum for Korean Language (ISCKL).

As noted above, students enrolled in the Korean general education course for four main reasons: to understand Korean dramas and songs, communicate effectively with Koreans, travel to Korea and enjoy and understand Korean culture (food, fashion, cosmetics, etc.). These results support the CSCHE general education course requirements of attaining extensive knowledge, understanding and appreciation of culture of both Thai and international societies. These findings also provide a clearer direction on contents and materials to be incorporated into the Korean courses. In doing so, students can relate materials they learned in the course to their daily lives.

Students of HYC-PSU also reported a high need for *Basic Korean* and *Korean Conversation in Daily Life* courses, indicated by their average Likert value of 4.79 and 4.61 respectively. As such, these classes should be continued to be offered. However, contents of these classes should be modified to incorporate elements that



corresponds to their purpose of learning Korean. For instance, the *Basic Korean* can include introduction to Korean Hangul characters and common Korean vocabulary terms (such as names of food) that students can utilize while travelling to Korea. The class can also include phrases frequently found in K-pop song lyrics and Korean drama dialogues to facilitate the students' understanding and enjoyment of Korean entertainment.

Many students also learned Korean to enjoy Korean culture (food, fashion, and cosmetics, etc.) (54.6%). In comparison, not many students learned Korean to get a competitive edge for in a job market (27.5%) or get a job related to Korea (21%). Likewise, this is reflected in the lowest mean Likert score of 4.35 for *Korean Conversation in the workplace* course. As such, it would be prudent to replace the planned *Korean Conversation in the workplace* course with one that focuses on contemporary Korean culture. This change will also correspond with the Office of the Higher Education Commission (2015) requirements and differentiate Korean general education course from the Korean major course, because it does not focus on business communication practiced at the workplace.

Most students prefer to have either two or three Korean courses offered as general education (49.3% and 17% respectively). These results can guide the development of the Korean course series that would match the language proficiency levels suggested by ISCKL rating system. In this case, *Basic Korean*, *Korean Conversation in Daily Life* and *Contemporary Korean Culture* courses shall correspond to the ISCKL Basic 1 and Basic 2 respectively. Developing a Korean language course series this way would establish a standardized approach that can be applied by other Thai universities which intend to offer Korean as general education courses. Each Korean course can be offered for two hours weekly, as preferred by most students (59.4%). At HYC-PSU, this amounts to 30 hours per semester (15 weeks at 2 hours/week), significantly less than the total class hours recommended by ISCKL (72 hours per beginner level 1) (National Institute of Korean Language, n.d.). As such, *Basic Korean* would cover approximately the first half of beginner level 1 (Basic 1-1) of the ISCKL, and *Korean Conversation in Daily Life* would cover the second half of the beginner level 1 (Basic 1-2). *Contemporary Korean Culture*, which focuses on discussions of Korean cultures would cover contents for the ISCKL beginner level 2 (Basic 2).

Finally, as aforementioned, a challenge of teaching *Basic Korean* is the varying language skills of students who enrolled in the course. In fact, 99 of the 229 study participants (45.2%) reported that they had previously studied Korean before entering university. Most common methods of studying Korean were self-study, online sources and taking Korean classes during secondary school. Although almost half the study participants had learned Korean prior to enrolling in *Basic Korean*, most students (64.2%) still prefer to start the entry level class with learning Korean Hangul characters. Finally, most students reported that their final goal of learning Korean as general course was to attain ISCKL Basic Level 2, indicating that they would enroll in two of the possible three courses offered by the university. Since these classes are offered as general education courses, the students will not be required to complete the Korean class series. Instead, they can choose to enroll in the number of courses according to their desired level of language proficiency level.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Suggestions for Korean General Education Course

Results from the research study indicate that the four most common reasons for learning Korean general education course are to understand Korean dramas and songs, communicate effectively with Koreans, travel to Korea, and enjoy Korean culture. Students of HYC-PSU reported a high need for *Basic Korean*, *Korean*



Conversation in Daily Life and *Contemporary Korean Culture* courses. Most students prefer to have either two or three Korean courses offered as general education. Each Korean course can be offered for two hours weekly, or 30 hours per semester. Finally, most students reported that their final goal of learning Korean as general course was to attain ISCKL Basic Level 2. Since students will not be required to complete the Korean class series, they can choose to enroll in the number of courses according to their desired level of language proficiency level.

Recommendations for contents of Korean general education courses based on this study and needs analysis are summarized in Table 5 below. For instance, *Korean Conversation in the Workplace* (from Table 2) is replaced with *Contemporary Korean Culture*. The recommendations also noted the specific ISCKL proficiency level of Korean and Korean culture for each class. Finally, the recommendations address topics to be covered in each class. For example, *Basic Korean* includes topics such as Korean songs, dramas, and foods, reflecting the students' interests. Similarly, *Korean Conversation in Daily Life* includes topics such as Korean culture and travelling to Korea.

Table 5 Suggestions for Courses of Korean General Education Course

Course Name	Course Description	Class Hours
<i>Basic Korean</i>	Students shall learn Korean Hangul characters and basic grammatical and sentence structures. Students shall practice listening, speaking, reading, and writing for daily communication. Topics include Korean culture such as Korean songs, dramas, and food. To gain an understanding of the Korean language to the standard of basic level 1-1 of ISCKL	2 hours per week
<i>Korean Conversation in Daily Life</i>	Students shall improve communication skills to engage in basic conversation and exchange information or opinion. Topics include traveling to Korea, and Korean culture and social customs. To gain an understanding of the Korean language to the standard of basic level 1-2 (Basic 1) of ISCKL	2 hours per week
<i>Contemporary Korean Culture</i>	Students shall compare Thai and contemporary Korean traditions and cultures such as songs, dramas, food, housing, festivals, and social etiquettes. To gain an understanding of the Korean language and culture to the standard of basic level 2 (Basic 2) of ISCKL	2 hours per week

This curriculum is developed exclusively for students of HYC-PSU. Educators in other Thai universities can follow a similar approach to develop Korean general education courses that meet the ISCKL standards and cater to the unique needs of Korean language learners in their respective institutions. Every Thai university has its own unique regional characteristics and educational environment. Therefore, each university should conduct a needs analysis of its students and address them in its general education curriculum. Each university also need to consider its own educational policies and assessment standards when developing contents of Korean general education classes to fit its situation.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study focuses on exploring only the purpose and possible contents of the Korean general education courses based on results of the needs analysis. It excludes other elements of teaching, such as the role and designs of instructional materials and evaluation of education. Further research can focus on development of class content, method of teaching and evaluation of Korean general education courses via online as the new normal of instilling education in the 4th Industrial Revolution Era.



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