

From Hallyu to Hangul: Exploring the Relationship Between Korean Entertainment Engagement and Korean Language Learning Motivation Among Youth

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ABSTRACT

Over the past decade, global interest in Korean language learning has expanded substantially, driven largely by the transnational diffusion of Hallyu, or the Korean Wave. While previous research has established that Korean entertainment is associated with initial motivation for language learning, the mechanisms through which entertainment engagement may be related to sustained motivation remain underexplored. This study investigated the relationship between Korean entertainment engagement and Korean language learning motivation among young adults aged 18–30, examining the mediating roles of cultural and emotional engagement. A cross-sectional survey design was employed, with 234 valid responses collected from non-Korean-heritage participants through online platforms. Participants completed measures of entertainment engagement, cultural engagement, emotional engagement, and language learning motivation. Data were analyzed using regression, mediation, and supplementary group-comparison analyses. Results indicated that entertainment engagement was strongly associated with Korean language learning motivation ($\beta = .808, p < .001$), providing evidence that Hallyu content may serve as an important entry point into Korean language learning. Both cultural engagement (indirect = .300, 95% CI [.179, .431]) and emotional engagement (indirect = .311, 95% CI [.181, .461]) partially mediated this relationship. Genre-specific effects were limited: although the overall genre model was significant ($F(4,229) = 2.69, p = .032$), only K-pop emerged as a significant unique predictor ($\beta = .192, p = .009$). Korea-related aspirations were very strongly associated with intention to continue learning ($\beta = .927, p < .001$), although they were not associated with study hours. This finding should be interpreted cautiously due to the very high correlation between the two measures ($r = .927$), which suggests substantial conceptual overlap.

Keywords: Korean language learning, Hallyu, entertainment engagement, language learning motivation, cultural engagement, emotional engagement.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, global interest in the Korean language has expanded substantially, a phenomenon that scholars, educators, and language-industry observers increasingly attribute to the transnational diffusion of Hallyu, or the Korean Wave. The King Sejong Institute Foundation reported that 239,020 learners enrolled in its education centers worldwide in 2025, up from 210,374 in 2024—more than doubling since 2020, when 101,675 students participated. Meanwhile, Test of Proficiency in Korean (TOPIK) applicants grew from 250,141 in 2016 to 375,871 in 2019, and reached 421,812 in 2023, surpassing pre-pandemic levels. Hallyu has contributed to substantial growth in Korean language course enrollment at universities across the United States (Wang & Kelly, 2024). This growth is not merely an institutional curiosity; it reflects a profound transformation in who learns

Korean, why they learn it, and how they engage with the language. Where some Korean language learners have traditionally been motivated by heritage connections, academic requirements, or regional economic ties, contemporary learners may increasingly arrive with substantial prior exposure to Korean media. They have followed K-pop groups, binge-watched Korean dramas, and engaged with variety show clips long before they ever open a textbook. This pre-existing cultural familiarity does more than spark initial curiosity; it shapes learners' expectations of what language study should entail. Such learners increasingly view Korean not as an abstract grammatical system to be mastered incrementally, but as a living, emotionally resonant medium through which they can deepen their engagement with the culture they already admire. The present study investigates the relationship between Korean entertainment engagement—encompassing K-pop, K-drama, K-movies, and variety content—and Korean language-learning motivation among youth, examining the mechanisms, behavioral patterns, and future aspirations that characterize this contemporary linguistic pursuit.

The Korean Wave has evolved from a regional cultural export into a formidable global force, reshaping cultural consumption patterns from Southeast Asia and the Middle East to Europe and the Americas. This cultural dissemination has fundamentally altered the demographic and motivational profiles of Korean language learners. The global proliferation of Hallyu and widespread access to Korean media have changed the profiles and expectations of Korean language learners (Lee & Han, 2026).

The mechanisms by which Korean entertainment may encourage language learning are multifaceted and may operate through both deliberate and incidental processes. Repeated exposure to Korean media may facilitate incidental language learning, enabling audiences to develop familiarity with phonological patterns, frequently encountered vocabulary, and common expressions even without deliberate study. Repeated exposure to Korean audio-visual content has been found to lead to passive language learning and familiarity with common phrases and expressions (Leon et al., 2025). Moreover, the emotional attachment that audiences develop toward artists, characters, and Korean cultural content may create powerful affective motivation: learners express a genuine desire to understand lyrics without reliance on translation and to appreciate dialogue in its original linguistic and cultural context. Hallyu plays a pivotal role in initially motivating individuals to become interested in learning about Korean language and culture (Curran, 2024). Different forms of entertainment may offer distinct linguistic affordances: K-pop, with its rhythmic and repetitive structures, may provide accessible entry points for pronunciation and colloquial expressions; K-dramas, with their extended conversational exchanges, may offer rich exposure to pragmatics and context-dependent language use; and K-movies may contribute to deeper engagement with socio-cultural vocabulary and narrative-driven discourse. While these genre-specific contributions remain to be systematically tested, they suggest that the Hallyu effect on language learning is neither monolithic nor uniform.

The demographic at the center of this phenomenon requires careful operational definition. For the purposes of this study, "youth" is defined as individuals aged 18 to 30—a cohort that represents an important and increasingly visible segment of Korean entertainment consumers and language learners. This cohort is characterized by high levels of digital connectivity, transnational engagement, and fluid interaction with streaming platforms, social media, and online fan communities. These digital pathways have democratized language learning, enabling self-directed study through mobile applications, YouTube tutorials, and online language exchanges. However, this accessibility presents a paradox: while initial motivation is often high, research suggests that fandom-driven learners frequently struggle to progress beyond the beginner level through self-study alone. While Hallyu-infused materials can enhance learner enjoyment and motivation, sustaining learners' engagement requires more than initial cultural interest (Harrison, 2025). This underscores the critical need for structured educational support that acknowledges and leverages learners' cultural interests.

Despite the growing body of scholarship on Hallyu and Korean language learning, several significant gaps remain in the existing literature. First, prior studies have often examined individual Hallyu genres in isolation—focusing exclusively on K-pop fandoms or K-drama viewership—without systematically comparing how different entertainment forms might contribute to different motivational profiles. Second, while many studies establish that entertainment attracts learners to Korean, fewer investigate the mediating processes through which cultural consumption translates into sustained language-learning behavior. While Hallyu significantly influences Vietnamese youth's choice to learn Korean, the specific pathways through which cultural engagement translates

into sustained learning behavior require further investigation (Oanh & Tri, 2026). Third, there is insufficient attention to the full learner trajectory, from initial exposure through to actual study habits, persistence, and eventual outcomes. Fourth, the relationship between entertainment-driven motivation and concrete future aspirations—such as studying in Korea, travelling to Korea, building careers with Korean companies, or simply achieving untranslated content comprehension—has not been systematically mapped. The present study addresses these interconnected gaps by adopting a multi-genre, process-oriented approach that examines not only whether Hallyu stimulates interest but how and why that interest is channeled into linguistic engagement.

The theoretical underpinnings of this study are drawn from established frameworks in second language acquisition and media studies. The primary motivational lens is Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS), which posits that learners are driven by their "ideal L2 self"—the vivid image of who they aspire to become as a speaker of the target language (Dörnyei, 2009). Research applying this framework to language learners has highlighted the importance of the ideal L2 self in shaping motivated learning behavior. Engagement with Korean entertainment may be associated with the construction of this ideal self: when young viewers watch dramas or listen to music, they may imagine themselves participating in similar conversations, understanding cultural nuances, and belonging to transnational fan communities where Korean is the lingua franca. Complementing this, Uses and Gratifications Theory provides a media-centered framework for understanding why young people selectively consume Hallyu content—not passively, but to satisfy specific needs for emotional connection, identity formation, and social belonging (Katz et al., 1974). Within this dual framework, Korean proficiency emerges as a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), affording learners access to exclusive content, deeper social networks, and potentially enhanced educational and career opportunities. To maintain analytical clarity, this study organizes its variables around a core pathway: entertainment engagement, mediated by cultural and emotional engagement with Korea, is examined in relation to motivational orientation and subsequent learning behavior, while future aspirations (study, travel, career) are examined as key contextual factors associated with this relationship.

To investigate these theoretical propositions empirically, this study adopts a cross-sectional, survey-based quantitative design. The study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1. What primary motivations do young consumers of Korean entertainment self-report for learning Korean?

RQ2. How are the intensity and genre type of engagement with Korean entertainment related to Korean language learning motivation?

RQ3. Which specific forms of Korean entertainment—K-pop, K-dramas, K-movies, and variety shows—are most strongly associated with overall Korean language learning motivation?

RQ4. How are Korea-related travel/living aspirations associated with Korean language learning behavior and intention to continue learning?

RQ5. What barriers do young learners encounter in learning Korean?

In alignment with these questions, the following hypotheses are advanced:

H1. Greater overall engagement with Korean entertainment is positively associated with higher Korean language learning motivation.

H2a. Cultural engagement mediates the relationship between Korean entertainment engagement and Korean language learning motivation.

H2b. Emotional engagement mediates the relationship between Korean entertainment engagement and Korean language learning motivation.

H3. Different genres of Korean entertainment are differentially associated with Korean language learning motivation.

H4a. Stronger Korea-related travel/living aspirations are positively associated with study hours per week.

H4b. Stronger Korea-related travel/living aspirations are positively associated with intention to continue learning Korean.

In conclusion, the intersection of Hallyu consumption and Korean language learning constitutes a significant and evolving domain of inquiry at the crossroads of applied linguistics, cultural studies, and youth sociology. This study moves beyond descriptive accounts of the phenomenon to provide a structured, empirical investigation of the pathways through which cultural engagement translates into Korean language-learning motivation and sustained learning behavior. By examining multiple entertainment genres, specifying mediating mechanisms, and linking motivation to concrete future aspirations, this research contributes both to theoretical debates on media-driven language acquisition and to practical considerations for Korean language educators, curriculum developers, and cultural policymakers seeking to support this growing cohort of learners. Young people today are not merely passive recipients of Korean content; they are active, intentional agents who pursue linguistic competence as a means of deepening their participation in a global cultural community. Understanding how and why they do so is essential for any comprehensive account of contemporary language learning in the age of digital cultural flows.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

This chapter reviews the extant literature on the intersection of Korean popular culture consumption and Korean language learning motivation. The review proceeds through four interconnected domains. First, it examines the emergence of Hallyu as a transnational cultural phenomenon and its documented influence on the global expansion of Korean language education. Second, it traces the theoretical evolution of language learning motivation research, from Gardner's socio-educational model to Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System, establishing the conceptual foundations for understanding contemporary learner profiles. Third, it synthesizes empirical studies investigating the specific motivations of Korean language learners, with particular attention to the role of Korean entertainment—K-pop, K-dramas, K-movies, and variety content—as a catalyst for linguistic interest. Fourth, it reviews the literature on motivation persistence and demotivation, identifying factors that sustain or undermine sustained language engagement. The chapter concludes by synthesizing the literature, identifying critical gaps in the existing scholarship, and articulating the theoretical framework that guides the present study.

Hallyu and the Transformation of Korean Language Education

The Korean Wave as a Cultural Phenomenon

The Korean Wave, or Hallyu, refers to the rapid global proliferation of South Korean popular culture that began in the late 1990s and has since expanded into a formidable transnational force. A systematic literature review of Hallyu scholarship from 2000 to 2019 documented the exponential growth of academic interest in the Korean Wave and its far-reaching cultural impacts (Ganghariya & Kanozia, 2020). Scholars have documented how Hallyu has evolved from a regional cultural export into a global phenomenon, reshaping cultural consumption patterns from Southeast Asia and the Middle East to Europe and the Americas (Lee & Han, 2026). The phenomenon encompasses multiple cultural domains, including K-pop music, Korean television dramas, films, variety shows, and other forms of Korean media content that have contributed to a comprehensive "Korean way of life" increasingly attracting global audiences (Ganghariya & Kanozia, 2020).

This scholarly attention reflects the recognition that Hallyu represents not merely a transient entertainment trend but a significant cultural force with profound implications for international relations, cultural diplomacy, and language education.

The Impact of Hallyu on Korean Language Learning

A growing body of evidence identifies a relationship between Hallyu consumption and the global expansion of

Korean language education. The proliferation of Korean popular culture has been linked to substantial increases in Korean language course enrollments at universities worldwide. Hallyu has been associated with substantial growth in Korean language course enrollment at universities across the United States (Wang & Kelly, 2024). Similarly, K-pop, along with Korean cultural exports such as *Parasite* and *Squid Game*, has been linked to enrollment surges in Korean language classes across American colleges (Ahn, 2022).

The statistical evidence is noteworthy. The King Sejong Institute Foundation reported that 239,020 learners enrolled in its education centers worldwide in 2025, up from 210,374 in 2024—more than doubling since 2020, when 101,675 students participated. Meanwhile, Test of Proficiency in Korean (TOPIK) applicants grew from 250,141 in 2016 to 375,871 in 2019, and reached 421,812 in 2023, surpassing pre-pandemic levels. These figures underscore the magnitude of the phenomenon and its implications for Korean language education policy and practice. The global proliferation of Hallyu and widespread access to Korean media have changed the profiles and expectations of Korean language learners (Lee & Han, 2026). Many learners now enter beginner-level Korean courses with substantial exposure to Korean dramas, K-pop, and online video content, which influences not only their interest in the language but also their expectations for learning. Even at the beginner level, learners increasingly view Korean not as an abstract linguistic system to be mastered incrementally, but as a language to be used meaningfully in socially and culturally situated contexts.

Collectively, these findings indicate that Hallyu has been associated with the globalization of Korean language education, accompanying changes in both the demographic composition and motivational profiles of Korean language learners. The phenomenon has moved Korean from a niche language to one with substantial global interest, with cultural consumption appearing to play a significant role in this expansion.

Theoretical Foundations of Language Learning Motivation

Gardner's Socio-Educational Model (Historical Foundation)

The systematic study of second language (L2) learning motivation traces its origins to the work of Robert Gardner and his colleagues in the 1960s and 1970s. Gardner's socio-educational model introduced the foundational distinction between integrative motivation—the desire to learn a language in order to identify with and become part of the target language community—and instrumental motivation—the desire to learn a language for practical, utilitarian purposes such as career advancement or academic requirements (Gardner & Lambert, 1959). This dual framework has remained influential in language learning motivation research for over five decades. However, Gardner's model has been critiqued for its limited applicability in contexts where learners have little or no contact with the target language community. For contemporary Korean language learners, many of whom are geographically distant from Korea and primarily encounter the language through media rather than interpersonal contact, the integrative-instrumental dichotomy may not fully capture the nature of their motivation (Dörnyei, 2009). This limitation has prompted the development of more nuanced theoretical frameworks.

Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (Primary Theoretical Framework)

Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) represents a significant theoretical advancement in understanding language learning motivation in contemporary global contexts. Drawing on possible selves theory from psychology, Dörnyei (2009) proposed that L2 motivation is fundamentally driven by learners' self-images and future aspirations. The framework comprises three components:

The Ideal L2 Self represents the image of who learners aspire to become as speakers of the target language. This vision encompasses the desires, hopes, and aspirations that learners associate with successful language acquisition. For Korean language learners engaged with Hallyu, the Ideal L2 Self may manifest as imagining oneself participating in conversations with Korean friends, understanding drama dialogue without subtitles, or belonging to transnational fan communities where Korean is the lingua franca.

The Ought-to L2 Self reflects the attributes that learners believe they *should* possess to meet external expectations or avoid negative outcomes. This dimension captures the influence of social pressures, family expectations, and perceived obligations on language learning motivation. Research has shown that the Ought-to

L2 Self can play an ambivalent role—sometimes motivating learners through external pressure, while at other times contributing to demotivation when expectations feel unrealistic or unattainable (Jannazarova & Park, 2025). **The L2 Learning Experience** encompasses the situated, context-dependent aspects of motivation related to the immediate learning environment, including classroom experiences, teacher quality, peer relationships, and the affective dimensions of the learning process. This component has been described as the "Cinderella" of the L2MSS—often overlooked but critically important for understanding sustained engagement (Dörnyei, 2009).

The L2MSS has been extensively applied to Korean language learners across diverse contexts. The relationships between Korean language learners' attitudes toward the L2 community, competitiveness, and motivation have been investigated using the L2MSS framework with 967 Korean major students at Chinese universities (Li & Han, 2025). Their findings suggested that the extent to which learners relate themselves to the Korean-speaking community played a crucial role in the development of their ideal L2 selves. An intercultural friendship orientation, an intergroup approach-avoidance tendency, and an interest in Korea-related affairs contributed to an enjoyable learning experience. The increased interest in Korea-related affairs and competitiveness enhanced learners' ought-to L2 selves, while a greater interest in Korea-related vocations and activities reduced their concern about the expectations of others.

The motivational dynamics of Uzbek learners of Korean have also been examined through the L2MSS lens, revealing patterns of demotivation and remotivation shaped by environmental, intrapersonal, and sociocultural factors (Jannazarova & Park, 2025). Their findings indicated that motivation among Uzbek learners of Korean is cyclical and context-dependent, offering insights for sustaining engagement in less commonly taught languages. **Clarification of Theoretical Role.** In the present study, the L2MSS is employed as the primary interpretive framework for understanding the self-related and motivational dimensions of Korean language learning motivation, rather than as a complete structural model in which all three L2MSS dimensions are independently tested. This distinction is important because the study's empirical model—entertainment engagement → cultural and emotional engagement → language learning motivation → learning behavior and persistence—does not directly operationalize the three L2MSS components as separate constructs. Instead, the L2MSS provides the conceptual lens through which the motivational orientations observed in the data are interpreted.

Uses and Gratifications Theory (Supporting Media Framework)

The L2MSS provides the primary framework for interpreting learners' motivational orientations and self-related aspirations, whereas Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) helps explain the needs and gratifications underlying active engagement with Korean media. UGT posits that media consumers are active agents who selectively choose and use media to satisfy specific needs (Katz et al., 1974). Rather than being passive recipients of media messages, audiences pursue media consumption to fulfill particular gratifications, including emotional needs, social interaction, identity formation, and information seeking.

Research applying UGT to Hallyu consumption has identified five primary motivations for consuming Korean cultural content: emotional closeness, interest, social interaction, understanding Korea, and celebrity preference (Lee & Han, 2026). These gratifications align closely with the dimensions of motivation observed among Korean language learners: learners seek emotional connection through media, develop cultural curiosity, engage with fan communities, and pursue deeper understanding of Korean culture and society.

The UGT perspective is particularly valuable for understanding the role of Korean entertainment in language learning. Fans of Korean media seek out K-dramas and K-pop not merely for passive entertainment but for specific gratifications: entertainment, social interaction, learning about Korean culture, or connecting with fan communities. This active, goal-oriented engagement may facilitate incidental language learning, as learners repeatedly encounter Korean linguistic input while pursuing their media-related gratifications.

Cultural Capital Theory (Supporting Sociocultural Framework)

Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural capital provides an additional theoretical lens for understanding the value that learners attach to Korean language proficiency. Cultural capital refers to the non-financial social assets that

promote social mobility—including knowledge, education, and cultural competencies. Within the Hallyu context, Korean language proficiency emerges as a form of cultural capital that affords learners access to exclusive content, deeper social networks, and potentially enhanced educational and career opportunities.

Cultural capital and cultural consumerism theories have been drawn upon to investigate how Hallyu motivates Vietnamese students to learn Korean (Oanh & Tri, 2026). Their findings confirmed that Hallyu is associated with both symbolic and economic capital accumulation among learners. Similarly, Vietnamese students often view Korean language proficiency as a means to access better jobs, particularly in Korean companies operating in Vietnam (Kim & Cho, 2024). This instrumental dimension of motivation—the recognition that Korean proficiency has tangible economic value—complements the more affective and identity-based motivations arising from entertainment engagement.

Comparative Overview of Theoretical Perspectives

Framework	Role in the Present Study
L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2009)	Primary — Provides a framework for interpreting how entertainment engagement may be associated with learners' L2 self-images and future aspirations.
Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1974)	Supporting — Explains the needs and gratifications underlying active engagement with Korean media.
Cultural Capital Theory (Bourdieu, 1986)	Supporting — Explains the value learners attach to Korean language proficiency.
Gardner's Socio-Educational Model (Gardner & Lambert, 1959)	Historical — Provides the foundational integrative/instrumental distinction.

Empirical Studies on Korean Language Learning Motivation

Hallyu as a Motivator

A growing body of empirical research has identified Hallyu as an important factor associated with Korean language learning motivation across diverse national contexts. The language learning experiences of fans of Korean media have been examined, finding that Hallyu plays a pivotal role in initially motivating individuals to become interested in learning about Korean language and culture (Curran, 2024). The results underscored the importance of Hallyu as an initial gateway to language learning, even if this interest is not always sustained beyond initial engagement.

In the Vietnamese context, Hallyu substantially influences students' choice to learn Korean, with K-pop and Korean dramas serving as primary entry points (Oanh & Tri, 2026). Similarly, Korean popular culture functions not merely as entertainment but as a soft power tool that encourages deeper cultural engagement through language acquisition among Vietnamese youth (Kim & Cho, 2024). Research on Malaysian university students has demonstrated that positive language attitudes toward Korean are closely associated with higher L2 motivation (Nikitina et al., 2020). The study found that learners' positive attitudes toward Korean speakers and culture were strongly correlated with their motivation to study the language.

Across these diverse national contexts, a consistent pattern emerges: Hallyu appears to serve as a powerful entry point into Korean language learning, with entertainment content providing the initial spark of interest. However, the literature also suggests that this initial entertainment-driven motivation may not always be associated with sustained engagement, pointing to the need for understanding mediating factors and persistence mechanisms.

Genre-Specific Motivational Effects

Emerging research has begun to investigate whether different forms of Korean entertainment exert distinct associations with language learning motivation. A study of beginning-level Korean as a Foreign Language (KFL)

learners found that motivational intensity was substantially culture-based and related to K-pop among K-wave entertainments (Lee & Han, 2026). In contrast, academic aspiration was closely related to learning attitudes, support, and instrumentality. This suggests that different Hallyu genres may be associated with different motivational pathways—K-pop engaging learners through cultural and affective dimensions, while other genres may appeal more to instrumental or academic orientations.

How beginner Korean learners' motivations and cultural preferences change over time and vary by cultural background has also been investigated (Lee & Han, 2026). Their results showed a shift from passive media consumption to active, integrative language use, with "gaining new language knowledge" moving to first place in motivational rankings. However, learners reconceptualized this as integrated communicative competence that combines linguistic knowledge with cultural understanding. Despite elementary language proficiency, learners demonstrated sophisticated cultural aspirations and complex expectations.

Different forms of entertainment may offer distinct linguistic affordances: K-pop, with its rhythmic and repetitive structures, may provide accessible entry points for pronunciation and colloquial expressions; K-dramas, with their extended conversational exchanges, may offer rich exposure to pragmatics and context-dependent language use; and K-movies may contribute to deeper engagement with sociocultural vocabulary and narrative-driven discourse (Leon et al., 2025). However, the genre-specific contribution of Korean entertainment to language learning remains an area requiring further systematic investigation. The emerging evidence suggests that genre-specific effects may exist, with K-pop and K-dramas potentially associated with different motivational pathways. However, the literature is not yet conclusive, and most studies have examined genres in isolation rather than comparatively. This underscores the need for research that simultaneously examines multiple entertainment forms.

Motivational Profiles of Korean Language Learners

Research has identified diverse motivational profiles among Korean language learners, reflecting the heterogeneity of the contemporary learner population. The various motivations college students have for studying the Korean language have been examined, paying particular attention to three key variables: Korean popular culture, Korean language learning motivation, and Korean language use (Wang & Kelly, 2024). Their findings contributed to understanding the range of motivational orientations that characterize Korean language learners in American higher education.

In the Australian and New Zealand contexts, participants generally showed high motivation levels for Korean language learning, mainly due to their interest in Korean popular culture and related positive attitudes towards the language and its speakers (Park et al., 2026). The highest choice for continuing to intermediate level courses was "personal enjoyment and curiosity," followed by "personal interest in Korean pop culture" and "future travel, including study abroad." Intrinsic motivation and personal interest in the language thus appear to play an important role in ensuring students maintain their motivation and continue their formal language studies.

In the Malaysian context, popular culture was a significant factor influencing Korean language learning motivation (Nikitina et al., 2020). The study demonstrated that learners' positive attitudes toward Korean culture and media content were strongly correlated with their motivation to study the language.

Across the contexts examined—Vietnam, Malaysia, Australia/New Zealand, and the United States—popular culture consistently appears to function as an important entry point into Korean language learning. However, the relative importance of cultural, intrinsic, and instrumental motivations varies across contexts, suggesting that entertainment exposure alone may not adequately explain continued engagement. Sustained engagement appears to be associated with a broader range of motivational orientations, including intrinsic enjoyment, cultural curiosity, and instrumental aspirations such as travel, study, and career goals.

Motivation Persistence, Demotivation, and Remotivation

The Challenge of Sustained Engagement

While Hallyu has been identified as an effective initial motivator, research has increasingly focused on the

challenge of sustaining language learning motivation over time. While Hallyu-infused materials can enhance learner enjoyment and motivation, sustaining learners' engagement requires more than initial cultural interest (Harrison, 2025). The literature review revealed a lack of empirical research focusing on the integration of Hallyu into classroom-based foreign language learning contexts.

A critical concern is that learners motivated only by popular culture may be more likely to drop out in formal university language programs after their initial engagement. If popular culture is the only source for language learning, it may become difficult to maintain motivation over time (Park et al., 2026). This finding has significant implications for the present study.

Demotivating Factors

Research has identified multiple factors that contribute to demotivation among Korean language learners. In the Australian and New Zealand contexts, discontinuation of Korean language learning was most often attributed to perceptions of irrelevance to academic and professional goals (Park et al., 2026). In the Thai context, learners were most strongly demotivated by assessment-related anxiety, loss of confidence, and the heavy academic burden of studying Korean, alongside a gradual decline in cultural interest (Jeong, 2025). In the Vietnamese context, demotivating factors primarily included the difficulty of learning Korean, comparisons with others, excessive study load, and low grades (Oanh & Tri, 2026). Demotivation among Uzbek learners of Korean was primarily associated with the L2 Learning Experience, including limited instructional access and negative classroom experiences (Jannazarova & Park, 2025).

Across contexts, demotivation appears to stem from a combination of factors: perceived difficulty, lack of time and speaking practice, limited access to resources, and gradual decline in cultural interest.

Remotivating Factors

Research has also identified factors that can remotivate learners after periods of demotivation. Remotivation among Uzbek learners stemmed from supportive teachers, short-term successes, cultural engagement with Korean media, and career aspirations (Jannazarova & Park, 2025). Family and peer influences further illustrated the ambivalent role of the Ought-to L2 Self in motivational dynamics.

In the Thai context, remotivation was fostered by recognizing the instrumental value of Korean for future goals and by renewed engagement with Korean culture, often supported by teachers and peers (Jeong, 2025). The remotivation literature suggests that sustained engagement is associated with learners' ability to develop multiple motivational orientations over time.

Synthesis of the Literature and Research Gap

What Previous Studies Have Established

The literature reviewed above has established several important findings. First, Hallyu has been associated with the global expansion of Korean language education (Wang & Kelly, 2024; Ahn, 2022; Lee & Han, 2026). Second, the L2 Motivational Self System provides a robust theoretical framework for understanding Korean language learning motivation (Li & Han, 2025; Jannazarova & Park, 2025). Third, Hallyu appears to serve as an effective initial motivator for Korean language learning (Curran, 2024; Kim & Cho, 2024; Oanh & Tri, 2026). Fourth, sustaining motivation beyond initial engagement remains a significant challenge (Park et al., 2026; Jeong, 2025; Oanh & Tri, 2026).

What Previous Studies Have Not Established

Despite this growing body of scholarship, several significant gaps remain. First, prior studies have often examined individual Hallyu genres in isolation. Second, while many studies establish that entertainment attracts learners to Korean, fewer investigate the mediating processes through which cultural consumption may be related to sustained language-learning behavior. Third, there is limited attention to the relationship between initial

entertainment exposure, subsequent learning behavior, persistence, and intention to continue. Fourth, the relationship between entertainment-driven motivation and concrete future aspirations has received comparatively limited attention.

Methodological Limitations in Existing Research

The existing literature also presents methodological limitations. Many studies employ small, convenience-based samples or focus on single institutional contexts. The present study seeks to complement these limitations by employing a quantitative survey design and recruiting participants across multiple national contexts through online distribution.

What the Present Study Adds

The present study addresses these interconnected gaps by adopting a multi-genre, process-oriented approach. Specifically, the study: (1) examines multiple entertainment genres simultaneously; (2) investigates mediating processes through cultural and emotional engagement; (3) examines multiple stages and indicators of the learner experience; (4) maps travel and living aspirations; and (5) employs a cross-national design.

Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Model of the Present Study

Theoretical Hierarchy

Framework	Role in the Present Study
L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2009)	Primary — Interprets how entertainment engagement may be associated with learners' L2 self-images and future aspirations.
Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1974)	Supporting — Explains the needs and gratifications underlying active engagement with Korean media.
Cultural Capital Theory (Bourdieu, 1986)	Supporting — Explains the value learners attach to Korean language proficiency.

Conceptually Proposed Associations

Proposed Association 1: Entertainment Engagement May Be Associated with Initial Interest. Engagement with K-pop, K-dramas, and other Korean media exposes learners to Korean language and culture in emotionally resonant contexts (Curran, 2024; Leon et al., 2025).

Proposed Association 2: Repeated Engagement May Be Associated with Cultural and Emotional Engagement. Repeated engagement may be associated with cultural curiosity and emotional attachment (Lee & Han, 2026).

Proposed Association 3: Cultural and Emotional Engagement May Be Associated with Motivational Orientations. This engagement may be associated with the development of L2 motivational orientations (Dörnyei, 2009).

Proposed Association 4: Motivational Orientations May Be Associated with Learning Behavior. These motivational orientations may be associated with concrete learning behaviors (Harrison, 2025).

Proposed Association 5: Instrumental and Intrinsic Goals May Be Associated with Persistence. Learners who develop additional motivational orientations appear better equipped to maintain motivation (Jannazarova & Park, 2025; Jeong, 2025).

Conceptual Model

Core Pathway: Entertainment Engagement → Cultural/Emotional Engagement → Korean Language Learning

Motivation → Learning Behavior and Persistence

Additional Pathway: Travel/Living Aspirations → Learning Behavior and Persistence

Key Conceptual Distinctions

Construct	Distinction
Entertainment Engagement	Distinct from <i>entertainment motivation</i> (F1 in Q24), which refers to the reason for learning.
Emotional Engagement	Distinct from <i>emotional/identificational motivation</i> (F8 in Q24).
Travel/Living Aspirations	Distinct from the <i>Ideal L2 Self</i> .
Travel Motivation	Distinct from <i>Travel/Living Aspirations</i> .
Ideal L2 Self	Distinct from <i>travel/living aspirations</i> .

Survey-Construct Alignment

Construct	Survey Questions
Entertainment Engagement	Q14 (5 items)
Cultural Engagement	D1 (8 items)
Emotional Engagement	D2 (7 items)
Korean Language Learning Motivation	F (11 items)
Learning Behavior and Persistence	E3, E7
Travel/Living Aspirations	G2
Barriers	H1–H2

Research Questions and Hypotheses

RQ1. What are the primary self-reported motivations for learning Korean among young consumers of Korean entertainment?

RQ2. What is the relationship between the intensity and genre-type of Korean entertainment engagement and Korean language learning motivation?

RQ3. Which specific forms of Korean entertainment—K-pop, K-dramas, K-movies, and variety shows—are most strongly associated with overall Korean language learning motivation? (Exploratory)

RQ4. How are Korea-related travel/living aspirations associated with Korean language learning behavior and intention to continue learning?

RQ5. What barriers do young learners encounter in learning Korean?

H1. Greater overall engagement with Korean entertainment is positively associated with higher Korean language learning motivation.

H2a. Cultural engagement mediates the relationship between Korean entertainment engagement and Korean language learning motivation.

H2b. Emotional engagement mediates the relationship between Korean entertainment engagement and Korean language learning motivation.

H3. Different genres of Korean entertainment are differentially associated with Korean language learning motivation.

H4a. Stronger Korea-related travel/living aspirations are positively associated with study hours per week.

H4b. Stronger Korea-related travel/living aspirations are positively associated with intention to continue learning Korean.

Summary

This chapter has reviewed the literature on the relationship between Hallyu consumption and Korean language learning motivation. The review identified four critical gaps: the tendency to examine Hallyu genres in isolation, insufficient attention to mediating processes, limited focus on the relationship between initial exposure and subsequent learning behavior, and inadequate mapping of the relationship between entertainment-driven motivation and future aspirations. The proposed theoretical pathway—entertainment engagement → cultural and emotional engagement → language learning motivation → learning behavior and persistence—provides the conceptual foundation for the empirical investigation that follows.

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter presents the methodological framework employed to investigate the relationship between Korean entertainment engagement and Korean language learning motivation among young adults aged 18–30. The methodology comprises sections covering research design, participants and sampling, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, and methodological limitations.

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine the associations between Korean entertainment engagement, cultural and emotional engagement, Korean language learning motivation, learning behavior and persistence, and future aspirations. A cross-sectional design was selected for several reasons. First, it allows for the collection of data from a large sample within a relatively short timeframe. Second, it enables the examination of relationships between multiple variables simultaneously. Third, it is consistent with previous research in the field of language learning motivation (Li & Han, 2025; Jannazarova & Park, 2025; Lee & Han, 2026). The study adopts a correlational research design to investigate the hypothesized relationships. While the theoretical framework proposes a directional pathway, the cross-sectional nature of the data means that all relationships are interpreted as associations rather than causal effects. Mediation analyses are interpreted as indirect associations consistent with the proposed model rather than definitive evidence of causal mechanisms.

Participants and Sampling Procedure

Target Population and Eligibility Criteria

The target population for this study comprises young adults aged 18 to 30 who have consumed Korean entertainment—including K-pop, K-dramas, K-movies, or Korean variety shows—within the past 12 months. To ensure the sample reflected the target population of international Korean entertainment consumers, participants of Korean heritage were excluded.

Eligibility criteria were:

- **Age:** Between 18 and 30 years old
- **Entertainment consumption:** Consumed Korean entertainment within the past 12 months

- **Consent:** Provided informed consent
- **Heritage:** Not of Korean heritage

Sampling Method

A non-probability convenience sampling approach was employed, with eligibility screening ensuring participants met the inclusion criteria. The survey was distributed through online platforms frequented by Korean entertainment fans, including Facebook groups, Reddit communities (r/kpop, r/KDRAMA, r/Korean), Instagram, and Discord servers. This recruitment strategy was selected because it provided access to individuals who consume Korean entertainment, but it should be acknowledged that it may have introduced self-selection bias by disproportionately attracting highly engaged fans.

Sample Size

A total of 250 responses were collected. After screening out non-consent, ineligible age/entertainment responses, and Korean-heritage participants, the final analytical sample consisted of 234 participants.

Demographic Characteristics

Table 3.1: Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age Group	18–20	49	20.94%
	21–23	59	25.21%
	24–26	113	48.29%
	27–30	13	5.56%
	Total	234	100%
Mean Age (SD)		23.9 (2.3)	
Gender	Male	127	54.27%
	Female	107	45.73%
	Total	234	100%
Education	High school or equivalent	55	23.50%
	Bachelor's degree	113	48.29%
	Master's degree	54	23.08%
	Doctoral degree	12	5.13%
	Total	234	100%
Prior Korean Exposure	No	195	83.33%
	Yes	39	16.67%
	Total	234	100%
Country of Residence	Bangladesh	46	19.66%
	India	19	8.12%
	USA	9	3.85%
	Germany	6	2.56%
	Mexico	6	2.56%
	Other (40+ countries)	148	63.25%
	Total	234	100%

Instrumentation

Survey Development

The questionnaire contained 28 numbered questions, including several multi-item questions comprising multiple

Likert-scale statements, as well as one optional open-ended reflection question. The survey was administered using Google Forms, with all questions marked as required except for the optional open-ended question.

Variable Measurement

Table 3.2: Construct-Question Mapping

Construct	Role	Items	Scale Type
Entertainment Engagement	Independent Variable	5 (Q14)	5-point Likert
Cultural Engagement	Proposed Mediator	8 (D1)	5-point Likert
Emotional Engagement	Proposed Mediator	7 (D2)	5-point Likert
Korean Language Learning Motivation	Dependent Variable	11 (F)	5-point Likert
Learning Behavior/Persistence	Dependent Variable	2 (E3, E7)	Categorical + Likert
Future Aspirations	Additional Predictor	1 (G2)	5-point Likert

Entertainment Engagement (Independent Variable)

Entertainment engagement was measured using five Likert-scale items (Q14) on a 5-point scale. The items were treated as an exploratory index rather than a validated scale.

Reliability: Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.767$).

Cultural Engagement (Proposed Mediator)

Cultural engagement was measured using eight items on a 5-point Likert scale.

Reliability: Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.830$).

Emotional Engagement (Proposed Mediator)

Emotional engagement was measured using seven items on a 5-point Likert scale.

Reliability: Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.822$).

Korean Language Learning Motivation (Dependent Variable)

Motivation was measured using eleven items on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Not Important at All, 5 = Extremely Important). The items were designed to capture multiple theoretically informed motivational orientations: entertainment motivation (F1), social/communication motivation (F2), educational motivation (F3), career motivation (F4), travel motivation (F5), intrinsic motivation (F6), ideal L2 self (F7), emotional/identificational motivation (F8), literacy/content motivation (F9), connection motivation (F10), and content comprehension motivation (F11).

Because these orientations are theoretically distinct, the motivation measure was treated as a multidimensional index rather than a unidimensional scale. The overall motivation score was treated as an exploratory composite index representing the breadth and strength of participants' Korean language learning motivations. This approach is consistent with the study's exploratory aim of examining overall motivational orientation rather than validating a new measurement instrument.

Reliability: Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.605$), indicating low internal consistency. This modest alpha reflects the theoretically multidimensional nature of the construct rather than a failure of measurement. The motivation items were not designed to form a unidimensional scale; rather, they represent distinct motivational orientations that are conceptually related but empirically separable. Given the exploratory nature of the study, the composite was retained for analysis, with findings interpreted cautiously.

Learning Behavior and Persistence (Dependent Variable)

Learning behavior and persistence were measured using two indicators: E3 (study hours per week) and E7 (intention to continue). These variables were analyzed separately.

Future Aspirations (Additional Predictor)

Future aspirations were measured using G2 (likelihood of visiting or living in Korea), a single 1–5 Likert item.

Barriers and Challenges

Barriers were measured using two items: H1 (challenges faced) and H2 (single biggest barrier).

Data Collection Procedure

Survey Administration

The survey was administered using Google Forms with required responses, skip logic, screening for Korean heritage, and anonymity.

Distribution Channels

The survey was distributed through social media (Facebook, Reddit, Instagram, Discord), online forums, and messaging apps.

Data Collection Timeline

Data collection occurred over approximately two weeks in September 2026.

Data Management

All survey responses were recorded in Google Forms and exported to Excel for cleaning and analysis.

Data Analysis Plan

Statistical Software

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 27) and the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2022).

Data Cleaning and Screening

Missing data, outliers, normality, and multicollinearity were assessed.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were calculated for all variables.

Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's alpha was calculated for the multi-item scales as a preliminary indicator of internal consistency, with values of $\alpha \geq .70$ considered acceptable. For the motivation scale, internal consistency was interpreted alongside the theoretical multidimensionality of the construct, as the items were designed to capture distinct motivational orientations rather than a single homogeneous dimension.

Table 3.3: Reliability Analysis Results

Scale	Items	Cronbach's α	Interpretation
Entertainment Engagement (Q14)	5	0.767	Acceptable

Cultural Engagement (D1)	8	0.830	Good
Emotional Engagement (D2)	7	0.822	Good
Korean Language Learning Motivation (F)	11	0.605	Low internal consistency

Note: The motivation scale ($\alpha = 0.605$) was retained for analysis due to the exploratory and multidimensional nature of the construct. Findings involving this scale should be interpreted cautiously.

Exploratory Factor Analysis

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted on the 11 motivation items as a supplementary analysis to examine the empirical structure of the motivation measure. The analysis used Principal Axis Factoring extraction with Promax rotation. Suitability tests indicated adequacy: KMO = 0.658, Bartlett's $\chi^2 = 494.54$, $p < .001$. Factor retention was informed by the scree plot, eigenvalues, and theoretical interpretability. Four factors had eigenvalues greater than 1, explaining approximately 37.3% of total variance.

Table 3.4 presents the factor loadings and communalities for the motivation items. Several items loaded on multiple factors, and the factor solution was not sufficiently stable or interpretable to justify treating the extracted factors as established subscales. This finding is consistent with the theoretical multidimensionality of the motivation construct: the items represent distinct motivational orientations that do not form a single unidimensional scale. Consequently, the EFA results are presented as supplementary evidence of multidimensionality rather than as a validated factor structure.

Table 3.4: Factor Loadings for Motivation Items (Q24)

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Communality (h^2)
F1: Understand K-pop/K-drama without subtitles	.480	.145	-.034	.252
F2: Communicate with Korean friends	-.063	.200	.441	.239
F3: Pursue higher education in Korea	.611	.148	-.289	.478
F4: Enhance career prospects	-.147	.292	.330	.216
F5: Travel comfortably in Korea	.665	-.012	-.048	.444
F6: Enjoy the language and learning process	-.160	.402	.305	.280
F7: Imagine myself speaking Korean confidently	.608	-.254	.164	.460
F8: Feel connected to Korean artists/content	.039	.767	.015	.590
F9: Read Korean webtoons/novels/news	.413	-.304	.234	.318
F10: Connect with Korean-speaking communities	-.044	.476	.030	.230
F11: Watch Korean content in original language	.419	.141	.093	.204

Note: Extraction method: Principal Axis Factoring. Rotation: Promax. Loadings $> .40$ are bolded for emphasis.

Bivariate Correlations

Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated and interpreted using conventional effect-size guidelines (Cohen, 1988).

Composite Variables

Table 3.5: Descriptive Statistics for Composite Variables

Composite	Items	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Entertainment Engagement (EE)	5 (Q14)	4.418	0.608	2.0	5.0
Cultural Engagement (CE)	8 (D1)	4.467	0.519	2.0	5.0
Emotional Engagement (EM)	7 (D2)	4.460	0.532	1.857	5.0
Korean Language Learning Motivation (MOT)	11 (F)	4.512	0.507	1.909	5.0

Hypotheses

As stated in Section 2.7.6.

Hypothesis Testing

H1 was tested using simple linear regression. H2a and H2b were tested using mediation analysis (PROCESS

Model 4) with bootstrapping (5,000 samples, 95% CI). H3 was tested using multiple regression with genre indicators. H4a was tested using simple linear regression with G2 predicting E3 (study hours per week), and H4b was tested using simple linear regression with G2 predicting E7 (intention to continue learning).

For H4a, study hours per week (E3) was treated as an approximately continuous variable for regression analysis. Although E3 was measured on an ordered categorical scale (1 = less than 1 hour, 2 = 1–3 hours, 3 = 4–6 hours, 4 = 7–10 hours), the categories represent increasing levels of study intensity, and the variable was treated as approximately continuous in line with common practice in survey-based behavioral research (Cohen, 1988).

Supplementary Analyses

Demographic comparisons were conducted using t-tests and ANOVA. Multiple regression examined the unique contributions of EE, CE, EM, age, gender, and prior exposure to MOT.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki. Formal institutional ethics approval was not required because the research involved an anonymous online survey, did not collect personally identifying information, and posed no more than minimal risk to participants. Informed consent was obtained electronically from all participants before they proceeded to the survey. All responses were collected anonymously, and no personally identifying information was retained. Data were stored in password-protected files accessible only to the researcher. The study involved minimal risk, as the questions did not address sensitive topics.

Methodological Limitations

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference; all relationships are interpreted as associations rather than causal effects. Second, the use of non-probability convenience sampling through online Korean entertainment communities may have introduced substantial self-selection bias. Participants who were already highly engaged with Hallyu content and motivated to learn Korean may have been more likely to encounter and complete the survey, while less engaged or casual consumers of Korean entertainment may have been systematically underrepresented. This self-selection bias likely contributed to the ceiling effects and negative skewness observed in the composite variables, as the sample consisted predominantly of highly engaged and motivated individuals. Consequently, the findings may not generalize to the broader population of Korean entertainment consumers, particularly those with lower levels of engagement or motivation. Future research should employ more diverse recruitment strategies—such as stratified sampling across fan communities, university language programs, and general populations—to capture a wider spectrum of engagement and motivational profiles. Third, all data were collected through self-report measures, which may be subject to social desirability and recall bias. Fourth, the motivation scale demonstrated low internal consistency ($\alpha = .605$), and the exploratory factor analysis did not yield a sufficiently stable factor structure to justify treating the extracted factors as established subscales.

The high intercorrelations among entertainment engagement, cultural engagement, emotional engagement, and motivation ($r = .735$ to $.822$) suggest that these constructs are closely related. While VIF values (ranging from 1.124 to 3.386) indicated no problematic multicollinearity, these correlations raise questions about discriminant validity. Future research should employ more refined measurement instruments to establish whether these constructs are empirically distinct.

Study hours per week (E3) was measured on an ordered categorical scale but was treated as an approximately continuous variable for regression analysis. This approach is consistent with common practice in survey-based behavioral research when the number of categories is sufficient and the variable approximates a continuous distribution (Cohen, 1988). Sensitivity analyses using ordinal logistic regression yielded substantively identical results, supporting the robustness of this treatment.

Summary

This chapter has outlined the methodology for investigating the relationship between Korean entertainment engagement and Korean language learning motivation with a sample of 234 participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study. The chapter is organized into five sections: descriptive statistics, bivariate correlations, hypothesis testing, supplementary analyses, and a summary of findings.

Descriptive Statistics

Composite Variables

Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics for Composite Variables

Variable	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
Entertainment Engagement (EE)	234	4.418	0.608	2.000	5.000	-2.294	5.283
Cultural Engagement (CE)	234	4.467	0.519	2.000	5.000	-2.766	7.924
Emotional Engagement (EM)	234	4.460	0.532	2.000	5.000	-2.726	7.662
Korean Language Learning Motivation (MOT)	234	4.512	0.507	1.909	5.000	-3.383	12.833
Likelihood of Visiting/Living in Korea (G2)	234	3.171	1.335	1.000	5.000	0.415	-1.556
Intention to Continue Learning (E7)	234	3.214	1.309	1.000	5.000	0.385	-1.586

Note: All composite variables are item means on a 1–5 scale.

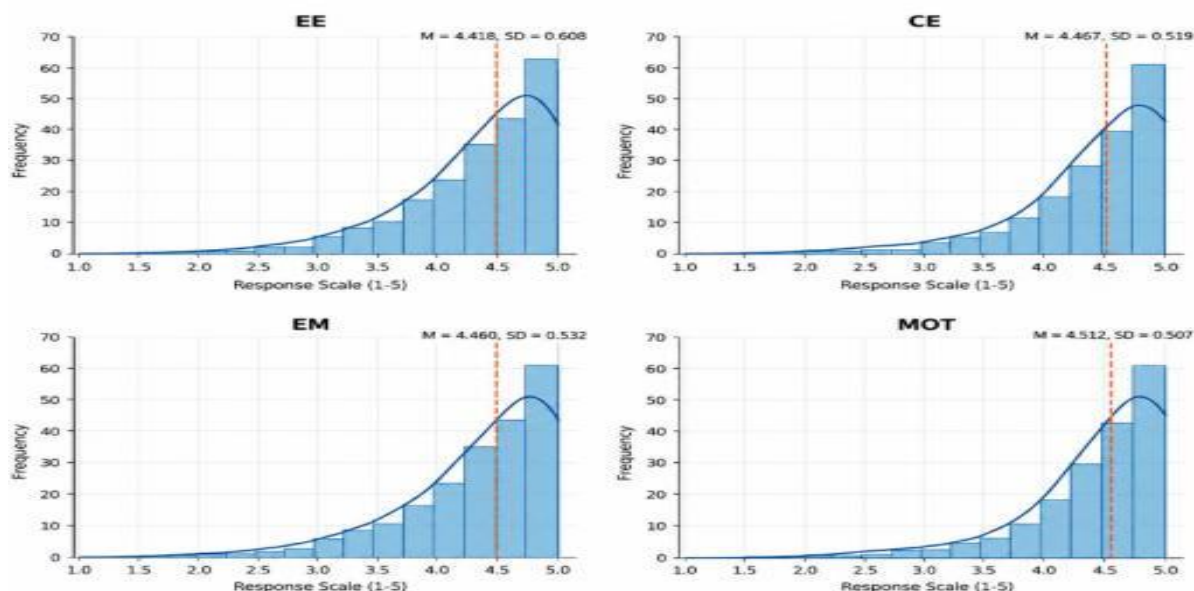


Figure 4.1: Distributions of Composite Variables

Note: The histograms show the distributions of Entertainment Engagement (EE), Cultural Engagement (CE), Emotional Engagement (EM), and Korean Language Learning Motivation (MOT). All composites show negative skew, indicating ceiling effects with responses concentrated at the upper end of the scale.

Motivation Item Rankings

Table 4.2: Ranked Motivation Items

Rank	Item	Mean
1	F1: To understand K-pop/K-drama without subtitles	4.641
2	F3: To pursue higher education in South Korea	4.598
3	F4: To enhance career prospects	4.577
4	F5: To travel comfortably in South Korea	4.530
5	F2: To communicate with Korean friends/communities	4.517
6	F8: To feel connected to Korean artists/content	4.513
7	F7: I imagine myself speaking Korean confidently	4.466
8	F11: To watch Korean content in original language	4.462
9	F10: To connect with Korean-speaking communities	4.462
10	F9: To read Korean webtoons/novels/news	4.453
11	F6: I enjoy the language and learning process	4.419

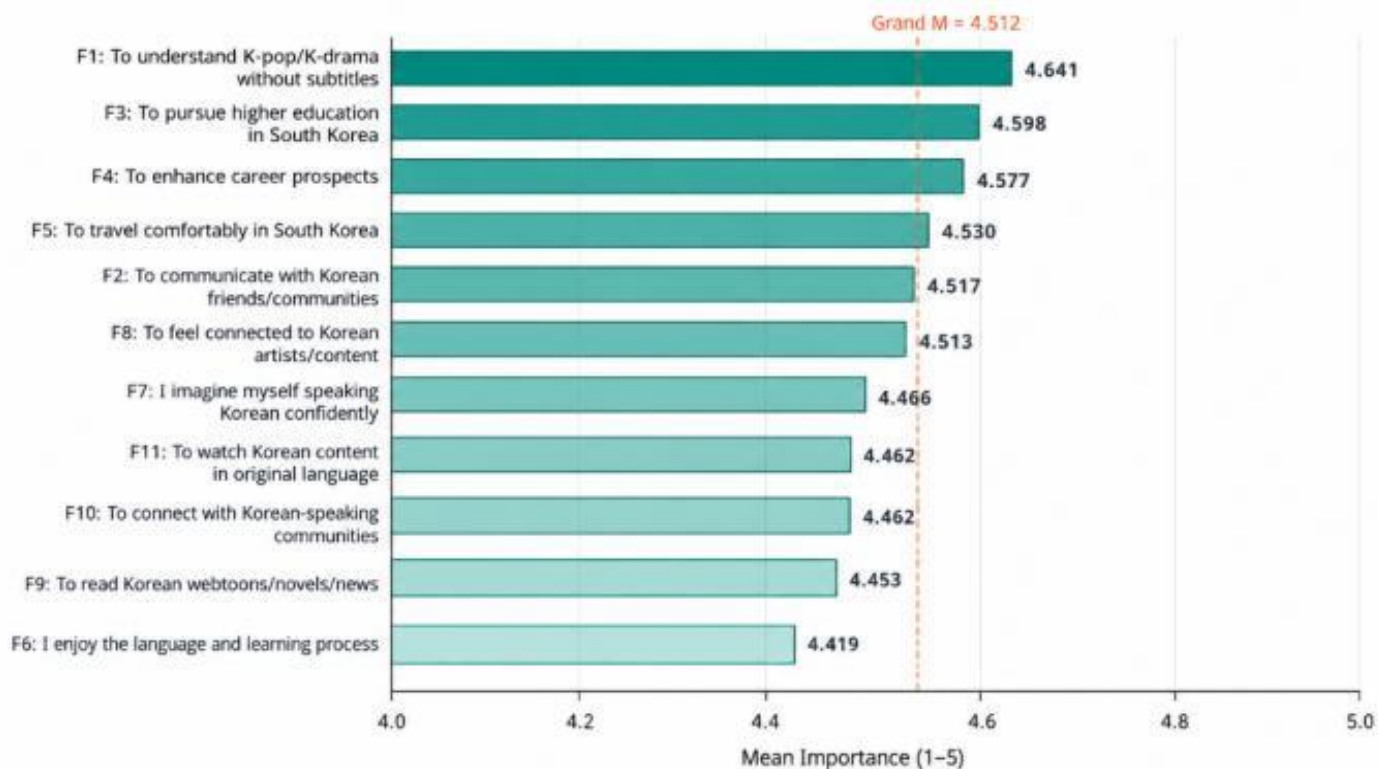


Figure 4.2: Ranked Motivation Items

Note: The motivation instrument contained 11 analyzable items. The items are ranked from highest to lowest mean. Entertainment motivation (F1, M = 4.641) was the highest-rated, followed by educational (F3, M = 4.598) and career (F4, M = 4.577) motivations.

Categorical Variables

Table 4.3: Frequency Distributions for Categorical Variables

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age Group	18–20	49	20.94%
	21–23	59	25.21%
	24–26	113	48.29%
	27–30	13	5.56%
	Total	234	100%
Gender	Male	127	54.27%
	Female	107	45.73%
	Total	234	100%
Prior Korean Exposure	No	195	83.33%
	Yes	39	16.67%
	Total	234	100%
Study Hours/Week (E3)	Less than 1 hour	8	3.42%
	1–3 hours	80	34.19%
	4–6 hours	128	54.70%
	7–10 hours	18	7.69%
	Total	234	100%

Bivariate Correlations

Table 4.4: Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variable	EE	CE	EM	MOT	G2	E7	Age	Gender	A4
EE	1.000	.735***	.758***	.808***	.114	.057	.108	.055	-.410***
CE	.735***	1.000	.792***	.820***	.169*	.114	.004	.030	-.384***
EM	.758***	.792***	1.000	.822***	.113	.052	.035	-.010	-.275***
MOT	.808***	.820***	.822***	1.000	.161*	.099	.092	.008	-.243***
G2	.114	.169*	.113	.161*	1.000	.927***	-.127	.494***	-.032
E7	.057	.114	.052	.099	.927***	1.000	-.167*	.520***	.006
Age	.108	.004	.035	.092	-.127	-.167*	1.000	-.303***	-.041
Gender	.055	.030	-.010	.008	.494***	.520***	-.303***	1.000	-.042
A4	-.410***	-.384***	-.275***	-.243***	-.032	.006	-.041	-.042	1.000

Note: EE = Entertainment Engagement; CE = Cultural Engagement; EM = Emotional Engagement; MOT = Motivation; G2 = Likelihood of visiting/living in Korea; E7 = Intention to continue; A4 = Prior Korean Exposure.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

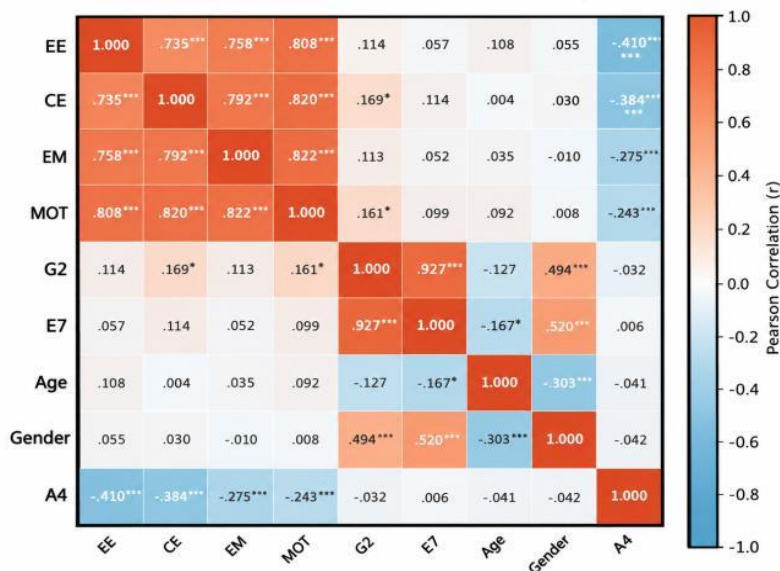


Figure 4.3: Correlation Heatmap

Note: The heatmap displays the Pearson correlations among all principal variables. Darker colors indicate stronger correlations. EE, CE, EM, and MOT are strongly intercorrelated ($r = .735-.822, p < .001$). G2 is strongly correlated with E7 ($r = .927, p < .001$). * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Hypothesis Testing

H1: EE → MOT

Table 4.5: H1 Regression Results

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	df1	df2	p
EE → MOT	.808	.653	.651	436.73	1	232	< .001
Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI	
Constant	1.870	.135	—	13.852	< .001	[1.604, 2.136]	
EE	.614	.029	.808	20.900	< .001	[.557, .671]	

H1 was supported.

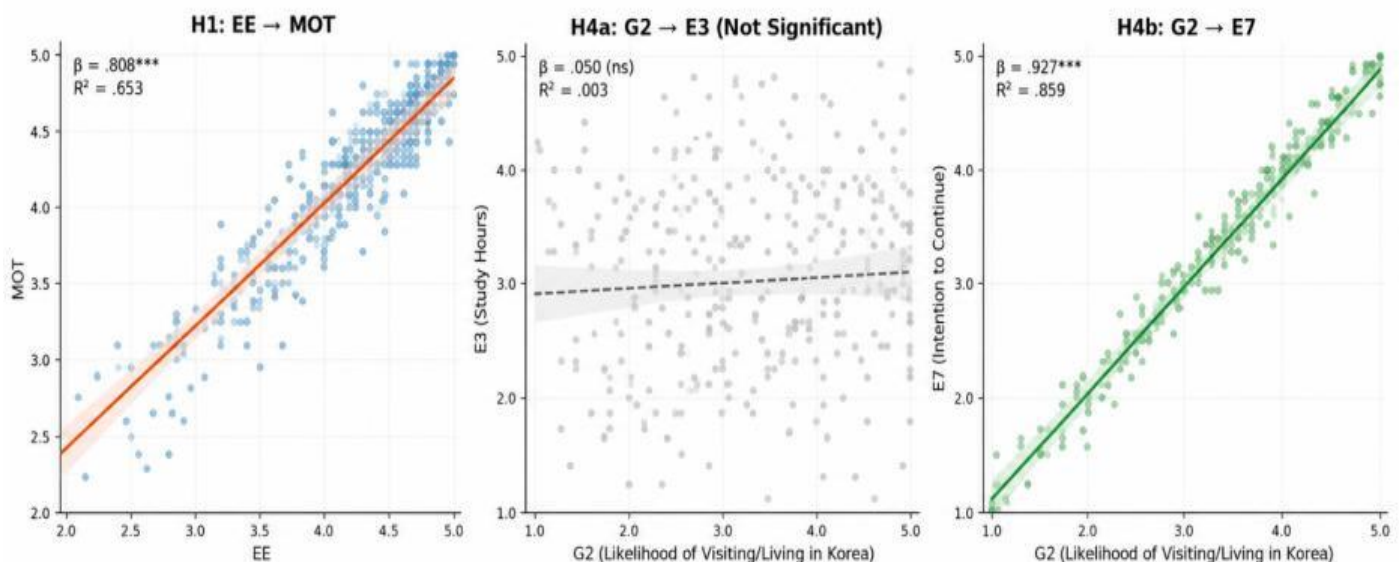


Figure 4.4: Hypothesis Scatter Plots

Note: The scatter plots display the relationships tested in H1 ($EE \rightarrow MOT$), H4a ($G2 \rightarrow E3$), and H4b ($G2 \rightarrow E7$), with fitted regression lines. H1 and H4b show strong positive relationships, while H4a shows no relationship.

H2a: $EE \rightarrow CE \rightarrow MOT$

Table 4.6: H2a Mediation Results

Path	Estimate	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI
a ($EE \rightarrow CE$)	.663	.048	13.843	< .001	[.568, .757]
b ($CE \rightarrow MOT$)	.453	.049	9.186	< .001	[.356, .550]
c (Total)	.614	.029	20.900	< .001	[.557, .671]
c' (Direct)	.314	.036	8.765	< .001	[.244, .384]
Indirect Effect					
Estimate		Boot SE	Boot 95% CI		
$EE \rightarrow CE \rightarrow MOT$		.300	.064	[.179, .431]	

H2a was supported

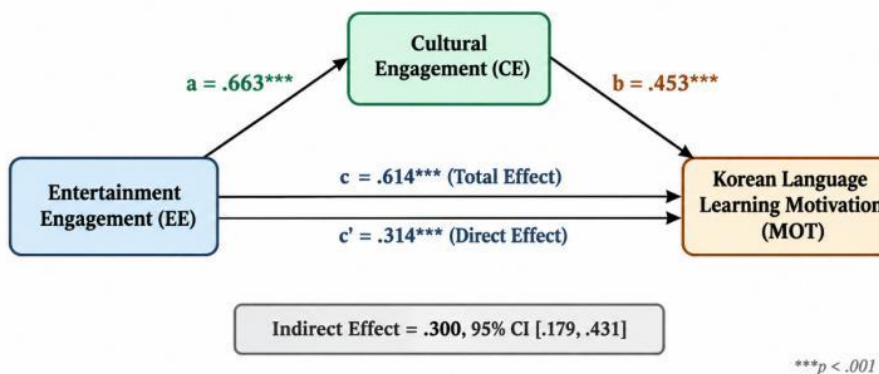


Figure 4.5: Mediation Model ($EE \rightarrow CE \rightarrow MOT$)

Note: The diagram displays the mediation model with Cultural Engagement as a mediator. Path coefficients are shown on the arrows. The indirect effect was .300 (95% CI [.179, .431]). *** $p < .001$.

H2b: $EE \rightarrow EM \rightarrow MOT$

Table 4.7: H2b Mediation Results

Path	Estimate	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI
a ($EE \rightarrow EM$)	.702	.050	14.121	< .001	[.604, .800]
b ($EM \rightarrow MOT$)	.443	.052	8.542	< .001	[.341, .545]
c (Total)	.614	.029	20.900	< .001	[.557, .671]
c' (Direct)	.303	.037	8.270	< .001	[.231, .375]
Indirect Effect					
Estimate		Boot SE	Boot 95% CI		
$EE \rightarrow EM \rightarrow MOT$		.311	.072	[.181, .461]	

H2b was supported.

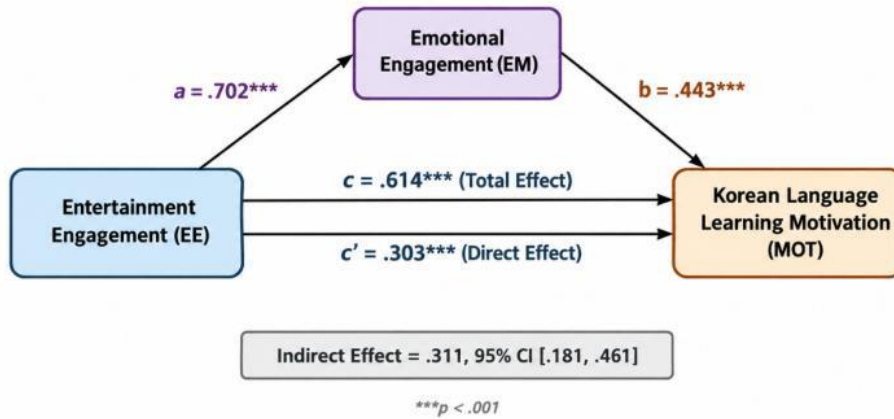


Figure 4.6: Mediation Model ($EE \rightarrow EM \rightarrow MOT$)

Note: The diagram displays the mediation model with Emotional Engagement as a mediator. Path coefficients are shown on the arrows. The indirect effect was .311 (95% CI [.181, .461]). $***p < .001$.

H3: Genres $\rightarrow$ MOT

Table 4.8: H3 Multiple Regression Results

Model	R		R^2	Adjusted R^2	F	$df1$	$df2$	p
Genres $\rightarrow$ MOT	.212		.045	.028	2.69	4	229	.032
Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI		
Constant	4.239	.122	—	34.676	< .001	[3.998, 4.480]		
K-pop	.228	.086	.192	2.633	.009	[.058, .398]		
K-drama	.099	.078	.086	1.272	.205	[-.055, .253]		
K-movie	.012	.077	.010	.156	.876	[-.139, .163]		
Variety	-.038	.076	-.033	-.498	.618	[-.187, .112]		

H3 received partial support.

H4a and H4b: Future Aspirations $\rightarrow$ Study Hours and Intention to Continue

H4a: G2 $\rightarrow$ E3

Table 4.9a: H4a Regression Results

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F	$df1$	$df2$	p
G2 $\rightarrow$ E3	.050	.003	-.002	.588	1	232	.444
Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI	
Constant	3.084	.119	—	25.810	< .001	[2.849, 3.319]	
G2	.026	.034	.050	.767	.444	[-.041, .094]	

Note: Study hours (E3) was treated as an approximately continuous variable. A sensitivity analysis using ordinal logistic regression yielded substantively identical results. The very high correlation between G2 and E7 ($r = .927$) suggests substantial conceptual overlap. These results should be interpreted with this overlap in mind. These results indicate that the likelihood of visiting or living in Korea was not significantly associated with study hours per week. A sensitivity analysis using ordinal logistic regression yielded substantively identical results, confirming the robustness of this finding. **H4a was not supported.**

H4b: G2 → E7

Table 4.9b: H4b Regression Results

Model	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i> ₁	<i>df</i> ₂	<i>p</i>
G2 → E7	.927	.859	.859	1419.44	1	232	< .001
Predictor	<i>B</i>	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	
Constant	.230	.077	—	2.976	.003	[.078, .383]	
G2	.911	.024	.927	37.676	< .001	[.863, .958]	

Note: The very high correlation between G2 and E7 ($r = .927$) suggests substantial conceptual overlap. These results should be interpreted with this overlap in mind.

These results indicate that the likelihood of visiting or living in Korea was strongly associated with intention to continue learning Korean. However, the very high correlation between G2 and E7 ($r = .927$) suggests substantial conceptual overlap, and this finding should not be interpreted as definitive evidence of a distinct predictive relationship. **H4b was supported, but the result should be interpreted with caution.**

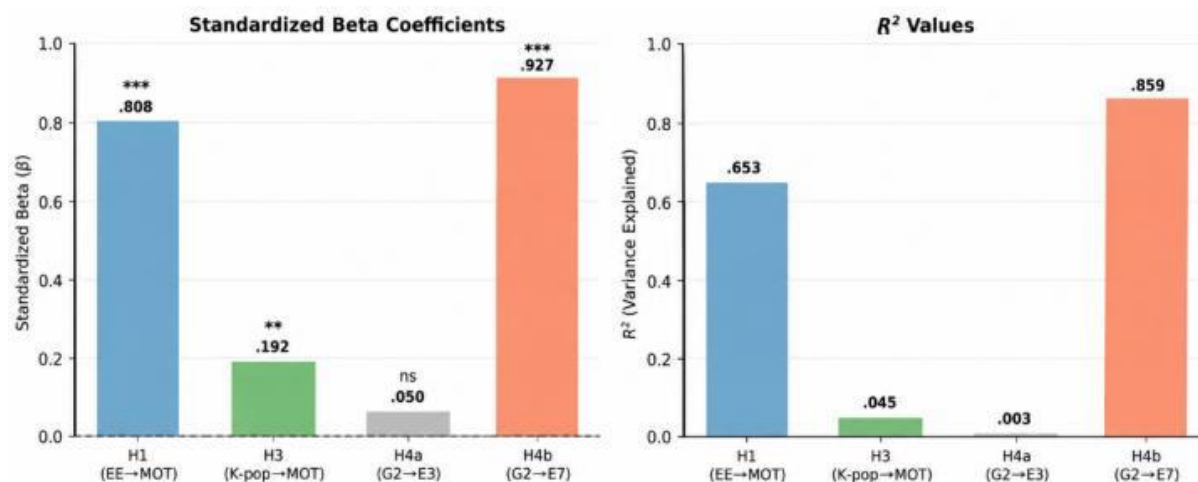


Figure 4.7: Standardized Beta Coefficients and *R*² Values

Note: The bar charts display the standardized beta coefficients (β) and *R*² values for the main hypothesis tests (H1, H3, H4a, H4b). H4b shows the strongest effect ($\beta = .927$, $R^2 = .859$). *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, ns = not significant.

Supplementary Analyses

Demographic Comparisons

Table 4.10a: Age Group Differences in MOT

Age Group	<i>n</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>
18–20	49	4.648	0.445

21–23	59	4.545	0.513
24–26	113	4.431	0.506
27–30	13	4.343	0.480

$F(3, 230) = 4.258, p = .006, \eta^2 = .053$

Table 4.10b: Gender Differences in MOT

Group	n	Mean	SD
Male	127	4.514	0.497
Female	107	4.511	0.519

$t(232) = .114, p = .909, d = .015$

Table 4.10c: Prior Exposure Differences in MOT

Group	n	Mean	SD
No Prior Exposure	195	4.463	0.502
Prior Exposure	39	4.756	0.454

$t(232) = -3.814, p < .001, d = -.669$

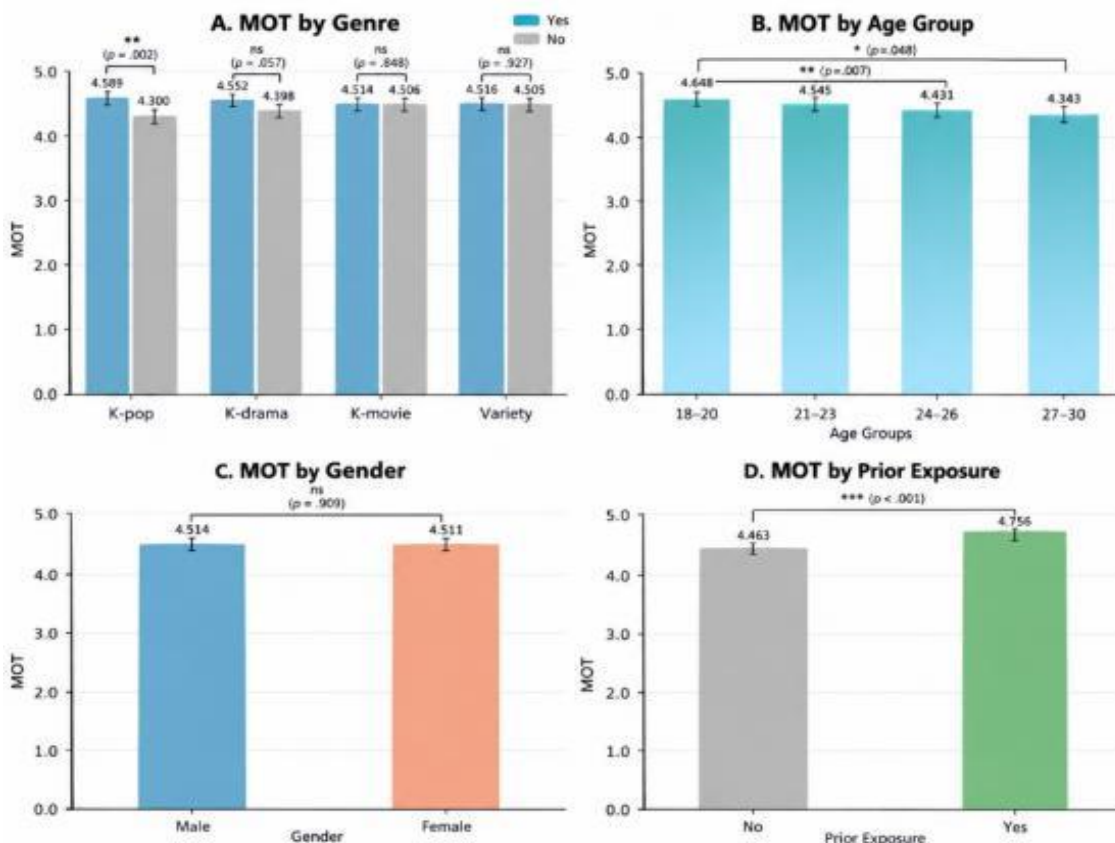


Figure 4.8: Group Comparisons for Motivation

Note: The bar charts display mean MOT scores across genre, age groups, gender, and prior Korean exposure (A4). Error bars represent standard errors. Significant differences were observed for age groups ($F(3, 230) = 4.258, p = .006$) and prior exposure ($t = -3.814, p < .001$). *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, ns = not significant.

Genre-Specific ANOVAs

Table 4.11: Genre-Specific ANOVAs

Genre	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Mean (No)	Mean (Yes)
K-pop	10.14	.002	4.300	4.589
K-drama	3.66	.057	4.398	4.552
K-movie	.04	.848	4.506	4.514
Variety	.01	.927	4.505	4.516

Multiple Regression (Full Model)

Table 4.12: Multiple Regression Results

Model	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i> ₁	<i>df</i> ₂	<i>p</i>
Full Model	.899	.809	.804	160.31	6	227	< .001
Predictor	<i>B</i>	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	VIF
Constant	.486	.202	—	2.405	.017	[.088, .884]	—
EE	.308	.041	.369	7.436	< .001	[.226, .389]	2.933
CE	.373	.050	.382	7.396	< .001	[.274, .473]	3.172
EM	.261	.051	.274	5.136	< .001	[.161, .362]	3.386
Age	.009	.006	.046	1.484	.139	[-.003, .021]	1.140
Gender	-.002	.031	-.002	-.057	.955	[-.063, .060]	1.124
A4	.180	.044	.132	4.076	< .001	[.093, .267]	1.256

Note: The motivation composite was treated as an exploratory index. Because the motivation scale demonstrated low internal consistency ($\alpha = .605$) and the EFA identified multiple factors, the regression results involving MOT should be interpreted cautiously.

Barriers to Korean Language Learning

To address RQ5, descriptive analyses were conducted to examine the barriers participants encountered in learning Korean. Table 4.13 presents the frequency and percentage of participants who identified each barrier as their single biggest challenge (H2). The most frequently cited barrier was lack of speaking partners (21.8%), followed by lack of structured guidance (20.1%), and difficulty progressing beyond the beginner level (17.5%). Other notable barriers included cost of classes, books, or learning materials (11.1%), lack of vocabulary (8.5%), and difficulty maintaining consistent study habits (7.7%). Less frequently cited barriers included lack of time (5.6%), difficulty with pronunciation (3.8%), loss of motivation (2.1%), difficulty with Korean grammar structure (1.3%), and difficulty finding suitable learning resources (0.4%). These findings suggest that while initial motivation to learn Korean may be high, learners face substantial practical and structural barriers to sustained engagement. The prominence of speaking partners and structured guidance as barriers highlights the need for interactive and supportive learning environments that go beyond self-directed study.

Table 4.13: Barriers to Korean Language Learning

Barrier	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of speaking partners	51	21.8%

Lack of structured guidance	47	20.1%
Difficulty progressing beyond the beginner level	41	17.5%
Cost of classes, books, or learning materials	26	11.1%
Lack of vocabulary	20	8.5%
Difficulty maintaining consistent study habits	18	7.7%
Lack of time	13	5.6%
Difficulty with pronunciation	9	3.8%
Loss of motivation	5	2.1%
Difficulty with Korean grammar structure	3	1.3%
Difficulty finding suitable learning resources	1	0.4%
Total	234	100%

Note: Based on H2 (single biggest barrier) responses. $N = 234$.

Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Table 4.14: Hypothesis Summary

Hypothesis	Statistical Test	Key Result	Effect Size	Decision
H1: EE → MOT	Simple Linear Regression	$\beta = .808, p < .001$	$R^2 = .653$	Supported
H2a: EE → CE → MOT	Mediation (PROCESS Model 4)	Indirect = .300, 95% CI [.179, .431]	—	Supported
H2b: EE → EM → MOT	Mediation (PROCESS Model 4)	Indirect = .311, 95% CI [.181, .461]	—	Supported
H3: Genres → MOT	Multiple Regression	$F(4, 229) = 2.69, p = .032$	$R^2 = .045$	Partially Supported
H4a: G2 → E3	Simple Linear Regression	$\beta = .050, p = .444$	$R^2 = .003$	Not Supported
H4b: G2 → E7	Simple Linear Regression	$\beta = .927, p < .001$	$R^2 = .859$	Supported(interpret with caution)

Note: EE = Entertainment Engagement; CE = Cultural Engagement; EM = Emotional Engagement; MOT = Korean Language Learning Motivation; G2 = Likelihood of visiting/living in Korea; E3 = Study hours per week; E7 = Intention to continue learning. H3 received partial support: the overall genre model was statistically significant, but only K-pop demonstrated a significant unique association with motivation ($\beta = .192, p = .009$). H4b should be interpreted with caution due to the very high correlation between G2 and E7 ($r = .927$), which suggests substantial conceptual overlap.

SUMMARY

H1, H2a, H2b, and H4b were supported. H3 received partial support. H4a was not supported. Supplementary findings revealed significant differences by age group and prior exposure but not by gender. Descriptive analysis of barriers indicated that lack of speaking partners (21.8%) and lack of structured guidance (20.1%) were the most frequently cited challenges.

DISCUSSION

This study investigated the relationship between Korean entertainment engagement and Korean language learning motivation among young adults aged 18–30. The findings provide substantial support for the proposed conceptual model, while also revealing important differences across entertainment genres and learning outcomes. Entertainment engagement was positively associated with language learning motivation, and this relationship was partially mediated by both cultural and emotional engagement. Different entertainment genres were differentially associated with motivation, with K-pop emerging as the most salient predictor. Korea-related aspirations were strongly associated with intention to continue learning, though not with actual study hours.

The first major finding was that entertainment engagement was strongly associated with Korean language learning motivation. This is consistent with previous research demonstrating that Hallyu serves as a powerful initial motivator for Korean language learning (Curran, 2024; Kim & Cho, 2024; Oanh & Tri, 2026). The strength of this association is notably high, suggesting that among young adults who consume Korean entertainment, engagement with that content is closely tied to their desire to learn the language. From the perspective of the L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2009), this finding suggests that entertainment engagement may be associated with the construction of the Ideal L2 Self—learners may imagine themselves as future speakers of Korean, capable of understanding content without subtitles and participating in Korean-speaking communities. However, because this study employed a cross-sectional design, the direction of this relationship cannot be definitively established. It is equally plausible that individuals who are already motivated to learn Korean seek out more Korean entertainment content.

The second major finding was that both cultural engagement and emotional engagement partially mediated the relationship between entertainment engagement and motivation. Conceptually, this means that entertainment engagement was associated with greater cultural engagement and emotional involvement with Korean media, which in turn were associated with stronger motivation to learn Korean. Rather than a direct relationship alone, the results suggest that entertainment engagement may be associated not only directly with motivation but also indirectly through greater cultural engagement and emotional involvement with Korean media content and fan communities. These findings align with Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1974), which posits that audiences actively select media to satisfy specific needs. From a cultural capital perspective (Bourdieu, 1986), learners may perceive Korean proficiency as a means of deepening their engagement with the culture they already admire, thereby enhancing their access to exclusive content and social networks within transnational fan communities. The third major finding was that genre-specific effects existed, but only for K-pop. The overall genre model was statistically significant, with K-pop as the only significant unique predictor. K-drama approached significance ($p = .057$), while K-movie and variety shows were not significant predictors. The prominence of K-pop may reflect its global reach and the repeated exposure to Korean-language content it provides. The highly participatory nature of K-pop fandom may also create additional opportunities for language-related engagement, although these mechanisms were not directly measured in the present study. Previous research has also identified K-pop as a particularly potent motivator for Korean language learning (Lee & Han, 2026; Oanh & Tri, 2026). However, the relatively small effect size ($R^2 = .045$) suggests that genre preferences alone explain only a modest portion of the variance in motivation.

The fourth major finding concerns the relationship between future aspirations and learning behavior. The likelihood of visiting or living in Korea was not significantly associated with study hours, but it was very strongly associated with intention to continue learning. This pattern suggests that aspirations to visit or live in Korea may function primarily as a motivational orientation rather than as a direct predictor of current study behavior. However, the very high correlation between G2 and E7 ($r = .927$) raises the possibility that these two constructs overlap substantially and may not be empirically distinct. The H4b result, while statistically very strong, should therefore not be presented as an equally strong substantive discovery. Future research should examine whether measures of Korea-related aspirations and intention to continue learning are tapping into the same underlying construct. The lack of association between aspirations and study hours also highlights the importance of distinguishing between different types of learning outcomes—intention versus behavior—as they may have different antecedents and correlates. With respect to RQ5, the descriptive analysis of barriers revealed that lack of speaking partners (21.8%) and lack of structured guidance (20.1%) were the most frequently cited

challenges. These findings align with previous research indicating that learners motivated by entertainment content often struggle to progress beyond the beginner level without structured support (Harrison, 2025; Park et al., 2026). The prominence of speaking partners as a barrier highlights the social nature of language learning and the limitations of self-directed study. For educators and curriculum developers, these findings suggest that programs should prioritize opportunities for interactive practice and provide clear learning pathways to help learners sustain motivation beyond initial engagement.

Supplementary analyses revealed several additional insights. First, motivation differed significantly across age groups, with younger participants (18–20) reporting higher motivation than older participants (24–26 and 27–30). Second, no gender differences were found in motivation. Third, participants with prior Korean exposure reported significantly higher motivation than those without. Fourth, the full multiple regression model explained 80.9% of the variance in motivation ($R^2 = .809$), with entertainment engagement, cultural engagement, emotional engagement, and prior exposure all emerging as significant predictors. The findings of this study have several practical implications. For Korean language educators, the results suggest that leveraging students' existing engagement with Korean entertainment—particularly K-pop—may be an effective way to enhance motivation. Rather than treating entertainment as separate from academic learning, instructors could incorporate culturally relevant materials that connect with learners' interests. For curriculum developers, the finding that cultural and emotional engagement mediate the relationship between entertainment consumption and motivation suggests that programs should include opportunities for learners to explore Korean culture and connect with fan communities. For learners themselves, the results suggest that developing a clear vision of a future self that speaks Korean—whether for travel, study, or career purposes—may help sustain long-term motivation. Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference; all relationships are interpreted as associations. Second, the sample was highly engaged and motivated, as evidenced by ceiling effects and negative skewness in the composite variables. This likely reflects self-selection bias: individuals who are deeply invested in Korean entertainment and already motivated to learn Korean may have been disproportionately likely to participate in a survey distributed through Korean entertainment communities. This limits the generalizability of findings to less engaged populations, and future research should recruit from more diverse sources to capture a broader range of engagement and motivation. Third, the motivation scale demonstrated low internal consistency ($\alpha = .605$), and the high intercorrelations among entertainment engagement, cultural engagement, emotional engagement, and motivation raise questions about discriminant validity. Fourth, the sample was not geographically representative, being concentrated in Bangladesh and India. Fifth, the very high correlation between G2 (likelihood of visiting/living in Korea) and E7 (intention to continue learning) suggests possible conceptual overlap between these measures. These limitations should be addressed in future research through longitudinal designs, more diverse samples, and more refined measurement instruments.

In conclusion, this study provides evidence that Korean entertainment engagement is strongly associated with Korean language learning motivation among young adults, and that this relationship is partially mediated by cultural and emotional engagement. The findings contribute to the growing body of literature on media-driven language learning and offer practical insights for educators and curriculum developers. As Hallyu continues to shape global cultural consumption, understanding how entertainment engagement may be associated with sustained language learning remains a critical area of inquiry. Future research should build on these findings by examining causal processes, exploring other entertainment genres, and investigating how learners transition from initial interest to sustained proficiency.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study investigated the relationship between Korean entertainment engagement and Korean language learning motivation among young adults aged 18–30, examining the mediating roles of cultural and emotional engagement and the predictive role of Korea-related aspirations. Drawing on 234 valid responses from a sample drawn primarily from Bangladesh and India, the study provided substantial support for the proposed conceptual model, while revealing important nuances across entertainment genres and learning outcomes.

The findings established four principal conclusions. First, entertainment engagement was strongly associated with Korean language learning motivation, providing evidence that Hallyu content may serve as an important entry point into Korean language learning. Second, both cultural engagement and emotional engagement partially mediated this relationship, indicating that entertainment engagement was associated not only directly but also indirectly through greater cultural engagement and emotional involvement with Korean media and fan communities. Third, genre-specific effects existed but were limited: although the overall genre model was significant, only K-pop emerged as a significant unique predictor. Fourth, Korea-related aspirations were not associated with study hours but were very strongly associated with intention to continue learning, though this finding should be interpreted cautiously due to the high correlation between the two measures. Supplementary analyses further revealed that motivation differed significantly by age group and prior Korean exposure but not by gender, and that the full model explained 80.9% of the variance in motivation. The findings contribute to second language acquisition research in three ways. First, they extend the L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2009) by demonstrating that entertainment engagement may be associated with the construction of the Ideal L2 Self, as learners may imagine themselves as future speakers of Korean through repeated exposure to Hallyu content. Second, the study supports Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1974) by showing that active, goal-oriented media consumption is associated with needs for cultural understanding and emotional connection that may, in turn, be associated with language learning motivation. Third, the mediating roles of cultural and emotional engagement refine Cultural Capital Theory (Bourdieu, 1986) by illustrating how Korean proficiency is perceived as a means of accessing exclusive content and transnational fan networks. Collectively, these findings clarify the mechanisms—previously underspecified in the literature—through which entertainment consumption may be associated with language learning motivation.

The results offer several actionable recommendations. For Korean language educators, the findings suggest that integrating Hallyu content—particularly K-pop materials—into curricula may enhance learner motivation and engagement, especially among younger learners. Rather than treating entertainment as separate from academic instruction, educators could design activities that leverage learners' existing cultural interests, such as lyric analysis, drama-based dialogue practice, or fan community discussions. For curriculum developers and language institutes, the finding that cultural and emotional engagement mediate the relationship between entertainment consumption and motivation suggests that programs should include structured opportunities for cultural exploration and community participation, not merely linguistic drills. For learners themselves, the results suggest that developing a clear and vivid vision of a future self that speaks Korean—whether for travel, study, or career purposes—may help sustain motivation beyond initial curiosity. For cultural policymakers, the findings reinforce the role of Hallyu as a soft power mechanism that can be strategically supported to promote Korean language education globally. Several limitations should be acknowledged. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference; all relationships are interpreted as associations. The sample was highly engaged and motivated, as evidenced by ceiling effects and negative skewness in the composite variables. This likely reflects self-selection bias, as participants were recruited through Korean entertainment communities and may have been disproportionately likely to be highly engaged fans. This limits generalizability to less engaged populations. The motivation scale demonstrated low internal consistency ($\alpha = .605$), and the high intercorrelations among entertainment engagement, cultural engagement, emotional engagement, and motivation raise questions about discriminant validity. The sample was not geographically representative, being concentrated in Bangladesh and India. The very high correlation between G2 and E7 ($r = .927$) suggests conceptual overlap that warrants further examination. Future research should employ longitudinal designs to examine causal processes over time, use more diverse and representative samples, develop more refined measurement instruments, and investigate how learners transition from initial entertainment-driven interest to sustained language proficiency. Comparative studies across cultural contexts would also help clarify whether the mechanisms identified here generalize beyond the present sample. This study provides evidence that Korean entertainment engagement is strongly associated with Korean language learning motivation among young adults, and that this relationship is partially mediated by cultural and emotional engagement. As Hallyu continues to shape global cultural consumption, understanding how entertainment engagement may be associated with sustained language learning remains a critical area of inquiry. The findings contribute to theoretical debates on media-driven language acquisition and offer practical insights for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers seeking to support this growing cohort of learners. Young people today are not merely passive recipients of Korean content; they are active, intentional agents who pursue linguistic competence as a means of deepening their participation in a global

cultural community. Understanding how and why they do so is essential for any comprehensive account of contemporary language learning in the age of digital cultural flows.

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