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From Language Learning to Language Loving: Rethinking Motivation in Korean Language Education

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Abstract: The global expansion of Korean language education has been strongly influenced by the Korean Wave, popular culture, digital media, study-abroad aspirations, and increasing academic and economic connections with Korea. Many learners begin studying Korean because of K-pop, Korean dramas, films, webtoons, food, fashion, or social media. However, initial cultural interest does not automatically develop into sustained engagement with the language. Learners may experience declining motivation when they encounter linguistic difficulty, limited opportunities for communication, examination pressure, or uncertainty about the future value of Korean. This conceptual article rethinks motivation in Korean language education by proposing a shift from language learning, understood as the acquisition of linguistic knowledge and skills, to language loving, understood as a deeper, long-term emotional, cultural, and personal attachment to the Korean language.

Drawing on Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System, the article examines how the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self, and the L2 Learning Experience shape learners' motivation. It also explores the role of the Korean Wave in creating initial interest and identifies pedagogical conditions that may transform cultural interest into lasting engagement. The article proposes a four-stage Language Loving Model consisting of cultural attraction, initial language learning, motivational challenge, and language loving. Korean language education in Uzbekistan is discussed as a relevant context for applying this framework because interest in Korean language and culture has been growing among young learners. The article argues that Korean language education should move beyond grammar-centered instruction and examination-oriented learning. Teachers should create learning environments in which students can connect Korean with their identities, future goals, cultural interests, and real communicative needs. Such an approach can help learners move from temporary interest in Korean culture to a sustainable love of the Korean language.

Keywords: Korean language education; Korean as a Foreign Language; learner motivation; L2 Motivational Self System; Korean Wave; language loving; learner engagement; Uzbekistan

1. Introduction

Korean language education has become one of the fastest-growing areas of foreign language education in many parts of the world. The global popularity of Korean popular culture, including K-pop, Korean dramas, films, webtoons, food, fashion, and social media content, has created unprecedented interest in Korea and the Korean language. For many young learners, Korean is no longer simply a school subject or an instrumental tool for employment. It is also a language through which they engage with music, entertainment, identity, friendship, travel, and imagined futures.

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At the same time, the initial enthusiasm created by Korean popular culture does not always last. Learners may begin studying Korean with excitement, but their motivation can weaken when they face the complexity of the Korean writing system, honorifics, verb conjugation, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and differences between spoken and written Korean. In addition, classroom instruction does not always reflect the cultural and communicative reasons that brought learners to Korean in the first place. When lessons focus mainly on memorization, tests, and grammar rules, students may begin to see Korean as a difficult academic requirement rather than as a meaningful part of their lives.

This situation raises an important question for Korean language education: how can teachers help learners move from short-term interest in Korean culture to long-term engagement with the Korean language? This article proposes that the answer lies in rethinking motivation. Instead of viewing motivation only as a reason for starting to learn a language, educators should view it as a continuous process of building a meaningful relationship between the learner and the language.

The central concept of this article is language loving. Language learning refers to the process of acquiring vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. Language loving, by contrast, refers to a deeper relationship with the language. A learner who loves a language does not merely study it because of an examination or external requirement. Such a learner sees the language as part of their identity, future, imagination, and emotional life. Language loving involves curiosity, enjoyment, persistence, cultural openness, and a desire to communicate.

This article uses Korean language education in Uzbekistan as a relevant context for discussion. Korean language education in Uzbekistan has expanded because of increasing interest in Korean culture, educational cooperation between Uzbekistan and Korea, opportunities to study in Korea, and the presence of Korean companies and cultural institutions. However, Uzbek learners may also face challenges such as limited exposure to Korean outside the classroom, differences between Korean and Uzbek linguistic structures, examination pressure, and uncertainty about how Korean will be useful in their future careers.

The purpose of this article is threefold. First, it examines the limitations of traditional approaches to motivation in language education. Second, it explains how the L2 Motivational Self System can help educators understand why some learners remain engaged while others lose interest. Third, it proposes a conceptual framework, the Language Loving Model, that can help learners move from language learning to language loving.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Motivation in Foreign Language Learning

Motivation is one of the most important factors in foreign language learning. It influences how much effort learners invest, how long they continue studying, and how they respond to difficulties. In traditional research, motivation has often been divided into integrative and instrumental types. Integrative motivation refers to a learner's interest in the culture and community of the target language, while instrumental motivation refers to practical goals such as passing an examination, obtaining a scholarship, or finding employment.

However, motivation is not a fixed characteristic that remains unchanged throughout the learning process. A learner may begin studying Korean because of a favorite K-pop group or a Korean drama, but later experience a decrease in motivation when the language becomes more difficult. Motivation can increase, decrease, disappear, and return. Therefore, it should be understood as a dynamic process rather than a stable personal trait.

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Demotivation refers to the loss or reduction of motivation. It may result from repeated failure, boring lessons, lack of progress, negative feedback, anxiety, personal problems, or unclear goals. Remotivation refers to the process through which learners regain their motivation after experiencing demotivation. Understanding both demotivation and remotivation is essential for language teachers because learners' interest in a language can change over time.

2.2 Korean as a Foreign Language Education

Korean as a Foreign Language, commonly abbreviated as KFL, refers to the teaching and learning of Korean by learners who do not use Korean as their first language or primary language of daily communication. The number of KFL learners has increased significantly in recent decades because of the global spread of Korean culture, the expansion of Korean universities and companies, and the growing popularity of Korean media.

KFL learners are not a homogeneous group. Some learners are interested in Korean popular culture, while others are motivated by academic goals, employment opportunities, family connections, or plans to study in Korea. Some learners may begin with cultural interest and later develop academic or professional goals. Others may begin with practical goals and later develop an emotional connection to the language. Therefore, Korean language education should recognize the diversity of learners' motivations.

Research on KFL learners has shown that motivation is connected to cultural interest, future self-images, learning experiences, and engagement with Korean media. Learners who can connect Korean with their personal goals and identities are more likely to remain engaged. In contrast, learners who see Korean only as a school requirement may lose interest when external pressure decreases.

2.3 The Korean Wave and Language Learning

The Korean Wave, or Hallyu, has played a major role in the global spread of Korean language education. K-pop, Korean dramas, films, webtoons, variety shows, beauty products, food, and social media content have made Korean culture visible and attractive to young people around the world. For many learners, Korean popular culture is the first point of contact with the language.

A learner may begin by listening to Korean songs, watching dramas with subtitles, following Korean celebrities on social media, or learning simple expressions used by their favorite idols. Gradually, they may become curious about the meaning of words, the structure of sentences, and the culture behind the media they consume. In this sense, popular culture functions as a doorway to language learning because it creates emotional interest before formal instruction begins.

However, popular culture alone cannot guarantee sustained language learning. A learner may enjoy Korean dramas but dislike formal study. They may recognize words in songs but struggle to produce grammatically correct sentences. They may enjoy passive consumption of Korean media but avoid speaking because of fear of making mistakes. There is also a risk that culture-based motivation remains superficial if learners are interested only in entertainment and do not develop a deeper interest in communication, culture, or language use.

Therefore, teachers should not dismiss popular culture, but neither should they rely on it alone. The challenge is to transform cultural interest into linguistic engagement. Korean Wave content can be used effectively when it is connected to meaningful language tasks, such as analyzing drama scenes, studying song lyrics, discussing cultural differences, and practicing real-life communication.

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2.4 The L2 Motivational Self System

One of the most influential modern frameworks for understanding second language motivation is Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System. This framework argues that language learning motivation is shaped by learners' visions of their future selves, as well as by their immediate experiences in the learning environment. The model consists of three main components: the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self, and the L2 Learning Experience.

The Ideal L2 Self refers to the image a learner has of themselves as a successful future user of the target language. For example, an Uzbek student may imagine themselves confidently speaking Korean with Korean friends, working in a Korean company, studying at a Korean university, or watching a Korean drama without subtitles. This imagined future self can motivate the learner to reduce the gap between their present abilities and their desired future abilities.

The Ought-to L2 Self refers to the attributes a learner believes they should possess in order to meet the expectations of others or avoid negative consequences. For example, a student may study Korean because their parents expect them to do so, because they need to pass an examination, or because they believe Korean proficiency will help them find a job. This component is related to duty, obligation, and external expectations.

The L2 Learning Experience refers to the learner's immediate experience of learning the language. It includes the teacher, classroom atmosphere, teaching methods, curriculum, learning materials, peer relationships, and experiences of success or failure. Positive learning experiences can strengthen motivation, while negative experiences can weaken it even when the learner has a strong Ideal L2 Self.

The L2 Motivational Self System is particularly useful for Korean language education because it explains why cultural interest, future goals, and classroom experiences must be considered together. A learner may enjoy Korean culture, but if their classroom experience is negative, their motivation may decrease. Similarly, a learner may have strong instrumental goals, but if they cannot imagine themselves as a future Korean speaker, their motivation may remain fragile.

3. From Language Learning to Language Loving

3.1 Language Learning

Language learning is the process through which learners acquire knowledge and skills related to a new language. In Korean language education, this includes learning Hangul, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Language learning is essential because learners cannot communicate effectively without linguistic knowledge.

However, language learning is often associated with formal education, textbooks, exercises, tests, and grades. When language learning is understood only in this narrow sense, learners may view the language as an academic subject rather than as a meaningful tool for communication and self-expression.

A student can learn a language without loving it. They may memorize vocabulary, complete exercises, pass examinations, and still feel emotionally distant from the language. This situation is common when learners study a language mainly because of external pressure or because they believe it is necessary for their future.

3.2 Language Loving

Language loving refers to a deeper and more personal relationship between the learner and the target language. It describes a situation in which the learner feels emotionally connected to the

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language and sees it as part of their identity, future, and everyday life. Language loving does not mean that learning becomes easy or that the learner never experiences difficulty. Rather, it means that the learner is willing to continue despite difficulty because the language has personal meaning.

Language loving can develop through several experiences. Learners may enjoy Korean songs, dramas, films, or online content. They may feel pride when they understand a Korean sentence without translation. They may imagine themselves speaking Korean in Korea or with Korean friends. They may feel that Korean is part of their personal identity. They may also want to continue learning even when the language becomes difficult.

The concept of language loving is important because it emphasizes the affective and identity-related dimensions of language education. Traditional language teaching often focuses on cognitive outcomes, such as grammar accuracy, vocabulary size, reading comprehension, and test scores. These outcomes are important, but they do not fully explain why learners continue or discontinue studying a language.

A learner may have high linguistic ability but low motivation. Another learner may have limited ability but strong emotional attachment to the language. The second learner may ultimately achieve more because they continue practicing, seeking input, communicating with others, and returning to the language after setbacks.

3.3 Differences Between Language Learning and Language Loving

Language learning and language loving are connected, but they are not the same. Language learning focuses on acquiring skills and knowledge. Language loving focuses on developing a meaningful relationship with the language. Language learning can exist without language loving, but language loving usually supports more sustainable language learning.

For example, a learner may study Korean because they need to pass an examination. This is language learning. Another learner may study Korean because they enjoy Korean culture, imagine themselves speaking Korean in the future, and feel happy when they understand Korean media. This learner is more likely to experience language loving.

The difference can be seen in learners' reactions to difficulty. A learner who sees Korean only as a requirement may give up when the language becomes difficult. A learner who loves Korean may experience frustration, but they are more likely to continue because the language has personal value for them.

4. The Language Loving Model

Based on the discussion above, this article proposes a four-stage Language Loving Model for Korean language education. The model explains how learners may move from cultural interest to long-term attachment to the Korean language. The four stages are cultural attraction, initial language learning, motivational challenge, and language loving.

4.1 Stage One: Cultural Attraction

The first stage begins with cultural attraction. Learners become interested in Korea through K-pop, Korean dramas, films, webtoons, food, fashion, social media, or Korean celebrities. At this stage, learners may not yet have a strong desire to study the language systematically. They may simply enjoy Korean cultural products and feel curiosity about Korea.

Cultural attraction is important because it creates emotional energy. Learners may begin to recognize Korean words in songs or dramas, imitate expressions, or search for information about Korea. This curiosity can later become the foundation for formal language learning.

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4.2 Stage Two: Initial Language Learning

In the second stage, learners decide to study Korean formally. They may enroll in a university course, attend a private language school, join an online class, or begin self-study. At this stage, learners usually focus on Hangul, basic vocabulary, pronunciation, simple grammar, and everyday expressions.

Initial language learning can be exciting because learners begin to see progress. They may learn to read Hangul, introduce themselves in Korean, understand simple phrases in songs, or recognize familiar words in dramas. These early successes are important because they can strengthen learners' confidence and motivation.

4.3 Stage Three: Motivational Challenge

The third stage is often the most difficult. As learners progress, Korean becomes more complex. They encounter honorifics, verb conjugations, particles, complex sentence structures, pronunciation differences, and a large amount of vocabulary. They may also experience anxiety when speaking in front of others or frustration when they cannot understand natural spoken Korean.

At this stage, learners may begin to question their original motivation. They may ask themselves whether Korean is really useful for their future, whether they are making enough progress, or whether they should continue studying. If learners receive negative feedback, feel bored in class, or lack opportunities to use Korean, their motivation may decrease.

This stage is crucial because it determines whether learners continue studying or give up. If teachers provide support, meaningful activities, and opportunities for success, learners can overcome this challenge. If learners feel isolated, anxious, or unsuccessful, they may become demotivated.

4.4 Stage Four: Language Loving

The final stage is language loving. At this stage, learners no longer see Korean only as a school subject or an instrumental requirement. They see it as part of their identity, future, and personal life. They continue learning because they enjoy the language, feel connected to Korean culture, and can imagine themselves using Korean in meaningful ways.

Language loving develops when learners have positive learning experiences, clear future goals, opportunities to use Korean, and a sense of progress. It also develops when learners feel that Korean is connected to their personal identity and cultural interests.

The four stages of the model can be summarized as follows:

Stage	Main characteristic	Learner's perspective
1. Cultural Attraction	Interest in Korean culture through Hallyu	"I like Korean culture."
2. Initial Language Learning	Beginning formal study of Korean	"I want to learn Korean."
3. Motivational Challenge	Difficulty, anxiety, and possible demotivation	"Korean is difficult. Should I continue?"
4. Language Loving	Long-term emotional and personal attachment	"Korean is part of my life and future."

5. Applying the Framework to Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan provides a relevant context for applying the Language Loving Model because interest in Korean language and culture has been growing among young learners. Korean dramas, K-pop, Korean food, technology, and educational opportunities have contributed to this interest. Korean

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language education has expanded in schools, universities, private language centers, and cultural institutions.

The Uzbekistan State University of World Languages has played an important role in Korean language education. Korean has been taught there as a second foreign language since 1995, and a separate Korean philology program began in the 2017–2018 academic year. In addition, Korean language education has been expanding beyond the capital, with new university departments and teacher-training initiatives emerging in regions such as Bukhara.

Uzbek learners may enter Korean language education through different paths. Some may begin because of K-pop or Korean dramas. Others may want to study in Korea, work for Korean companies, or pursue academic careers. Some learners may be influenced by family expectations or by the perceived value of foreign language proficiency. Therefore, the Language Loving Model can help educators understand that learners' motivations may differ and change over time.

At the cultural attraction stage, Uzbek learners may become interested in Korean through media and popular culture. At the initial language learning stage, they may begin studying Hangul and basic expressions. However, at the motivational challenge stage, they may face difficulties related to grammar, pronunciation, limited practice opportunities, and academic pressure. To help learners reach the language loving stage, teachers should connect Korean with learners' personal goals, provide positive classroom experiences, and create opportunities for real communication.

6. Pedagogical Implications

6.1 Use Hallyu Meaningfully

K-pop and Korean dramas should not be used only as entertainment. They should become the basis for structured language tasks. Teachers can select short, appropriate scenes or songs and design activities that develop listening, vocabulary, grammar, speaking, and intercultural awareness.

For example, after watching a short drama scene, students can identify polite and informal expressions, discuss the relationship between speakers, practice role-play, and reflect on cultural differences. This approach uses learners' existing interests while developing linguistic competence.

6.2 Develop the Ideal L2 Self

Teachers should help learners develop a clear and realistic Ideal L2 Self. This can be done through goal-setting activities, reflective writing, classroom discussions, and personal learning plans.

For example, at the beginning of a course, students can write a short paragraph titled "My future self as a Korean speaker." They may describe where they want to use Korean, whom they want to communicate with, and what they want to achieve. Teachers can revisit these goals during the course so that learners can see their progress.

6.3 Create Positive Learning Experiences

Teachers should create a supportive and encouraging classroom environment. Students should feel safe when making mistakes and should receive constructive feedback rather than harsh criticism. Teachers can use pair work, group activities, games, role-plays, and project-based tasks to make learning more engaging.

Positive learning experiences are especially important during the motivational challenge stage. When learners feel supported and see their progress, they are more likely to continue studying Korean.

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6.4 Encourage Learner Autonomy

Learner autonomy refers to the ability and willingness of learners to take responsibility for their own learning. Autonomous learners do not depend only on the teacher. They look for Korean songs, videos, podcasts, articles, and conversation opportunities outside class.

Teachers can support autonomy by helping students set realistic goals, choose materials according to their interests, reflect on their progress, and develop independent study habits. Autonomy is particularly important because classroom time is limited, while language learning requires continuous exposure and practice.

6.5 Connect Korean to Real Life

Korean language education should provide frequent opportunities for meaningful communication. Grammar is important, but grammar should serve communication rather than replace it. Learners need chances to introduce themselves, describe daily routines, express opinions, ask questions, tell stories, and interact with others.

Communicative activities may include role-plays, interviews, information-gap tasks, discussions, presentations, and project-based learning. Such activities help learners experience Korean as a living language rather than as a set of rules.

6.6 Support Learners During Demotivation

Teachers should recognize that demotivation is a normal part of language learning. Instead of treating it as a personal failure of the learner, teachers should help learners identify the causes of demotivation and find ways to regain motivation.

For example, a learner who feels discouraged by slow progress may benefit from smaller goals and visible progress records. A learner who feels anxious about speaking may benefit from low-pressure speaking activities. A learner who loses interest in grammar may benefit from more communicative and culture-based tasks.

7. Discussion

The main argument of this article is that Korean language education should aim not only to produce learners who can pass tests or memorize grammar, but also to develop learners who feel personally connected to Korean. This shift from language learning to language loving has important theoretical and practical implications.

From a theoretical perspective, language loving can be understood as a form of sustained L2 motivation. It is closely connected to the Ideal L2 Self because learners who love Korean often imagine Korean as part of their future identity. It is also connected to the L2 Learning Experience because positive classroom experiences can strengthen emotional attachment to the language.

From a practical perspective, language loving requires more than cultural content. Korean dramas and K-pop can attract learners, but they cannot replace meaningful instruction. Teachers must help learners use Korean actively, experience progress, build confidence, and connect the language to their own lives.

The Uzbek context illustrates this point clearly. Uzbek learners may enter Korean language education through popular culture, but their long-term engagement depends on whether they can find personal, academic, professional, and social meaning in the language. If Korean remains only a subject associated with examinations, motivation may weaken. If Korean becomes a language of friendship, imagination, opportunity, and identity, learners are more likely to continue.

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8. Limitations and Future Research

This article is conceptual rather than empirical. It does not present new survey or interview data. Instead, it develops a theoretical framework based on existing research and established motivation theories. Therefore, the proposed Language Loving Model should be understood as a starting point for further research rather than as a final conclusion.

Future research should empirically examine the model in different educational contexts. Researchers could conduct surveys with Korean language learners to measure cultural attraction, initial motivation, learning experiences, demotivation, and language loving. They could also conduct interviews to understand learners' personal stories and experiences in more depth.

Future studies could also compare learners in different countries, educational levels, and proficiency levels. Such research would help determine whether the Language Loving Model is applicable across contexts and whether certain stages are more important for particular groups of learners.

9. Conclusion

This article has argued that motivation in Korean language education should be rethought through the concept of language loving. While language learning focuses on acquiring linguistic knowledge and skills, language loving describes a deeper and more sustainable relationship between the learner and the language.

The L2 Motivational Self System provides a valuable framework for understanding this process. The Ideal L2 Self helps learners imagine themselves as future Korean speakers. The Ought-to L2 Self connects language learning to external expectations and instrumental goals. The L2 Learning Experience determines whether learners find the process of learning enjoyable, supportive, and meaningful.

The Korean Wave plays an important role in creating initial interest, but it should be used as a starting point rather than as the final goal of Korean language education. Teachers should transform cultural interest into communicative competence, learner autonomy, intercultural understanding, and personal attachment to the language.

In the Uzbek context, where interest in Korean language and culture continues to grow, educators have an important opportunity to design learner-centered programs that support long-term motivation. Future research should empirically examine Uzbek learners' motivational profiles, the role of Hallyu in their learning experiences, and the relationship between language loving, learner autonomy, and language achievement.

Ultimately, the goal of Korean language education should not be simply to teach students Korean. It should be to help them discover why Korean matters to them and to support them in building a lasting relationship with the language.

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