Learning Korean using Online Platforms Following the Success of "Squid Game" and during Pandemic Times

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Abstract

The consumption of Korean popular culture in Indonesia has always been increased since the early 2000s. In September 2021, the entire world was shocked by the South Korean entertainment industry with the appearance of the "Squid Game" Netflix mini series. South Korean language and culture is currently being globalized with the Korean wave, a term given when Korean pop culture has spread worldwide in various countries since the 1990s, such as films and music. The success of South Korean in exporting its culture can be immediately detected by the hike of interests in learning Korean. This study is particularly interested in examining the growing interest in learning Korean using online platforms, following a massive hit of the "Squid Game" in Indonesia. It also seeks to understand Indonesian young people's perceptions towards the Korean language.

Keywords
E-learning, "Squid Game", Korean Language, K-Pop and South Korea.

1. Introduction
Currently, with the COVID-19 pandemic, almost all face-to-face learning has turned to online learning. Digitization and the use of information and communication technology have changed all aspects of the educational process, bringing several benefits as well as disadvantages (Stefanovic and Klochkova 2021). The foreign language education environment has become more colorful, attractive and effective with the use of digital learning materials over the last few years (Karademir, Alper, Soğuksu, and Karababa 2021). The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is forcing the world to turn to e-learning practices as attending classes physically is sometimes not possible, and digital education allows one to study anytime and anywhere (Kosareva, Demidov, Ikonnikova, and Shalamova 2019), a shift from traditional learning to e-learning approaches, more or less already proven by some study. On the one hand, it contributes to overcoming the existing difficulties, but on the other hand, it will be interesting to evaluate the effects and final results in the years to come (Stefanovic and Klochkova 2021). In addition, e-learning can improve foreign language skills in reading, listening, speaking, and writing. The use of e-learning is a new learning process that can provide new experiences (Ying, Mulyadan, and Lim 2021).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, everyone can learn a language anywhere, anytime, and through anything cheaply and even for free. Many digital platforms to learn such as Duolingo, Cakap, Lingotalk and many more. For example Duolingo which is an online language learning platform launched in 2012 that offers courses in 27 different world languages (Teske 2017). Although Duolingo can be accessed by any web-enabled device via the internet at https://www. duolingo.com/, the greatest affordability is mobile access worldwide. Learner progress across multiple platforms can be synced across devices. The program also includes features for interacting with both the program and other language learners (Loewen, Crowther, Isbell, Maloney, Miller, Rawal and Kim 2019). However, apart from Duolingo, there is a language education platform called Cakap by squline which is the pioneer of online education in Indonesia since 2014 by Tomy Yunus. Cakap by squline is a company adopting a two-way interaction platform by facilitating language learning for non-native speakers either by providing pre-developed content or by connecting learners with native speakers. The Cakap platform caters to learners of all ages, whether they are in school or adults looking to develop new language skills (World Bank Group 2020). And in 2019 Cakap already has more than 100,000 users (Marsyaf 2018).

In the late 1990s, South Korea became a new center for transnational popular culture production (Sari and Jamaan 2014), distributing its media products to many Asian countries such as Japan, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore. At that time it was the Chinese media who popularized the "Korean Wave" or "Hallyu" which is the term for the spread of Korean popular culture abroad (Hae-Joang 2005) and also describes the love of Korean cultural products by young Chinese. Initially only distributing Korean TV dramas, now there are various kinds of

cultural products, such as Korean pop music (K-pop), movies, animation, online games, electronics, fashion, cosmetics, food, and lifestyle (Kumalaningrum 2021) (Arkananta, Susilo, Divania, Mauludi, and Pandin 2021). The Korean culture industry has developed and become a national project that competes in globalization. With its popularity, Korean culture is highly concentrated in the Asian market, and some products have flown to the United States, Mexico, Egypt, Iraq and Europe. This is one example of the large global circulation of Korean popular culture (Kim 2019). Along with the rise of Korean pop culture that has penetrated into Indonesia, Korean is favored by teenagers who want to be closer to what they like. Apart from the cultural aspect, the interest of Korean language learners has also increased because South Korea has established many collaborations with Indonesia (Hasanah and Kharismawati 2019). According to Fukunaga (2006), people who are very interested in foreign popular culture may develop a critical attitude, cultural knowledge, and foreign language skills. People who have the same tendency towards a type of pleasure have a distinctive use of language (Touhami and Al-Haq 2017).

In September 2021, the paid streaming service Netflix released a series from South Korea called "Squid Game", a nine-episode series about people being invited to play games, specifically big survival games disguised as children's games, and competing against each other to get money in a state of urgent need of money (90 Day Korean 2021). This series is interesting, because it is a non-English film series (Arkananta, Susilo, Divania, Mauludi, and Pandin 2021), which managed to steal the attention of the world community with 142 million views in 4 weeks and was ranked 1st in 94 countries.With the trend of the "Squid Game" series, there are a lot of unique and new things that are certainly Korean in the global community. For example, the trend of green light and red light, dalgona, and also the game of *ddakji*. But it's not just the game, the thing that attracts people's attention is the language. Many young people are interested in learning Korean culture, including the language. A company that offers online language learning services says more people are learning Korean after the launch of the popular Korean TV show on Netflix. Language learning company Duolingo reported a sharp increase in Korean language learners (Cha and Seo 2021). In the UK, 76 percent more people sign up to learn Korean than usual. In the US, the number increased by 40 percent after the show began on September 17, 2021 (Voanews 2021).

1.1 Objectives
With the explanation above, this study aims to investigate Learning Korean using an online platform following the success of "Squid Game". Regarding the research question "how is the influence of the "Squid Game" series on the use of online learning platforms and young people's perceptions of the Korean language? The method is an online survey distributed via social media (Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter). We succeeded in recruiting 259 participants, which we then analyzed the respondents' interests and strategies for learning Korean.

2. Data and Methods
To answer the questions posed earlier, we distributed an online survey using Google Forms where we asked people aged between 18 to 34 years old if they became interested in learning Korean after watching "Squid Game". The age group was purposefully selected as a study in America suggests that almost 60% of those who watched the series are in this age brackets category (Katz 2021). We share the invitation to join this study via social media platforms, namely Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp. During the period of observation February—March 2022 we have gathered a total of 259 respondents who have seen the series and fall into the age group criteria. The survey consists of 13 questions including demographic information, how they rate "Squid Game", interest in learning Korean, and motivation as well as strategies in studying the foreign language.

3. Results and Discussion
Based on the author's findings regarding Korean Language Learning using an online platform following the success of "Squid Game", the data will be presented in tabular form. Table 1 and Table 2 show that most of the respondents are women aged between 18 and 22 years. In Table 3, we can see that the audience for the Squid Game series and prospective Korean language learners are dominated by high school graduates or active university students. However, it is possible for learners other than university students to have the same level of interest, because learning languages has no age limit or what activities they are carrying out. And for Table 4 almost all participants have the experience in learning foreign language for a couple of potential reasons. One is being in a school or at the University level, where learning a foreign language such as English is part of the curriculum.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by Sex

No.	Sex	Frequency	In Percentage (%)
1	Male	43	16.6
2	Female	216	83.4
	Total	259	100

Table 2. Distribution of Respondents by Age

No.	Age	Frequency	In Percentage (%)
1	18-22	210	81.1
2	23-27	37	14.3
3	28-34	12	4.6
	Total	259	100

Table 3. Distribution of Respondents by Education Attainment

No.	Education	Frequency	In Percentage (%)
1	High school	162	62.5
2	Diploma	15	5.8
3	Bachelor degree	69	26.6
4	Other	13	5
	Total	259	100

Table 4. Distribution of Respondents by Experience in Learning Foreign Language

No.	Experience in Learning Foreign Language	Frequency	In Percentage (%)
1	Yes	255	98,5
2	No	4	1,5
	Total	259	100

Table 5 displays the variety of motivations that drive Indonesian young people to learn Korean. Most respondents who are interested in learning Korean because they are interested and like Korean cultural products. Usually before learning a language other than the mother tongue, the learner has studied other foreign languages, such as English. This can make the learner more interested because there are lots of loan words and they become familiar with

Korean-English (konglish) words. However, there are also 30 out of 259 respondents who have consumed Korean products, especially the "Squid Game" series; they still do not have a desire to learn the language.

Table 5. Motivation in Learning Korean

No.	Motivation	Frequency	In Percentage (%)
1	I am interested in K-pop, Korean movies, and TV programs	87	33.6
2	I want to enjoy Korean songs	3	1.2
3	I want to broaden my perspectives	48	18.5
4	I want to master another language	34	13.1
5	I want to pursue my study in Korea	8	3.1
6	I want to be able to communicate/interact with Koreans	24	9.3
7	I want to travel to Korea	18	6.9
8	It will be useful for my future career	7	2.7
9	No motivation	30	11.6
	Total	259	100

The explanation of Table 6 and Table 7 shows that many viewers become interested in learning Korean after watching the "Squid Game" series, this is in demand because of the responses of respondents after watching the "Squid Game" series. In numerical terms, many viewers of the "Squid Game" series are satisfied with the series, and it makes them interested and have a desire to learn Korean, although not all respondents want to learn Korean.

Table 6. Respondents' Reviewing the "Squid Game" Series

No.	Scale	Frequency	In Percentage (%)	Description
1	1	0	0	
2	2	0	0	
3	3	2	0.8	
4	4	8	3.1	From a scale of 1 to 7, 1 is for suggesting the series are terrible and 7 is for suggesting the series are excellent.
5	5	65	25.1	
6	6	101	39	
7	7	83	32	

Total		259	100	

Table 7. Respondents' Interest learning Korean After Watching the "Squid Game" Series

No.	Scale	Frequency	In Percentage (%)
1	1	13	5
2	2	17	6.6
3	3	30	11.6
4	4	57	22
5	5	51	19.7
6	6	37	14.3
7	7	54	20.8
Total		259	100

As presented in Table 8, it can be seen how the respondents chose the strategy to learn Korean. The result suggests that most of the respondents chose to study independently or self-taught. But even so, there are still many who choose to learn to use online platforms. In mastering a foreign language, the key is to keep practicing and honing it. This can be started by learning independently through an online platform that can make learning a foreign language easier and learners must have the intention to practice it and continue to learn consistently and progressively. However, even though we are currently still in the COVID-19 pandemic, there are still respondents who choose to take language courses at course institutions. And there are some respondents who are still not interested in learning Korean specifically.

Table 8. Distribution of Strategies in Learning Korean

No.	Motivation	Frequency	In Percentage (%)
1	Course at course institute	45	17.4
2	Using FL application (e.g Duolingo, Cakap, Bubble, Lingodeer, etc)	93	35.9
3	Self-taught/self-study	109	42.5
4	Others	12	4.2
Total		259	100

After conducting an online survey, we applied in-depth interview techniques with 13 research participants as we are interested in understanding their strategies in learning Korean by using online learning platforms. **Table 9** displays the distribution of our interviewees by age and background. Each respondent is coded with "R" and the number on the list. For example, R1 refers to our first respondent during the interview sessions. To the question why did they choose to learn Korean through online platforms, their responses are as following:

"Because it's practical and applications like Duolingo are quite easy to understand, and can be done anywhere and anytime"(R1)

"Because my lecture is online, the study time can be adjusted to suit your needs. With this online platform, I can adjust my schedule. Then these online platforms are practical because they can be accessed anywhere, and can be accessed 24 hours." (R2)
"Through online platforms, learning becomes more practical, and can be done at any time. Moreover, managing time with a busy schedule, online platforms are easier" (R8).

Some respondents prefer to use online learning platforms because they are more practical and flexible in their use without being tied to time. However, there are also respondents who use online platforms to learn Korean because there are no course providers in their neighborhood. Thus, it is evident to suggest that online platforms are very helpful in supporting learners without the need to deal with distance.

"Because in the neighborhood where I live there is no foreign language courses, so I use online platforms to learn foreign languages"(R4)

Table 9. Distribution of Interviewees by Age and Background

No.	Code	Age	Background
1	R1	21	University Student
2	R2	20	University Student
3	R3	21	University Student
4	R4	19	University Student
5	R5	21	University Student
6	R6	21	University Student
7	R7	24	Employee
8	R8	20	University Student
9	R9	22	Employee
10	R10	22	University Student
11	R11	19	University Student
12	R12	21	University Student
13	R13	21	University Student

Participants of this study further expressed the advantages and disadvantages of learning Korean through online platforms. For example, an interviewee coded as R3 asserts that *"from the beginning, downloading the app is free, the layouts of the app are interesting, and there are goals that need to be achieved so that I have a target (to fulfill)"*. However, learning a foreign language using online platforms is not always a smooth sailing experience.

"We need a stable Internet access, and in my opinion it is less effective because we don't meet the teacher directly" (R5)

> *"..there are limitations in exploring the apps with paid features, sometimes the vocabulary is not for daily conversation, so I really don't know who should be our partner in the exercise (older person, parents, peers, etc.)" (R3)*

> *"There are times when the task becomes neglected because I forgot to use the platform because there is no reminder" (R6)*

The purpose of the study was to identify the effects of the successful "Squid Game" series on the use of online learning platforms and young people's perceptions of the Korean language. The results showed that the atmosphere of the COVID-19 pandemic greatly affected the desire to learn languages, especially Korean, but it did not become an obstacle for second language learners, instead it became an encouragement for them to be even more enthusiastic and many of them used online media platforms as a tool to hone their language skills. they. Even so, the use of online platforms still has its advantages and disadvantages, such as flexibility, efficiency, and even an attractive layout that creates its own advantages. However, online platforms have drawbacks such as limited use of applications with paid features and unstable internet connections. Further studies are needed to examine how and why the interest in learning Korean using online platforms can change, especially when the pandemic ends.

4. Conclusion

Our study has shown that after watching the "Squid Game" series and the current pandemic, most respondents continue to learn foreign languages, especially Korean. In fact, the limitation of face-to-face learning could actually encourage learners to use online platforms because this approach offers flexibility and can be accessed at any time. This paper reveals the interests of our respondents in learning Korean through online platforms after watching the "Squid Game" Netflix mini series and during the pandemic using online surveys and interviews. The findings show that most of the respondents in this study are very interested in learning Korean after watching the "Squid Game" series and their main motivation is because they are very interested in Korean cultural products such as K-pop, Korean films, and TV programs and also they want to broaden their insight about Korea. This paper contributes to the literature on Korean foreign languages and the use of online platforms to study Korean. Some caveats from this study include the number of respondents and the duration of the observation. While the interest in learning Korean can be triggered by the "Squid Game", more study is needed to examine whether this is sustainable in a longer run. It is also interesting to test whether the new skill will provide a better job opportunity for young Indonesians.

Acknowledgement

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