

Criteria For Selecting Country Studies Texts In Korean Language Education And Their Significance In Developing Socio-Cultural Competence

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Abstract: Socio-cultural competence is a key skill in the digital age, enabling students to critically evaluate information sources related to Korean culture, identify reliable data, and engage with cultural contexts responsibly. This article explores the significance of country studies texts in Korean language education for developing socio-cultural competence and presents the main criteria for selecting such texts. By linking criteria such as authenticity, modernity, cultural relevance, language complexity level, and alignment with the curriculum to practical strategies, the article provides a foundation for enhancing students' socio-cultural competence. Practical strategies include applying a three-stage system for working with texts, exercises for analyzing cultural realities, comparative analysis, and independent projects aimed at deepening cultural knowledge. These approaches not only enrich students' understanding of Korean culture but also promote thoughtful and analytical engagement. This article contributes to the development of teaching methodologies that foster conscious, reflective, and ethically responsible socio-cultural competence in students.

Keywords: Socio-cultural competence, country studies texts, Korean language, cultural competence, text selection criteria, Korean culture, critical thinking, foreign language teaching strategies.

Introduction: In the era of globalization, especially in the context of the rapid spread of Korean culture worldwide (the "Korean Wave" or Hallyu), it is becoming increasingly important to develop not only students' language skills but also their socio-cultural competence when learning Korean. Socio-cultural competence encompasses students' abilities to understand Korean culture, recognize cultural differences, engage effectively in intercultural communication, and exhibit appropriate behavior in various situations within Korean society [1]. Country studies texts play a crucial role in developing such competence, as they provide students learning Korean with authentic information about the lifestyle, values, traditions, history, and contemporary life of the Korean people.

The process of selecting and using country studies texts in Korean language education requires a well-thought-out approach. These texts should not only enhance language skills but also deepen students' understanding of Korean culture, increase their

intercultural sensitivity, and help them recognize similarities and differences between Korean and their own cultures. What criteria should guide the selection of such texts? What features should these texts possess? Finding answers to these questions is essential for Korean language instructors [2]. This article aims to define the criteria for selecting country studies texts in Korean language education and examines their significance in developing socio-cultural competence. Additionally, the article presents strategies and methods for working with country studies texts, as well as ways to improve their effectiveness.

Literature Review and Methods. The issues of selecting country studies texts and developing socio-cultural competence in Korean language education have been explored by various Korean and international scholars. For instance, in her book "Country Studies in Korean Language: Theory and Practice," Park Ji-young emphasizes the importance of such texts in language education, arguing that they must be modern and authentic and should reflect key aspects of Korean

culture [3]. Lee Hyun-joo, in her work "Socio-Cultural Approach to Teaching Korean," highlights the need to focus on cultural realities when selecting country studies texts [4].

Kim Young-woong, in his study "Developing Cultural Competence in Korean Language Learning," proposes a comprehensive approach to selecting country studies texts. He suggests that criteria such as language complexity, cultural significance, and alignment with the needs of the target audience should be taken into account [5]. Western scholars like Byram and Zarate also stress the importance of developing socio-cultural competence in foreign language education and highlight the key role of country studies texts in this process [6]. The study used methods such as pedagogical observation, comparative analysis, and the generalization of experimental findings.

When selecting country studies texts in Korean language education, the following key criteria should be considered:

- **Authenticity.** Country studies texts should be as authentic as possible, accurately and reliably reflecting Korean culture [7]. Authentic texts expose students to real-life language environments and include materials such as newspaper and magazine articles, literary works, historical documents, online content, street signs, and advertisements. Although some adaptation may be necessary for pedagogical purposes, preserving the original content and cultural features is essential.

Modernity. The texts should reflect modern Korean culture and address current, relevant topics. This allows students to gain up-to-date knowledge about contemporary Korean society. Topics such as the global popularity of K-pop, K-dramas, Korean cuisine, and technological innovation are particularly motivating and engaging for students [8].

Cultural significance. Texts should highlight essential aspects of Korean culture, including values, traditions, customs, holidays, historical events, and everyday life. They should showcase the unique features of Korean culture and underline what differentiates it from other cultures, allowing students to develop a deeper cultural understanding.

Language complexity level. Texts should correspond to students' language proficiency and be slightly above their current level (according to Krashen's $i+1$ theory). Overly complex texts may discourage students, so selecting materials that match their abilities is crucial.

Interest and motivational appeal. Texts should be selected based on students' interests to capture their attention and boost motivation for learning the Korean

language and culture. Consideration should be given to students' age, gender, interests, and career goals to increase the effectiveness of the learning process.

Alignment with curriculum. Texts must correspond to the goals and objectives of the curriculum and the needs of the students. They should cover themes, grammar structures, and vocabulary specified in the curriculum and contribute to the development of communicative competence.

Presence of cultural realities. Texts should include culturally specific elements such as eating customs, holiday rituals, family relationships, the education system, and business etiquette. This helps students grasp the distinctive aspects of Korean culture.

Freedom from cultural stereotypes. Texts should avoid reinforcing cultural stereotypes and provide an objective representation of Korean culture. This prevents the formation of misconceptions and promotes a more accurate and respectful understanding of the target culture.

In Korean language education, country studies texts perform several essential functions in developing socio-cultural competence:

Expanding cultural knowledge: Country studies texts enrich students with historical, geographical, socio-political, and cultural information about Korea. These texts cover diverse aspects of Korean culture, including traditions, values, customs, holidays, historical events, art, literature, and culinary culture. Such knowledge broadens and deepens students' understanding of Korean culture.

Enhancing cultural awareness: These texts increase students' awareness of both their own and other cultures. By studying Korean culture, students begin to perceive their native culture from a different perspective and recognize cultural similarities and differences. This contributes to developing their intercultural sensitivity and awareness.

Developing intercultural communication skills: Country studies texts prepare students for intercultural communication situations. They introduce students to key aspects of Korean verbal and non-verbal communication, politeness formulas, speech etiquette, and interaction norms, thereby enhancing their ability to communicate effectively with Korean speakers.

Increasing cultural sensitivity: Such texts foster sensitivity towards other cultures and teach respect for cultural differences. They help students develop values such as tolerance, openness, and respect for cultural diversity.

Fostering cultural identity: Studying foreign cultures through country studies texts also strengthens

students' understanding of their own cultural identity. Learning about other cultures helps students recognize and appreciate the unique aspects of their own, thus raising their level of cultural self-awareness.

Discussion. The following strategies have proven effective when working with country studies texts in Korean language education:

Three-stage approach: Working with texts using a three-stage approach—pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading—is advisable.

In the pre-reading stage, it is important to activate students' prior knowledge, generate interest in the topic, and introduce new vocabulary.

During the while-reading stage, students engage in reading, comprehension, and analysis of the text.

In the post-reading stage, exercises are conducted to expand cultural knowledge, develop communication skills, and apply acquired knowledge in practice.

Cultural realities analysis: Identifying and explaining Korean cultural references within the texts, and comparing them with similar concepts in Uzbek culture, deepens understanding and encourages intercultural comparison.

Comparative analysis

Conducting comparative analysis between Korean and Uzbek cultures enhances intercultural awareness. Using tools like Venn diagrams to visually represent similarities and differences between the two cultures is particularly effective.

Project work: Assigning students independent projects on specific aspects of Korean culture fosters research and inquiry skills. For example, students can prepare presentations, videos, or blogs on topics such as the history of Korean cuisine, traditional holidays, music, dramas, and cinema. This also nurtures their creativity.

Role plays and simulations: Simulating real-life Korean cultural communication scenarios helps develop practical intercultural communication skills. Examples include role plays involving Korean restaurants, family meetings, university classes, or job interviews, which teach students how to act appropriately in culturally specific contexts.

Use of visual materials: Incorporating photos, videos, slides, and other visual content during text-based lessons enhances students' understanding of Korean culture. Visuals help clarify abstract cultural concepts and make them more accessible.

Use of authentic materials: Articles from Korean newspapers and magazines, excerpts from TV programs, Korean songs, advertisements, and announcements are effective tools for enriching

cultural content and deepening students' knowledge.

CONCLUSION

The selection and use of country studies texts in Korean language education play a crucial role in developing students' socio-cultural competence. When choosing such texts, it is important to adhere to criteria such as authenticity, modernity, cultural relevance, appropriate language complexity, engaging and motivational content, alignment with the curriculum, presence of cultural realities, and freedom from cultural stereotypes.

Effective strategies include the three-stage reading approach, cultural analysis, comparative analysis, project-based learning, role plays and simulations, and the use of visual and authentic materials. Future research should focus on developing innovative methods for working with country studies texts in Korean, making greater use of modern information and communication technologies, and creating effective tools for assessing cultural knowledge. This will contribute to improving the quality of Korean language education and better preparing students for intercultural communication.

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