BỘ GIÁO DỤC VÀ ĐÀO TẠO

TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC QUẢN LÝ VÀ CÔNG NGHỆ HẢI PHÒNG

KHÓA LUẬN TỐT NGHIỆP

NGÀNH : NGÔN NGỮ ANH – HÀN

Sinh viên : Hoàng Phương Anh

HẢI PHÒNG – 2025

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TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC QUẢN LÝ VÀ CÔNG NGHỆ HẢI PHÒNG

INTERCULTURAL ADAPTATION STRATEGIES OF THIRD-YEAR KOREAN MAJORS AT HPU IN KOREAN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

KHÓA LUẬN TỐT NGHIỆP ĐẠI HỌC HỆ CHÍNH QUY

NGÀNH: NGÔN NGỮ ANH-HÀN

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Giảng viên hướng dẫn : ThS. Bùi Thị Mai Anh

HẢI PHÒNG – 2025

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TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC QUẢN LÝ VÀ CÔNG NGHỆ HẢI PHÒNG

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Tên đề tài: Intercultural adaptation strategies of third-year Korean majors at HPU in Korean language classrooms

NHIỆM VỤ ĐỀ TÀI

1. **Nội dung và các yêu cầu cần giải quyết trong nhiệm vụ đề tài tốt nghiệp**

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3. **Địa điểm thực tập tốt nghiệp**

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GIẢNG VIÊN HƯỚNG DẪN ĐỀ TÀI TỐT NGHIỆP

Họ và tên   : Th.S Bùi Thị Mai Anh

Cơ quan công tác   : Trường Đại học Quản lý và Công nghệ Hải Phòng

Nội dung hướng dẫn: Intercultural Adaptation Strategies of Third-Year Korean Majors at HPU in Korean Language Classrooms.

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Hoàng Phương Anh   **Bùi Thị Mai Anh**

Hải Phòng, ngày 27 tháng 12 năm 2025

XÁC NHẬN CỦA KHOA

PHIẾU NHẬN XÉT CỦA GIẢNG VIÊN HƯỚNG DẪN TỐT NGHIỆP

Họ và tên giảng viên: Th.S Bùi Thị Mai Anh

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Nội dung hướng dẫn: Intercultural Adaptation Strategies of Third-Year Korean Majors
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1.   Tinh thần thái độ của sinh viên trong quá trình làm đề tài tốt nghiệp

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(Ký và ghi rõ)

Bùi Thị Mai Anh

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Chuyên ngành: Ngôn ngữ Anh-Hàn

Nội dung hướng dẫn: Intercultural Adaptation Strategies of Third-Year Korean Majors at HPU in Korean Language Classrooms

1. Phần nhận xét của giảng viên chấm phản biện

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Hải Phòng, ngày 27 tháng 12 năm 2025

Giảng viên chấm phản biện

(Ký và ghi rõ tên)

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While I have strived for accuracy and clarity, any shortcomings in this thesis remain my own. I hope the findings will contribute to a better understanding of students' intercultural adaptation and support future improvements in teaching and learning within the Korean Language program at HPU.

Sincerely, thank you.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the intercultural adaptation strategies employed by third-year Korean Language majors at Hai Phong University of Management and Technology (HPU), focusing on classroom interactions with native Korean lecturers. Using Berry's Acculturation Model and Kim's Integrative Communication Theory, the research analyses quantitative data from 10 surveyed students.

Findings show that the Korean Wave (Hallyu) is the main motivation for students' choice of major and provides a cultural foundation that facilitates adaptation. Most students report confidence in communicating with native instructors and applying cultural etiquette, though they still experience stress due to the fast teaching pace in Korean. According to Kim's theory, this stress acts as a driver for students to enhance their communicative competence. Notably, the majority of students favour the Integration strategy, actively embracing Korean culture while maintaining Vietnamese identity. Based on these results, the study recommends that educators and the university integrate cultural elements into the curriculum and foster a linguistically safe learning environment, while encouraging students to transform their cultural enthusiasm into effective learning motivation.

Keyword: Intercultural Adaptation, Acculturation Strategies, Korean Language Major, Berry's Model, Integration, Vietnamese students, HPU, Language Learning, Cultural Identity

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PART I: INTRODUCTION

1. Rationale

Amidst the sweeping tide of globalisation and the deepening process of international integration, higher education across the world is experiencing a remarkable surge in the mobility of students. Vietnam, as a nation that is rapidly modernising and actively engaging with the global community, is part of this transformative trend. In recent years, South Korea has emerged not only as an economic powerhouse and a hub of advanced education but also as a cultural epicentre that strongly appeals to international students, especially those from Vietnam. This allure is driven by more than just Korea's impressive economic growth and its reputable, modern education system. The pervasive influence of the Korean Wave (Hallyu) – with its captivating music, dramas, cuisine, and fashion – has taken root in the hearts of Vietnamese youth, largely through digital platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Netflix, and other social media networks.

Through these channels, Hallyu has become much more than a fleeting trend; it is now a cultural phenomenon deeply embedded in the daily lives and aspirations of young people in Vietnam. The vibrant, progressive image of Korea, which skilfully blends modernity with enduring traditional values, has inspired a passionate interest in Korean culture among Vietnamese students. Regular engagement with Hallyu content fosters not only a fascination with cultural products but also motivates many students to learn the Korean language as a means of accessing and fully experiencing the world they admire.

At Hai Phong University of Management and Technology (HPU), this cultural attraction has translated into a significant increase in enrolment in the Korean Language major. Most students initially choose this field out of a genuine enthusiasm for Korean pop culture. For third-year students, however, this period marks a crucial turning point: it is the stage where theoretical knowledge must be translated into practical language skills. They are required to actively engage in classroom interactions, particularly in classes led by native Korean lecturers, which serve as the first real "intercultural contact zones." In these unique classroom settings, students begin to confront and adapt to cultural differences firsthand.

These classrooms are characterised by distinct Korean cultural norms – such as hierarchical relationships between teachers and students, indirect communication styles, and a strong

collectivist ethos in group learning. The gap between the theoretical understanding of Korean culture acquired in earlier years and the realities of interacting in authentic classroom environments often creates a "cultural distance." Even students with strong language foundations may find themselves struggling to express ideas, participate confidently, or showcase their abilities. Many experience culture shock, feelings of awkwardness in communication with native lecturers, difficulty integrating with classmates, and sometimes a sense of not reaching their full potential, which may lead to feelings of stress and frustration.

Given these challenges, a thorough investigation into the adaptation strategies of this particular group of students is not only academically significant but also has practical implications for improving educational quality, student support, and the effectiveness of the Korean language program at HPU.

2. Aims of the study

This thesis seeks to systematically identify, examine, and deeply analyse the intercultural adaptation strategies employed by third-year students majoring in Korean language at HPU, specifically within the context of classrooms taught by native Korean lecturers. The overarching aim is supported by several targeted objectives:

First, the research aims to pinpoint and describe the specific cultural challenges that students commonly face in these classes. These may include differences in teaching and learning styles, interaction patterns, implicit rules in group activities, and expectations regarding classroom etiquette.

Second, the study will analyse and categorise the adaptation strategies used by students, guided by Berry's acculturation model, which distinguishes among four key approaches: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalisation.

Third, the research will delve into the dynamic process of intercultural adaptation utilising Kim's integrative communication theory, with a particular focus on the stress-adaptation-growth cycle.

Fourth, the study seeks to assess the effectiveness of these strategies by examining their impact on students' academic achievement, psychological well-being, and social integration in the classroom.

Finally, based on the findings, the thesis will offer practical recommendations for lecturers, university administrators, and students, with the aim of fostering a more inclusive, supportive, and effective intercultural learning environment at HPU.

3. Scope of the study

To ensure both depth and manageability, the research scope is carefully delineated. The study focuses exclusively on third-year Korean language majors at HPU who have completed at least two semesters of coursework with native Korean lecturers. This focus excludes students from other academic years or those lacking direct classroom experience with Korean instructors, thereby honing in on the critical period when adaptation challenges are most pronounced.

In terms of content, the research is confined to classroom-based cultural adaptation. It analyses students' perceptions, emotions, behaviours, and communicative strategies in the academic setting, intentionally leaving aside experiences related to student exchanges, internships, or daily life in Korea.

The theoretical framework is anchored in Berry's acculturation model (2005) and Kim's integrative communication theory of cross-cultural adaptation (2001). Methodologically, the study adopts a quantitative survey approach, but the findings are presented as interpretive and context-specific to HPU, with no intention of broad generalisation to all Vietnamese Korean language learners. The ultimate goal is to provide nuanced, context-rich insights that can inform practice and policy within this specific institutional landscape.

4. Method of the study

The research employs a quantitative method design utilising a structured survey to capture the breadth of the adaptation experience. This instrument was administered to 10 third-year Korean language majors at HPU who met the study's inclusion criteria. The resulting data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) to discern overarching patterns and dominant adaptation strategies.

 The study achieves a robust depiction of the adaptation landscape by analysing the quantitative survey data to map the general contours and dominant strategies.

5. Design of the study

The thesis is systematically organised into three main parts:

Part I: Introduction

This section presents the rationale, aims, scope, and methodology of the study. It sets the context of globalisation and the influence of the Korean Wave (Hallyu) on Vietnamese students' motivation to learn Korean. The research focuses on identifying the intercultural adaptation strategies used by third-year Korean language majors at HPU, based on Berry's Acculturation Model and Kim's Integrative Communication Theory.

Part II: Development

This part consists of three chapters:

Chapter I: Establishes the theoretical foundation, reviewing key concepts and frameworks related to intercultural adaptation.

Chapter II: Presents the research context, methodology, data analysis, and discussion of findings based on survey results from 10 students.

Chapter III: Findings and Discussion

Part III: Conclusion

This section summarises the key findings, discusses their implications, acknowledges the study's limitations, and suggests directions for future research.

PART II: DEVELOPMENT
CHAPTER I: LITERATURE PREVIEW

1. Concepts of intercultural adaptation

Intercultural adaptation has long been recognised as a foundational concept in the fields of cross-cultural psychology, intercultural communication, and second language acquisition. As global mobility continues to rise and educational settings become increasingly multicultural, there is a growing imperative to understand the processes by which individuals adjust to new cultural environments. Whereas early research on adaptation often focused narrowly on observable behavioural changes, more recent scholarship underscores that adaptation is a multifaceted and holistic journey. It encompasses not only behavioural but also psychological, social, linguistic, and communicative adjustments.

Adaptation, therefore, should not be viewed as a one-time or linear event, but rather as an ongoing, dynamic, and cyclical process. Influential theorists such as Oberg (1960), Ward (2001), and Kim (2001) have emphasised that individuals in intercultural contexts are required to continuously negotiate and reconcile the values, norms, and expectations of their own cultural backgrounds with those of the host culture. In educational contexts, particularly in foreign language classrooms, this process becomes even more intricate. Here, students are challenged not only by linguistic differences but also by the often-unspoken cultural norms that influence classroom discourse, teacher-student dynamics, and academic expectations. As a result, successful adaptation in such settings demands both cognitive flexibility and cultural sensitivity, enabling learners to navigate and integrate into the new environment while maintaining a sense of personal and cultural identity.

1.1. Intercultural adaptation and acculturation

Intercultural adaptation refers to a dynamic and ongoing process that occurs when individuals are exposed to a cultural environment different from their own. This process demands profound adjustments not only in behaviour but also in psychological and cognitive dimensions, enabling individuals to function effectively in the new context. According to Kim (2001), intercultural adaptation is more than the acquisition of superficial skills it is an internal transformation, wherein individuals develop the capacity to

understand and operate within the value systems, norms, and communication practices of the new culture.

Acculturation, on the other hand, is a broader concept describing the cultural and psychological changes that arise when cultural groups come into direct and continuous contact. Berry (2005) emphasises that this is a two-way process, affecting both individuals and groups. A natural consequence of this process is acculturative stress—a psychological strain resulting from the challenges of facing cultural differences, which may manifest as anxiety, insecurity, homesickness, or even physical health problems.

1.2. Components of the adaptation process: psychological and sociocultural

❖ Psychological adaptation

Psychological adaptation refers to the internal and emotional side of the adaptation process, centring on an individual's mental well-being, emotional state, and overall sense of comfort when navigating a new cultural environment. This process involves learning how to manage stress and anxiety that arise from cultural differences, a phenomenon commonly referred to as acculturative stress.

Success in psychological adaptation is demonstrated through several key factors:

- Emotional stability and reduced anxiety: learners are able to overcome culture shock and maintain a balanced psychological state, even when confronted with unfamiliar or challenging situations.
- Enhanced confidence and resilience: the ability to sustain psychological resilience enables learners to face setbacks or misunderstandings in communication without losing motivation or becoming discouraged.
- Sense of belonging: feeling accepted and comfortable within the new environment, rather than experiencing alienation or isolation.

Within the context of Korean language classrooms at HPU, psychological adaptation is a crucial factor that helps students overcome evaluation anxiety, the fear of being judged negatively by teachers or peers when speaking Korean. When students feel psychologically stable and confident (as reflected by the average communication confidence score of 3.3), they are more likely to actively participate in learning activities, creating a positive cycle that enhances language acquisition.

❖   Sociocultural adaptation

Sociocultural adaptation, on the other hand, focuses on external behaviours and the ability to interact effectively and appropriately within the new cultural context. For students majoring in Korean, this process entails learning and applying essential social skills to integrate into the academic community.

Key aspects of sociocultural adaptation include:

-        Classroom communication and etiquette: understanding and adhering to classroom norms, such as navigating the complexities of honorifics and hierarchical systems in Korean. Students often struggle to choose and use the correct level of honorific language with teachers and peers, which can lead to a pragmatics gap.

-        Social integration: building relationships with instructors and classmates, including Korean exchange students. Successful sociocultural adaptation enables students to participate actively in group activities and collaborative learning. Although HPU students show a low tendency toward separation (mean score of 2.1), this openness must be translated into meaningful and effective social interactions.

-        Grasping cultural norms: comprehending unique Korean educational norms, such as the collectivist ethos and indirect communication styles prevalent in classroom settings.

Through the development of both psychological and sociocultural adaptation, students are better equipped to overcome the complexities of intercultural learning and thrive in the Korean language classroom.

The process of intercultural adaptation comprises two closely interrelated dimensions. Psychological adaptation pertains to an individual's internal adjustments, including emotions, perceptions, and mental states. The success of psychological adaptation is reflected in comfort levels, emotional stability, reduced anxiety, and the maintenance of overall mental health in the new cultural setting. Key factors here include the ability to overcome culture shock, manage negative emotional responses, and maintain psychological resilience.

In parallel, sociocultural adaptation refers to the individual's ability to learn and apply essential social skills for integrating into the daily life of the new culture. In educational contexts, this encompasses understanding and adhering to classroom rules, building

relationships with instructors and peers, participating effectively in group activities, and navigating complex communication situations. These two aspects are synergistic: strong psychological adaptation facilitates social engagement, and successful social interactions reinforce psychological well-being.

2. Key theoretical frameworks of adaptation

2.1. Berry's acculturation model

Berry's (2005) theory of acculturation stands as one of the most influential and widely used frameworks in the study of intercultural adaptation. It offers a clear, systematic way to understand how individuals manage the complex process of living and learning in a new cultural environment. At its core, Berry's model is built around two key, interrelated questions that reflect the central dilemmas faced by anyone undergoing acculturation:

-To what extent does the individual wish to maintain their original cultural identity and characteristics?

-To what extent does the individual wish to participate in and interact with the larger host society?

(1) Integration

Integration describes a strategy in which individuals both maintain their heritage culture and actively engage with the host culture. This approach represents a desire for balance, enabling people to draw meaningfully from both cultural worlds. Research has repeatedly shown that integration is the most adaptive and psychologically beneficial strategy, consistently linked to:

High intercultural competence: the ability to function effectively in both cultures.

Strong identity stability: maintaining a secure sense of self without feeling threatened by the other culture.

Low acculturative stress: experiencing less anxiety and psychological strain during the adaptation process.

Better academic and social outcomes: achieving improved performance and overall well-being.

For Vietnamese learners of Korean, integration means embracing Korean customs—such as the nuanced use of honorifics and classroom etiquette while also retaining pride in and

practising Vietnamese traditions. Studies such as Wei et al. (2008) have shown that this balanced approach leads to optimal and sustainable learning outcomes.

(2) Assimilation

Assimilation refers to adopting the host culture while abandoning or minimising one's original culture. While this strategy can sometimes result in rapid, surface-level progress in language or social integration, it often comes at the cost of:

Identity conflict: internal friction or a sense of loss regarding one's cultural roots.

Pressure to conform: feeling compelled to hide one's original identity for the sake of fitting in.

Dependence on host norms: a fragile sense of belonging that relies heavily on external acceptance.

Long-term psychological strain: emotional distress from suppressing one's cultural background.

In Korean language classrooms, assimilation might be seen in students who feel they "must act like Koreans" to be accepted by native-speaking teachers or peers. While this may reduce some cultural conflicts in the short term, it can ultimately undermine students' cultural identity and emotional security.

(3) Separation

Separation is characterised by a strong maintenance of one's original culture and a reluctance or refusal to engage with the host culture. This strategy may be observed among students who:

Form exclusive Vietnamese-speaking groups.

Avoid voluntary communication with Korean instructors outside of required classroom interactions.

Do not participate in intercultural events or exchanges.

While separation can provide immediate emotional safety and in-group support, it severely limits opportunities for language development, pragmatic competence, and meaningful social integration within the academic community.

(4) Marginalisation

Marginalisation occurs when individuals feel disconnected from both their heritage culture and the host culture. This is the least common and most problematic strategy, often associated with:

High acculturative stress: significant feelings of anxiety, isolation, and alienation.

Identity confusion: a lack of clear or secure cultural belonging.

Poor academic performance: difficulty concentrating and engaging due to psychological distress.

Social isolation: withdrawal from both co-national and host-national groups.

Fortunately, as the data from HPU in chapter 2 will show, marginalisation is rare among Vietnamese learners of Korean, indicating a generally healthy intercultural environment.

- Strengths and limitations of Berry's model

❖ Strengths:

Berry's model is widely recognised and validated within cross-cultural psychology, allowing for comparison across studies and contexts.

It offers a simple, categorical structure that helps researchers and educators identify, organise, and understand observable adaptation behaviours.

The framework is highly adaptable, making it relevant in various settings such as education, migration, and the workplace.

❖ Limitations:

The model can oversimplify the fluidity and complexity of cultural identity, which is often hybrid, dynamic, and situational rather than a binary choice between two cultures.

It presumes that individuals can freely "choose" a strategy, whereas, in reality, adaptation is frequently influenced by external factors such as discrimination or the attitudes of the host society. Individuals may also shift between strategies depending on context (for example, integrating in the classroom but separating in their social life).

The model does not fully address the roles of communication competence, emotional processes, or power dynamics in the adaptation process.

For these reasons, it is beneficial to use Berry's model in conjunction with other frameworks, such as Kim's integrative communication theory (to be discussed next), to

develop a more dynamic, communicative, and holistic understanding of the intercultural adaptation journey.

2.2. Kim's integrative communication theory

Building upon Berry's focus on identity and acculturation strategies, Young Yun Kim's (2001) integrative communication theory offers a dynamic, process-oriented lens for understanding intercultural adaptation. Unlike static models that emphasise fixed categories, Kim conceptualises adaptation as a continuous, cyclical, and transformative journey, fundamentally propelled by communication. This theory is particularly illuminating for exploring the mechanisms behind how and why language learners navigate the adaptation process.

(1) The stress–adaptation–growth dynamic

At the heart of Kim's model lies the stress–adaptation–growth cycle. Kim asserts that adaptation is inherently non-linear, driven by the inevitable challenges that arise when encountering a new culture.

Stress arises when individuals confront cultural differences that disrupt their familiar cognitive and emotional patterns. For HPU students, this might include experiencing stress from the rapid speech of native lecturers, grappling with the intricacies of honorifics, or facing unfamiliar classroom expectations.

Adaptation is the set of responses to this stress. Learners are compelled to adjust their behaviours, develop new coping strategies, and acquire novel knowledge and skills to meet these challenges.

Growth is the outcome of successful adaptation. Each time learners navigate a stressor successfully, they emerge with greater cultural competence, increased self-confidence, and strengthened resilience.

This cycle repeats itself throughout the adaptation journey. Each new wave of stress, though potentially uncomfortable, acts as a catalyst for personal and intercultural development, propelling the learner toward ever-greater understanding and capability.

(2) Host communication competence

A central concept in Kim's theory is host communication competence the capacity to communicate effectively and appropriately within the host culture. This competence develops across three interrelated domains:

Cognitive competence: knowledge and understanding of the host culture's language, communication norms, and social rules. For Korean language learners, this means not only mastering grammar and vocabulary but also grasping the logic behind honorifics, recognising hierarchical structures in communication, and understanding indirect conversational styles.

Affective competence: the emotional and motivational resources needed for adaptation. This includes empathy, curiosity, a positive attitude toward cultural differences, emotional self-regulation, and the willingness to embrace new experiences.

Operational (behavioural) competence: the ability to enact appropriate verbal and non-verbal behaviours in real-time interactions. This covers aspects such as using honorifics correctly, managing conversational turn-taking, interpreting non-verbal cues (such as silence or particular gestures), and presenting oneself in a manner acceptable to the host culture.

As learners develop competence in these domains, they become better equipped to reduce uncertainty, establish meaningful relationships, and participate more fully in their new environment.

(3) The role of the environment

Kim's theory heavily emphasises the context in which adaptation takes place. The host environment can either facilitate or hinder the adaptation process through several key factors:

Receptivity: the openness and willingness of host members (e.g., native Korean lecturers, exchange students) to engage and interact with newcomers.

Opportunities for interaction: the availability of both formal and informal settings for intercultural communication, such as group assignments, language exchange programs, and social events.

Support systems: the presence of formal and informal networks teachers, peers, university staff, and the local Vietnamese community that can provide guidance and emotional support.

For HPU students, the classroom led by native lecturers is a primary environmental factor. It simultaneously introduces communicative stress and offers essential opportunities for learners to develop host communication competence.

(4) Interplay with Berry's model and limitations

Kim's theory provides a rich explanatory mechanism for the processes underlying the acculturation strategies outlined in Berry's model. The repeated cycle of stress adaptation, growth and the resulting development of host communication competence enables students to move toward integration. Conversely, insufficient competence or a lack of environmental support can steer individuals toward Separation or marginalisation.

Nevertheless, Kim's model is not without its critiques:

It sometimes assumes that all stress is ultimately developmental, potentially underestimating the negative effects of severe or chronic acculturative stress.

The theory may not fully account for hostile or discriminatory environments, where adaptation is neither safe nor voluntary.

Its relevance may be limited in contexts where intercultural contact is minimal or mediated, such as in entirely online learning settings.

Despite these limitations, Kim's integrative communication theory remains highly applicable in structured, educational contexts like HPU's Korean language program, where supportive environments and frequent interaction are the norms. In such settings, the theory powerfully illuminates the dynamic, often transformative journey of intercultural adaptation.

3. Factors influencing adaptation in educational contexts

3.1. The role of Hallyu and cultural motivation

The Hallyu wave serves as a significant catalyst, creating strong cultural affinity among Vietnamese students. The enthusiasm fuelled by Hallyu is not only a source of inspiration but also a foundation for a positive adaptation cycle. When students are interested in and sympathetic to Korean culture, their intrinsic motivation is strengthened, lowering their affective filter a psychological barrier comprising anxiety, lack of confidence, or low motivation, as described by Krashen. Consequently, learning and adaptation take place in an open and favourable mental state.

3.2. Pragmatic barriers and classroom culture

One of the greatest challenges for students in Korean language classes is the pragmatics gap—the disparity between learned language knowledge and the ability to use language appropriately in real-life contexts. This barrier manifests in several ways. First is the complexity of Korean honorifics and hierarchical systems. Students often struggle to choose and flexibly use the appropriate levels of honorifics according to status, age, and relationships with instructors and peers, leading to awkward or unintentionally disrespectful communication.

Secondly, there are differences between the academic language taught in textbooks and the everyday Korean (slang) used by native instructors. The use of slang, idioms, natural expressions, and rapid speech in class can confuse students, even those with a solid grammatical foundation. Lastly, evaluation anxiety is a common psychological barrier. The fear of making mistakes or being judged negatively by teachers and peers suppresses students' active participation, limiting their opportunities for practice and essential experiential learning. The combination of these barriers creates an "invisible wall" that hinders students' full integration into a multicultural learning environment.

4. Summary

Chapter 1 has established a solid theoretical framework for the entire study on intercultural adaptation strategies among third-year Korean language majors at HPU. The core concepts, key theoretical models, and influential factors have been presented in detail.

- Concepts and components of intercultural adaptation

  Intercultural adaptation is a dynamic and continuous process that occurs when an individual is exposed to a different cultural environment. This process requires profound adjustments in behaviour, psychology, and cognition.

Acculturation is a broader concept, describing the cultural and psychological changes that arise when cultural groups come into direct and continuous contact.

- The adaptation process consists of two essential components:

Psychological adaptation: focused on the mental and emotional state of individuals (e.g., reduced anxiety, increased confidence, maintenance of psychological well-being). Psychological stability helps students overcome evaluation anxiety in the classroom.

Sociocultural adaptation: involves the ability to learn and apply social skills to interact effectively in a new environment (e.g., using honorifics, classroom communication, participation in group activities).

- Core theoretical frameworks of adaptation

Two main theoretical frameworks are used for data analysis:

- Berry's acculturation model

This model classifies how individuals manage their identity based on two questions: to what extent do they want to maintain their original culture, and to what extent do they want to participate in the host culture?

Integration: maintaining the original culture and participating in the host culture. This is considered the optimal adaptation strategy, associated with high intercultural competence and low acculturative stress.

Assimilation: abandoning the original culture to accept the host culture, which can lead to identity conflicts.

Separation: maintaining the original culture while refusing to engage with the host culture, limiting language development and social integration opportunities.

Marginalisation: feeling disconnected from both cultures, associated with the highest acculturative stress.

- Kim's integrative communication theory

This theory views adaptation as a continuous, cyclical, and transformative process driven by communication.

Stress–adaptation–growth cycle: Kim argues that stress (e.g., stress from fast-paced lectures) is not only negative but also a necessary catalyst, motivating learners to adjust their behaviour and develop new skills (adaptation). Overcoming each instance of stress leads to personal growth and enhances intercultural competence.

Host communication competence: the ability to communicate effectively in the new culture, developed across three domains:

Cognitive: knowledge of language and communication rules.

Affective: positive attitudes, empathy, and motivation.

Operational/behavioural: ability to use language and nonverbal behaviours appropriately (e.g., proper use of honorifics).

- Factors affecting adaptation

The role of the hallyu wave: the popularity of hallyu creates positive cultural affinity, serving as a strong intrinsic motivator that lowers the affective filter and facilitates more open and effective learning.

Pragmatic barriers to communication: the gap between textbook language knowledge and the ability to use language appropriately in real-life contexts (e.g., the complexity of honorifics, differences between academic and everyday language, and evaluation anxiety) poses significant challenges in the classroom.

In summary, chapter 1 has clearly defined adaptation as a parallel process of psychological and sociocultural adjustment, explained through the selection of individual strategies (Berry) and the stress-coping-growth cycle that develops communication competence (Kim). These foundations will be applied to analysing the current situation and forming the basis for discussion in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER II: A STUDY ON THE INTERCULTURAL ADAPTATION OF THIRD-YEAR KOREAN LANGUAGE MAJORS AT HPU

1. Reality

1.1. Teaching Staff and Educational Context

Hai Phong University of Management and Technology (HPU) has prioritised the development of an exceptional teaching faculty within its Korean language department, recognising that the quality of instructors is a pivotal factor in student success. The department adopts a unique approach by integrating Vietnamese lecturers, many of whom have completed advanced training at renowned Korean universities, with native Korean instructors recruited directly from Korea. This deliberate combination enriches the educational environment, exposing students to a multifaceted array of linguistic nuances and cultural viewpoints.

Native Korean teachers, in particular, play a dual role. Not only do they provide a linguistically authentic setting for language instruction, but they also serve as direct conduits to contemporary Korean culture and societal trends. These instructors generally possess postgraduate qualifications in Korean language pedagogy and have undergone formal training in teaching Korean as a foreign language. However, their classroom methods often reflect the traditional Korean educational ethos. This includes clear hierarchical relationships, a pronounced emphasis on respect and the use of honorifics, indirect modes of communication, a focus on collective achievements, and strict adherence to classroom discipline and etiquette.

Such cultural differences in educational philosophies and practices present a distinctive learning environment at HPU, one that is markedly different from what Vietnamese students may have previously experienced. For third-year students who are transitioning from foundational language acquisition to more advanced, culturally embedded forms of communication, these contrasts can present considerable adaptation challenges. Navigating the space between familiar Vietnamese educational traditions and the expectations of Korean instructors becomes an integral part of their academic journey.

1.2. Characteristics of the Student Cohort

The cohort of third-year Korean language majors at HPU exhibits a number of distinguishing features, both in their backgrounds and in their evolving aspirations. A significant majority, estimated at around 85%, initially chose to major in the Korean language largely due to the influence of the Korean Wave (Hallyu), especially through popular culture phenomena such as K-pop, Korean dramas, and digital media. However, by their third year, many students' motivations shift, with growing attention paid to academic achievement and future career prospects.

Students enter the program with diverse levels of Korean language proficiency; some have prior exposure or self-study experience, while others begin as true novices. Nonetheless, by the third year, most reach an intermediate or advanced level, typically corresponding to TOPIK levels 3 to 5. The group is predominantly female, making up approximately 85% of the cohort, which aligns with broader national trends observed in language and cultural studies programs.

In terms of learning preferences, many students express a strong inclination toward interactive, communicative teaching methodologies. However, adaptation can be challenging for those who are more accustomed to student-centred environments, particularly when faced with the structured, teacher-centred approach of some native Korean lecturers. Despite these differences, most students remain highly motivated by their future goals, which commonly include careers in translation, tourism, business, or education. This drive compels them to develop not only linguistic competence but also cultural fluency, which is essential for both professional integration and personal growth.

1.3. Learning Conditions in HPU's Intercultural Environment

The learning environment at HPU offers students both significant opportunities and notable challenges as they navigate the process of intercultural adaptation. On the one hand, the university provides modern, well-equipped facilities designed to support multimedia-based instruction. However, certain aspects, such as fixed seating arrangements, can still reinforce a teacher-centred classroom dynamic. The third-year curriculum itself is robust, encompassing advanced grammar, business Korean, cultural studies, and

translation/interpretation, all of which are intended to foster holistic development in both language and cultural understanding.

Beyond the formal curriculum, students benefit from a range of extracurricular activities that serve as practical extensions of their classroom learning. Conversation clubs, cultural workshops—such as cooking classes or K-pop dance sessions, language exchanges, and annual festivals are regularly organised, offering students immersive experiences that complement theoretical knowledge. These activities function as "living laboratories," where students can apply cultural insights in real-world contexts.

Assessment at HPU is multi-dimensional, blending written exams, oral presentations, group projects, and participation grades. Such diversity in evaluation methods reflects the standards commonly found in Korean academia, with an emphasis on thorough preparation, formality, and group performance. Social interactions at HPU are equally complex, spanning relationships between Vietnamese students and Korean lecturers, among Vietnamese peers, and between local students and Korean exchange students. These interactions not only enrich the cultural tapestry of the university but also require students to continually adapt to various communication styles and social expectations.

2. Survey

2.1. Introduction

2.1.1. University Context

Since the introduction of its Korean language program in 2015, Hai Phong University of Management and Technology (HPU) has steadily established itself as a leading institution for Korean language education in northern Vietnam. The university's ongoing investments have resulted in both quantitative and qualitative improvements: student enrollment numbers have consistently risen, and the program's reputation has grown in tandem. This expansion reflects not only the popularity of Korean culture among Vietnamese youth but also the deepening cooperation between Vietnam and South Korea in areas such as economics, culture, and education.

Crucially, HPU has cultivated a strong network of institutional partnerships with several prestigious universities in South Korea. These collaborations have yielded a wealth of opportunities for students, including academic exchanges, joint research projects, and short-

term study abroad programs. Such international connections enhance the quality of education provided, broaden students' perspectives, and give them tangible access to modern Korean educational environments.

HPU's commitment to the Korean language program is also closely linked to its strategic location in Hai Phong, a major industrial and seaport city, as well as a significant hub for South Korean foreign direct investment. This geographic and economic context greatly increases the practical relevance of the program, as graduates are well-positioned to find employment in Korean multinational corporations, joint ventures, and a variety of sectors tied to Vietnam-Korea cooperation. The program's alignment with both local and international trends ensures that students are well prepared for the demands of a globalising workforce.

2.1.2. Class Size and Instructional Time

The research for this study was conducted within the context of third-year Korean language classes at HPU. Each annual intake is typically divided into two classes, each comprising between 25 and 30 students. This moderate class size is considered optimal for language learning, as it allows for a balance between group dynamics and individual attention. In such settings, instructors can more easily facilitate interactive learning activities, ensuring that every student has ample opportunity to participate, express themselves, and practice their language skills an essential component for effective language acquisition and intercultural engagement.

The third-year curriculum is deliberately structured to be both intensive and comprehensive, encompassing advanced topics that build on students' foundational knowledge. Courses are logically sequenced and include advanced grammar, speaking and listening, reading and writing, as well as business Korean. The regular, varied exposure to the language that comes from this curriculum enables students to reinforce their skills and adapt more naturally to the demands of intercultural communication. The thoughtfully designed schedule ensures that students are consistently immersed in Korean, both within and beyond the classroom, providing a strong basis for ongoing adaptation.

2.1.3. Research Participants

To obtain data that genuinely reflects the process of intercultural adaptation, careful consideration was given to the selection of research participants. The study employed purposive sampling to ensure that participants possessed relevant experience and met clearly defined criteria. Ultimately, the participant group consisted of ten third-year Korean language majors, each of whom had successfully completed at least five courses taught directly by native Korean instructors. This criterion ensured that all participants had substantial exposure to authentic Korean language and cultural contexts.

In addition, only students who had maintained a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 2.5 or higher in major-related subjects were chosen. This requirement underscored the importance of academic commitment and a solid foundation in the language, which are both essential for meaningful participation in the study. Participation was voluntary, with students agreeing to engage fully in the quantitative survey.

The group was intentionally diverse in terms of academic performance, including students rated as "good" and "excellent," to capture a wide spectrum of perspectives and experiences. The final group included ten students (seven female, three male), aged between 20 and 21, all of whom had completed two to three years of formal Korean study and had frequent contact with native Korean instructors. This careful selection helped ensure that the findings would be grounded in real-life student experiences and would accurately represent the processes of intercultural adaptation within the Vietnamese higher education context.

2.2. Methodology

2.2.1. Reasons for Using the Survey Questionnaire

The choice to employ a survey questionnaire as the primary data collection instrument in this research was informed by several compelling considerations. Surveys are particularly well-suited to university settings, allowing researchers to efficiently gather a wide range of information from multiple participants in a relatively short period. This is especially valuable in studies where time and resources may be limited, but the need for comprehensive data remains high.

Moreover, as highlighted by Richards (1994), questionnaires are especially effective for investigating the affective dimensions of teaching and learning, such as beliefs, attitudes,

motivations, and preferences. These aspects are often difficult to capture through observation alone, but are crucial for understanding how students experience and adapt to intercultural learning environments. The standardised nature of surveys also facilitates the aggregation and statistical analysis of data, ensuring that all respondents are asked the same set of questions in a consistent manner.

In the Vietnamese context, the use of anonymous questionnaires is particularly advantageous. Cultural norms may make students hesitant to voice personal opinions or admit to challenges in face-to-face settings, especially when teachers or peers are present. By guaranteeing anonymity, the survey encourages honest and candid responses, allowing students to express their perspectives, difficulties, and concerns without fear of negative repercussions. As a result, the data collected is likely to be more authentic and reliable, providing a solid basis for subsequent analysis.

2.2.2. Purpose of the Survey Questionnaire

The survey questionnaire was meticulously crafted to address multiple, interconnected research objectives, each contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the topic. The primary aim was to explore the beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of third-year Korean language majors regarding their classroom experiences with native Korean instructors. This focus was chosen because classroom interactions are central to the process of intercultural adaptation.

A secondary goal was to identify the specific linguistic and cultural challenges that students encounter in classes taught by native instructors. By understanding these difficulties, the study aims to shed light on the barriers students face and the factors that may impede their adaptation. In addition, the questionnaire sought to investigate the adaptation strategies employed by students, using Berry's acculturation model as a theoretical framework to categorise and analyse these responses.

Finally, the survey was designed to assess students' self-perceived confidence, sources of anxiety, and their perceptions of the effectiveness of their adaptation efforts. By capturing this range of information, the questionnaire provides a nuanced picture of the adaptation process, highlighting both the obstacles students face and the strategies they use to overcome them.

2.2.3. Survey Questionnaire Development Process

The development of the survey questionnaire was a rigorous, iterative process that drew upon both theoretical insights and practical considerations. The first stage involved a thorough review of the literature, with particular attention paid to existing research and validated measurement scales related to intercultural adaptation, acculturation strategies, and language learning motivation. This literature review informed the initial pool of questionnaire items, ensuring that they were conceptually aligned with the study's key questions.

Next, the draft questionnaire was subjected to pilot testing with a small group of students who met the study's criteria but were not part of the main sample. Feedback from this pilot group proved invaluable, highlighting questions that were ambiguous, confusing, or poorly sequenced. Based on this feedback as well as input from subject-matter experts, the questionnaire was revised multiple times to enhance clarity, remove redundancy, and ensure that all items accurately measured the intended constructs.

The finalised questionnaire was divided into several key sections. The first focused on students' motivations for learning Korean and their exposure to Korean culture through various forms of media and entertainment. The second section used a five-point Likert scale (ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree") to assess classroom experiences, including confidence in communication, understanding of cultural norms (such as the use of honorifics), ease of social integration, and levels of anxiety or stress experienced during class. The third section addressed adaptation strategies, again employing a five-point Likert scale to gauge the extent to which students identified with Berry's four acculturation strategies: Integration, Assimilation, Separation, and Marginalisation.

2.3. Data and Analysis

2.3.1. Data Analysis Techniques

To uphold objectivity, scientific rigour, and practical relevance, the quantitative data collected from the 10 completed survey responses were subjected to careful statistical analysis. The process began with systematic data preparation: all responses were compiled, and for items measured on a Likert scale, numerical values (from 1 to 5) were assigned to facilitate quantitative analysis. Descriptive statistical methods were then employed to

summarise and interpret the data. For categorical variables—such as students' primary motivations for studying Korean—frequency counts and percentage distributions were calculated to provide a clear picture of the sample's composition. For quantitative variables, such as confidence levels, perceived stress, and agreement with particular adaptation strategies, measures of central tendency were used. The mean score was computed to represent the average response across the sample, while the median was calculated to provide a measure of central tendency that is less susceptible to distortion by outlier values a particularly important consideration given

the small sample size.

To enhance the clarity and accessibility of the findings, the results were visualised using tables and charts. For example, pie charts were used to depict categorical data distributions, while column charts illustrated mean scores across various adaptation strategies or classroom experiences. These visual tools made it easier to identify key trends and patterns in the data.

The overarching aim of the analysis was to map the landscape of intercultural adaptation among third-year Korean language majors at HPU. By focusing on students' cultural backgrounds, classroom challenges, and preferred acculturation strategies, the analysis established a foundation for a more detailed discussion of findings, which is presented in the subsequent section.

2.3.2. Analysis of the research

This section presents a comprehensive analysis of the quantitative data collected from the structured survey of 10 third-year Korean language majors at HPU. The analysis proceeds systematically, beginning with students' pre-existing cultural background and motivations, moving to their concrete classroom experiences, and concluding with their overarching cultural adaptation strategies. Each thematic segment integrates descriptive statistics with in-depth interpretive commentary, explicitly connecting empirical findings to the theoretical frameworks established in Chapter 1.

2.3.2.1. Exposure

Level of Exposure to Korean Culture. The data reveal a student cohort with substantial pre-academic engagement with Korean cultural products. A decisive majority of 70% of

respondents expressed agreement with having a high level of exposure, selecting Agree (50%) or Strongly Agree (20%). This finding is of paramount importance for understanding the students' starting point. It indicates that they are not approaching Korean culture as a complete unknown but as a domain already populated with familiar narratives, aesthetics, linguistic fragments, and social codes absorbed through movies, music, and digital media. This reservoir of "cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1986) serves a critical function: it lowers the initial psychological barriers to entry, mitigates the shock of the unfamiliar, and provides a scaffold upon which formal cultural instruction can be built. The remaining 30% of responses (Neutral 20%, Disagree 10%) suggest a spectrum of engagement, highlighting that while high exposure is the dominant trend, individual experiences vary, potentially influencing the pace and ease of initial adaptation.

THE FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
0	10	20	50	20
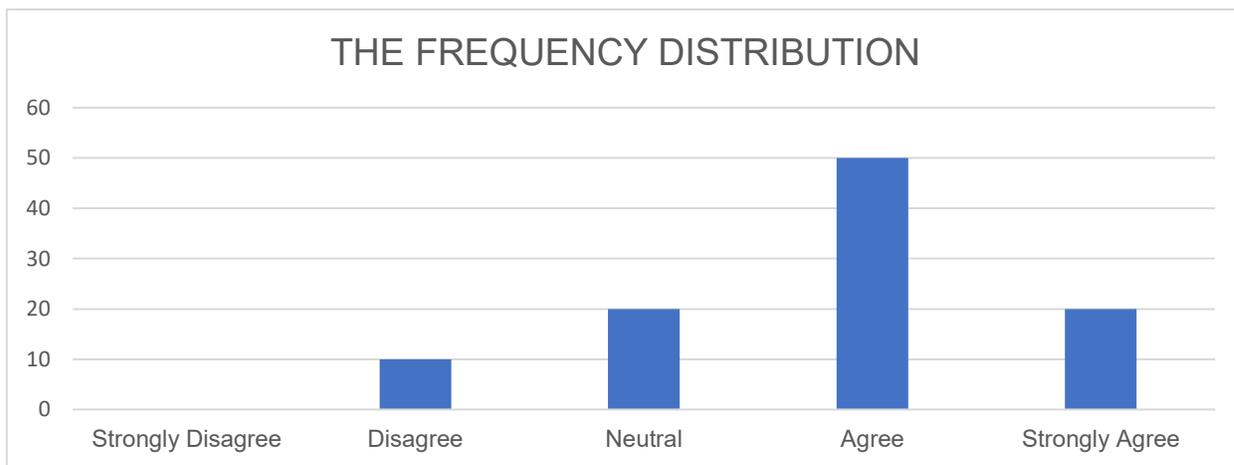
Chart 1: Students' Self-Reported Exposure to Korean Culture

2.3.2.2. Motivation

While exposure indicates familiarity, motivation reveals the driving force behind the sustained effort required for language acquisition and cultural learning. The second survey item uncovers the primary "why" behind the students' academic commitment.

- Primary Motivation Linked to Culture. The results here are striking in their clarity. An overwhelming 80% of participants identified their main motivation for learning Korean as being intrinsically tied to Korean culture—specifically the Hallyu wave (Agree 40%, Strongly Agree 40%). This transcends being a mere hobby or side interest; it is the central, animating force of their academic journey. This aligns powerfully with Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory, where intrinsic motivation engagement driven by

inherent interest, enjoyment, or personal significance is associated with greater persistence, creativity, and deep learning. In the intercultural context, this type of motivation transforms the adaptation process. Challenges like those identified in the classroom (e.g., fast speech pace) are more likely to be framed as hurdles within a personally meaningful project rather than as insurmountable external demands. This motivational foundation provides the emotional and psychological energy necessary to navigate the "stress" phase of Kim's (2001) model and persist toward "adaptation" and "growth." The 20% selecting Neutral may represent students whose motivations are more instrumental (e.g., career prospects) or who are in a process of reflecting on their primary drivers.
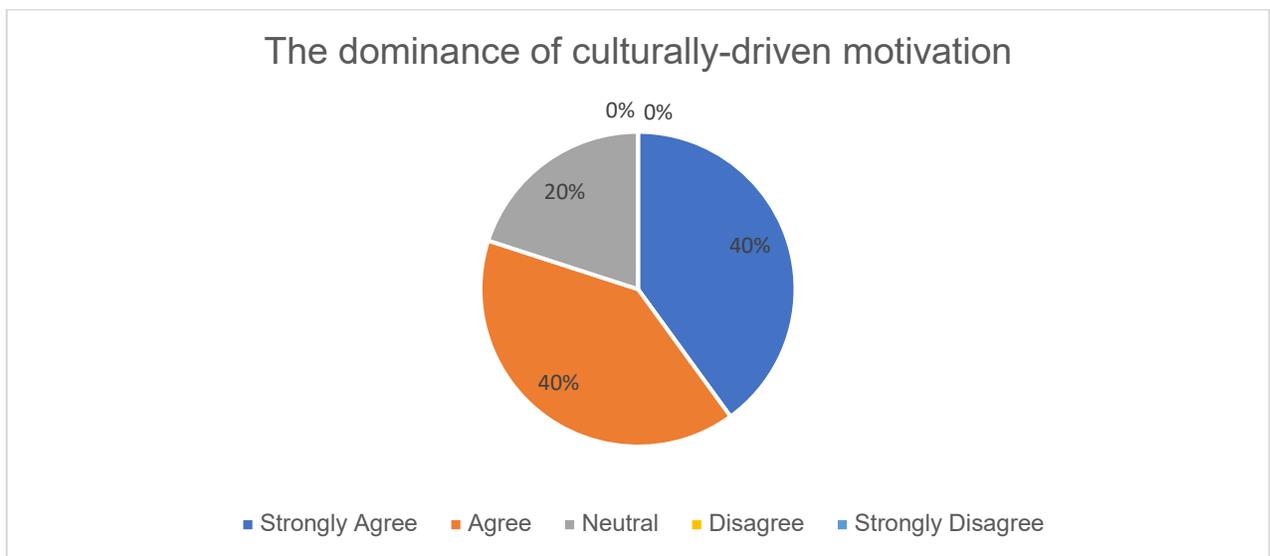
Chart 2: Cultural Motivation for Learning Korean

2.3.2.3. Confidence

Survey results indicate that students' confidence in communicating with Korean native instructors is at a moderately positive level, with an average score of 3.3 on a 5-point Likert scale. This suggests that most students have overcome the initial stage of shyness and uncertainty commonly observed in new language environments and are entering a phase of positive psychological adaptation. However, there is still a clear division among students, as scores range from 2 (not confident) to 5 (very confident). Some students have developed strong affective competence, effectively regulating themselves to manage anxiety and maintain intrinsic motivation, thereby participating more actively in classroom communication. In contrast, those with lower confidence scores still struggle with

evaluation anxiety, often worried about making mistakes in front of native instructors and peers. Thus, communicative confidence is not only a psychological indicator but also a strong predictor of active participation in learning activities, creating a positive feedback loop that promotes language acquisition and sociocultural adaptation.
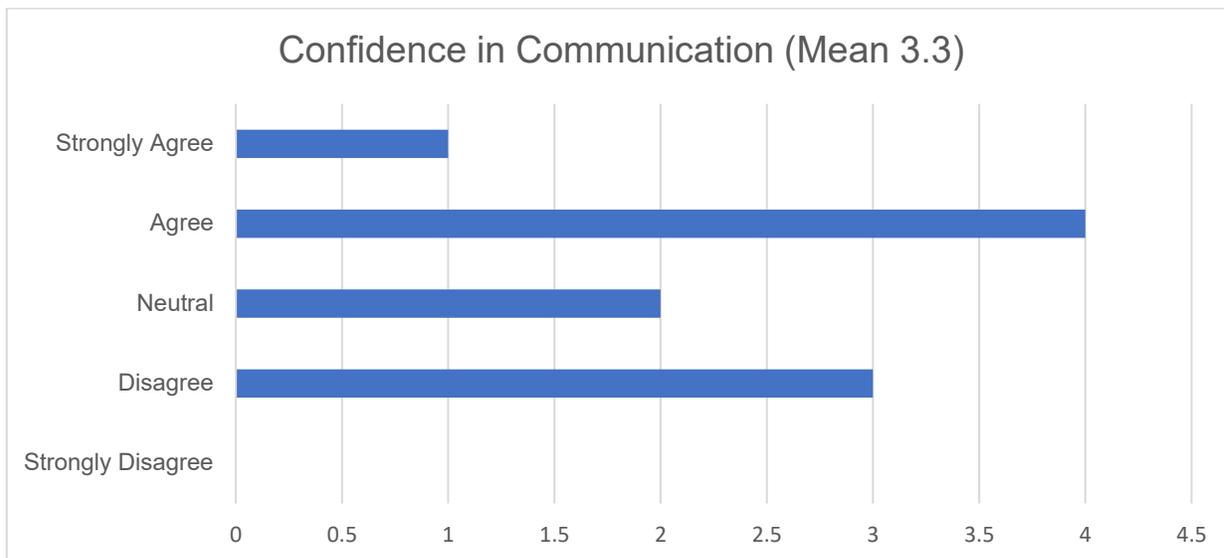

Chart 3: Level of confidence when communicating with native instructors

2.3.2.4. Ability

Beyond confidence, the ability to understand and apply classroom cultural norms, especially complex pragmatic rules like honorifics, is another crucial indicator of students' sociocultural adaptation. With an average score of 3.4, slightly higher than communicative confidence, it is clear that students have invested significant effort in adapting to behavioural expectations in the new academic environment. Using honorifics in Korean is a major challenge, not only linguistically but also in terms of fulfilling appropriate social roles. Survey data and classroom observations reveal that students have engaged in observational learning and trial-and-error, gradually narrowing the pragmatic gap with native speakers. This adaptation not only facilitates more effective communication and reduces misunderstandings, but also helps build positive relationships with instructors and classmates, laying a solid foundation for personal development and social integration.
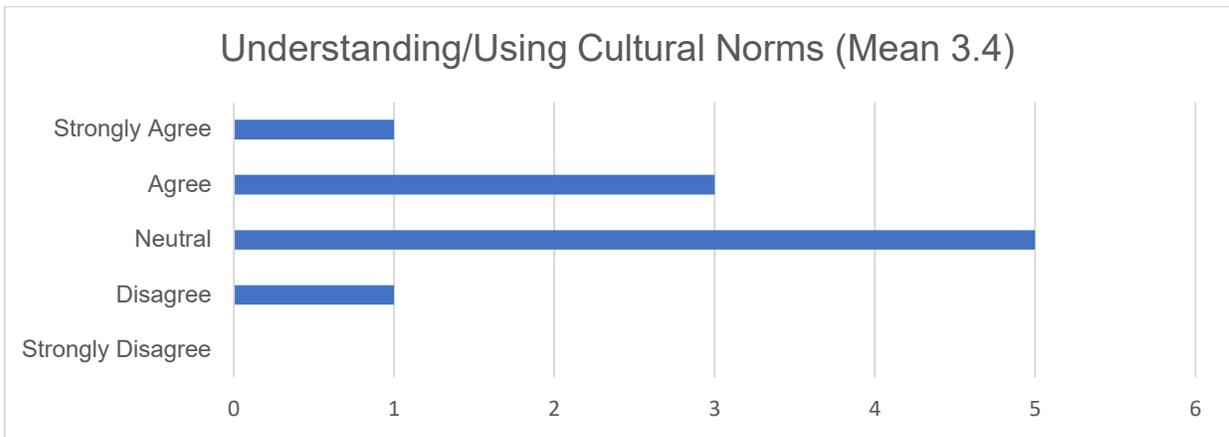
Chart 4: Ability to understand and use appropriate classroom cultural rules

2.3.2.5. Stress

One of the greatest obstacles students face is the rapid pace of speech by native instructors. On average, the stress level caused by this factor is rated at 3.4, on par with their ability to apply cultural norms. This is a typical manifestation of cognitive overload, as students must process auditory, semantic, and contextual information simultaneously in a short period of time. According to Kim's Stress–Adaptation–Growth model, a certain level of stress is necessary to stimulate adaptation and personal growth. However, if stress exceeds the students' tolerance, it can have a boomerang effect, causing withdrawal and reducing motivation and listening comprehension. Therefore, maintaining a balance between challenge and support is essential; instructors need to moderate their speech speed and enhance support measures to help students gradually improve their listening skills in real-world contexts.
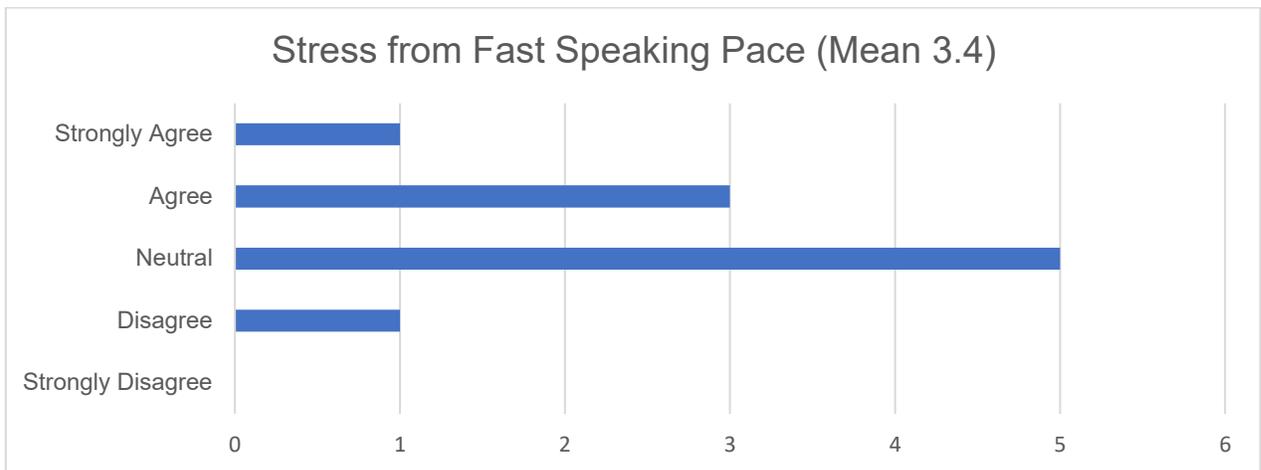

Chart 5: Level of stress due to the fast speaking pace of the native instructors

2.3.2.6. Anxiety

Anxiety about being evaluated when speaking Korean is a fairly common psychological barrier, reflected by an average score of 3.0. Although not the highest, this factor still hinders students' confidence and proactivity, especially in East Asian cultures where personal image is highly valued. Fear of making mistakes, being ridiculed, or facing negative judgments can increase the affective filter, making students hesitant to participate in meaningful language practice activities. This highlights the need to create a psychologically safe classroom environment, where mistakes are accepted as learning opportunities. Only when emotional barriers are lowered can students increase their willingness to communicate and adapt more effectively to a multicultural learning environment.
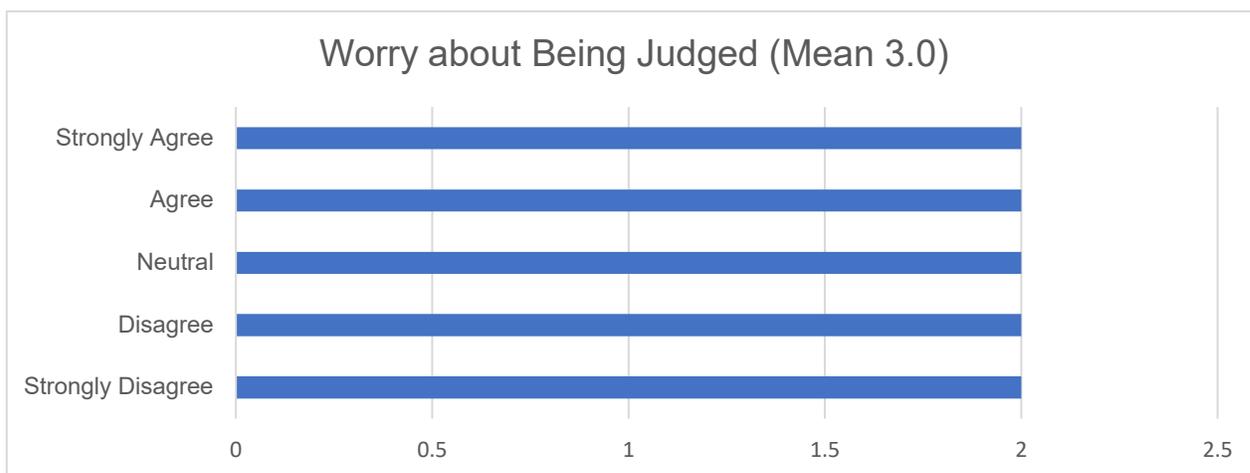

Chart 6: Level of worry about being judged when speaking Korean in class

2.3.2.7. Integration Strategies for Cultural Adaptation

Integration stands out as the preferred adaptation strategy for most students, as evidenced by an average score of 4.2 and roughly 90% agreeing with actively embracing Korean culture while maintaining pride in their Vietnamese heritage. This convincingly demonstrates the effectiveness of Berry's acculturation model: integration leads to harmonious development both psychologically and socially, enabling students not only to adapt but also to enrich their personal identity. Rather than viewing cultural differences as obstacles, students see them as opportunities to broaden their perspectives and develop a flexible, resilient bicultural identity—a significant asset in today's globalised society.
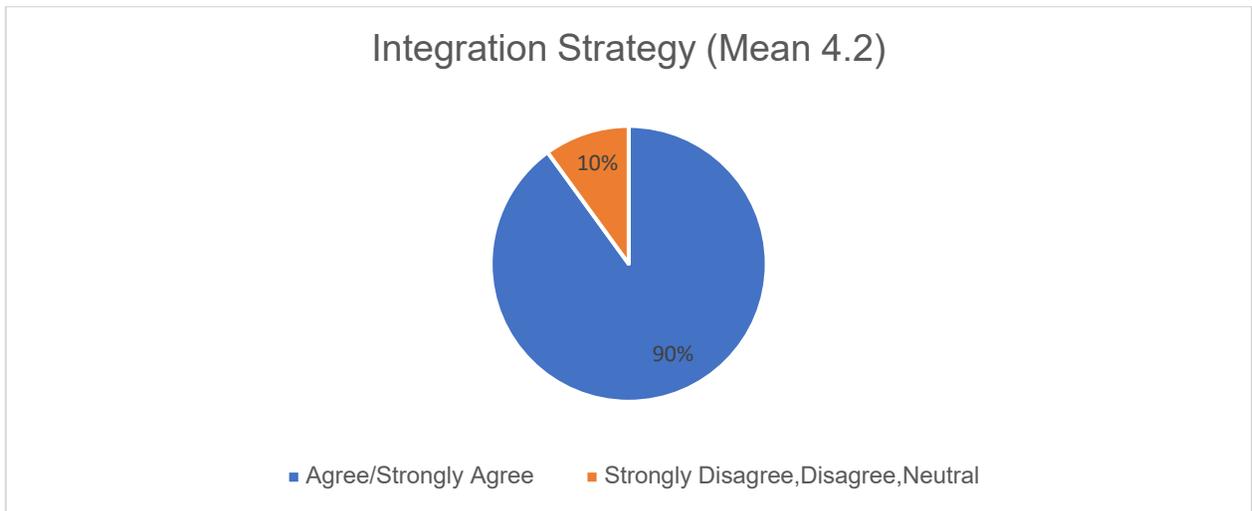
Chart 7: The extent to which the Integration strategy is employed

2.3.2.8. Marginalisation Tendency and the Role of the Learning Environment

In stark contrast to integration, the tendency towards marginalisation, where individuals feel disconnected from both their native and host cultures, was almost entirely absent in this study group, with an average score of just 1.9, the lowest among all surveyed factors. 80% of students firmly rejected this strategy, indicating that the learning environment at HPU is effectively supporting healthy adaptation and preventing feelings of alienation or being "caught between two worlds." Minimising marginalisation is crucial for fostering psychological stability and a sense of belonging, ultimately enhancing academic performance and promoting positive, healthy cultural integration.
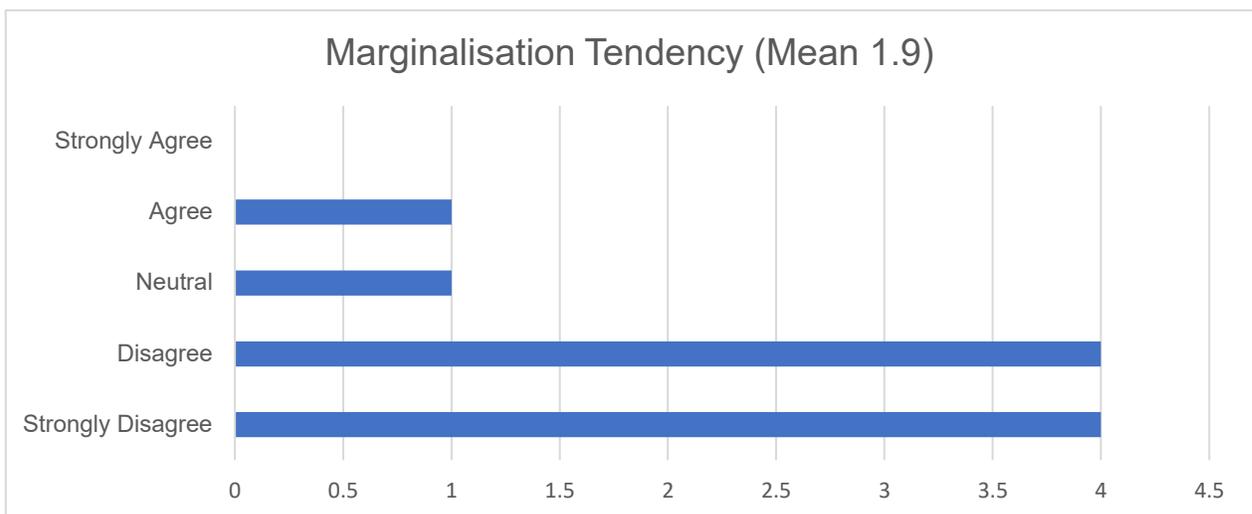

Chart 8: The extent to which there is a tendency toward Marginalization

2.3.2.9. Synthesis: An Integrated Profile of the Intercultural Learner

The survey data converge to form a coherent, multidimensional profile of the third-year Korean language major at HPU:

Culturally-Primed Learners: Students enter the program with significant informal cultural capital from prior Hallyu exposure, easing initial adaptation.

Intrinsically Motivated Agents: Their learning is driven by a deep, personal interest in Korean culture, fostering resilience.

Navigators of the Stress-Growth Cycle: They demonstrate foundational confidence and competence but are actively challenged by cognitive (fast instructional pace) and psychological (evaluation anxiety) stressors, which drive adaptive learning.

Conscious Integrators: The defining characteristic is their strategic adoption of a bicultural identity, actively embracing Korean cultural elements while firmly maintaining their Vietnamese heritage. This is evidenced by the overwhelming preference for Berry's Integration strategy and the strong rejection of Marginalisation.

This empirically grounded profile confirms that students are not passive recipients but active, strategic participants in their intercultural adaptation. It provides the essential foundation for the subsequent discussion of implications in Chapter III.

CHAPTER III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter serves as the analytical centrepiece of the thesis, uniting empirical findings from Chapter 2 with theoretical insights to construct a nuanced account of intercultural adaptation among third-year Korean language majors at HPU. Rather than presenting results in isolation, the chapter weaves quantitative data and qualitative interpretation into a cohesive narrative. Central to this discussion are Berry's (2005) Acculturation Model and Kim's (2001) Integrative Communication Theory, which provide the conceptual framework for understanding not only the strategies students employ but also the underlying motivations and contextual dynamics that shape their adaptation. The chapter concludes with a thorough exploration of implications, offering targeted recommendations for both learners and educators to foster more effective and resilient intercultural adaptation.

3.1. Motivation to Strategic Positioning

The findings reveal that the adaptation process of HPU's third-year Korean language majors unfolds along a logical continuum, beginning with pre-existing cultural resources and intrinsic motivation, passing through concrete experiential challenges, and culminating in the adoption of a deliberate acculturation strategy. This pathway is neither linear nor uniform, but is marked by distinct stages that interact with both the students' individual dispositions and the structural realities of the classroom.

3.1.1. Pre-Existing Cultural Capital and Intrinsic Motivation

Notably, the adaptation process does not begin at university entry, but is seeded much earlier in students' personal histories. Survey data reveal two salient preconditions that fundamentally shape their subsequent adaptation:

First, the majority of students (70%) report moderate to high prior exposure to Korean culture, primarily through media such as K-pop, dramas, and online platforms. This early engagement means that students approach university study with a meaningful stock of informal cultural knowledge, which Bourdieu (1986) calls "cultural capital." Rather than being cultural novices, these students have already internalised certain symbols, behaviours, and reference points from Korean society.

Second, intrinsic motivation emerges as a powerful driver, with 80% of participants citing a genuine "love for Korean culture" as their main reason for pursuing the field. This form

of motivation is qualitatively distinct from extrinsic or purely instrumental motivations (such as employability). Students are propelled by personal identification, curiosity, and enjoyment factors that Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) identifies as central to sustained learning and resilience.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings are highly significant. Kim's (2001) work underscores the importance of a positive affective orientation toward the host culture, which acts as a psychological buffer during the initial stress of adaptation. Students' prior positive attitudes and cultural familiarity reduce resistance and lower the emotional barriers to deeper engagement. This foundation also predisposes them toward Berry's Integration strategy, as they seek to incorporate new cultural elements without erasing their own identity. The implication is clear: educational interventions should recognise and leverage this pre-existing momentum, rather than treating students as blank slates.

3.1.2. The Classroom as a Dynamic Stress-Adaptation-Growth Arena

The locus of adaptation for these students is the classroom, particularly in courses taught by native Korean instructors. Here, the theoretical meets the practical, and adaptation becomes a lived experience marked by both progress and tension.

Data indicate that students are developing key competencies. On average, they report moderate confidence (mean = 3.3) when communicating with native teachers and a slightly higher proficiency (mean = 3.4) in understanding and using cultural norms such as honorifics. These scores reflect the emergence of what Kim terms "host communication competence," encompassing both psychological (confidence) and operational (pragmatic knowledge) facets.

However, these gains are offset by significant challenges. The most acute stressor reported is the rapid speaking pace of native instructors, with a mean stress score of 3.4. This is emblematic of Kim's "stress" phase, where environmental demands momentarily exceed students' current skills, triggering anxiety and cognitive overload. Further, half of the students express anxiety about being judged during classroom participation (mean = 3.0), highlighting the social-psychological barriers, such as fear of losing face or making mistakes, that can impede active engagement.

Importantly, the data suggest that stress is not inherently negative. In line with Kim's stress–adaptation–growth cycle, moments of difficulty serve as catalysts for further development. Exposure to authentic, challenging input pushes students to refine their listening strategies, expand vocabulary, and build resilience. The key, however, lies in the balance: while moderate stress can motivate and stretch learners, excessive or unmanaged anxiety risks disengagement and diminished confidence. Thus, classrooms must cultivate both challenge and psychological safety, providing scaffolding without diluting authenticity.

3.1.3. The Hegemony of the Integration Strategy

Perhaps the most compelling finding is the near-unanimous adoption of the Integration acculturation strategy. A remarkable 90% of respondents identify with this approach (mean = 4.2), which is characterised by active learning and appreciation of Korean culture alongside continued pride in their Vietnamese heritage. Conversely, the marginalisation strategy is firmly rejected by 80% of students (mean = 1.9).

This strong preference for Integration provides robust empirical support for Berry's model within the Vietnamese context. Students do not view cultural adaptation as a zero-sum game; instead, they pursue a bicultural identity that is additive rather than substitutive. The rejection of marginalisation is also notable, indicating that the institutional and social environment at HPU supports healthy identity formation and prevents students from feeling alienated or "between worlds."

Theoretically, this trajectory makes sense: intrinsic cultural motivation fuels a desire for integration, and the skills developed through classroom challenges equip students to pursue this goal effectively. The result is an adaptive, resilient, and strategically bicultural learner, an "Active Integrator" rather than a passive recipient of cultural influences.

3.2. Integrated Profile and Holistic Discussion

Taken together, the findings yield a rich, multidimensional portrait of the third-year Korean language major at HPU. Far from embodying a deficit or remedial orientation, these students are best understood as agentive, resourceful, and strategically engaged actors within a complex intercultural ecosystem. Their journey is characterised by the following attributes:

Culturally-Primed: They arrive with informal cultural capital, which reduces initial adjustment barriers and accelerates early learning.

Intrinsically-Driven: Their engagement is fueled by genuine personal interest, which sustains motivation and resilience over time.

Resilient Navigators of Stress: They encounter and manage real linguistic and cultural challenges, viewing stress as an opportunity for growth rather than an insurmountable obstacle.

Strategically Bicultural: They consciously pursue an integrated identity, drawing strength from both their Vietnamese roots and their acquired Korean cultural competence.

This integrated profile challenges stereotypes of language learners as passive or struggling. Instead, it recognises them as proactive participants who actively shape the terms of their cultural engagement.

3.3. Comprehensive Implications and Detailed Recommendations

The insights drawn from this study point directly to actionable recommendations for the primary stakeholders involved.

3.3.1. For Students: From Conscious Experience to Strategic Agency

Students are encouraged to transition from being passive recipients of cultural input to becoming strategic agents in their own adaptation.

Leverage Cultural Capital Proactively: Move beyond passive fandom to analytical engagement. For instance, students might transcribe dialogues from dramas to analyse speech patterns and honorifics, use song lyrics to expand vocabulary, or follow Korean educational content creators for authentic language exposure.

Deepen and Broaden Integration: Seek out intercultural experiences beyond the classroom, such as language exchanges, cultural clubs, or online forums and actively share Vietnamese cultural insights in these contexts, reframing their heritage as an asset.

Develop Stress-Management Toolkits: Prepare for fast-paced classes by previewing materials, using focused note-taking, and seeking clarification as needed. Reframe mistakes as valuable feedback, and cultivate habits of seeking constructive criticism from instructors and peers to facilitate continuous improvement.

3.3.2. From Knowledge Delivery to Ecosystem Design

Educators and institutions must move beyond traditional teaching roles to become designers and facilitators of intercultural learning ecosystems.

Embed Culture Deeply in the Curriculum: Integrate cultural pragmatics into every lesson. Teaching grammar, for example, should naturally include exploration of social hierarchies and context. Use a wide range of authentic materials news, blogs, social media, and video clips, to bridge the gap between the textbook and the real-world Korean.

Foster a Safe, Supportive Classroom Climate: Instructors should be mindful of speech rate, use pauses and visual aids, and normalise the process of making mistakes. Emphasise collaborative tasks that lower performance pressure, provide formative feedback, and create plenty of low-stakes opportunities for practice.

Scaffold and Validate Integration: Institutions should create platforms for structured intercultural contact, such as conversation partner programs or joint projects with Korean universities. Intercultural competence training should become a core part of the curriculum, helping students reflect on their acculturation strategies and set goals for integrative growth. Teachers should also be attentive to signs of maladaptive strategies and offer timely support to steer students toward integration.

3.4. Concluding

In summary, the intercultural adaptation journey of HPU's Korean language majors emerges as both dynamic and successful, underpinned by strong intrinsic motivation and a robust, supportive learning environment. The findings not only reinforce the relevance of Berry's and Kim's theoretical models but also situate them within the lived realities of Vietnamese students. By embracing their agency and by institutions intentionally supporting their adaptation, students can transform initial enthusiasm for Hallyu into genuine linguistic and cultural competence. Ultimately, this process produces not just fluent speakers of Korean but confident, adaptable, and culturally agile participants in a globalised world.

PART III: CONCLUSION

This research has thoroughly examined the intercultural adaptation strategies employed by third-year Korean language majors at Hai Phong University of Management and Technology (HPU), focusing especially on their experiences within classrooms led by native Korean instructors. Grounded in Berry's Acculturation Model and Kim's Integrative Communication Theory, and supported by quantitative data from a carefully selected sample, the study has contributed meaningful insights into the motivations, challenges, and adaptive strategies that define this cohort's intercultural journey.

1. Summary of Key Findings

The study's findings can be distilled into three central conclusions, each reinforcing and extending the theoretical perspectives and contextual discussions presented in earlier chapters.

First, the influence of the Korean Wave (Hallyu) emerges as both foundational and transformative. The majority of students entered the program with considerable exposure to Korean culture 70% reported moderate to high engagement with Korean media, while 80% cited cultural affinity as their primary motivation for pursuing Korean studies. This pre-existing cultural capital acts as an emotional buffer, easing the initial transition and fostering a genuine, self-sustaining interest in the target language and culture. As discussed in Chapters I and II, this intrinsic motivation serves to lower affective barriers and primes students for a more open and receptive approach to intercultural learning.

Second, the classroom itself is revealed as a dynamic space where growth and challenge coexist. Students demonstrated moderate to high confidence in communicating with native instructors (mean: 3.3) and in grasping cultural norms such as honorifics (mean: 3.4). However, they also encountered tangible stressors, most notably the fast speaking pace of native lecturers (mean: 3.4), that put their developing skills to the test. These challenges are not simply obstacles but, as Kim's theory suggests, necessary catalysts for adaptation and growth. The experience of moderate evaluation anxiety (mean: 3.0) underscores the importance of a supportive learning environment, where stress serves as a motivator rather than a deterrent.

Third, and perhaps most significantly, the overwhelming preference for the Integration acculturation strategy stands out as a hallmark of successful adaptation. Ninety percent of participants aligned themselves with this approach (mean: 4.2), actively seeking to learn from Korean culture while simultaneously valuing their Vietnamese heritage. In contrast, the marginalisation strategy was decisively rejected (mean: 1.9). This not only validates Berry's theoretical model in the context of Vietnamese higher education but also highlights the students' conscious construction of a bicultural identity that is both adaptive and sustainable. Rather than feeling forced to choose between cultures, these students are empowered to draw on the strengths of both, resulting in positive engagement and minimal cultural alienation.

2. Implications and Contributions

The implications of these findings are both theoretical and practical.

On a theoretical level, the study affirms the relevance of Berry's and Kim's frameworks for interpreting the adaptation processes of Vietnamese students learning a foreign language in a domestic university setting. It further demonstrates how global cultural flows, like Hallyu, interact with local agency to shape adaptation in ways that are both predictable and context-specific.

On a practical level, the research provides actionable guidance for all key stakeholders at HPU:

For students: The evidence encourages students to adopt an intentional and proactive approach to intercultural adaptation. By transforming their passion for Korean culture into active, reflective learning strategies, they can strengthen their integrative orientation and enhance both their academic and personal development.

For educators and administrators: The findings highlight the necessity of designing curricula that are deeply embedded in authentic cultural content, and of fostering classroom climates that are psychologically safe and linguistically supportive. Structured opportunities for intercultural interaction should be deliberately created to nurture the integrative tendencies naturally present among students.

3. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

While this study has yielded valuable insights, several limitations must be acknowledged. The small sample size and the use of purposive sampling from a single institution limit the generalizability of the results. Additionally, reliance solely on quantitative self-report data provides breadth but may not capture the deep, nuanced, personal experiences of adaptation. To address these limitations and further enrich the field, future research might consider:

Broadening the scope to include larger and more diverse samples across multiple universities thus increases the representativeness and external validity of the findings. Adopting a longitudinal study design to trace the evolution of strategies over time. Conducting longitudinal studies to trace the evolution of adaptation strategies throughout the students' university careers, from entry through graduation.

In sum, this research demonstrates that the intercultural adaptation of third-year Korean language majors at HPU is not a passive or haphazard process, but an active, strategic, and largely successful endeavour. Anchored by intrinsic cultural motivation and guided by an integrative approach, these students are adeptly negotiating the complexities of multilingual, multicultural classrooms. By recognising and supporting this integrative orientation both at the individual and institutional level, HPU has the opportunity to cultivate not only competent Korean language speakers, but also confident, flexible, and culturally attuned global citizens, ready to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world.

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APPENDIXES

My name is Hoang Phuong Anh, and this is the survey questionnaire used in the thesis titled "Intercultural Adaptation Strategies of Third-Year Korean Majors at HPU in Korean Language Classrooms." The survey was designed to collect students' experiences, perceptions, and adaptation strategies to support the data analysis of the study. I appreciate to all the students who participated in the survey. Your thoughtful responses, willingness to share experiences, and contributions of time made this research possible

Question 1: My level of exposure to Korean culture (movies, music, media) is high.

  o Strongly Disagree   o Disagree   o Neutral   o Agree   o Strongly Agree

Question 2: My main motivation for learning Korean is related to Korean culture (Hallyu, K-pop, K-drama).

  o Strongly Disagree   o Disagree   o Neutral   o Agree   o Strongly Agree

Question 3: I feel confident when communicating with native Korean teachers in class

  o Strongly Disagree   o Disagree   o Neutral   o Agree   o Strongly Agree

Question 4: I can understand and use appropriate classroom cultural rules (e.g., honorifics).

  o Strongly Disagree   o Disagree   o Neutral   o Agree   o Strongly Agree

Question 5: I often feel stressed because the teacher speaks too fast for me to keep up

  o Strongly Disagree   o Disagree   o Neutral   o Agree   o Strongly Agree

Question 6: I worry about being judged when speaking Korean in class.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Question 7: I actively learn about Korean culture while still maintaining pride in Vietnamese culture (Integration strategy).

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Question 8: I feel I do not fully belong to either Vietnamese or Korean culture in the learning environment (Marginalisation tendency).

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree