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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# LEARNING KOREAN LANGUAGE IN THE WORKPLACE: THROUGH THE LENS OF OVERSEAS FILIPINO WORKERS

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### ABSTRACT

This qualitative phenomenological study features the need to learn Korean language, the strategies used in learning Korean language, insights gained and changes in life of learning Korean language by Filipino workers in the workplace. Online conferencing was used in the in-depth interview of the participants' experience in dealing with the Korean language. The result of the study found out that participants had various strategies in learning the language in order to perform their jobs fast and efficient. One of which was by utilizing multi-media sources in learning the language. Participants also experienced difficulty in learning the language but they motivated themselves and they were able to manage this difficulty. Thus, language is very important not only in their daily activity in the workplace but also in their society. Furthermore, learning the language is beneficial for job employment especially in the field of language skilled based occupation.

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## INTRODUCTION

Language in a workplace is essential. It is a necessity to must have in a productive business. It is also a mean wall that separates people from each other.

Hence, language could be could be hindrance or a vehicle for success. Ribeiro (2007) argued that "language barrier" is normally considered as an obstacle. It hinders the understanding concepts, beliefs and customs thus directly challenging each other. Foma (2014) claimed the first confrontation is communication difficulty in a workplace and how it hinders performance of workers when left unresolved. Cui and Kwon (2014) stated proper language use and barrier solutions is encourage in order to obtain optimum performance in the workplace to avoid unwanted conflicts and misconducts.

The Philippines a multilingual country that has much variation of languages also has language barriers. Gonzalez (2003) argued multilingual condition make it difficult to try to flourish

all languages. Philippines made up of more than 170 living languages.

Considering that there is many languages, communication with one another in different languages is hard.

Working in a foreign country like Korea; for a worker, communication barrier makes the employer and employee clash which affects their relationship. Thus, it was also experienced by one of the researchers who personally faced this kind of dilemma while working for seven years in Korea in a factory.

This study is of great importance to future foreign workers to provide them with the information on how to learn foreign language effectively in fastest way.

### Research Questions

This exploratory study aimed at determining the nature of this language barriers and search solution to its problem.

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*Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions*

1. Why do Filipino workers in Korea need to learn Korean language in their workplace?
2. What are the strategies employed by the participants in learning the Korean language?
3. What are the insights gained in learning the Korean language?
4. What are the changes in life in learning the Korean language?

## **METHOD**

Presented in this chapter are the methods used by the researchers: research design, research instrument, research participants, and scope and limitations; following qualitative-phenomenology approach.

### ***Research Design***

In this study, researchers endeavors to have a deep understanding of the learning of Korean language by the Filipino workers. Hence, it also intends to discover the experiences and the nature of process of learning the Korean language of the participants.

This study will do a qualitative –phenomenology approach. This method is appropriate to this research since the participants (Filipino Workers) are in Korea also; phenomenology approach mainly focuses on the perception of meaning of a person (van Manen, 1990). For the reason that participants are in Korea, researchers will conduct the in depth interview through online conference. Electronic conference will be conducted using Synchronous session that refers to sessions that are live (Rezabek, 2000). By using online conferencing, it will be beneficial to participants as they will feel comfort, can express freely their thoughts and will be motivated to cooperate on the discussion. However, following the ethics of research, Cayogyog and San Jose (2012) pointed out that though research outputs need to be disseminated for the benefits of all, confidentiality of personal accounts of the participants must be kept. Thus, the specific names, house locations, occupations of the participants in this were disclosed. In terms of jobs, we classified the participants in general terms like teachers, factory workers and so on.

The following are the guidelines of the researchers in conducting the study: developing of guide questions; selection of participants; sending letter of invitation; sending consent document together with the guide questions; reservation of time for the participants; preparation for the conduct of interview that includes devices and software application for recording; proper interview; encoding the whole interview and transcribing; analyzing of the results of the gathered information; writing the conclusion of the research and lastly, writing the implications for practice.

### ***Research Instruments***

Researchers formulated interview guide questions and said guide questions were checked and validated by three (3) authorized validators ensuring that the questions comply to the prescribe research questions. In formulating guide questions, researchers assured that all questions are open-ended and that possible insights of the study were included in the probe questions. Hence, all questions were based on the possible factors that participants were engaged into such as learning Korean language and the benefits that it brought to them. This instrument will be used in finding the result of the objectives of the study.

### ***Research Participants***

Participants of this study are Filipino workers who have been staying and working for at least three (3) years in Korea. Participants aged from thirty (30) to fifty five (55) years old. Some of the participants have been staying and working in Korea for ten (10) years.

Seven (7) out of eight (8) participants were teachers the other one was a factory worker. Most of the participants were female and married to a Korean national. For now, they study at Multicultural Center it is where all foreign workers study to take and pass the examination on the basis of level of knowledge about the language. Participants were selected primarily for the reason that their experiences were the answers to our study and that they could contribute essential information. Moreover, participants were chosen based on the capacity of their learning and the length of their stay in Korea.

### ***Scope and Limitations***

Participants of this study were exclusively Filipino workers in Korea who had been stayed and worked for at least three (3) years. Also, age of participants were considered that limits from thirty (30) to fifty five (55) years old. This set down for the purpose of the range of the maturity of the participants and potentially capable to express their thoughts.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

This chapter reveals the experiences of learning Korean language of Overseas Filipino Workers in Korea. It is revealed through the questions raised during the interview, which questions composed of the following: Research questions, Main questions and Probe questions. . Questions and answers are sum up and are filtered into themes as a result. Below are the results of ten (10) essential themes with corresponding results based on participants' answers and discussion.

### ***The Need to Speak Korean Language in the Workplace***

In this section, it mainly indicates the reasons why the participants need to speak Korean language in the workplace. Language is a primary connection that helped the participant to be efficient on their job and to widen the scope of their work.

Most of the participants answered that there is a need to speak Korean for them to understand each other well. Also, it is important for them to create harmonious relationship with each other. Participant 3 said that it is the best way to communicate with others:

Participant 4 also said that Koreans don't speak English. Others point of the necessity to speak Korean is that Koreans don't speak English where English is considered as the universal language. Indeed, learning foreign language is very essential for foreign workers for them to work with ease and perform better in their performance. Hence, learning foreign language can be their solace in times when their away from their homeland. [McHugh and Challinor \(2011\)](#) averred that foreign workers with higher level of language proficiency in target language earn more and performs well.

### ***Strategies Used in Learning Korean Language***

This area discusses the way the participants manages to learn Korean language. The strategies that mainly shaped their second language that taught them to become a competent speaker of Korean language. Most of the participants were aware that there is a need to speak Korean language and they need to make strategies in order for them to communicate toward their boss accurately and effectively. Participants studied first on the alphabets of Korean which is "Hanguel". Participants also relied on using multi-media sources in learning the language where they listen on audio tutorials/modules, listen to music and watch Korean movies on television. One of the best strategies she used in learning the Korean language through listening to the CD.

### ***Difficulties in Learning Korean***

This part reviews the participants' ordeal in coping with the Korean language. Their shared thoughts and experience in their difficulties in learning Korean language. There were two common difficulties that participants have encounter and one of this is the pronunciation and second is the same spelling and pronunciation but different in meaning. Sentence structure of Korean language is different with the first language of participants which they find it difficult in studying the language.

### ***Overcoming Difficulties in Learning Korean***

In this field it enumerates the answers of participants in overcoming their difficulties, their shared experiences on coping with in speaking and understanding language. Studying hard through the use of materials available and communicating to other Koreans are the most common way used by the participants in overcoming the difficulties of learning the language.

Participants have various techniques in overcoming their difficulties. Some of them use available materials such as using dictionary, internet, listening to music and watching movies. Others said that they practice always and mingle with the Koreans.

### ***Insights Gained***

This component tackles their thoughts, understanding and importance of learning the language in their workplace. Participants have distinct insights in learning the Korean language. Some of them pointed out the benefits in the workplace; they have appreciated the culture of the Koreans and they have lived conveniently upon learning the language.

### ***Results of the Experience in Learning Korean Language***

In this section the participants elaborated on the effects in learning Korean language. The maturity of the participants of the language through their experience of work in Korea is manifested by their results. Learning Korean language was advantageous on the part of participants for they have gained confidence, it helped in improving their selves better and it helps them do the work better.

### ***Application of Results in Learning the Language***

This area the participants utilize the results in learning the language. The use of the knowledge in their work that is optimizes their effectiveness in doing their job. The participants have not only gained benefits in learning Korean language they have also shared their knowledge of the language.

In learning the Korean language, participants were able to utilize this by sharing their knowledge to other Filipinos and to their children.

### ***Transformation of Speaking Skills***

In this part the participants speaking skills measured based on their experience they have in Korea. The change of participants' second language transforms the competency in communication skill in their workplace. Participant 1 said that Korean language transformed her speaking skills because she learned how to listen well. Upon learning the language participants were able to speak correct pronunciation of Korean words. They were also able to mingle with others Koreans and they were able to work effectively.

### ***Changes in Life by Learning the Korean Language***

In this field the participants' observations that change their lives through learning Korean language. The outcomes that brought them of what they are today. Confidence and being competent are the avenues of the participants to work effectively in their workplace

Being competent and confident participants become brave in facing other native speakers and they were able to help other Filipinos by becoming an interpreter.

### ***Impacts of learning Korean language in performance***

In this section the participants shows the significance of learning Korean language on their performance in workplace. The change of their work efficiency after that they learned the

language. Participants have improved their performance at work and they were able to communicate well.

### **Responses to the Impacts**

In this area it shows how the participants responded to the effect of learning Korean language. Most of the participants responded positively on the impact of learning the Korean language. Most of the participants responded positively by gaining interest in learning the language more. They also become more excited in learning the language.

### **CONCLUSION**

Researchers found out the Filipinos' first-hand experience who struggle in learning the language of Korea, how they manage their turmoil in their workplace and live functionally in their society because of these problems of acquiring a new language that is far different from their native language. The respondents having a hard time following orders that makes them inefficient in their workplace and can't talk to people around them that limits their affairs during their first few years of stay in Korea. They have fear to speak the language because they are highly concern of the Korean native speaker's scrutiny in their pronunciation, correct usage of words, and for having poor vocabulary skills. Hence, this will serve as an awareness to avoid the same scenario as our respondents have experienced; however they motivate themselves to learn the language. They find ways on learning the language on easier and fastest way by available resources and alternative strategies. Most of the respondents learned the language in an informal way by talking to native speakers most of the time for the reason that native speakers also correct them on their pronunciation and encourages them to talk every day and master the basic conversation. Using the multi-media in learning the language also helped them a lot for this is the most convenient way and readily available material when they study the basic words and conversation.

In using also the multi-media (television) it captures your attention for the reason that you can see actions that implies the meanings, it easily registers in your mind where you can easily apply the correct usage of the words on daily conversation. Also, listening to music improves the production of language for the melody of the music makes you relax, refreshed and stress free. Besides, you can easily memorize Korean words/sentences by listening same song repeatedly. Learning the language also gives them the fulfillment for they excel on their performance in the workplace and was motivated to learn more for they are given a lot of benefits and promotion. Furthermore, participants also pointed out the importance in using specific words for a certain people depending on the status, age, and relationship to a particular person.

### **Implication for Practice as Future Linguists**

Studying the nature of language is predominantly the advocacy of linguists in the quest of language scheme.

It is thus shown in this section the implication of learning a foreign language in relation to becoming future linguists; hence, the outcome of this study generalize on the benefits of learning foreign language.

As future linguists, there is a need to be fully equipped before emerging on real life endeavors in order for us to be fully competent in facing the challenges that may come. It is thus a commitment as linguist to comprehend on over-all nature of language. Also, as linguist what you have learned through the years should be applied in the real world by showing and sharing the knowledge and applying those knowledge on the experiences that may come. Creating harmonious relationship in the community is also the least very important as linguist for you know and understand what is a community should be.

Submerging in a new workplace requires adjustment, being observant and respectful in any ways that you do. You can do this by using the proper languages and values according to the culture of where you are in to. If time comes that you'll be working in a foreign land you can find solace by using the foreign language and talk to the native speakers. Having a deep sense of interest on the goal would lead you to the fulfillment you're aiming for. It also satisfies the aim of language learner and thus, gives him the self-fulfillment. Furthermore, appreciation of the process of learning foreign language is also essential in the field of linguistics for this defines what is a linguist.

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