

31.1% of all the inquired persons provide negative answer to question 13. As a reason for their critical opinion they define the absence of sufficient practical language classes that brings about serious deficits in their skills for freely using the language at verbal level.

When it comes to juxtaposing the answers of question 13 to the demographic aspect “age” the following is outstanding: the most critical is the age group “between 21 and 25-year-old” whereas the per cent ratio is 55.6% to 44.4% supporting the “No” answer.

When juxtaposing the answers to question 13 to the particular educational institution, it becomes clear that the highest satisfaction level is in King Sejong Institute (96%), and the lowest one is in Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” (60%). In the case of pupils, the share of those who answered positively is 66.2%.

When juxtaposing the results to the specifying indicator “class/course/level” it becomes clear that as tuition advances, the satisfaction level in school and at university goes down, whereas in the case of Institute such change is not observed.

At the time of juxtaposing the answers to question 13 with the answers of question 12 (*Do you intend using Korean language in your job, in the time to come?*) we observe something interesting – 72.4% of the people who have declared their wish to be using Korean for work, are happy with the level of language knowledge they get in the educational institution in which they study at present. In the case of respondents who do not intend using language in their career pathway on the other hand, the dissatisfaction level goes up to 50%.

The last two questions – **question 14** and **question 15** – are of demographic character and aim at differentiating the respondents in view of their sex and age. In view of the results, 88% of all the inquired respondents are women and men are just 12%.

In terms of the indication “age” 15.5% are aged below 15, 1.9% are aged between 16 and 20, 16.1% are aged between 21 and 25, 3% are aged between 26 and 30 and 3.6% are aged over 31.

2.3 Analysis of the results of the inquiry research

Based on the results of the performed inquiry research, we could outline several conclusions when it comes to the current status of interest in Korean culture and language in Bulgaria. At the very beginning, it is worth mentioning that the target group of the present research are the Bulgarians who have decided to start studying Korean language in an established educational institution and not the Bulgarian *Hallyu* fans in general. The decision on similar narrowing of the target group is motivated by the understanding that readiness to invest time, effort and resources in assimilating the language is indicative of more serious and in-depth interest in the Republic of Korea.

The first thing that strikes us is related to *Hallyu* in Bulgaria. If we juxtapose the leading answer to question 1 (*How long have you been interested in the Republic of Korea?*), and, in particular, the answer “for around 4 years”, to the corresponding year versus 2021, when the present analysis was drawn, we could conclude that the time which the majority defines as a starting point of its provoked interest in the Republic of Korea coincides with the dawn of the international uprising of the group BTS. Namely in 2017, BTS became the first Asian group that

was invited to perform live at the ceremony of conferring the American Music Awards and made its first record-breaking at the international music stage. If we juxtapose this to the results of question 2 (*Do you remember what provoked your interest in the Republic of Korea?*), whereas 70.7% of all the inquired defined “K-pop music and dances” we could draw the conclusion that namely K-pop and in particular, the group BTS, played decisive importance for the productive increase in the interest towards the Republic of Korea in recent years in Bulgaria.

The next thing that strikes us is that the results of the performed research indisputably prove the statement that at present we observe strongly expressed feminization of the Korean Wave. Of a total of 169 inquired persons, only 20 were men⁴⁴. Of them 8 are students, 7 pupils and 5 course attendees. The research work depicts the reason behind this feminization. Just like we commented in the theoretical setting of the doctoral thesis, the fans of K-pop music and Korean movie industry are much more inclined to developing interest in Korean culture in all its versatility of fans of electronic sports. Nevertheless the research results make it clear that men do not demonstrate specific interest in K-pop and Korean series – K-pop is present solely in the share of men of the age group “between 16 and 20-year-old” (with share of 20%), and the Korean series and motion pictures are present only in the age groups “between 26 and 30” (with share of 50%) and “over 31-year-old” (once again, with share of 50%). At the same time, in the case of women, K-pop music and Korean series are intrinsically present, with high shares.

It is interesting to monitor the motivation for studying Korean language that could be analysed on the basis of answers provided to questions 6 (*At the time of applying in the present educational institution, was Korean language your first wish?*) and 7 (*Why did you decide to start studying Korean language?*). When reviewing the data, we could highlight the high motivation for enrolment in the particular educational institution – for 77.9% of all the inquired respondents Korean language tuition is first wish, whereas in the last couple of years the share of people to whom Korean is a backup option significantly went down. Additionally, we should state that some of the inquired persons for whom Korean language was not a first wish, wrote down that at present they are happy they were admitted in Korean class/major. The results could be inevitably assigned to *Hallyu* uprising thanks to the international success of bands such as BTS and Blackpink that in recent years enjoy huge popularity all over the world, including in Bulgaria. Additionally, the research shows that motivation for studying Korean language in university is highest (94.5% of those studying in Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” declare they were admitted learning Korean language as their first wish). This is the institution in which people with long-term interest in the Republic of Korea study – 80.3% of the inquired students have been interested in Korea and Korean culture for at least 4 years. These results could be explained by people of this age group striving for professional orientation and narrower specialization. Additionally, this is supported by the fact that highest is the per cent of people who declare that they would be using Korean language for work, namely in the case of students.

After reviewing the results of the performed research in greater detail and the direct relation between presenting the products of Korean entertainment industry and the interest in

⁴⁴ Two of the inquired persons are of non-specified sex.

Korean language. When it comes to question 7, directly targeted at researching the motivation for studying Korean language, the inquired respondents declared motives such as: interest in Korean culture, curiosity about the language itself, attraction due to language sound or orthography of the alphabet – all these are things that directly result from the touch with language and culture via what was seen and heard via the products of the Korean entertainment industry. Opposite to the statement that more teenagers and youth started studying Korean not because seeing clear perspective, but just because of their love, even passion for Korean pop music and Korean series, the research results show that nearly 90% of the trainees who participated in the research hope or state their firm decisiveness to use Korean language for the purposes of their labour realization.

The interest in Korean culture inspires interest in Korean language yet the results of the inquiry research make it clear that the opposite is also in effect – the tuition in Korean language reflects the manner of perceiving the country. One of the main reasons behind this is the principle of integrated tuition that is inherent to the three targeted organizations where not only language classes take place, but tuition in Korean culture is foreseen. As a matter of fact, most people enrol in the particular class/major/course after being influenced in advance. Nevertheless, just like the research undoubtedly shows, culture knowledge make it possible not only to cultivate this interest but to transform it into an objective knowledge of the country that is to be used afterwards for the purposes of the career pathway. It is not by chance these are interwoven within the whole tuition course to a degree that makes it hard for the respondents to distinguish the effect of language preparation and the effect of cultural tuition.

Additionally, it would be interesting to analyse the satisfaction level of those studying Korean language in the three organizations. The research shows that the greatest satisfaction degree is the one of course attendees in the King Sejong Institute where nevertheless is the lowest per cent of people who declared their intention to be using the language for work purposes. On the other hand, the lowest degree of satisfaction was noted among students⁴⁵, where we have the highest per cent of expressed desire to assimilate a work language whereas the dissatisfaction per cent rises as the tuition advances. This is the right time to mention that oftentimes, in the case of stated satisfaction from the language tuition, the respondents add the organization provides them with rather priceless basic knowledge that should be improved afterwards. According to what the respondents say, unfortunately this does not happen in the particular institution but they should find ways how to achieve it. Similar answers could be interpreted as a veiled dissatisfaction.

The mismatch between expectations and ambitions could be explained in the following manner: students/pupils start their tuition in Korean most often from scratch, hoping to learn the

⁴⁵ It is worth noting that of all the 84 inquired pupils, 17 refused to answer the question 13 (*According to you, does the educational institution in which you study Korean language at present, provide you with sufficiently in-depth knowledge so that you could be using the language in your (future) work?*). The reasons behind this could be different, yet one of them could be dissatisfaction that they are afraid to express because of concerns that the answer could impact them negatively somehow (even though the inquiry card is anonymous, the research in the 18th Secondary school “William Gladstone” was held with the cooperation of class teachers or the Korean language teacher). In the case of students, only one didn’t answer this question.

language rapidly and easily, whereas during the fixed years of their tuition they would like to achieve a level of fluency in the Western language that they have mastered at high level. A measure by itself is this Western language they have studied most often in combination (at school and in private language schools) for years. The problem is that the demanded results are unattainable because of several reasons that could be summarized to six. Firstly, because of the short tuition term compared to the time for assimilating the Western language. Secondly, because of the number of hours foreseen according to curriculum in practical Korean language, which prove insufficient, at least because the university curriculum includes many accompanying subjects that aim at expanding students' knowledge about Korea and the region, and the school curriculum includes numerous subjects that are part of the curriculum of the Ministry of education and science. Thirdly, because of the absence of opportunities for informal or formal practicing outside the academic environment, also confirmed by the answers to the question 11 (*Do you practice the language outside the tuition environment at present?*). Fourthly, because of language complexity. Fifthly, because of the absence of proactivity on behalf of the trainees. Sixthly, because of the lack of desire or impossibility of the trainees to take part in exchange programs that would put them for certain period of time in the language environment. Oftentimes, after the unsuccessful attempt for using Korean as a work language the students/pupils realize their serious deficits and remain disappointed that drastically cuts down their level of satisfaction from the tuition institution. This also impacts their confidence that in the future they would be able to use the language for work purposes.

CONCLUSION

In recent years we have witnessed unseen increase of interest in the Republic of Korea, in the Korean culture and the Korean language tuition globally, as well as in Bulgaria in particular. This phenomenon, also known as *Hallyu*, could be used as etalon because it sets the example how a country of small territory, with dramatic modern history, manages to achieve cultural expansion that goes beyond our wildest dreams. The research of *Hallyu*, its prehistory and cause and effect brings about precious knowledge that could be used for the purposes of the Bulgarian diplomacy, especially at the background of similarities between both countries. Bulgaria and the Republic of Korea are of approximately the same territory⁴⁶; both parties are located at an important crossroad locked between strong neighbours and during their history they have been subjected to foreign encroachments; Bulgaria as well as Korea loses its sovereignty; both countries started drastic reforms in the end of the 80's and the beginning of the 90's of the past century. The results achieved in our modern history are nevertheless totally different – while Bulgaria's transition to democracy and market economy has not been finalized and our country is not especially competitive at the international market, the Republic of Korea has managed to establish itself as one of the leading economies worldwide, as a country with high international rating and one of the largest exporters of cultural products in their region and worldwide in

⁴⁶ The territory of Bulgaria amounts to 110 994 km², and of the Republic of Korea – 100 210 km².

general. This contrast brings about research interest in the topic that is directly aimed at state's role and the government apparatus for the achievement of national prosperity. Of course, we do not underestimate the influence of factors such as globalization, capitalism, technological revolution etc., yet the focus is set as priority onto the steps subordinate to the state power and government apparatus.

The hypothesis of the doctoral thesis is in two parts, namely:

- 1) The dissemination of *Hallyu* is the main reason for the increase of interest in Korean culture and language around the world and in Bulgaria in particular.
- 2) The sustainable development of *Hallyu* is a direct result of carefully planned and consistent policy of the South Korean government.

The objective is to prove that namely the state (represented by the government) and the government apparatus (represented by the government institutions) play key role in the achievement of cultural expansion that we witness at present, being a simple consequence of combining favourable external factors.

The data of the performed research (theoretical and empirical) confirm the hypotheses and provide grounds for drawing several leading conclusions:

- 1) The state policy and the responsible activity of government institutions play decisive role in evolution and sustainable international success of *Hallyu*. This role covers the provision of the suitable prerequisites for the development, as well as the timely elimination of the prospective and/or real (legislative) hindrances that create limitations to evolution and dissemination of *Hallyu*.
- 2) The state and the competent government institutions on the one hand promote *Hallyu* in its capacity of commercial product and on the other hand – they use *Hallyu* for the purposes of country's "soft power".
- 3) The achieved results are brought about by the inherited policy whereas each and every subsequent cabinet upgrades what was achieved by the previous one. This is the key to phenomenon's sustainability that was initially forecasted as instantaneous and not to last.
- 4) Special attention is paid to the local centres that provide Korean language tuition (schools, universities, institutes) because they become direct conductors of Korean cultural influence. The scholars of these educational institutions start acting as cultural moderators that directly or indirectly make the Republic of Korea popular at local level and not only (in the case they enter the international labour market).
- 5) Republic of Korea demonstrates quite obviously how important it is to borrow other country's best practices. What it achieved is not unprecedented – before it, such thing was done by countries like the USA and Japan. Being the good student it is, the Republic of Korea borrowed the proven successful model, adapted it, improved and "commissioned" it.

The doctoral thesis does not claim to be exhaustive when it comes to the researched features and measurements of Republic of Korea's national strategy for making popular the Korean culture and language around the world. Many questions remain open for example, the

one about the future of *Hallyu* and how and to what degree the South Korean government would manage to establish it as a sustainable phenomenon (unlike Japanese who could not keep the effect of the Japanese Wave). At the same time, the research raises new unknown factors, mostly related to the opportunities for implementing the South Korean model in Bulgaria. According to these guidelines we could undertake additional research works mainly of practical and applicable character.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE DOCTORAL RESEARCH

The present doctoral research is the first scientific work elaborated in Bulgaria that studies the international phenomenon *Hallyu* whereas its focus is on the features of its dissemination in our country. It satisfies the interest of modern society and the academic community brought about by the unrepresented success of the Republic of Korea in international diplomacy that we witnessed in the last decade.

The most significant scientific contributions of the doctoral thesis could be summarized in the following manner:

1. The doctoral thesis is the first of its kind in Bulgaria and in Europe comprehensive research of the topic on the Korean model for promoting the national culture and language abroad.

2. It contains summary and analysis of the main features of the phenomenon *Hallyu*; it presents the process of its evolution, factors that have secured its success and the main effects of its dissemination among which the central place is taken up by making Korean culture and language popular in recent years, in our country and globally.

3. It outlines the consistent steps undertaken by the government of the Republic of Korea that prove the thesis the government plays key role in improving, managing and massively disseminating *Hallyu*.

4. It presents the most influential government institutions that make up the foundations of implementing the national strategy for making popular Korean culture and language around the world.

5. It presents analyses of the results of the empirical research performed in two parts – interview and inquiry research.

6. As part of the empirical research, for the first time in our country an in-depth research was performed of interest in Korean culture and language's evolution in Bulgaria, as well as the motivation for studying Korean language among the Bulgarians.

7. The empirical research makes a pilot attempt for in-depth research and analysis of satisfaction level among the trainees in the three institutions that are of key importance to Korean language tuition in our country.

The results presented in this doctoral thesis could serve as valuable resource for the purposes of adapting the *Hallyu* example to the features of every country (including Bulgaria) as well as in the case of future planning of program or project activity aimed at reproducing the success achieved by the Republic of Korea. The results of the empirical research, in turn could serve as basis for improving the tuition practices in our country.

PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO THE DOCTORAL RESEARCH

1. A Case Study on the Evolution of K-pop and K-drama Related Fandom in Bulgaria. *Manas: Studies into Asia and Africa*, 2020, 6(1).
2. The Korean Wave in Bulgarian Context. In S. Karteva-Dancheva & S. Y. Kim (Eds.). *Globalization in Korea: On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of Korea*, 2020. St. Kliment Ohridski University Press, 146 – 151.
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