

Teach English, Study Korean

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Korean culture, tasty food, foreign travel, teaching experiences, these are just some of the reasons people come to teach and live in Korea. Yet, for most of them, studying Korean is not on their to-do-list. And really, why should it be? Korea is indeed making it easier and easier for global visitors. With more Koreans speaking English, as well as street signs, handouts, and even menus in English, many foreigners can get away with only learning some basic Korean. Why put time and commitment into learning more Korean? Because if you study Korean, it can change your life.

When I first arrived in Korea, I didn't know any Korean. During EPIK Orientation was I able to learn the alphabet and how to read, though I was not very good. I also learned some basic necessary expressions, such as hello, thank you, and nice to meet you. I found knowing these basic expressions made a big impression. Koreans were so appreciative and delighted that I knew even a little Korean that it motivated me to learn a little more. When I started learning Korean I didn't realize how much it would improve and shape my life here.

Daily Life—this is no brainer. Speaking some Korean makes daily living much easier. Learn some simple phrases for daily situations such as taxi rides, getting your hair cut, asking for directions, online shopping, filling out forms, and ordering food. This will give you more confidence, help you avoid horrifying hair-cuts, and may even save you some money. For example, I love going to the traditional Korean markets to buy cheap, fresh produce. By knowing a little Korean I can save money, help support traditional markets, and turn my grocery shopping into a fun adventure.

Social Life—I can honestly say studying Korean has improved my social life. Taking a Korean language class has enabled me to meet many friends both foreign and Korean. For example, in my



Korean language class students are from China, Japan, Malaysia, Canada, England, India, Turkey, and Nepal, just to name a few. Taking a Korean language class also keeps you busy and fills your time with something fun, purposeful, and rewarding.

Because I study Korean, my English speaking friends want to hang out with me. This may sound strange, but when we go to a restaurant, who do you think orders? When we take a taxi, who do you think tells the driver where to go? When we go to see a movie, who do you think gets the tickets? That's right, me. Learning some Korean can improve your social life with both Koreans and other foreign teachers a like. Who doesn't want this!

School Life—this was and still is the biggest surprise for me. Studying Korean has not only helped improve my school life, but it's also helped my teaching. When I tell students I study Korean, their eyes light-up. I can build rapport with them and we now have something in common. We are both learning a foreign language. It also motivates students to know their teacher is studying a foreign language and understands their difficulties. Learning Korean has also enabled me to better understand why certain aspects of the English language are harder for Koreans. I can better teach my students because I understand the grammar relationship between English and Korean.

Studying Korean can help your school life by making it more enjoyable. At school, I can understand important announcements or emails. And, I can laugh at teacher dinner parties because I understand the jokes. I can also communicate with other teachers who may only speak a little English. I have even inspired other teachers to study English again through my learning Korean.

My top 5 ways to increase your Korean.

- 1. Watch T.V.** Yes, I just told you to watch T.V. But don't just watch any channel. Make sure to watch Korean channels. I recommend watching cartoons as they are the easiest to understand. Try to find a Korean T.V. show you enjoy. You will learn culture too. Though it may take time you will begin to hear words you understand.
- 2. Read Korean signs when outside.** While you're out-and-about be sure to read all the Korean you see. You will also be surprised to find many words are actually English words written in Korean.
- 3. Buy a Korean language book.** Head to the nearest bookstore and pick out a Korean language study book you like. Mine has lots of pictures, colors, and even some

English. This makes it interesting for me to study. Be sure to set aside some time for studying your book. ☺

4. **Join a class.** Search your area or ask around for a Korean language class. It can even be a language exchange or individual meeting. When you join a class it ensures study time. Even if you just listen in class, your Korean will improve. If you can't find a class, check out www.talktomeinkorean.com for online lectures.
5. **Practice.** Put yourself in real-life situations. You live in Korea, what better place to learn Korean. You can ask shopkeepers questions or practice answering the phone at school. Though it may be uncomfortable at first, you will see big improvements.

At this point you may think I must speak perfect Korean. Let me reassure you I am still far from it, however everyday brings me closer. My whole goal is not to persuade you that you must speak perfect or even fluent Korean, but to inspire to learn more everyday. Don't just settle for the least amount Korean you can get away with. You never know when it will make all the difference!