

The Power of Hallyu: Educational, Work, and Migration Tendencies of Turkish Youth Toward Korea

Aslı Kavurmacı¹

Abstract

This study examines how the Hallyu (Korean Wave), as an instrument of South Korea's cultural diplomacy and soft power, shapes the educational, work, and migration tendencies of Turkish youth toward South Korea. The research adopts a descriptive approach based on a comprehensive review of the current literature and media analyses. This study assesses the impact of the increasing popularity of Korean popular culture, specifically K-pop, K-dramas, and K-beauty, on cultural perceptions and the motivations of youth in Türkiye to learn the Korean language, pursue education in Korean universities, and explore career opportunities in South Korea. The results show that Hallyu serves as a socioeconomic and cultural draw, strengthening South Korea's reputation as an alternative destination for the educational and lifestyle choices of Turkish young. However, the lack of quantitative and qualitative data in the current literature makes it difficult to measure these trends among youth in Türkiye precisely. The study calls for further empirical research on Türkiye and South Korea youth mobility and suggests that this growing interest represents a new dimension of cultural interaction shaped by soft power dynamics.

1. Introduction

The strategy of countries using their own cultural elements and themes to create an impact internationally and establish relationships with other cultures is defined as cultural diplomacy. One of the most recent examples of cultural diplomacy today is the Korean Wave, also known as Hallyu.

1 Sorumlu Yazar/Corresponding Author: Doç. Dr., Bandırma Onyedi Eylül Üniversitesi, İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi, Çalışma Ekonomisi ve Endüstri İlişkileri Bölümü, akavurmaci@bandirma.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0002-4790-2269.

Recently, the global rise of South Korea's popular culture has significantly increased interest in the country, greatly boosting the popularity of Korean pop music (K-pop), Korean dramas, Korean cuisine, Korean beauty products, and the Korean language. This increase in popularity has led many young people from different countries to take an interest in South Korea and to show a tendency to go to this country for work or education. In Türkiye, particularly through social media and the written press, Generation Z shows a strong interest in Korean culture. This interest is not limited to music, dance, television series, or beauty products; rather, it plays an important role in shaping young people's future educational, work, and migration-related choices.

This research aims to fill a gap in the literature concerning the Hallyu and its influence on the educational, work, and migration tendencies of Turkish youth toward South Korea. The study's main question is, "How has Hallyu transformed the education, employment, and migration patterns of young people in Türkiye?" In this study, academic publications, theses, and media content published between 2010 and 2025 on Hallyu and Turkish youth were compiled and analysed through qualitative content analysis. In the end, the research discussed South Korea's influence on youth as a contemporary example of cultural diplomacy and soft power theories.

The main contribution of this study is its attempt to look at the Hallyu from a broader perspective than is usually found in the literature. Rather than viewing Hallyu only through the lens of cultural consumption or popular culture, the study draws attention to how this cultural attraction may shape young people's longer-term plans for education, work, and migration. Research in Türkiye has so far tended to focus on the cultural identities, media habits, and everyday practices of young people who engage with Korean popular culture. For many young people, however, interest in Korean popular culture goes beyond entertainment or personal taste. It often becomes part of how they imagine their future whether in terms of studying abroad, looking for work opportunities, or building a life elsewhere. Despite these emerging aspirations, there is still little systematic data from Türkiye on education and migration-related orientations toward Korea, and both official statistics and in-depth field research remain limited. By drawing attention to this overlooked area, the study approaches Hallyu as more than a cultural phenomenon, offering a conceptual starting point for future empirical and qualitative research on youth mobility between Türkiye and Korea.

From this perspective, this study is structured around three main sections. The introduction outlines the conceptual framework of the Hallyu within the context of cultural diplomacy and soft power, and discusses the global impact generated by South Korea through its popular culture industries. Building on the existing literature, it also looks at Hallyu's visibility in Türkiye and its sociocultural reflections, specifically among young people. The second section explores the influence of Korean popular culture in Türkiye with a focus on education, language learning, employment, and migration tendencies. By reviewing existing academic studies, graduate theses, available field research, and limited quantitative data, this section highlights the key areas in which Turkish youth's growing interest in Korea has become most pronounced. The conclusion brings together the key findings of the study, reflects on the data gaps and methodological limitations identified in the literature, and puts forward directions for future empirical research.

2. Hallyu: South Korea's Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy Tool

First used by Chinese media in 1999, the term “Korean Wave” or Hallyu² refers to the growing global interest in Korean popular culture, including TV dramas, music (especially K-pop), and publishing. This wave has had both economic and cultural impacts worldwide (Bae et al., 2017). South Korea's popular culture wave, Hallyu, which began in Asia in the 1990s and gained global influence in the 2000s, became a state policy for the South Korean government, which was affected by the Asian crisis in the 1990s. From this point on, culture ceased to be merely a part of the entertainment sector and became central to the state's international image policy. Supported as a strategic power in addition to other industries, the cultural industry aimed to increase the country's soft power. Nye defines soft power as a country's capacity to “persuade others to want what it wants” and identifies its three main sources as political principles, cultural norms, and foreign policy legitimacy. According to him, culture encompasses all of a society's meaning-creating practices and manifests itself in both high culture (art, literature, education) and popular culture such as media, music, and entertainment (Nye, 1990; Nye, 2008). Behaviourally, soft power is the power to influence others through attraction as opposed to force. This power is derived from a country's or institution's culture, values, and positive examples. Some sources can generate both hard and soft power; for example, a strong economy can offer material incentives and also attract others as a model of success. In short, soft power works through setting an example and inspiring

2 In this study, the Korean Wave is hereafter referred to as Hallyu for the sake of brevity and consistency.

admiration, not persuasion (Nye & Kim, 2019). From this perspective, the Hallyu phenomenon is a typical soft power strategy whereby South Korea uses elements of its popular culture (K-pop, TV series, cinema, cosmetics) to generate sympathy, recognition, and prestige on a global scale. In this way, South Korea is building a form of national power based on both economics and image through cultural diplomacy.

Today, South Korea is regarded as one of the world's leading soft powers, known for its globally renowned cultural products such as music groups (BTS, EXO, Blackpink, etc.), TV series (K-dramas), the cosmetics industry, and its gastronomy. According to Brand Finance's "Global Soft Power Index," the country ranks 15th among 193 countries and 10th in terms of national brand value (Brand Finance, 2024).

South Korea has turned its music from a niche genre into a global industry, making money and building its brand in the process. The country boasts the sixth-largest music industry in the world. BTS alone has given the country \$4.9 billion during this time. But this success didn't just happen; it was the result of a planned project. In the 1990s, "star system" programs started. These projects pick and train young Koreans in music, dancing, acting, and language. The system is focused on Confucian discipline that has an obedience-based hierarchy, and a strict work ethic. Therefore, it was criticized by the society for a long time for its "slave contracts" and "robotic performances" (Youna Kim, 2022). The Hallyu, which started in the 1990s and grew into a worldwide trend in the 2000s, may be broken down into two main periods. The first period, called Hallyu 1.0, covers the years between 1997 and 2007. During this time TV shows and movies were the most popular, and the main audience was in East Asia. After that time, K-pop, digital games, and animation became more popular. This period was the beginning of the Hallyu 2.0 that is still going on today. Social media, smartphones, and digital platforms became the main ways for culture to spread that target the young generation between 13 and 20. The government actively encouraged cultural businesses during this time, which helped Hallyu become a part of the culture (Jin, 2014). The second period marks an important time in which the Korean government supported its active policies and transformed culture into a strategic brand in global markets through creative content.

From the beginning of the 90s to the mid-2000s, many Korean dramas were broadcast in various Asian countries. Then in 2002, one of the famous boys' band groups called H.O.T. from South Korea performed their first concert in China. This event made them the first pioneers of K-Pop in Asia

with their successful stage performance. Artists such as Shinhwa, BoA, TVXQ and many others continued this trend and exposed their culture at another level, which resulted in recognition of Korean culture within larger audiences all over Asia. Then something unpredictable happened. In 2012, the song “Gangnam Style” by PSY got 1 billion views on YouTube. This was the first time that people recognized the power of digitalization and social media that makes artists famous worldwide, as exemplified by PSY. BTS, an idol group that debuted in 2013, is seen as the primary player in the new Hallyu Wave. With “Boy with Luv,” the most-watched music video in 24 hours, the group set another worldwide record like PSY. They also won many Music Awards from 2017 to 2019, which made them even more popular around the world. In addition to the music industry, the cinema and television series sector also benefited greatly from the streaming platform Netflix. This online platform brings Korean series and films to a wide audience. But the turning point of this increase was when Bong Joon-ho’s movie “Parasite” (2019) won both the Palme d’Or and the Best Foreign Language Film award at the 92nd Academy Awards (Barros, 2019). Another strong example of how social media can be a useful instrument of soft power in South Korea is Squid Game. People all over the world loved the series, and it spread through videos through platforms like TikTok, Twitter, and Instagram etc. This trend has both expanded the audience of the series and created a worldwide recognition of elements in Korean culture (Ramli & Rahman, 2025). This success once again has shown how social media plays a crucial role in strengthening the global appeal of Korean popular culture and reinforcing the country’s soft power.

The Korean cultural content industry has steadily grown over the years to become a high value-added sector. This industry, which encompasses areas such as music, games, film, animation, publishing, design, and performing arts, has become one of the main drivers of both economic development and the international promotion of Korean culture. The Korea’s content market was estimated to be worth USD 41.2 billion, placing it eighth in the world in 2023. It was estimated to reach USD 42.9 billion in 2024, up 4.13% from 2023. Beginning in 2023 and continuing for the next five years, the market is anticipated to expand at an average annual rate of 3.46%. In 2023, the Korean content sector generated KRW 151.0585 trillion in revenues and USD 12.96294 billion in exports. Indeed, K-Content is gaining global recognition for its excellence through international success. According to Netflix’s official website, “Squid Game 2,” which premiered on the platform on December 26, 2024, was watched for around 500 million hours, making it the most watched content as of the first week. “Chef in

Black and White: Culinary Class War,” a cooking survival show that aired in September 2024, also became popular and reached Netflix’s global TOP 10 TV (non-English) rankings. This proves that the rising global popularity of K-Content continues to increase viewership of Korean content around the world (Invest Korea, 2025).

Korea has placed its cultural content industry at the centre of national development and its international image. Global brands such as BTS are excellent examples of this approach. They are pointed as a symbol of cultural exports that contribute significantly to the country both in economic terms and cultural diplomacy. Their global success has brought economic value not only to the music industry but also to many other sectors such as fashion, cosmetics, publishing, gaming, and tourism. Unlike Western music, the group uses digital technologies such as YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and smartphones, thereby extending its popularity beyond national borders. Social media has created a digital fandom, and these communities have shown their support by volunteering their labour and emotional investment to produce translations, promotions, and campaigns, and by participating in online concerts via the internet (Youna Kim, 2022). For instance, HYBE, the company BTS is affiliated with, reported that 756,000 ticketed fans worldwide watched the first online concert, Bang Bang Con: The Live, held on June 20, 2020, and that 993,000 people from 193 countries watched another online concert, Map Of The Soul ON: E, held on October 10 and 11, 2020, was watched by 993,000 people from 193 countries. During this process, the group used AR and XR technologies to prepare online concerts and events, projecting the images of their fans onto the screen, singing songs together, and bringing their interactions with fans to the virtual music stage. The holograms used also provided listeners with the opportunity to experience the most surreal performances that technology allows (Keskin, 2023).

Meanwhile, in June 2024, the Korean government announced the Third Content Industry Incentive Master Plan, outlining its strategic plans to position Korean content (K-Content) as one of the top four global content powers. Within this framework, the government announced its policies to develop Korean content as a national strategic industry, enable content-producing companies to grow and create more jobs, generate economic value by focusing on specific genres, and make its content a global mainstream culture (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2024). As in the past, the Korean government continues to view Hallyu as a strategic tool to enhance the reputation of the “Made in Korea” brand and reinforce South Korea’s positive image worldwide (Ünlü, 2025). How these global

dynamics interact with youth culture in Türkiye forms the main focus of the next section of this study.

3. Reflections of Korean Popular Culture in Türkiye: Education, Work, and Migration Dynamics

The reflections of Korean popular culture in Türkiye can be evaluated within the context of the Hallyu, which contributes to cultural affinity, language learning, and academic motivations, and even career-oriented choices. Like globally, Hallyu's cultural impact through music, TV shows, and other media has had a trigger effect on Turkish people, especially on the younger generation. Some domestic studies use the idea of cultural closeness to explain this trend. Due to their Asian roots, Turkish people experience an emotional and traditional closeness to Korean culture, where they witnessed conservative relationships, family traditions, and respect for elders similar to theirs.

3.1. Hallyu (Korean Wave) and the Effect of Cultural Affinity

Turkish viewers experienced Korean dramas first with *The Empire of the Seas* which was broadcast on TRT in 2005 following the *Empire of Seas* dramas like *Dae Jang Geum*, *Dong Yi*, *Prince of My Dreams* were introduced to Turkish audience and gained awareness of Korean culture. Over time, many other TV shows and the Turkish adaptations of some Korean dramas were aired by different platforms and the Hallyu effect became visible in Türkiye. The country's unique music, fashion, language, and cuisine become trend day by day. Due to the strength of historical ties between the two countries, the Hallyu fuels its impact in Türkiye too. The Korean War's "blood brotherhood" relationship was transformed into a shared sense of sympathy between both peoples during the World Cup in 2002. The similarities in both countries' modernization and Westernization processes, along with their efforts to preserve traditional values, have increased cultural sympathy. In fact, Korean productions addressing these themes have made it easier for Turkish viewers to identify with them (Fırat, 2017). Jung (2019) also mentioned that Korean dramas are the most important reason for the prominence of the Hallyu in Türkiye. He states that Korean dramas have helped create the name "Korean Movement" in Türkiye and that they have maintained their status as the most widespread and popular Korean cultural product throughout the development of this movement. In addition, Asa's (2019) research and observations indicate that, although there are a clear historical/cultural legacy and emotional connection between South Korea and Türkiye, claiming that this is the primary cause of Hallyu's increase

is inaccurate. Conversely, many participants indicated that Hallyu is the primary reason for the increased awareness of Korea and Korean people in Türkiye.

The themes and formats of Korean dramas are familiar to Turkish viewers. In particular, romantic relationships in Korean dramas are more conservative compared to Hollywood and European productions. Since women are the main followers of Hallyu in Türkiye, the formality and moral emphasis seen in Korean dramas are important factors supporting their popularity. Turkish viewers' connection to the images in Korean dramas is based on their Asian cultural identity, which shows the roots of their culture and traditions. Numerous Turkish viewers have expressed that the values and emotional depth displayed in Korean dramas are significantly more appealing than those in Western productions, as Korean dramas reflect traditional Asian values and the emotions inherent in the lives of Asian individuals, such as familial bonds and respect for the elderly (Oh & Chae, 2013).

At present, popular cultural products like Korean cuisine (especially snacks, tteokbokki, ramyeon, etc.), and Korean cosmetics have fired interest in Korea among younger generations in Türkiye. Young people are trying out Korean food at home, using K-beauty goods to produce makeup videos, and posting them on social media. The popularity of K-beauty and K-food trends has increased greatly in the Turkish market, too. As highlighted by Jung (2019) the increase in the number of bloggers and vloggers has enabled Korean cosmetics to reach a wider audience through the active promotion of K-Beauty products on blogs and the publication of their content with positive reviews. Therefore, Hallyu is a major factor for this trend that has a great impact on shaping consumer behaviours and lifestyle choices among Turkish consumers. Besides, in line with the one-click online shopping, fans can quickly and easily purchase and incorporate items from the Hallyu virtual world into their everyday lives. Websites such as Korea-fans and Koreanturk, which operate as the largest virtual communities for Turkish fans, also serve this audience by featuring advertisements that promote Hallyu-related products, including chopsticks, fashion items, and makeup (Asa, 2019).

Meanwhile, the number of Korean restaurants is increasing in major cities such as Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, and Bursa. This pattern is also a reflection of Hallyu in the field of gastronomy. The growing interest in popular Korean cultural products, along with the spread of K-Pop and Korean TV series, has accelerated the promotion of Korean cuisine. In parallel, Korean TV series, films, and the music industry have introduced the "K-Beauty" trend by means of Korean-style skin care and makeup to the global consumers. This trend

has enabled Korean brands such as Missha, Skin Food, Holika Holika, and Lancige to be strong competitors in the Turkish market by opening stores. Furthermore, translations of Korean literature have reached a wider audience and increased international interest in Korean books. Popular books such as *Vegetarian*, *Everything About My Daughter*, *The Cursed Rabbit*, *Almond*, *Birth: 1982*, and *The Story of Hong Gil Dong* have been translated and introduced to Turkish readers (Doğan, 2023).

On the other hand, the Korean government has also supported the promotion of Korean culture in Türkiye systematically. This has been done through the King Sejong Institutes, Korean Cultural Centres, cultural events, language and taekwondo classes that have opened in various cities. With the cooperation of these institutions, Korean culture has spread in Türkiye, become part of daily life, and emerged as an alternative popular culture to American culture (Firat, 2017). Besides, Korean Cultural Centres operating in Türkiye also collaborate with local governments, arts and cultural institutes, Korean firms and various non-governmental organizations to promote and spread Korean culture. In addition to Korean cuisine, the Korean language, and taekwondo training, the centre also offers courses on calligraphy, K-Pop, traditional music, and instruments introducing different aspects of Korean culture to Turkish society. These activities are attracting even more attention due to its accessibility to everyone (Demircan, 2024). In line with the previous discussion, Cengiz (2024) also indicated that the impact of Hallyu in Türkiye is particularly concentrated among the 18–25 age group. Involving 598 participants in his study, more than half of the participants stated that they were introduced to Korean culture through K-dramas (52%) and K-pop (28.6%). 78.6% of the participants expressed a desire to learn Korean, while 74.6% indicated an interest in exploring Korea through travel. The findings emphasise Hallyu's effect on many different aspects of life in Türkiye, from the way young people consume culture to their choices in education and travel.

3.2. Language Learning and Academic Motivation

The study of Korean as a foreign language has become notably popular in Türkiye, mirroring its global trend. In this context, the Korean government actively promotes teaching Korean as a foreign language across various domains. For instance, there are five King Sejong Institutes operating in different cities, such as Istanbul, Bursa, Izmir, and Ankara, affiliated with the King Sejong Foundation in Türkiye. In addition, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea has also been providing the TOPIC exam or “Test of Proficiency in Korean” exam in Türkiye since 2008 (Korkmaz, 2023).

But Korean language education is not a new trend in Türkiye. It began for the first time in 1989 with the establishment of the Department of Korean Language and Literature at Ankara University. The department conducts studies on the Korean language, Korean literature, and Korean history, and students receive education in these areas. In addition to Ankara University, Erciyes University also established its Korean Language and Literature Department in 1998, where the student capacity number has exceeded 40 every year.

Regarding language learning, a positive correlation has been observed between admiration for Korean culture and the desire to learn Korean. For example, in the Cengiz's (2024) study, 74.1% of participants mentioned that Korean culture triggered their desire to learn the language. In the same study, in terms of education and work preferences, 71.7% of participants underlined that they wanted to study or work in Korea, while 20.9% expressed that they only wanted to visit. These findings suggest that Korea's cultural appeal also influences education and career preferences of its followers. Altundağ (2013) also conducted a small-scale survey to analyse students' perceptions, knowledge levels, and attitudes toward Korea among students in the Korean Language and Literature Department at Ankara University. The research findings reflect that students' motivation to learn Korean is predominantly driven by cultural and academic curiosity. 54% of participants preferred to learn Korean because of their "interest in language and culture" while 43% chosen it because of their "belief in bilateral relations will improve."

This point is particularly noteworthy, South Korea's growing cultural and educational visibility in Türkiye is being strengthened not only via media content but also through educational and cultural policies implemented at the institutional level. For instance, the first Korean Cultural Centre in Türkiye was established in Ankara in 2011. The centre has constantly increased Turkish youth's interest in Korea through its activities like promoting Korean language instruction and cultural exchange (KCC, 2024). Again, the Global Korea Scholarship (GKS) program run by the Korean government has been the main scholarship channel for Turkish students applying for undergraduate and graduate education in Korea each year. In the same way, the Ministry of National Education in Türkiye included Korean as an elective second foreign language in the curriculum in 2017, which has brought this interest into an institutional framework. Such institutional support mechanisms enhance Korea's appeal to young people through its "education diplomacy." Learning Korean, short-term exchange programs, and scholarship opportunities greatly strengthen Turkish youth's desire to go to South Korea. For instance, the Ministry of Education (MOE)

of the Republic of Korea and Study in Korea indicates a notable rise in the enrolment of international students at higher education institutions in South Korea. The number of foreign students, which was 91,332 in 2015, rose to 208,962 by 2024 (Study in Korea, 2024; MOE, 2023). Although exact numbers for Türkiye are not included in the published data, field research and student interviews show that there is a rising demand for higher education and employment opportunities in South Korea. For many years, Turkish youth have considered North America, Europe, and other countries as educational or immigration destinations. However, in recent years, Korea has been seen as a significant alternative destination offering both quantitative and qualitative opportunities, replacing traditional migration routes.

3.3. Socio-Cultural Motivation

The Hallyu (Korean Wave) phenomenon has surprisingly found a huge impact in Türkiye as well. As a result of the global success of Hallyu, the cultural industry has progressively led diverse cultural products to the creation. But this success was not achieved alone. The improvements in communication technologies and Gen Z have played a crucial role to speed up this cultural spread. Modern technologies are heavily used by Gen Z's who spread the Hallyu culture faster and wider in Türkiye, too (Çağır, 2023). Furthermore, Arol et al. (2020) pointed out that Hallyu significantly influences the identity formation processes of Gen Z in Türkiye regarding cultural identity. The study indicates that some young people feel they belong to Korean culture and express themselves better in Korean. Furthermore, it is emphasized that Hallyu affects characteristics like gender identity, social relationships, beauty perception, and a sense of belonging, particularly among K-Pop fans. This impact creates alternative identity through new communication ways, images, and social media interactions.

Building upon the previous argument, it is also believed that Hallyu strengthened the sense of community and belonging among K-pop fans. It also gives rise to a shared sub-identity that connects individuals across different backgrounds. Through social media groups and fan-organized events, fans come together to express themselves, share experiences, and build collective identities. Most K-pop fan communities revolve around a specific group or artist, creating online spaces where people exchange emotions, form friendships, and offer mutual support through their shared enthusiasm for K-pop. Again, K-pop groups often have their own unique styles and personalities that fans can easily relate to. By identifying with these artists, listeners can feel inspired and gain confidence in themselves. Hearing how idols overcome challenges and achieve success can also encourage fans to

value self-belief, self-esteem, and self-love in their own lives. (Öztaş, 2024). In this context, the Korean popular culture admiration can be evaluated not only as a form of consumption but also as a new place where identity, belonging, and cultural representation are reproduced. It can be inferred that cultural identity can also be acquired in various hybrid and flexible forms.

As previously discussed, Bozyer (2023) reveals, Hallyu significantly influences Turkish youth's career preferences and future life plans related to South Korea. While 88.4% of participants strongly desire to visit South Korea, only 41.8% intend to live there. Furthermore, 61.1% of the participants want to study at a higher education institution. But what is surprising is the fact that 47.3% expressed a preference for a "Korean spouse," which shows that interest stemming from popular culture even reflects lifestyle and personal relationship preferences. Another research perspective shows that while 60.1% of participants expressed interest in visiting Korea after watching a K-drama, 67.6% indicated they would prefer to live there (Jung E., 2019). Such as in Asa's (2019) research, the participants' motivation to learn Korean arises from multiple factors, including the desire to watch K-dramas without subtitles, comprehend song lyrics, and visit Korea either as tourists, students, or prospective residents. Although they were high school students preparing for university entrance, the participants expressed a strong eagerness to learn Korean and to pursue their Korea-related aspirations as soon as possible.

This outcome suggests that Hallyu is not only shaping consumption practices but also creating an area of attraction that influences medium- to long-term education or even migration and future plans. These findings show that Hallyu can translate into behavioural intentions at the individual level. In addition to the data already discussed, Yıldırım & Göç (2021) sought to determine the elements influencing the preference towards Korea. Indeed, cultural elements, such as culinary traditions, historical landmarks, and traditional objects (64%) are emphasized in this analysis. However, educational options (38%), particularly postgraduate programs and advanced academic prospects, are also significant. Social interaction (26%) and the desire for discovery (19%) are secondary but significant driving forces. These factors indirectly encourage education and migration intentions by supporting Korea's positive image. The combination of these factors reveals that the trend toward Korea is based on both cultural and educational foundations.

While many Turkish youths express a strong interest in pursuing careers and long-term residency in South Korea, empirical studies or qualitative

data based on lived experiences remain highly limited. Surveys indicate that this interest is especially strong among those aged 18 to 25, indicating a desire to work or live in South Korea in the future. However, these findings predominantly reflect intentions rather than actual migration or employment outcomes. In addition, there is not much available data on how many actually move to Korea or manage to obtain employment there. At this point, literature mostly relies on expressions of intention rather than real-life experiences. Despite these tendencies, the lack of systematic data regarding Turkish youth currently working or residing in Korea represents a major research gap. Future studies using fieldwork and in-depth interviews, including real-life stories, or follow-ups with young people in Korea, could offer a more comprehensive understanding of these migration-related aspirations.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study demonstrates that there is an increasing trend for youth mobility from Türkiye to South Korea. This intention obviously began with the rise of the Hallyu but has since evolved into a multidimensional phenomenon. This outcome cannot be explained solely by cultural similarities. The emphasis on “brother countries discourse” between two countries since the Korean War was the initiative factor for this trend at the beginning that made people of each country feel close to one another. However, this relation has been deepened by many different channels, such as economic ties, cultural exchange, educational policies, academic cooperation, and scholarship programs since then. Notably, academic studies and student experiences demonstrate that the Hallyu effect is a significant starting point for Turkish youth’s interest in the country. Nowadays, this interest has shifted into a new trend and grown over the years with various demands and desires. The rise of the online platforms is one noteworthy factor contributing to this trend. Furthermore, Hallyu effect has become even more visible since the pandemic. In fact, during the pandemic, there was a notable increase in Korea-related shared content across various social media and online platforms. With the help of these platforms and websites, young people have easier access not only to the country’s cultural content, such as TV series, films, and music, but also to popular Korean products. This accessibility has encouraged young people’s desire to explore Korea, learn the local language, create and share content related to Korean culture, and daily life and even pursue educational and professional opportunities in South Korea. This pattern has also led to a new cultural orientation among

Turkish youth, reflected in their educational pursuits, travel preferences, and lifestyle choices.

On the other hand, it has been observed that the existing academic literature focuses on broader themes such as Türkiye–Korea relations, soft power, economic development, education system comparisons, or the Hallyu itself. The absence of studies addressing topics expected to be examined on a more micro dimension such as “Turkish youth studying in Korea” or “the work experience of Turkish youth in Korea” creates a significant gap in the literature. In addition, it has been noticed that the data examined during the research process mostly consist of small-scale field surveys conducted through social channels. Such as, up-to-date statistics regarding student mobility from Türkiye to South Korea are limited in public availability. In fact, the actual number of young people residing in Korea can only be collected from scholarship program results or individual success stories shared on social media. Therefore, it is important that new research in this field be supported not only by comprehensive statistics that systematically report Türkiye–Korea student mobility, but also by field data, quantitative analyses, and institutional collaborations. All things considered, the Hallyu theme has now gone beyond cultural interaction and has become a multidimensional phenomenon influencing the preferences and tendencies of today’s Turkish youth. Undoubtedly, future systematic, comparative, and interdisciplinary studies will further enhance this field by exploring the factors motivating Korean cultural experiences.

The Hallyu, once seen only as a cultural trend, now stands as a path to new identities, educational goals, and lifestyle preferences among Turkish youth, and this transformation deserves deeper, human-involved exploration. However, narratives and stories based on real experiences can offer a more grounded and realistic perspective on these research findings. Additionally, supporting this youth-driven interest through structured exchange opportunities will foster deeper, long-term cooperation between Türkiye and South Korea. From this perspective, the study is positioned not as a final or conclusive interpretation, but rather as a starting point for future empirical research that places youth mobility at the centre of the Türkiye–Korea relationship.

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