Article

The Benefits of YouTube in Learning English as a Second Language: A Qualitative Investigation of Korean Freshman Students' Experiences and Perspectives in the U.S.

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Abstract: YouTube has the potential to significantly impact Korean millennials' daily lives. Nevertheless, it remains unclear whether the value of YouTube can be explained by Korean students' learning needs and practice. This qualitative study attempts to add a new dimension to possible ways of using YouTube for educational purposes. Focusing on narratives of first-year Korean international students studying in the U.S., this study examines the ways in which using YouTube contributes to students' linguistic and cultural diversity. Findings reveal that YouTube helps expand students' perspectives on cross-cultural understanding. The educational use of YouTube also leads students to academic pursuits and engagement during studying abroad by developing content knowledge and skills in English. It further enables students to enhance their knowledge of English as a global language by taking ownership. Ultimately, YouTube plays an indispensable role in supporting Korean international students' academic and social progress in the transitional phase from their home to host countries. From these findings, and in response to the post-COVID era, the implications for the new normal in education using social networking sites, YouTube in particular, are discussed for effective multilingual and multicultural education in South Korea.

Keywords: YouTube for educational purposes; Korean international students; English language education; multilingual and multicultural education

1. Introduction

Along with the development of a cutting-edge mobile industry based on two large technology companies, namely, Samsung and LG, and an easy access to the world's fastest broadband Internet service, access to YouTube is a growing social trend in South Korea (henceforth, Korea). Indeed, YouTube is one of the most popular smartphone applications among Koreans (For more information, see http://www.businesskorea.co.kr/news/article View.html?idxno=22301, accessed on 30 June 2021). The importance of this popularity has been reinforced, bringing about significant changes in Koreans' career options. According to the annual survey of future career preference among Korea's K-12 students, conducted in 2020 by the Ministry of Education and Korea Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training, 6.3% of the 6352 sixth-grade students in Korea stated "YouTube creators (or YouTubers)" as a desired job. This ranks fourth behind athletes (8.8%), medical doctors (7.6%), and teachers (6.5%) [1]. The interest in YouTube use is not limited to young kids alone. This trend has continued into Korean millennials' occupational alternatives as well. Some Korean millennials appear to have given up their steady job, the duties and environment of which cause stress and pressure. Instead, they want to manage their time, develop their talents, and enjoy their interests by venturing into their own business on YouTube (for example, see https://www.reuters.com/article/us-southkorea-jobs-youtube-feature/sou

th-koreas-burned-out-millennials-chose-youtube-over-samsung-idUSKCN1RC0YC, accessed on 30 June 2021).

While YouTube has been understood in relation to a greater array of opportunities available to Korean millennials in pursuing their self-realization, the influence of social networking sites (SNSs), such as YouTube, in achieving their academic needs and goals has been rarely studied to date. To be specific, a few studies have conducted large-scale evaluations of Korean college students' use of SNSs for educational purposes [2]. However, this topic has not had a high priority in the field of second language (L2; English in the present study) education. Moreover, there is little research that delves into the role of SNSs associated with the transitional experiences of Korean international students [3]. In light of such research gaps, it is important to gain a better understanding of the detailed experiences and beliefs in using SNSs among Korean students who take the first step into the target language context. The present study examines the benefits of YouTube for Korean international students aiming to succeed in new academic and social contexts. Based on our findings, this paper seeks to provide some promising and sustainable supports for the educational use of YouTube. This use aims to improve Korean students' opportunities at a better quality of L2 learning through digital media and technology integrated education by discussing possible educational and industrial efforts in response to the post-COVID-19 education landscape.

2. English Language Education for Korean Millennials

Korea, similar to Japan and China, is an Asian country where English is used as a foreign language. In fact, English is not particularly necessary in many Koreans' daily life, since the Korean language is used commonly as the national and major language. Since the mid-1990s, however, English as a global language [4] has been recognized as the must-learn language based on the national agenda, "*Segyehwa*" ("globalization" in Korean) [5]. As part of the government's response to globalization, Korea's Ministry of Education (MOE) has made efforts to initiate government-driven policies that lead to growing engagement of K-12 students in English language education under the seventh national curriculum and its revisions.

In addressing the national need for teaching and learning English as a global language, for example, MOE in Korea has sought to discuss the role of English in developing K-12 students' communication knowledge and skills with an emphasis on the importance of multilingual and multicultural understanding [6–8]. In an effort to achieve this goal, advancing learner-centered classroom environments was one of the crucial ideas behind the curriculum reform. Concurrently, innovative teaching approaches have been widely promoted to enhance students' English language competence and proficiency through communicative language teaching, content-based instruction, and task-based language teaching, which are largely immune from students' passive attitudes and receptive skills of English (for a comprehensive review on English language education under the seventh curriculum, see Moodie and Nam [9]). The Korean government has also attempted to create opportunities to increase secondary students' exposure to English in a more practical manner by hiring native English-speaking teachers who can support students for the purpose of the cultivation of cross-cultural competence [10,11].

While efforts to improve students' English knowledge and skills have continued to make progress, the quality of English language education still represents a significant challenge for Korean millennials. Of particular concern are issues of Korea's traditional and rigid education system that has solely relied upon the outcomes of high-stakes tests. Among Korea's secondary school students, to be specific, the College Scholastic Ability Test is well known as the most demanding exam that determines and solidifies Korean students' future college and career options [12]. Correspondingly, pedagogical attention and considerations in English language education have focused on exam-driven curriculum across the public and private education sectors [13]. It has pushed Korean students to

invest more in preparation for English tests and exams. Consequently, this drives students to concentrate more on developing "receptive English knowledge" [9] (p. 90).

Under these circumstances, broadening their understanding of global outlook and cultural diversity through English lessons has been excluded from K-12 education, particularly the high school curriculum. In essence, most of the pedagogical decisions in the local context still cling to their own deep-seated academic, cultural ideologies, and traditions that are largely linked to native-speakerism [14]. It has brought about an English language education in Korea that has struggled to grasp "the diversification of English as a result of the global spread of the language" [15] (p. 5). Such an exam-oriented pedagogy often triggers Korean students' low self-confidence towards English, even though most of them spend nearly ten years learning English in public schools [16].

Rethinking English language education in Korea is especially relevant when it comes to the necessity of new curriculum development and pedagogical strategies, which has recently become more prominent in the post-COVID-19 education scenario. For example, it is significant for policymakers to determine the potential benefits and problems of technology- and web-based instruction in order to transform Korea's education policy agendas for the new normal in education. It is also significant for educators to determine what innovative expertise should be required to help Korean students acquire digital knowledge and skills and translate them into their learning engagement, management, and performance, which are all conducive to academic excellence and cultural diversity. In this contribution, we discuss how the use of YouTube for educational purposes can be central to the new efforts in supporting Korean students' academic and social success, particularly in order to cope better with the COVID-19 crisis.

3. Use of Social Networking Sites among International Students

In recent decades, the demand for the use of digital media and technology has been widely understood as being essential for students' academic access and achievement across many different scholarly disciplines. One good reason to place a greater emphasis on learning using digital media and technology is that students are already familiar with a variety of Web 2.0 technologies for diverse purposes in real-life contexts. Related to this, there is an underlying premise that the benefits of using Web 2.0 technologies for educational purposes can foster students' self-regulated learning that positively affects their potential to attain academic success [17]. It also encourages students to promote creative and critical thinking in collaborative learning [18,19]. Particularly, the emerging forms of Web 2.0, such as SNSs, are generally well equipped with a user-friendly interface. Hence, there is a growing recognition that using SNSs in education can improve students' learning motivation and needs by actively engaging in online based learning environments [20]. It is also assumed that using SNSs can help students acquire and develop 21st century skills, which are essential in regard to today's information society, in more appropriate and effective ways [21].

An increased attention to using SNSs has been particularly well documented in previous literature on international students' experiences. The expanding body of research has confirmed that using SNSs is beneficial with regard to international students' acculturation [22–27] and psychological well-being [3,28,29] in settling into new cultural and academic settings. For example, Lim and Pham's study [23], which focuses on Indonesian and Vietnamese international students studying in Singapore, shows that there is a positive association between reducing acculturative stress and using SNSs. Similarly, Park and Noh [24] look into the integration of using a mobile message application among international students participating in their academic programs in Korea. According to Park and Noh [24], a local SNS, KakaoTalk, appears to allow the international students to create more opportunities to adapt to Korean culture and communities by providing psychological support. There is research into the potential effectiveness of using digital instructional resources for Korean international students' well-being issues. For example, Lim and Meier [29] focus on a variety of SNSs such as online instant messengers, blogs, chat-based

websites, and email to better understand Korean international students' academic life in the target language context. The findings of the study suggest that online communication platforms play an important role in aiding students' acculturation and staying connected with their home language and culture. Such studies provide sound evidence of an effective way of using SNSs when students try to engage in new academic contexts.

In spite of the clear call for the potential effectiveness of using SNSs that brings to the fore international college students' cross-cultural understanding and participation, the analysis of their literacy development and language use through using SNSs remains less obvious in the area of research and education. Particularly, there seems to be a dearth of studies examining issues related to how the growing SNSs can enable students to actively participate in learning English as a second language [30]. Moreover, previous research has not provided a sound explanation for the possibilities of activities using YouTube to enhance students' academic engagement and achievement in a study abroad context.

To gain further insights into the current emphasis on using SNSs in education, our qualitative study, which pays special attention to students' own voices, seeks to provide insight into how a sample of Korean international undergraduate students perceive incorporating SNSs, specifically YouTube, into their academic and social commitment while studying abroad. We expect that the present study provides a more nuanced understanding of how Korean millennials who are in transition between different cultures can foster the necessary and advanced skills and capabilities to use SNSs in learning language(s) in and out of school. In a broader sense, we expect that the present study can explain the best pedagogical practices for Korean students to surpass traditional teaching methods in the context of education practice.

4. Multicultural Competence in Education

Multicultural competence is defined broadly as "the awareness, knowledge, and skills necessary to work effectively and ethically across cultural differences" [31] (p. 270). According to Hall and Theriot [32], multicultural competence also refers to the ability to appreciate "awareness of one's own worldview, knowledge and awareness of the worldview of the culturally different client, and the use of culturally appropriate intervention strategies" (p. 36). Taken together, multicultural competence can be represented as a combination of three major components—multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills. As discussed in Pope and Reynolds [31], to be specific, multicultural awareness accounts for "the attitudes, beliefs values, assumptions, and self-awareness necessary to serve students who are culturally different from oneself" (p. 270); multicultural knowledge involves "the information individuals have about various cultures" (p. 270); additionally, multicultural skills encompass "effective and meaningful interaction" (p. 270). Each component has criteria for careful consideration when it comes to student affairs that are underlying services for academic and social integration by providing supportive and equitable learning environments [31]. Pope and Reynolds [31] further point out that promoting multicultural competence has been a prominent feature to address the call for implementing and sustaining curriculum reform for diversity and inclusion across universities and colleges (see also Pope & Mueller [33]; Pope, Reynolds, & Mueller [34]).

Indeed, multicultural competence has been a critical aspect of teaching and learning in higher education and has been highly considered to find deep connection between the expertise and practices of the individual educator and communities in helping students cultivate cultural diversity and complexity [35]. For over a couple of decades, efforts to promote the importance of multicultural competence in the field of second language education have been constant and ongoing (e.g., Byram [36]; Byram & Wagner [37]; Hua [38]; Kramsch [39,40]; Ting-Toomey & Dorjee [41]). Much emphasis has been placed on providing L2 learners with best practices in order to "develop cross-cultural awareness and understanding of target language cultures and their own, as well as the ability to recognize cultural stereotypes and generalizations and to evaluate them" [42] (p. 231). As such, L2

learning practices and experiences expect us to gain substantial benefits "for linguistic and cultural pluralism rather than just for communicative competence" [43] (p. 16).

The recent attention to multicultural education has particularly underscored the use of digital and social media, which is closely intertwined with "communication with others across national cultures or languages, as well as engagement in multimodal meaning-making" [44] (p. 187). Such a focus on integrating digital and social media into L2 curricula has often provided a lens into the ways in which the use of digital and social media promotes effective literacy development, paying special attention to the relevance of appropriate cultural learning [45]. In this respect, YouTube is gradually considered as one of the major technology tools that support L2 learners' language and cultural learning [46,47]. For example, a qualitative study conducted in Bangladesh by Hasan et al. [48] focuses on L2 learners' views and practices of using YouTube for educational purposes. According to the authors, YouTube videos, which offer audio-visual materials, aid students to improve L2 comprehension as well as gain motivation towards learning L2. More recently, Wang and Chen [49] look into Taiwanese L2 learners' self-regulated learning via English tutoring videos on the YouTube platform. In Wang and Chen's [49] study, the L2 learners were found to benefit from YouTube; namely, the tutoring videos appear to play an important role in promoting their willingness to seek academic help and support while learning L2. The benefits particularly show favorable results concerning L2 learners' commitment to and attitude towards cross-cultural understanding.

Indeed, more extensive research in the field of second language education has often looked to determine the relationship between L2 learners' cross-cultural awareness and the use of digital and social media through mixed methods or quantitative experimental investigations [50–52]. In the present study, however, our focus pertains to understanding L2 learners' experiences and perspectives through their own narratives. As Kramp [53] states, "stories preserve our memories, prompt our reflections, connect us to our past and present, and assist us to envision our future" (p. 107). Moreover, Benson [54] and others [55,56] claim that telling stories is a meaningful means of giving explanations of our own feelings and thoughts as well as negotiating our identities, which we may undergo while learning and teaching other language(s). Therefore, our effort in analyzing the potential significance of YouTube to foster Korean L2 learners' multicultural competence is focused on giving attention to their lived experiences while studying abroad. In this contribution, we set out a research question—How do Korean international undergraduate students understand and perceive the role of using YouTube to promote their multicultural competence?

5. The Present Study

In order to explore the role of YouTube for educational purposes, the present study is drawn from a larger research project delving into academic literacy development among Asian international students from diverse countries such as Korea, Japan, and China. This study took place in ESL classrooms, specifically in composition classrooms, located in a U.S. research university. In line with the university's academic policy and regulations, all international undergraduate students whose first language was not English were required to complete two basic English language courses: spoken and written English. Those course offerings were intended to prepare international students for academic engagement and success in the target language context. The composition classes focused on in the present study were structured, for the most part, in a discussion-based format. Thus, students had ample opportunity to clarify concepts of academic writing in English with their instructors as well as participate in cooperative activities, such as writing essays, with their classmates. While engaging in small group activities designed to work three or four students together, the instructor participated in this project often allowed students to use any type of online resource to develop academic writing skills, when necessary. That is, the instructor encouraged students to develop skills of how to seek relevant online sources and information about academic writing and create active, meaningful, and enjoyable learning environments with students from diverse linguistic and cultural communities.

Based on the objectives of the present study, nine Korean students were specifically selected in order to gain more in-depth information about Korean students' shared values, experiences, and attitudes toward educational use of YouTube. These students were born and raised in Korea before participating in undergraduate degree programs in the U.S. All of them were first-year students. The average age of the students was 20.2 with the ages ranging from 19 to 22. Three of the students were male and six were female. During the research period, they were enrolled in diverse undergraduate academic programs, such as business administration, accounting, chemistry, computer science, biological science, and economics. A summary of the students' demographic information is represented in Table 1.

Table 1. Students' demographic information.

Name (Pseudonym)	Age	Gender	Academic Major	Language Used during Interview
Hye-ju	20	Female	Business administration	Korean/English
Hyun-soo	22	Male	Accounting	Korean
Ji-min	21	Male	Business administration	Korean
Kyung-ha	20	Female	Chemistry	Korean/English
Na-yeon	19	Female	Computer science	English
Sang-eun	20	Female	Business administration	English
So-ri	19	Female	Accounting	English
Tae-hyun	20	Male	Biological science	Korean
Yun-ah	21	Female	Economics	Korean

Data was collected and triangulated by means of multiple sources such as semi-structured interviews, informal interviews, and classroom observations with detailed field notes to increase the validity and reliability of research by offering rich empirical descriptions that involve a single phenomenon [57,58]. For the present study, semi-structured interviews served as the first and major source of information that collected data about their experiences of using YouTube in and out of the classroom and their perceptions on how it affected their academic and cultural engagement in the target language context. The interviews were carried out twice with each of the nine students at the beginning and the end of the semester. Informal interviews were conducted as a supplementary data collection instrument, which enabled students to share their stories in more relaxing and comfortable environments. Both English and Korean were used during all interview sessions as per the students' preferences (see Table 1). Along with students' interviews, classroom observations and field notes, which were conducted during the entire semester, were used to enrich and strengthen the present study by providing additional insight into the nature of using YouTube for educational purposes.

All data were audio and video recorded. Data gained from all sources were manually transcribed and read thoroughly for coding and analysis. All of the Korean language data gained from the interviews were translated and reviewed by the first author of the present study. The transcribed data were primarily compared and contrasted by generating and developing a coding scheme. The coding procedure was completed thematically through two phases to enhance "accuracy or sensitivity in understanding and interpreting observations about people, events, situations, and organizations" [59] (p. 5). The first cycle of the coding procedure involved descriptive coding of all transcribed data—it enabled us to generate the coding scheme. In this process, three main themes emerged. The initially coded data was subsequently examined for detailed and thematic analysis along with interpretation of emergent patterns. Data coding and analysis were managed using ATLAS.ti software that helped us to handle our datasets by two authors in a systematic and logical manner by excluding one researcher's bias [60].

6. Findings

Upon integrating the nine Korean international students' transitional experiences, three major themes emerged surrounding the role of YouTube for educational purposes to promote multicultural competence: (1) enhancing cross-cultural sensitivity, (2) building content knowledge and skills in L2, and (3) refining an understanding of English as a global language. Table 2 illustrates the themes and major findings of the present study. The following section accounts for the collective ideas among the nine students.

Table 2. The themes and major findings of the present study.

Themes	Major Findings
Enhancing cross-cultural sensitivity	Learning cross-cultural awareness (for example, using slang/(socio)cultural norms and aspects) Having indirect experiences of and preparedness for new academic life Obtaining essential knowledge of multicultural contexts (including L2 classroom)
Building content knowledge and skills in L2	Gaining sufficient knowledge of basic English Learning academic writing rules and strategies Checking grammatical errors and mistakes Obtaining essential knowledge for participation in L2 classroom
Refining an understanding of English as a global language	Broadening perspectives on a variety of English by rethinking Standard (American) English Having a better understanding of Korean-style English (or Konglish/Koreanized English)

6.1. Enhancing Cross-Cultural Sensitivity

The first theme that emerged was that the Korean international students who participated in this study were actively involved in learning various aspects of L2 culture through YouTube. The majority of the students viewed L2 education in their home country as not ostensibly concentrated on teaching multiculturalism. For that reason, they failed to consider ideas of diverse cultures and communities. Furthermore, it was rarely dealt with by other relevant venues in daily life. Instead, they believed that YouTube helped them develop cross-cultural sensitivity, exposing them to a broader world.

Students shared what they learned through YouTube in terms of cross-cultural sensitivity. According to some of them, watching YouTube inspired them to deepen their understanding of U.S. culture during preparation for and participation in a degree program in brand-new communities. For example:

> I was able to warm up before I started my study abroad program in the U.S. No one told me things I might face while studying abroad. So, I decided to watch YouTube [videos] to gain information about cultural matters that I should know. They were very useful, actually. Through [watching] YouTube videos, I also feel like . . . get so much closer to people living in foreign countries. I will definitely recommend watching YouTube videos, if someone around me would like to go abroad. (Hyun-soo)

> YouTube is the easiest way to learn about new cultures that I haven't met directly. I even learned about U.S. customs and immigration questions through YouTube videos in order to enter the U.S. [. . .] Through watching YouTube videos, I felt a sense of being a member of a certain community where so many people are living together. I am part of it. Such knowledge [gained from YouTube] also makes me get along well with my international classmates without any trouble. (Hye-ju)

A similar experience was documented by another student, Na-yeon, who attempted to reinforce her cross-cultural sensitivity by enjoying YouTube video clips. She recalled that she had fewer opportunities to engage in multicultural education or training in

Korea and had difficulties with gaining multicultural competence when she started her academic journey in the U.S. She explained why YouTube was critical to her academic and sociocultural adaptation in a multicultural context:

> I am studying in America, but sometimes I have no idea how I should do [things] because I cannot understand all the cultural norms ... for example ... like etiquette for college life or when I meet my classmates who came from countries that I did not know well. Those situations make me very nervous. It's too tough for me. YouTube videos or vlogs help me a lot. I have learned a lot about real-life stories and manners in surviving here [in the U.S.].

Consistent with Na-yeon, Sang-eun and Kyung-ha expounded their own stories when they tried offering comments on the efficacy of YouTube. Sang-eun said, "my academic experience in Korea was not so useful in understanding diversity. In fact, schools and teachers did not take it seriously." She continued to express that her prior experiences during K-12 education did not provide the "supportive learning activities" needed for multicultural awareness and competencies. In this regard, she viewed YouTube as "a game changer" and that it helped her effectively deal with "sensitive social and cultural issues." In a similar vein, Kyung-ha recollected the pedagogical practices that she received in Korea. She said, "Teachers had very limited ideas and subjects about multiculturalism; therefore, in Korea, I also thought that that was not an issue to be concerned about." She further stated, "English teachers in Korea sometimes used YouTube considering students' understanding of other cultural aspects in order to meet their instructional goals. It worked to motivate me to broaden my perceptive on others who are far from me. [...] Personally, I have been counting on YouTube to increase my knowledge about American culture."

Ji-min was the one who underlined the tendency for Korea's education to downplay the significance of multiculturalism. As an international student, he described this as his challenge while fitting into a new academic environment. He appreciated learning through YouTube as "an alternative way to learn many different cultural groups and aspects." He added, "I feel a sense of security in the YouTube world because it leads me to accept diversity in class, for example ... when sharing and debating our opinions, even very small things ... like choosing a linking word when we write together. After all, we can finish up our good discussion because we try to hear each other." Such a virtual environmental context aided in shaping his open-minded attitude, thereby ensuring positive progress toward successful communication with his classmates.

6.2. Building Content Knowledge and Skills in L2

Analysis of our data also unveiled that the majority of students who participated in the present study felt passionate about gaining information about L2 by learning through YouTube. In comparison to other global and local search engines or SNSs, including Google and Naver, YouTube was used as a more advantageous venue for the Korean student participants to experience high-quality English language education as well as allow them to implement self-regulated learning. The evidence for this was apparent during their classroom learning. The students had initially somewhat appeared to struggle with classroom actives and displayed difficulties in writing in English, particularly in small group instructional settings. Throughout the semester, however, they showed much better writing skills when the instructor allowed them to use online materials to support their learning.

According to Sang-eun, who seemed to be proactive in attending class meetings, many YouTube videos provide "simple, clear, and practical instruction" in improving her English proficiency and competence as well as contributing to small group activities. She particularly thought that, compared to Google, YouTube that is a multimedia-based platform offered more useful resources essential to academic writing tasks while working with her classmates. Hence, she considered YouTube as a key tool to clarify and grasp unclear subject matter or grammar in English, instead of seeking other online resources. Other students made related comments:

> My instructor said that it would be okay to use any electronic devices and Internet resources when we write essays during small group discussions. Then, I just turn on YouTube to find information that I would like to obtain. Naver is good but sometimes it is hard to find reliable information; one bad thing in using YouTube in class is that it is hard to find suitable information all in the given time. However, I mostly count on YouTube when she (the instructor) gives us enough time. (Yun-ah)

> I learn a lot from my teachers, but I often feel that it is not enough because English is not my first language. In fact, it (academic writing in English) is not easy for me. I had no idea how to read, summarize, and synthesize papers . . . and even [fix] my grammatical mistakes; so, I decided to subscribe to a couple of YouTube channels to keep up with my writing assignments step by step. (Na-yeon)

> I have been learning about English writing rules and strategies through YouTube lessons. They (YouTubers) provide very detailed information. For example, I learned from one YouTuber about the differences between present perfect and past perfect in English, which made me very confused. Watching YouTube videos is fun and informative. (Ji-min)

Similarly, Tae-hyun, who appeared to struggle with fitting into the American classroom, thought that classroom participation was "much harder than expected," especially when discussing about academic writing in English. In this regard, he viewed that YouTube was more beneficial than any other SNS to strengthening content knowledge for academic writing necessary to classroom activities. He noted, "my instructor asked us to bring our own [electronic] devices to class. It is a good approach to me because I can search for some of the short tutorials on YouTube to make my writing better. I usually learn how to write academic papers in English and look for materials for checking grammar rules and errors from some English lessons on YouTube."

Hye-ju reported that she used YouTube for assistance in improving her English writing skills. She discussed one example when offering comments on this: "I am a new international student. To me, it is pretty difficult to find good resources to develop my English skills on campus. I learned these skills from YouTubers. YouTubers put their effort into their videos to improve subscribers' English writing proficiency." Based on her experience, she believed that it played an important role in stimulating her motivation to learn English. To be specific, YouTubers encouraged her to set academic goals for English writing skills as well as increase her sense of self-efficacy in learning English. She stated:

> YouTube enables me to have my own certain rules in learning writing [in English] according to my [English] proficiency; for example, once I subscribe to some of the good channels that fit with my interest and level, I can keep watching their recently uploaded videos. I can see the videos again and again. It looks like free English tutoring. Learning is always challenging but is mostly fun and enjoyable on YouTube.

A similar idea was seen in the narrative of So-ri who managed to show her seamless academic progression throughout the semester. She was strongly aware of the benefits of learning English through YouTube. She emphasized that educational YouTube channels such as JenniferESL (https://www.youtube.com/user/JenniferESL, accessed on 30 June 2021) and VOA Learning English (https://www.youtube.com/user/VOALearningEnglish, accessed on 30 June 2021) provided a potential solution to enhance her ability to learn English. According to her, "My English skills have improved thanks to these two YouTube channels. They teach me how to use English [from the bottom up]." In this sense, she expressed a belief in "YouTube creators who are equipped with deep knowledge of English." In her view, YouTubers encouraged her to "have more opportunities to practice English academic writing."

6.3. Refining an Understanding of English as a Global Language

The last theme of our analysis showed that YouTube enabled Korean international students to see English from a new perspective and extended their understanding of English as a global language, which they had been inadequately informed about in their prior formal education in Korea. Most of the students explained that learning experiences through YouTube were relevant and connected to accepting different varieties of English, which are not limited to Standard English. Notably, such positive experiences enhanced their confidence in fitting into the new academic culture.

YouTube was described as something that "makes a clear difference" by Na-yeon who keenly participated in classroom activities. She pointed out that her lack of awareness of the varieties of English was attributed to her high school education that heavily focused on "English used by American people." She stated that "YouTube helped me put things in perspective on English. The English that I learned [in Korea] was not everything." Others also clarified how they gained familiarity with English as a global language through YouTube:

> I couldn't understand various English forms . . . because, in my high school days, English teachers focused on just one form, American English. [. . .] You know, when learning English in Korea, Konglish is implicitly considered as something to be avoided in schools. [. . .] Korean culture and language are getting popularity on YouTube. I can see many comments left on YouTube videos related to K-POP. Those are very favorable to Korea and even Konglish. I am now proud of my English. (So-ri)

> [In Korea,] we never put [American] English and other forms of English together. In order not to lose face, we tried to use American English; otherwise, we tried to keep silent. [. . .] YouTube is very appropriate to keep me motivated in using my Korean-style English. I don't need to verify who I am on YouTube. No one can know and judge me. (Ji-min)

> I think I am better trained through YouTube. I am increasingly interested in varieties of English. Sometimes I search YouTube to know more about European-accented English because that is very new to me. I think it would be good if I would get familiar with that [European-accented] English because I have two classmates from Italy. I will be able to make friends with them. (Kyung-ha)

Hyun-soo was another student who expressed why his prior education in Korea was evident in his inadequate sense of the varieties of English. According to him, English language education in Korea pushed him to "learn the absolute thing only." From our classroom observations, Hyun-soo often seemed reluctant to participate in classroom activities, but we found that he gradually improved. He thought that such progress was due to YouTube, as it helped him cope with challenges and stress pertaining to his English use and proficiency. For him, the best benefit of learning English through YouTube was that it allowed him to build confidence in using his own English. He described the situation thusly:

> I was always curious about my English. I always thought, "is this expression acceptable? is this pronunciation correct?" because there is only one answer to a question in Korea. I am now confident about my own English because YouTube use made me cognizant that various expressions and styles exist in the world. [. . .] Honestly, sometimes I am still shamed of my English, but I usually leave comments on some videos that I have really enjoyed.

This is substantiated by comments from Hye-ju, who was the one of the more hard-working students throughout the semester. She first told us about her apprehension in engaging in particular environments where English is used as a first language. She bluntly explained, "I was very worried about my English when preparing to study abroad. I received little preparation for the skills necessary for American college life in Korea." YouTube, on the other hand, helped her "learn varieties of English expressed by people

from different language backgrounds." She continued to say, "there are so many people who do not use English as their mother tongue. Of course, [through YouTube] I can also learn about native-like pronunciation, which I couldn't experience in real life in Korea."

During the final interview, Yun-ah and Tae-hyun expressed feelings of certainty toward their "Koreanized English." Interestingly, they were the ones who discussed Korea's social expectations that pushed them to use and learn Standard English. Yun-ah explained her rationale for her appreciation of YouTube, which gave her a chance to develop her awareness of a variety of English types. According to her, "YouTube is a global platform, so diversity is definitely acceptable." She further stated, "I am connected to my Korean friends in local blog platforms like Naver and Tistory. I have to pay special attention to my [English] writing when I leave messages because they expect me to have more Americanized English because I am in an English-speaking country. But, YouTube is a totally different place where I feel . . . I am free to use English." Likewise, Tae-hyun perceived that a social expectation by his parents was evident in preserving his prejudiced ideas about English. He recalled that his parents always wished for him to learn "very fluent English spoken by native speakers." Reflecting on this, he said, "my Koreanized English was discouraged. That made me frustrated whenever I spoke English. [. . .] YouTube is intended for unspecified individuals. For me, I think that it is a very good feature in feeling few language barriers when I use my Koreanized English." He continued to remark, "I do not worry about my Koreanized English. I don't need to be shy in that digital space. I can push myself out of my own comfort zone."

7. Discussion

The present study, which describes the experiences of a group of first-year students from Korea, provides a valuable snapshot of how YouTube can be used in conjunction with L2 learners' understanding of cultural and linguistic diversity. Among the Korean international students, there is a high degree of agreement about the value of YouTube in that it plays a significant role in their transitional stage from L1 to L2 contexts. It lends some evidentiary support for the potential benefits of YouTube—(1) enhancing cross-cultural sensitivity, (2) building content knowledge and skills in L2, and (3) refining an understanding of global language—which aids the Korean students' academic and social progress while preparing for and participating in overseas degree programs in the new context of higher education. At its core, in other words, YouTube enables them to build acceptance for L2 and its culture by creating circumstances where they can interact with others and enrich new experiences.

Our findings reveal that there is a greater tendency for Korean international students to use YouTube, as it is characterized by more open access in acquiring content knowledge and skills in English on their own. To be specific, participants in this study underscored the effectiveness of using YouTube in searching, gaining, and synthesizing information, which is directly linked to L2 literacy development and academic writing in particular. As shown in our findings, Korean international students are adept at seeking and integrating relevant online resources gained from YouTube in order to develop their own L2 proficiency and competence. It is necessary for them to not only fulfill their own learning needs but also to achieve academic inclusion and success in the target language context. This finding is consistent with previous research [48,49] that highlights the pivotal role of YouTube for L2 learners' academic engagement and achievement. Especially, our finding is congruent with that of Wang and Chen [49], which emphasizes the importance of self-regulated learning that can be achieved by increasing learner autonomy and flexibility.

Our findings also reveal that YouTube enables Korean international students to clearly feel a sense of belonging and security in a wider community. For the nine Korean students, YouTube was seamlessly used as a venue of communication with people sharing diverse backgrounds in an interactive manner. Particularly, their learning preference for using YouTube was found to have tangible consequences in relation to positive attitudes toward and awareness of cultural and linguistic diversity. It is important to note that such an

inclination to learn English through YouTube mirrors restricted learning opportunities stemming from their prior learning experiences in their home country. To put it another way, there is evidence from the present study that the majority of the participants rarely had exposure to multicultural knowledge and skills in formal classroom settings in Korea. For that reason, YouTube plays a vital function in providing primary multicultural resources. It is considered beneficial for them to be keenly aware of the growing idea of cultural diversity and inclusion that are essential to today's academic and social climate [31,34,35]. In this regard, our findings are in line with previous research that has shown the significance of using SNSs for multicultural understanding [49,61,62], suggesting that SNSs can lead to better education for multicultural practices by allowing students to step into new linguistic and sociocultural surroundings directly and indirectly.

As Chau [63] has noted, YouTube is indeed a crucial place that provides "a participatory culture in which to develop, interact, and learn" (p. 65). The findings of the present study are more meaningful, especially when considering the expectation in students' commitment to developing multicultural competence including multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills explained by Pope and Reynolds [31]. The findings complement a growing body of literature reporting the importance of SNSs for academic and social integration of international students [64]. We focused more on the importance of developing SNSs to support a better understanding of multiculturalism. Based on our findings, it is reasonable to assert that, for Korean international students, the use of YouTube is not simply for fun. It is at the heart of all aspects of their learning trajectories academically and culturally. Educational use of YouTube has the potential to enhance and expedite the quality of education in enabling students to engage in a more participatory culture of L2 education. In addition, our findings tell us that YouTube, as an interactive means of communication, is central to the access to more cross-cultural interactions and experiences.

8. Conclusions

Given that the participants in the present study are from Korea, our findings may be explained by Korea's current education system that has posed difficulties in learning linguistic and cultural diversity along with the pursuit of 21st century skills. A closer look at our findings shows critical queries and issues that go far beyond Korea's conventional K-12 instruction and are still a matter for consideration in order to alleviate such negative consequences. Our study also extends a line of research in response to the sustainability of online learning by exploring sensible explanations of how and why the use of YouTube can be favorable to multilingual and multicultural education in a digitalized world that is highly attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on our findings, we assert that YouTube is seen as "a fertile language-learning site" [49] (p. 342), where Korean L2 learners can experience multilingual and multicultural gains with the ultimate potential of YouTube. This approach is not new, but an unprecedented situation like the COVID-19 pandemic particularly calls for urgent action to develop innovative initiatives that are optimized for technology- and web-based instruction in Korea.

Indeed, it has prompted teachers and administrators to make full use of digital materials that are mainly accessible with SNSs. Unfortunately, however, Korea's reform initiatives have not successfully shaped online learning using SNSs. In addition, a lack in teachers' digital knowledge and skills sometimes impedes the integration of technology resources into pedagogical practices [65,66]. Without doubt, there needs to be a shift toward a more innovative and feasible learning model, which is important for digital natives [67]. On a positive note, the present study demonstrates promising evidence of the pedagogical value of YouTube. Based on our findings (see Figure 1), we reiterate that it is an opportune time to expand our understanding of how such efforts contribute to instructional shifts toward multicultural education using SNSs in response to the new normal in education.
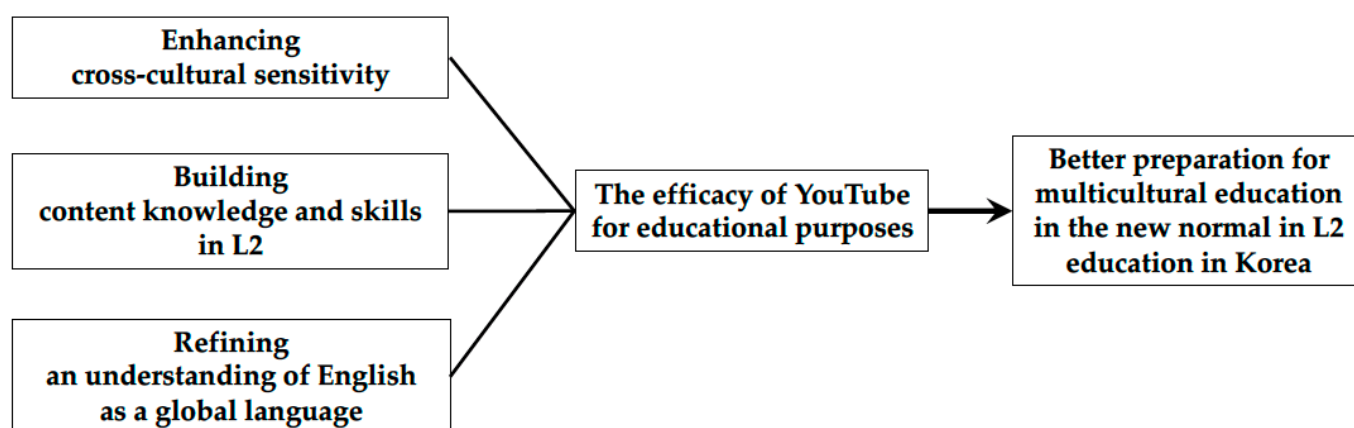
Figure 1. A summary of the findings.

The present study is limited to nine Korean millennials participating in degree programs in the U.S. One may still argue that mixed methods or quantitative analysis is favorable for more comprehensive views in examining the effect of using YouTube on international students' multilingual and multicultural competence. As a way to bridge the gap, a follow-up experimental study, which measures Korean international students' academic achievement and engagement through pre- and post-tests, can be potentially valuable to more deeply understand the long-term effects of the educational use of YouTube. In addition, future studies working with a larger sample of international students and their teachers could possibly be conducted to determine the relationship between L2 learners' attitudes toward using YouTube and teachers' expertise and instructional practices for multilingual and multicultural competence. Nevertheless, the present study allowed us the opportunity to closely examine the beneficial features of YouTube for educational purposes, which can leverage students' learning interests and strengths toward L2 and its culture. More specifically, this study illustrates how YouTube can be used to address the need for effective pedagogical options to fulfill students' L2 learning goals that emphasize linguistic and cultural diversity in the post-COVID era.

From our findings, we in this sense highlight that policymakers should step up their preparedness to build robust collaborative partnerships with international and domestic industrial companies, including YouTube, in developing infrastructures and environments for virtual learning that puts special emphasis on the importance of integrating multicultural education into L2 education. Well-rounded educational environments should be maintained in the effort to not only identify barriers to securing students' L2 learning and retention but to also offer equal support to all students in terms of access to technology and online resources. This will help ensure adequate learning facilities and opportunities such as critical thinking, creativity, and information literacy [21].

Furthermore, in order to avoid the possible pitfall of reform efforts, the curriculum for SNS-based online learning should be realistic and informative for educational purposes, which in turn may maximize students' potential and the benefits of online learning. Related to this, the curriculum should be well designed and delivered and not subjected to time and space constraints. In developing the technology-enabled curriculum, students' academic needs and potential should be considered along with their digital capabilities. At the same time, cultural values and practices should be used appropriately in order to support their multilingual and multicultural understanding during the learning process. Based on a comprehensive development of an online-oriented approach to L2 learning, students will be able to explore their own learning space in order to extend their educational experiences by broadening their intellectual and cultural horizons.

Finally, we underscore the need for considerable effort toward establishing and implementing professional development training for educators at the institutional and national levels. This is because some studies have [68–70] expressed concern over possible draw-

backs in using SNSs for educational purposes, such as exposure to social media addiction and learning distraction. For these reasons, students' engagement with and understanding of online learning can be largely contingent upon the ways in which educators apply teachers' expertise to their lessons [71,72]. Hence, high-quality professional development programs are a must for L2 educators to diagnose students' prevalent problems in taking their first steps toward developing digital knowledge and skills. At the same time, they should identify more substantial and refined multilingual and multicultural resources from SNSs and determine the best practices to help students move beyond classroom-oriented educational boundaries. Change cannot occur until the significance of professional development is highlighted in the educational planning and policy of Korea.

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