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Learners' preferences in learning Korean as a foreign language with native and non-native speaker teachers

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ABSTRACT

The discussion of native speaker teachers (NSTs) and non-native speaker teachers (NNSTs) has attracted significant interest in language education. However, studies on Korean language learners' preferences for Korean NSTs and NNSTs in Indonesia remain limited. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate learners' preferences based on their experiences of learning Korean with both NSTs and NNSTs. Forty-one Indonesian university students majoring in Korean language who had experience learning with both types of teachers participated in this study. A 34-item questionnaire was used to measure learners' experiences in several aspects, including grammar, writing, reading, listening, speaking, culture and learning strategies, and assessment. Interviews were also conducted with selected participants whose questionnaire scores indicated preferences for NSTs, NNSTs, or neutral preferences. Descriptive statistics and the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test were used to analyze the quantitative data. The results showed a slight tendency to prefer Korean NNSTs ($\bar{x} = 1.90$) over Korean NSTs ($\bar{x} = 1.95$), although the difference was not statistically significant ($p = .466$, $p > .05$). The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic coding. The findings revealed that learners tended to value teachers' ability to explain materials clearly, communicate effectively, provide learning support, and explain concepts in students' mother tongue more than their native or non-native speaker status. Korean NSTs were preferred in the aspects of grammar, culture, and assessment, while Korean NNSTs were preferred in the teaching of writing, reading, listening, and speaking. These findings suggest that pedagogical and interpersonal factors influence learners' preferences more strongly than teachers' native or non-native speaker status.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Korean language has gained increasing popularity through Korean culture, with the purpose of learners communicating with Korean people (Li & Han, 2025). With globalization, the Korean Wave has also spread to Indonesia (Yuliawan & Subakti, 2022). As a result, many Indonesians are motivated to learn Korean as a second language with various goals (Harahap et al., 2025). For example, to work in Korea (Fadilla et al., 2026), to understand pop culture (Mutiara et al., 2023), to study in Korea (Prasanti & Dewi, 2020), and plenty more. Since Korean language education has a significant part in enhancing academic collaboration between South Korea and Indonesia (Darmanto et al., 2025), some universities even offer the Korean language as a major, with both native and non-native Korean speakers as teachers. Teachers play an important role in shaping language classes for students (Ly, 2024), and a good teacher can promote positive attitudes, boost students' motivation, and encourage them to develop their abilities (Muslumova, 2025). Teachers indeed have a key part in learners' learning experiences and in developing language development.

As the role of teachers is important in encouraging effective language learning, discussion on the teacher's nativeness status also still constantly arises (Perez, 2024). In a Korean language classroom, learners may study with either native speaker teachers (Korean NSTs), non-native speaker teachers (Korean NNSTs), or both. The two groups of teachers contribute to language learning in different ways, each having its own strengths and limitations. According to Kim (2015), the Chinese students prefer Korean NNSTs to teach speaking, pronunciation, and writing classes. Meanwhile, Korean NSTs are preferred in grammar classes. Lee and Kim (2022) also revealed that Korean NNSTs are at a disadvantage compared with Korean NSTs in terms of language proficiency. But at the same time, the ability of NNSTs to teach Korean in their mother tongue makes it easier to address learners' questions. This shows that both teachers are actually supporting each other in a Korean language class.

A number of studies on NSTs and NNSTs in language learning have also been conducted in other language learning contexts. Benke and Medgyes (2005) conducted a study among English language learners in Hungary and found that English NNSTs tend to be more effective at teaching grammar by addressing learners' difficulties. They were also considered better at preparing students for exams, providing equivalent vocabulary from L2 to L1, and developing learners' translation skills. English NNSTs in China generally received higher scores in teacher-focused educational and pedagogical aspects (Deng et al., 2024). Kim (2020) added that Korean English NNSTs may reduce learners' anxiety toward language learning because they share the same first language. Regardless of these strengths, NNSTs also face several difficulties. Learners thought that NNSTs are prone to using too much of their mother language (Benke & Medgyes, 2005; Nam, 2010), and that not all NNSTs have the same ability to predict learners' challenges in learning L2 (Andrew, 2007). In addition, Arabic NNSTs find phonology to be a significant challenge (Almelhes, 2024). According to Tajeddin et al. (2023), inaccurate pronunciation of NNSTs can cause learning problems. In contrast, Wulandari et al. (2021) reported that English NNSTs' pronunciation was inferior and easier to understand than that of NSTs. The NSTs, on the other hand, have extensive knowledge of their culture and mother language (Alemi et al., 2025). They were seen as more caring, engaging, and flexible teachers in the Chinese English majors' class (Deng et al., 2024). This supports the results of Árva and Medgyes's (2000) study, which found that English NSTs are effective facilitators who show genuine interest in students and are also open to healthy discussion. They prepared interesting topics in class as a result of their richness of cultural knowledge, resulting in leading a natural flow of conversation with learners (Cha, 2022). In contrast, Yeung (2021) analyzed data from 253 Hong Kong English learners and found a slight preference for English NSTs, with English NNSTs preferred for effectiveness. Although the full use of the L2 in class is often regarded as an NST's strength, Medgyes (1994) suggested that it may be difficult for early-level learners to follow the class. More importantly, for NSTs who don't speak L1, teachers often find it difficult to interpret the learners' mistakes.

Both NSTs and NNSTs have certain strengths and weaknesses in language teaching, as previous research has repeatedly shown (Alemi et al., 2025; Fatahillah, 2024; Kim, 2024; Wang & Fang,

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2020). Each group plays a particular role in learners' language development; neither can be considered uniformly superior. Thus, the continuing debate about teachers' native-language status has gradually shifted from determining which teacher group is superior to recognizing how both groups can strengthen language teaching (Deng et al., 2024; Selvi et al., 2024). The majority of existing studies are in the context of English language learning, and similar discussions of other foreign languages remain limited. Previous studies have reported strengths and limitations of both NSTs and NNSTs. For example, NNSTs may be better able to address learners' difficulties, while NSTs can bring cultural knowledge and natural language use into the classroom (Benke & Medgyes, 2005; Cha, 2022). However, beginners may find it difficult to follow classes conducted fully in the target language (Medgyes, 1994). Studies on Korean language teachers have also examined Chinese learners' perceptions and the competencies required of Korean NNSTs (Kim, 2015; Lee & Kim, 2022). However, these studies do not show which strengths and limitations matter most to Indonesian learners when they choose between Korean NSTs and Korean NNSTs. Research on Indonesian learners' perceptions and preferences toward these two teacher groups is still hard to find, despite the increasing popularity of the Korean language. Therefore, this study examines learners' preferences, the strengths and limitations they associate with each teacher group, and the reasons behind their preferences. It addresses the following research questions: (1) What are Indonesian Korean language learners' preferences regarding their learning experiences with Korean NSTs and Korean NNSTs? and (2) What strengths and limitations do learners associate with each teacher group?

2. METHOD

This study uses a mixed-methods research design to investigate Indonesian Korean language learners' preferences toward their experiences in class with Korean NSTs and NNSTs. According to Mujis (2010), mixed methods is a flexible research design that is decided by what one actually wants to find out. Both qualitative and quantitative methods can have equal status in this research. The purpose of mixed methods research is to gain a deeper understanding of a case than would be possible with a single method (Mills & Gay, 2015). An explanatory sequential mixed methods design was used, in which qualitative interviews followed quantitative data collection. Mills and Gay (2015) explained that the quantitative data collected first determines the second phase of data collection. This research's quantitative methods are dominant, so the qualitative findings are used to obtain qualitative explanations and richer views on learners' experiences of learning with Korean NSTs and NNSTs, building on the first findings.

The participants were 41 Indonesian university students majoring in Korean who had experience learning with both types of teachers. They were selected through purposive sampling based on the study criteria (Priyono, 2008). At the beginning of the questionnaire, respondents were asked whether they agreed to participate in the study, and only those who gave their consent were included. The questionnaire also asked whether they were willing to take part in a follow-up interview. Based on the overall mean scores of the questionnaire, three participants were selected for semi-structured interviews to represent the preference groups (Korean NSTs, Korean NNSTs, and neutral). The questionnaire was adapted and adjusted from previous research on English NSTs and NNSTs by Lasagabaster and Sierra (2002), Medyes (1994), and Yang (2011) into a Korean language learning version for NSTs and NNSTs. The questionnaire items focused on students' experiences learning Korean, covering seven aspects of language learning: grammar, writing, reading, listening, speaking, culture & learning strategies, and assessment. These aspects were included to examine whether learners' preferences differed across specific instructional areas, rather than treating teacher preference as a general judgment.

A pilot study was conducted with a group of Korean students to examine the instrument's validity and reliability before the main data collection. The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25, resulting in Cronbach's alpha of .899 across the 35 questionnaire items, with 34 valid items selected for the final questionnaire. The Likert scale scoring system was used to

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measure what an individual notices or feels about activities, ranging from Strongly Agree (1) to Strongly Disagree (4) (Mills & Gay, 2015). All questionnaire items were positively worded. Therefore, lower scores mean stronger learners' agreement with the statements. The quantitative data were organized and examined to identify general preference patterns and participants representing different preference outcomes. Descriptive statistics were first used to summarize learners' responses after the collected data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25. While the analysis showed the overall distribution of participants' responses, it could not determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between the two teacher groups. Thus, a Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used to compare participants' answers toward NSTs and NNSTs. The purpose of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test is to test the difference in ranks between two related groups (Mills & Gay, 2015). Two comparable sets of scores from the same participants were analyzed, and the responses were combined. The statistical significance value was then used to determine whether learners demonstrated a significant difference in their preferences toward the two teacher groups. A significance level of .05 was used, with p-values below .05 indicating a statistically significant difference and p-values above .05 indicating no statistically significant difference.

Based on the individual mean scores from quantitative results, three participants were selected for the qualitative semi-structured interview: one participant who preferred NSTs, one who preferred NNSTs, and one who showed a relatively neutral preference. Semi-structured interviews allow for unplanned follow-up questions (Mills & Gay, 2015), so the same 11 main questions were used as an interview guide, with additional questions added when further explanation was needed. The interview recordings were then transcribed and translated from Indonesian into English. The transcripts retained the original meaning of participants' responses. Thematic analysis method was used to identify, analyze, and report patterns or themes within data to organize and describe data sets in detailed and nuanced ways (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data. Codes are a way to indicate patterns and meaning by marking units of text (Mills & Gay, 2015). Relevant excerpts from the transcripts were then assigned initial codes representing the main meaning of each statement. To ensure consistency in the coding process, identical initial codes were utilized for segments conveying similar meanings across several interview questions and respondents. The coding procedure pointed out the importance of specific excerpts rather than classifying responses solely based on the interview question. The significance of a theme does not necessarily depend on quantifiable measures, but rather on its ability to capture aspects that are important to the overall research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Consequently, answers to a single interview question may span multiple categories or themes if they reflect different aspects of participants' experiences. The same initial codes were applied to excerpts across different interview questions and participants. Five major themes were identified from the qualitative data: Grammar, Korean Language Skills, Cultural Knowledge, Assessment and Feedback, Factors Influencing Learners' Preferences, and Characteristics of an Effective Korean Language Teacher.

The quantitative and qualitative findings were then integrated in the interpretation stage. The quantitative findings showed the overall preference pattern and statistical analysis among Korean NSTs and Korean NNSTs. The qualitative findings explained why participants valued different traits in each teacher group. The use of learners' L1, authentic exposure to the L2, cultural knowledge, feedback, teacher characteristics, and teaching methods were the factors in focus. This approach allowed the study to view learners' preferences as a mix of linguistic and pedagogical factors rather than simply a preference for teachers' nativeness status.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the main findings on Korean language learners' preferences for Korean NSTs and NNSTs. The results are organized around the two research questions and include findings from the questionnaire and interviews. The discussion interprets these findings and compares them with previous studies.

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3.1. Learners' Preferences toward Korean NSTs and Korean NNSTs

Quantitative results from a questionnaire completed by 41 learners were used to examine their overall preferences for seven aspects of Korean language learning: grammar, writing, reading, listening, speaking, teaching strategies and cultural knowledge, and assessment experience in classes with Korean NSTs and NNSTs. Descriptive statistics were used to identify the general tendency of participants' responses toward both teacher groups. Table 1 presents the questionnaire's descriptive statistics results. Lower scores indicate stronger agreement with the questionnaire statements.

Table 1.
Descriptive Statistics of Learners' Preferences toward Korean NSTs and NNSTs

Learning Domains	Mean of Korean NNSTs	Standard Deviation	Mean of Korean NSTs	Standard Deviation
Overall	1.8994	.359	1.9484	.364
Grammar	1.9878	.685	1.9146	.558
Writing	1.8902	.506	2.0163	.471
Reading	1.7561	.405	1.8659	.559
Listening	1.9593	.523	2.0610	.527
Speaking	1.8374	.495	1.9634	.574
Teaching Strategies and Cultural Knowledge	1.8537	.584	1.8130	.460
Assessment	2.0122	.440	2.0081	.468

As shown in Table 1, Korean NNSTs got a general mean score of 1.8994 (SD = .359), while Korean NSTs gained a slightly higher mean score of 1.9484 (SD = .364). As lower scores reflect stronger agreement with the questionnaire statements, this showed a slight overall preference toward Korean NNSTs. Still, the results varied across different areas of teaching. In specific categories, Korean NSTs scored lower in grammar (M = 1.9146), teaching strategies and cultural knowledge (M = 1.8130), and assessment (M = 2.0081). On the other hand, Korean NNSTs had lower mean scores in writing (M = 1.8902), reading (M = 1.7561), listening (M = 1.9593), and speaking (M = 1.8374). The differences across sections were quite small. Although the overall descriptive statistics showed a slight bias toward Korean NNSTs, the direction of learners' responses varied across the seven aspects of Korean language learning.

To discover whether the differences in preferences between Korean NSTs and NNSTs were statistically significant, a Wilcoxon signed-rank test was performed. The findings from this analysis are detailed in Table 2.

Table 2.
Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test of Learners' Overall Preferences

Comparison	Negative Ranks	Positive Ranks	Ties	Z	P
Korean NNST and Korean NSTs	17	18	6	-.729	.466

The Wilcoxon signed-rank test resulted in 17 negative ranks, 18 positive ranks, and 6 ties. The negative ranks indicate that 17 participants gave lower scores for Korean NSTs than for NNSTs, while the positive ranks indicate that 18 participants obtained lower scores for Korean NNSTs than for NSTs. Six participants placed equal scores for both teacher groups. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test revealed that the difference between learners' preferences toward Korean NSTs and NNSTs was not statistically significant ($Z = -.729$, $p = .466 > .05$). Nevertheless, the descriptive statistics pointed to a slight overall tendency toward Korean NNSTs; the quantitative findings did not present a significant preference for either teacher group. The varying patterns identified across the individual learning aspects were further explored through the qualitative interview data. Their answers showed that learners' preferences could change depending on the class and the language skill.

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3.2. Perceived Strengths and Limitations of Korean NSTs and Korean NNSTs

Following the quantitative analysis, semi-structured interviews were performed with three participants representing the preference patterns identified in the questionnaire results: a preference for Korean NSTs, a preference for Korean NNSTs, and a neutral preference. The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Five major themes appeared from the coding process. Table 3 summarizes the themes and categories identified from the interview data.

Table 3.
Themes, Categories, and Initial Codes of Interview Results

Theme	Categories	Summary of Responses
Korean Language Skills	Grammar	Valued explanations in L1 and grammar comparisons provided by Korean NNSTs and Korean NSTs with Indonesian proficiency, while Korean NSTs were also appreciated for providing clear and contextual grammar explanations.
	Listening	Korean NSTs were associated with authentic pronunciation, exposure to native dialects, and listening-focused instruction.
	Speaking	Korean NSTs were valued for authentic expressions and immediate corrective feedback. Korean NNSTs were appreciated for providing speaking practice and immediate feedback in L1.
	Reading	Both Korean NSTs and Korean NNSTs were perceived as helpful in explaining vocabulary. Korean NSTs tended to provide more contextual explanations.
	Writing	Korean NSTs were associated with detailed written feedback, while Korean NNSTs facilitated learners' understanding by providing explanations in L1.
Cultural Knowledge	Cultural Knowledge	Korean NSTs were perceived as providing authentic cultural knowledge. Korean NNSTs explained Korean culture in ways that were more localized to Indonesian learners.
Assessment and Feedback	Feedback	Korean NSTs were appreciated for detailed feedback. Korean NNSTs made feedback easier to understand.
	Assessment	Both Korean NSTs and Korean NNSTs were perceived as providing fair assessment and showing appreciation for learners' efforts.
Factors Influencing Learners' Preferences	Communication	Korean NNSTs' shared language was valued for facilitating communication. Korean NSTs with no L1 proficiency often faced language barriers.
	Teacher Characteristics	Positive teacher personality was appreciated in both teacher groups, while empathy was more frequently associated with Korean NNSTs.
	Teaching Approach	Korean NSTs were valued for extending explanations beyond textbook materials. Korean NNSTs were appreciated for balanced language instruction and ensuring learners' understanding.
	Learning Motivation	Korean NSTs motivated learners to improve their Korean proficiency by having a class full in Korean. Korean NNSTs created a more comfortable learning environment through accessible communication.
Characteristics of an Effective Korean Language Teacher	Ideal Teacher	Teacher who combines the authentic linguistic and cultural competence of Korean NSTs with the accessible explanations and L1 support commonly associated with Korean NNSTs.

As presented in Table 3, the interview findings show that learners' perceptions were complex and not limited to teachers' native-speaker status. Across the interviews, participants described different experiences with Korean NSTs and Korean NNSTs depending on the learning context, instructional practices, and communication during classroom interaction. Participants' varying preferences across grammar, listening, speaking, reading, and writing appeared as Korean language skills, which was the most frequently discussed theme. This was followed by cultural knowledge, assessment and feedback, factors influencing their preferences, and the characteristics of an

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effective Korean language teacher. These themes were chosen so that it can be seen how learners associate different strengths with each teacher group and perceive their roles as complementary rather than mutually exclusive.

Participants discussed how Korean NSTs and Korean NNSTs supported different language skills. For grammar, they valued clear explanations and comparisons between Korean and Indonesian. Participant B said that grammar explanations in Indonesian were easier to understand. Participant C also described how a teacher who spoke Indonesian could compare Korean vocabulary and grammar with Indonesian.

> "Kalau dosen Indonesia, nilai plusnya saat menjelaskan tata bahasa dalam bahasa Indonesia lebih mudah dimengerti." (Participant B)
> (*The advantage of Indonesian teachers is that their grammar explanations in Indonesian are easier to understand.*)
> "[...] beliau bisa bahasa Indonesia jadi bisa mencocokkan [kosakata] secara detail. Kayak tata bahasa juga beliau bisa langsung cari persamaan di bahasa Indonesia." (Participant C)
> (*...they could speak Indonesian, so they were able to match [vocabulary] in detail. They could also directly identify similarities in Indonesian when explaining Korean grammar.*)

For reading, participants said that both teacher groups helped explain unfamiliar vocabulary, while Korean NSTs tended to provide more contextual explanations. For writing, Korean NSTs were associated with detailed written feedback, while Korean NNSTs helped learners understand feedback through Indonesian. In listening, participants valued the pronunciation and dialects introduced by Korean NSTs. In speaking, they appreciated Korean NSTs' natural expressions and immediate corrections, while Korean NNST's were valued for providing speaking practice and feedback in Indonesian. Participants also described differences in cultural knowledge. Korean NST's were valued for sharing information about Korean society and everyday life, including regional pronunciation and dialects. Korean NNSTs were valued for explaining Korean culture from a perspective that felt more familiar to Indonesian learners. Participant A described this difference:

> "Untuk budaya seperti cara pakai transportasi umum gitu, aku lebih paham dengan dosen Indonesia. Karena mereka pernah kuliah di sana, jadi menceritakan budaya tersebut pakai point of view mereka dan lebih relate dengan kita yang di Indonesia." (Participant A)
> (*For cultural topics, such as how to use public transportation, I understood them better when they were explained by Indonesian teachers. Since they had studied in Korea, they explained those cultural experiences from their own perspective, which felt more relatable to us as Indonesian learners.*)
> "Karena pengalaman budayanya kurang, yang dipelajari terlalu textbook jadi kurang seru" (Participant B)
> (*Because there was less cultural experience, what we learned felt too textbook-based, so the lessons were less engaging*)
> "Kelebihannya budaya dan pronunciation mereka beragam karena ada yang dari daerah tertentu jadi bisa belajar dialek." (Participant B)
> (*One advantage was that they provided diverse cultural perspectives and pronunciation because some of them came from different regions, allowing us to learn different dialects.*)
> "Saat ada kosa kata [baru], langsung jelasin budaya yang ada di sana. Contohnya ada kosakata naik gunung, beliau langsung jelasin kalau di Korea ada budaya naik gunung saat musim gugur." (Participant C)
> (*Whenever we learned a new vocabulary item, they immediately explained the related cultural context. For example, when we learned the vocabulary for hiking, they explained that hiking is a common cultural activity in Korea during autumn.*)

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For assessment and feedback, participants described both teacher groups as fair and said that both appreciated learners' efforts. Korean NSTs were associated with detailed feedback and immediate corrections, especially during speaking activities. Korean NNSTs' feedback was easier to understand when it was explained in Indonesian. Communication was another factor in learners' experiences. Participants said it was easier to ask questions when the teacher could speak Indonesian. Participant B said:

> "[...] kelebihannya mau nanya ke dosen Indonesia lebih gampang secara komunikasi." (Participant B)
> (*...one advantage was that communicating with Indonesian teachers made it easier to ask questions.*)
> "[...] dosen Indo ngerti kesulitan kita, jadi mereka lebih bisa memberikan toleransi." (Participant C
> (*...Indonesian teachers understood the challenges we faced as learners, so they were more accommodating toward our learning difficulties.*)

One participant described difficulty understanding a Korean NST who could not speak Indonesian:

> "Saya pernah tanya terkait perbedaan makna antara dua kata. [...], jadi karena beliau ga bisa bahasa Indonesia, dijelasinnya pakai bahasa Korea. Jadi saya ga terlalu paham. Kalau dosen Indonesia, mereka langsung ngasih tau artinya pakai bahasa Indonesia, jadi bisa langsung paham artinya apa." (Participant C)
> (*I once asked about the difference in meaning between two words. Because the teacher could not speak Indonesian, the explanation was given in Korean, and I did not fully understand it. With Indonesian teachers, they explained the meaning directly in Indonesian, so I was able to understand it immediately.)*
> "Tetep language barrier kalau sama dosen Korea. Karena walau ditanyakan tetap ada yang kurang karena ada kosakata yang gak tau. Pada akhirnya jalan tengahnya pakai bahasa Inggris, walau tetap aja sulit." (Participant B)
> (*There was still a language barrier with Korean teachers. Even when I asked questions, there were still things I couldn't fully understand because there were unfamiliar vocabulary items. In the end, we used English as a middle ground, but it was still difficult.*)

Participants mentioned teacher personality and teaching approach as well. They appreciated positive personalities in both groups, while empathy and understanding learners' difficulties were more often associated with Korean NNSTs. Korean NSTs were described as adding information beyond the textbook, while Korean NNSTs were valued for balancing Korean and Indonesian and checking learners' understanding. Some participants also valued explanations in Indonesian because they made the lessons easier to understand. Participant A said that this could reduce their motivation to review the material after class. In contrast, Participant B said that learning with a Korean NST encouraged them to improve their Korean so they could communicate more fluently.

> "Karena mereka menjelaskan dengan bahasa Indonesia, kurang ada dorongan untuk mengulang materi untuk belajar ulang. Atau mengulik kembali materi yang sudah diberikan." (Participant A)
> (*Because they explained everything in Indonesian, I felt less encouraged to review the lesson or revisit the material that had already been taught.*)
> "[...] Native bikin ingin [bisa] bahasa Korea lebih lancar biar bisa komunikasi dengan lancar." (Participant B)
> (*...Native speakers made me want to become more fluent in Korean so that I could communicate with them more effectively.*)

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When asked about the qualities of an effective Korean language teacher, participants described someone who could combine the authentic language and cultural knowledge associated with Korean NSTs with the accessible explanations and Indonesian language support associated with Korean NNSTs. Participant B said that the two teacher groups complemented each other. Participant C described an ideal teacher as "a Korean teacher who can speak Indonesian."

3.3. Discussion

Learners' Preferences toward Learning with Korean NSTs and Korean NNSTs

The lack of a statistically significant overall preference suggests that learners did not consistently favor Korean NSTs or Korean NNSTs. Even in descriptive statistics, results revealed only slight differences across the seven aspects of Korean language learning. This pattern is similar to Yeung's (2021) finding that learners tended to prefer different teacher groups depending on the learning context. Also line with Elyas and Alghofaili (2019) research that found no significant influence on English writing, speaking, reading, and listening skills whether taught by NST or NNST. Instead, each type of teacher contributed different strengths and had its own limitations when teaching. Depending on teachers' quality while teaching, learners' preferences might also change (Yeung, 2021). The qualitative findings showed that learners' preferences were shaped by their classroom experiences rather than by teachers' nativeness status. Teachers' competence wasn't based on being native or having native-level proficiency (Alemi et al., 2025). Participants valued different pedagogical qualities according to the learning objectives, language skills, and classroom situations instead of consistently favoring one teacher group.

In Grammar learning, participants consistently made clear the importance of comprehensible explanations, noting that using L1 (Indonesian) helped them understand grammatical concepts, clarify vocabulary meanings, and ask follow-up questions more confidently. Wulandari et al. (2021) found that in English class, Non-Native English Teachers were preferred because the classroom experience is easier and they are willing to use L1 if necessary, when learning grammar. Learners' fear of language learning will be lower when the teachers share the same L1 with them (Kim, 2020). Rather than preferring Korean NNSTs solely because they shared the learners' first language, participants valued teachers who could strategically use Indonesian to support comprehension. Lack of L1 can lower teachers' explanatory skills (Árva & Medgyes, 2000), and teachers who share an L1 seem to be more approachable to the learners (Shimray & Wangdi, 2023). The mother tongue is found to be a key resource to help overcome their lack of understanding in L2 lessons (Algazo, 2022). At the same time, traditional grammar teaching approaches that are textbook based also counted as NNSTs' disadvantages (Colmenero & Lasagabaster, 2024; Qadeer, 2019). Korean NSTs who were proficient in Indonesian were perceived just as positively because they combined authentic linguistic knowledge with comprehensible explanations.

The participants did not consistently choose a particular teacher group when learning Korean. Instead, they valued teachers who provided detailed explanations that were easy to understand, regardless of whether they were Korean NSTs or Korean NNSTs. According to the interview results, this was achieved when teachers had a strong understanding of Korean grammar as well as the ability to explain it effectively in both Korean and Indonesian. During reading activities, for example, learners usually encounter unfamiliar vocabulary that requires explanation in Indonesian to understand. In this case, L1 support was especially useful when teachers explained the meanings of new words or clarified answers to comprehension questions. L1 is usually seen as a supporting tool, especially for beginners, that can highlight the differences between the two languages in grammar and vocabulary classes (Metruk & Rafajdusová, 2024). Language barriers would leave learners with unsettled questions without such support. This could create further confusion rather than support understanding. At the same time, participants also acknowledged that learning in Korean encouraged them to become more independent learners. Metruk and Rafajdusová (2024) emphasize that the use of L1 has to be wise to facilitate language learning and ought to minimize the use of the mother tongue; this goes well with Participant A and B's answer. Difficulties

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encountered during class motivated them to review lesson materials, search for unfamiliar vocabulary, and improve their Korean proficiency after class. In class, L1 use can also lessen students' chances to speak or listen in L2 (Shimray & Wangdi, 2023), so a clear policy on the language spoken in class needs to be determined, with L1 used only when permitted (Nitisakunwut et al., 2023). These results suggest that while L1 support plays a key role in facilitating comprehension during classroom instruction, L2 exposure continues to encourage learner motivation beyond the classroom.

Strengths and Limitations of Korean NSTs and Korean NNSTs

While the first research question focused on learners' preferences toward learning with Korean NSTs and Korean NNSTs, the second research question sought to understand the pedagogical strengths and limitations that learners associated with each teacher group. The findings show that learners recognized distinct points in both teacher groups that contributed differently to their Korean language learning experiences, rather than having one big preference over one group of teachers. Both NST and NNST are not superior to one another (Wang & Fang, 2020), and either group gives positive motivation to learners (Deng et al., 2024). They all make an effort to support learners' communication (Cha, 2022). Rasyid et al. (2023) also found that English learners in Indonesia perceived both teachers as the same. This observation is consistent with previous studies arguing that the effectiveness of language teachers should be understood through their pedagogical competence rather than their native-speaker status alone.

The Korean NNSTs were consistently linked with comprehensible instruction. Participants emphasized that the ability to explain Korean using Indonesian enabled them to understand complex linguistic concepts, unfamiliar vocabulary, and classroom feedback more effectively. Unlike simply translating Korean into Indonesian, Korean NNSTs frequently compared linguistic structures between the two languages, allowing learners to connect new knowledge with concepts that were already familiar to them. Participants also appreciated that Korean NNSTs could immediately clarify confusions and respond to follow-up questions without creating additional communication barriers. These results indicate that the main strength of Korean NNSTs is not merely in sharing the learners' first language but in deliberately using that shared language to facilitate comprehension. It is also consistent with previous research highlighting the role of NNSTs. In a study of English NNSTs, Alemi et al. (2025) found that bilingual NNSTs possessed several pedagogical advantages over monolingual NSTs. These included a better understanding of learners' language errors, the ability to explain concepts by drawing on learners' first language and culture, greater awareness of learners' difficulties, and stronger teacher-student connection resulting from their shared linguistic and cultural backgrounds. NNSTs were considered more capable of identifying challenging language areas and providing lower-proficiency learners with opportunities to discuss learning difficulties in their first language. These advantages closely align with the present findings, in which participants valued Korean NNSTs for providing comprehensible explanations, anticipating learners' difficulties, facilitating classroom communication, and creating a more supportive learning environment. The same goes for participants' interviews that mentioned the strengths of Korean NNSTs, that they boost the participants' motivation in the class. The main strength of Korean NNSTs is not merely in sharing the learners' first language but in deliberately using that shared language to facilitate comprehension. NNSTs are regarded as multicompetent, as their knowledge of the target language can encourage learners to explore the language more deeply (Calafato, 2019). According to Bae and Igno (2012), learners attending Korean language classes taught by local teachers in the Philippines considered bilingual instruction using both Filipino and Korean to be more effective than instruction conducted solely in Korean. Korean NNSTs shared a learning experience that learners gradually construct through comparison, clarification, and repeated practice. Importantly, the use of L1 should not be interpreted as replacing Korean during instruction. In terms of culture, Korean NNSTs were still valued as they could explain Korean culture from the perspective of Indonesian learners, making unfamiliar cultural concepts easier to relate to their own experiences.

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Participant A, for example, reported that explanations about using public transportation in Korea were easier to understand when presented by Korean NNSTs.

Despite these strengths, participants also recognized several limitations associated with Korean NNSTs. Korean NNSTs were perceived as having fewer opportunities to provide authentic pronunciation models, native-like dialects, broad expressions, and first-hand cultural explanations. Although participants acknowledged that Korean NNSTs possessed strong linguistic knowledge and teaching skills, they generally believed that authentic language use and cultural understanding were more naturally demonstrated by teachers who had grown up and lived in Korea. However, these perceived limitations should not be interpreted as indicators of lower teaching quality. Rather, they reflect differences in the types of expertise possessed by each teacher group. The NNSTs' knowledge of both languages' cultures can be identified as their merit as well (Kim, 2020). Participants did not suggest that Korean NNSTs were incapable of teaching pronunciation, culture, or communicative language use. In contrast to Korean NNSTs, the strengths associated with Korean NSTs were primarily related to the authenticity of language and culture.

Korean NSTs were consistently described as often introducing additional information related to Korean society, customs, and everyday life based on their own experiences. valuable sources of authentic pronunciation and dialect, natural expressions, and cultural knowledge derived from local Korean. Korean NSTs frequently expanded discussions by including examples from everyday life in Korea, rather than depending solely on textbook materials. NSTs known to have more knowledge of L2 and its culture (Alemi et al., 2025). Results in Colmenero and Lasagabaster (2024) research also preferred NSTs for motivations, assessment, and culture. Another strength of Korean NSTs was the quality of corrective feedback. Participants appreciated receiving immediate corrections during speaking activities, especially when teachers introduced more natural, suitable expressions in Korean. English NSTs in Türkiye preferred NST for explanations and feedback (Kucukali & Er, 2023). Instead of simply identifying errors, Korean NSTs often suggested alternative expressions commonly used by native speakers, enabling learners to improve both their linguistic accuracy and pragmatic competence. The most frequently discussed challenge of Korean NSTs was communication during classroom interaction, particularly when Korean NSTs had limited proficiency in Indonesian. Participants said that when explaining grammar, unfamiliar vocabulary, or word differences were explained entirely in Korean, it occasionally resulted in confusion and unanswered questions. While such situations encouraged learners to rely more heavily on Korean, they also created frustration when learners were unable to fully comprehend teachers' explanations. These findings suggest that authentic language exposure alone may not always be sufficient to facilitate effective learning, particularly for learners with limited Korean proficiency. The lack of experience in a bilingual learning role is one of the weaknesses of NSTs (Alemi et al., 2025). In contrast, Korean NSTs who also speak L1 were chosen as the ideal Korean teacher. This is in line with Tajeddin et al. (2023) findings that showed NSTs who speak L1 efficiently in the classroom were acknowledged.

Taken together, the findings reveal that the strengths of Korean NSTs and Korean NNSTs should not be interpreted as competing characteristics. Rather, participants consistently described the two teacher groups as having complementary forms of expertise that addressed different views of Korean language learning. Both teachers' identities are inseparable because of their complexity (Selvi et al., 2024). This interpretation is clearly reflected in Participant B's statement that "They complement each other," as well as Participant C's description of the ideal teacher as "a Korean teacher who can speak Indonesian." Rather than choosing one teacher group over the other. The same goes for Yeung's (2021) conclusion that both English NSTs and NNSTs have their own strengths through appreciation and collaboration. Combining both teacher groups might afford a wider learning experience, as their strengths can complement each other. Complementary teaching between NSTs and NNSTs is considered to be an advantageous and good match (Rao & Yu, 2019). Korean NNSTs contribute important pedagogical resources by fostering comprehension, anticipating learners' difficulties, and supporting classroom interaction through strategic L1 use;

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on the other side, Korean NSTs contribute authentic language exposure, cultural knowledge, and opportunities for natural communication in Korean. Future teacher development programs may therefore benefit from strengthening pedagogical collaboration between both teacher groups, encouraging Korean NSTs to develop basic Indonesian proficiency while supporting Korean NNSTs in expanding opportunities for authentic language and cultural engagement. Such collaboration has the potential to create learning environments that support learners' linguistic, communicative, and intercultural development more effectively than either instructional approach alone.

4. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine Indonesian Korean language learners' preferences for Korean NSTs and NNSTs and the strengths and limitations they associated with each group. The objective was addressed through questionnaire responses from 41 university students and interviews with three participants representing different preference patterns. The results showed no significant overall preference between Korean NSTs and NNSTs ($Z = -.729$, $p = .466$), although the descriptive statistics indicated a slight tendency toward Korean NNSTs. Across the seven learning aspects, Korean NSTs received lower mean scores in grammar, teaching strategies and cultural knowledge, and assessment, while Korean NNSTs received lower mean scores in writing, reading, listening, and speaking. The interview findings helped explain these differences. Participants valued Korean NNSTs' explanations in Indonesian because they made lessons easier to understand and questions easier to ask. They also appreciated NSTs for their authentic language use, pronunciation, cultural knowledge, and immediate corrections, especially in speaking. However, some participants found it difficult to follow NSTs who could not speak Indonesian, while others felt that lessons with NNSTs could be too textbook-based or offered less motivation to review Korean after class. Learners did not consistently favor one teacher group. Their views depended on the skill being taught, the clarity of explanations, and their experiences in class. The findings also suggest that Korean language classes may benefit from combining Indonesian support with opportunities to hear and use authentic Korean. This research was limited to 41 Indonesian university students majoring in Korean and three interview participants. The interview findings therefore reflect a small number of learners' experiences, and the results may not represent all Korean language learners in Indonesia. The study also focused on learners' views and did not include classroom observations or teachers' perspectives. Future studies could involve more participants from different institutions and proficiency levels and include classroom observations and interviews with teachers to provide a broader understanding of the roles of Korean NSTs and NNSTs.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A.

Questionnaire

No.	Questions	Scale			
		1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Disagree	4 Strongly Disagree
1	Pengajar penutur lokal menjelaskan tata bahasa dengan lebih jelas dibandingkan pengajar penutur asing. *Korean NSTs explain Korean grammar more clearly than Korean NNSTs.*	□	□	□	□
2	Saya lebih mudah memahami materi tata bahasa ketika diajarkan oleh pengajar penutur lokal. *I understand Korean grammar more easily when it is taught by Korean NSTs.*	□	□	□	□
3	Pengajar penutur asing membantu saya menggunakan tata bahasa secara lebih alami	□	□	□	□

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	saat berkomunikasi menggunakan bahasa Korea. *Korean NNSTs help me use Korean grammar more naturally in communication.*				
4	Koreksi dari pengajar penutur lokal membantu saya menggunakan tata bahasa dengan lebih tepat. *Feedback from Korean NSTs helps me use Korean grammar more accurately.*	□	□	□	□
5	Saya lebih memilih pengajar penutur asing untuk pembelajaran tata bahasa. *I prefer Korean NNSTs for learning Korean grammar.*	□	□	□	□
6	Pengajar penutur lokal membantu meningkatkan kemampuan menulis saya secara efektif. *Korean NSTs effectively improve my Korean writing skills.*	□	□	□	□
7	Pengajar penutur asing memberikan contoh penulisan bahasa Korea seperti yang digunakan penutur asli. *Korean NNSTs provide examples of Korean writing used by native speakers.*	□	□	□	□
8	Masukan dari pengajar penutur lokal membantu saya memahami kesalahan dalam menulis. *Feedback from Korean NSTs helps me understand my writing mistakes.*	□	□	□	□
9	Pengajar penutur asing mendorong saya untuk menyampaikan ide secara lebih bebas dalam tulisan berbahasa Korea. *Korean NNSTs encourage me to express my ideas more freely in Korean writing.*	□	□	□	□
10	Saya merasa lebih percaya diri menulis dalam bahasa Korea ketika diajarkan oleh pengajar penutur lokal. *I feel more confident writing in Korean when I am taught by Korean NSTs.*	□	□	□	□
11	Pengajar penutur asing memberikan bacaan teks yang sering digunakan oleh penutur asli bahasa Korea. *Korean NNSTs provide reading materials commonly used by native Korean speakers.*	□	□	□	□
12	Pengajar penutur lokal membantu saya memahami isi teks dengan lebih mudah. *Korean NSTs help me understand reading texts more easily.*	□	□	□	□
13	Pengajar penutur asing membantu saya meningkatkan kemampuan membaca bahasa Korea. *Korean NNSTs help improve my Korean reading skills.*	□	□	□	□

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14	Penjelasan pengajar penutur lokal mempermudah saya memahami bacaan yang sulit. *Explanations from Korean NSTs make it easier for me to understand difficult reading passages.*	□	□	□	□
15	Saya lebih mudah memahami materi menyimak ketika diajarkan oleh pengajar penutur lokal. *I understand listening materials more easily when they are taught by Korean NSTs.*	□	□	□	□
16	Aksen pengajar penutur asing membantu saya memahami percakapan bahasa Korea dengan lebih baik. *The accent of Korean NNSTs helps me better understand Korean conversations.*	□	□	□	□
17	Aktivitas menyimak yang diajarkan pengajar penutur asing lebih menarik. *Listening activities conducted by Korean NNSTs are more engaging.*	□	□	□	□
18	Pengajar penutur lokal membantu saya memahami isi percakapan dalam suatu audio berbahasa Korea dengan lebih baik. *Korean NSTs help me better understand the content of Korean audio materials.*	□	□	□	□
19	Saya lebih memilih pengajar penutur asing untuk meningkatkan kemampuan mendengar dalam bahasa Korea. *I prefer Korean NNSTs for improving my Korean listening skills.*	□	□	□	□
20	Pengajar penutur asing membantu meningkatkan kelancaran berbicara bahasa Korea. *Korean NNSTs help improve my Korean speaking fluency.*	□	□	□	□
21	Saya merasa lebih percaya diri berbicara bahasa Korea saat diajarkan oleh pengajar penutur lokal. *I feel more confident speaking Korean when I am taught by Korean NSTs.*	□	□	□	□
22	Pengajar penutur lokal membantu saya memahami isi percakapan dalam suatu audio berbahasa Korea dengan lebih baik. *Korean NSTs help me better understand the content of Korean audio materials.*	□	□	□	□
23	Pengajar penutur asing mendorong saya untuk aktif berbicara bahasa Korea. *Korean NNSTs encourage me to actively speak Korean.*	□	□	□	□
24	Pengajar penutur lokal membantu saya mengatasi kesulitan saat berbicara bahasa Korea. *Korean NSTs help me overcome difficulties in speaking Korean.*	□	□	□	□

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25	Saya merasa pelafalan bahasa Korea saya menjadi lebih baik ketika diajar oleh pengajar penutur asing. *My Korean pronunciation improves when I am taught by Korean NNSTs.*	□	□	□	□
26	Pengajar penutur asing membantu saya memahami bahasa Korea dan budaya Korea Selatan secara lebih mendalam. *Korean NNSTs help me gain a deeper understanding of the Korean language and South Korean culture.*	□	□	□	□
27	Pengajar penutur lokal meningkatkan minat saya terhadap mempelajari bahasa dan budaya Korea Selatan. *Korean NSTs increase my interest in learning the Korean language and South Korean culture.*	□	□	□	□
28	Pengajar penutur lokal membantu saya memahami perbedaan budaya dengan lebih baik. *Korean NSTs help me better understand cultural differences.*	□	□	□	□
29	Pengajar penutur asing membantu saya menemukan cara belajar bahasa Korea yang efektif. *Korean NNSTs help me discover effective ways to learn Korean.*	□	□	□	□
30	Pengajar penutur lokal lebih sering menggunakan materi dari buku ajar dalam proses pembelajaran. *Korean NSTs rely more on textbook materials during classroom instruction.*	□	□	□	□
31	Pengajar penutur asing mampu menilai kemampuan mendengar saya dengan lebih baik. *Korean NNSTs assess my Korean listening skills more accurately.*	□	□	□	□
32	Pengajar penutur lokal mampu menilai kemampuan membaca saya dengan lebih baik. *Korean NSTs assess my Korean reading skills more accurately.*	□	□	□	□
33	Pengajar penutur lokal mampu menilai kemampuan berbicara saya dengan lebih baik. *Korean NSTs assess my Korean speaking skills more accurately.*	□	□	□	□
34	Pengajar penutur asing mampu menilai kemampuan menulis saya dengan lebih baik. *Korean NNSTs assess my Korean writing skills more accurately.*	□	□	□	□
35	Pengajar penutur lokal mmampu menilai pemahaman tata bahasa saya dengan lebih baik. *Korean NSTs assess my understanding of Korean grammar more accurately.*	□	□	□	□

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Appendix B.

Interview Questions

Questions
1. Secara umum, bagaimana pengalaman Anda belajar bahasa Korea dengan pengajar penutur asing? *Overall, how would you describe your experience learning Korean with Korean non-native speaker teachers (NNSTs)?*
2. Secara umum, bagaimana pengalaman Anda belajar bahasa Korea dengan pengajar penutur lokal? *Overall, how would you describe your experience learning Korean with Korean native speaker teachers (NSTs)?*
3. Bagaimana perbedaan yang Anda rasakan antara cara mengajar dari pengajar penutur asing (non native) dan pengajar penutur lokal? *What differences have you noticed between the teaching approaches of Korean NNSTs and Korean NSTs?*
4. Bagaimana pengalaman Anda saat mempelajari tata bahasa bahasa Korea dengan pengajar penutur asing dan penutur lokal? *How would you describe your experience learning Korean grammar with Korean NNSTs and Korean NSTs?*
5. Bagaimana pengalaman Anda saat mempelajari keterampilan menulis, berbicara, membaca, dan mendengar bahasa Korea dengan pengajar penutur asing dan penutur lokal? *How would you describe your experience developing your Korean writing, speaking, reading, and listening skills with Korean NNSTs and Korean NSTs?*
6. Bagaimana pengalaman Anda dalam menerima tugas, penilaian, atau feedback umpan balik dari pengajar penutur asing dan penutur lokal? *How would you describe your experience receiving assignments, assessments, and feedback from Korean NNSTs and Korean NSTs?*
7. Bagaimana pendapat Anda tentang pengetahuan budaya yang Anda terima dan strategi belajar yang diberikan oleh pengajar penutur asing dan penutur lokal dalam kelas? *What are your views on the cultural knowledge and learning strategies provided by Korean NNSTs and Korean NSTs during classroom instruction?*
8. Bagaimana pengalaman Anda saat belajar bahasa Korea dengan pengajar penutur asing? Apa saja hal yang menurut Anda menjadi kelebihan dan kekurangannya? *What has been your experience learning Korean with Korean NNSTs? In your opinion, what are their strengths and limitations?*
9. Bagaimana pengalaman Anda saat belajar bahasa Korea dengan pengajar penutur lokal? Apa saja hal yang menurut Anda menjadi kelebihan dan kekurangannya? *What has been your experience learning Korean with Korean NSTs? In your opinion, what are their strengths and limitations?*
10. Bagaimana pengaruh kewarganegaraan pengajar terhadap kenyamanan dan motivasi Anda dalam belajar bahasa Korea? *How does a teacher's nationality influence your learning comfort and motivation when studying Korean?*
11. Bagaimana karakteristik pengajar bahasa Korea yang ideal menurut Anda? *In your opinion, what characteristics define an ideal Korean language teacher?*

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