



# Language and identity: A systematic review on the intersection between English proficiency and North Korean refugees' experiences in South Korean society

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## **Abstract**

This systematic review investigated the intersection of English language proficiency on North Korean refugees' experiences assimilating to South Korea. This was achieved by assessing current research, questioning the impact of English on North Korean identity, difficulties experienced by North Korean refugees in English speaking spaces, and exploring suggestions for pedagogy and policy reforms. Following rigorous search and selection criteria to mitigate bias and select only studies most pertinent to answer the research questions put forward, 26 studies were selected as eligible for inclusion in this study and underwent data extraction, quality appraisal, and thematic analysis.

Included studies were a mix of qualitative and mixed methods studies, overwhelmingly utilising interviews and surveys to gather data from participants. Occasionally additional data collection methods including but not limited to, reflective journals, motigraphs, and observations were also used. The majority of participants were university students, followed by secondary school students, and then adults in employment.

Following a narrative synthesis and thematic analysis, this review uncovered themes of identity, challenges within educational environments, systematic disadvantages, motivation, , the necessity of additional support, and English as valuable and important in South Korea. Studies revealed that the negative perception of North Korean refugees in South Korean society in combination with North Koreans' lack of English skill contributes to strong feelings of inferiority and low self-confidence. This forced North Korean refugees to negotiate their new identities as existing in a society that does not apparently value their knowledge, skill set, or background. The unbridgeable gap between North and South Koreans in terms of English proficiency also contributes to feelings of inferiority but also to high levels of motivation for North Korean refugees wanting to improve their English skills. Despite this motivation, challenges within educational environments such as difficult content levels due to a lack of foundational English, metacognitive skills, South Korean language ability, and the ability to successfully communicate with native instructors impacts the progress of North Korean refugees. Therefore, findings across the board called for a specialised and customisable curriculum and specific resources for North Korean refugees as well as increased access to support programmes. Overall, studies highlighted how English is considered incredibly valuable and important to surviving in South Korean society, contributing to a high motivation to improve English skills due to its cultural capital and promise of upwards social mobility.

Despite the interesting and revealing findings of the included studies, the methodological quality and rigour of all studies was found lacking. Primary concerns surrounded researcher positionality, explicit explanations of ethical clearance for interacting with a vulnerable population, and a lack of clear research questions. As a result of this poor display of methodological practice, future studies should endeavour to ensure a high standard of methodological rigour to effectively draw impactful and trustworthy conclusions from studies on North Korean refugees.

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Thank you to all my wonderful friends who I have met here. How lucky we are that we were all here at the same time and got to experience all of this together. I cannot wait to see what you all go on to accomplish in the future.

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I am also grateful to the authors and participants of all the studies included in this systematic review for providing the world with such rich and diverse accounts of North Korean refugees' experiences. It is of upmost importance that these stories are told, and it has been a privilege to read them.

As my research interest lies in inter-Korean relations, I am often asked if I believe North and South Korea will ever reunite. I cannot answer it with certainty, but I hope within my lifetime I will be able to witness more progress to peace on the peninsula. I am grateful for the opportunity to study the population and hope to have more chances to explore this area in the future.

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## **Introduction**

Language has long been a maker and divider of communities; a shared language promotes a sense of belonging, and creation of community and identity among a group of people that may otherwise have little in common (Hobsbawn, 1996). On the other hand, a lack of a shared language, or the rejection of a minority language, can create intergroup tensions and hostility (Medeiros, 2015). In relation to the experiences of refugees in resettling in a new nation, the role of language has been extensively researched, with the general consensus being that the greater the proficiency in the majority language of the new environment, the smoother the transition process (Tip et al, 2019). This is accompanied by increased positive well-being for refugees due to greater access to resources such as education, employment, and healthcare as well as a social network to combat isolation and loneliness (Phillimore, 2011; Vervoort, Dagevos, & Flap, 2012; Blake, Bennetts Kneebone & McLeod, 2017; Tip et al, 2019; Morrice et al, 2021). In contrast to immigrants who voluntarily choose to leave their home countries in search of better opportunity, refugees are forcibly uprooted from their homelands, often fleeing conflict or persecution, journeying to a new and often culturally and linguistically different environment. North Korean refugees, also referred to as defectors, are no exception.

Fleeing North Korea due to economic crisis, famine, or political persecution, North Korean refugees make their way to South Korea often via China, Mongolia, and other South Asian countries, where they are welcomed in the south as citizens (Eschborn & Apel, 2014; Liberty in North Korea, 2025). North and South Koreans share a history, a traditional culture, a language, and ethnicity. This unique phenomenon of moving from one Korea to another would suggest a smoother transition into their new environment compared to that of the ‘typical’ refugee. However, after 80 years of separation, not only do North Koreans experience discrimination (Eschborn & Apel, 2014; Sung & Go, 2014; Chun, 2022; Park & May, 2024), culture shock towards South Korean culture (Kang, 2019; Liberty in North Korea, 2022), and possess a skewed understanding of Korean history due to North Korean propaganda (Lankov, 2014), but the Korean

language has evolved to the extent that the two struggle to communicate (Terrell, 2007; Hamad, 2018; BBC Monitoring, 2019). Therefore, the resettling process presents barriers that perhaps are not anticipated.

Diverging language ideology, globalisation versus isolation, and decades of separation has caused the Korean language to diverge extensively: vocabulary, grammatical structures, accents and intonation all vary across the peninsula making communication less fluid than one may think (Song, 2015; Kwong, 2018; Jang & Kim, 2021). Furthermore, English in South Korea goes beyond the foreign language classroom and has become a necessity to survive in South Korean society, frequently appearing in everyday life via signage, menus, and in conversation between South Koreans via loan words and slang (Shim, 1994; Park, 2021; Kim, 2022c; Choi, 2023). English skill has become a valuable cultural capital and is required for graduating university and entering competitive job markets (Park, 2011; Choi, 2021). Thus, English's presence in South Korean society has prompted scholars to question whether South Korea is on a path to become bilingual (Shim, 1994; Kim, 2022a; Kim, 2022c).

North Korean refugees, who often enter the country having little to no experiences with English (Jung & Lim, 2009; David-West & Choi, 2010; Jang & Kim, 2021), have to not only negotiate a new form of Korean language, but take on the added burden of learning English if they have any chance of surviving in South Korean society. North Korean refugees must compete with peers with years more experience (Korean education centre in UK, 2025), and a lifelong exposure to English loan words. Thus, South Koreans have had a seemingly unreachable head start. Experiencing discrimination from South Koreans, enhancing the inferiority of their position in society and unvalued linguistic repertoire, North Koreans' assimilation attempts lead to low self-confidence, psychological distress, and identity crises (Kim, Cho, & Kim, 2015; Lee & Ahn, 2016; Park & May, 2024).

This review aims to identify how English proficiency impacts the experiences of North Koreans in South Korean society, as well as exploring pedagogical and policy recommendations to aid in the integration process. Although it is undeniably pertinent to speak directly to North Korean refugees about their

experiences first hand, as a population there remains a level of apprehension towards revealing their identities as well as ethical implications due to the vulnerability of the group. With this in mind, a systematic review has been undertaken to synthesise the data of existing studies with the aim of answering a series of research questions.

*Outline of thesis:*

The first chapter explores the background leading to the phenomenon of the division of language across the Korean peninsula, highlighting the role of English across the Koreas, and the desire of North Koreans to assimilate. Chapter 2 outlines the methodology of this review, including eligibility criteria, search and selection details, and the steps taken to mitigate bias throughout. Chapter 3 explains the results of the selection process and data extraction, outlining the methodological quality of the studies, a narrative synthesis, and thematic analysis of the included studies. Chapter 4 discusses the implications of findings, as well as analysing the strengths and limitations of the studies and review process, and direction for any potential future studies. Following the discussion chapter, the final section of this thesis will recap conclusions drawn from this systematic review.

## **Chapter 1 - Background**

This chapter will establish a succinct background/history of the Korean peninsula and the division which lead to the establishment of North and South Korea. Following this, I will discuss the role language plays in cultural and political spheres of North and South Korea and how this has developed. Additionally, the significance of language for refugee populations is discussed, both widely and specifically in the context of North Korean refugees. I then articulate the motivation for conducting a systematic review and the research questions which will be addressed.

### *1.1. A brief modern history of the Korean peninsula:*

After 80 years of separation following the end of the second world war, the image of a united Korean peninsula remains in the living memory of very few. Divisions have branched to more than just land borders and political ideologies; culture and language has evolved to the extent where effective communication is impacted, forming barriers to successful resettling for North Korean refugees in South Korea.

In 1945 following the end of the second world war, the Korean peninsula was divided into North and South Korea, putting an end to 35 years of Japanese occupation. (Cummings, 2005; Kim, 2022b). Inspired by Soviet allies, North Korean leader Kim Il-Sung developed the political ideology known as *Juche*, a system advocating for total self-sustainability, whilst manufacturing collective memory and history to hold onto and maintain the superiority and legitimacy of North Korea and the Kim regime (Cummings, 2005; Lee & Thorpe, 2010; Kurbanov, 2019; Lee, 2023a). Under the guidance of the USA, South Korea pursued a brutal right wing authoritarian regime with a series of dictators until democratisation following the monumental June Uprising in 1987 (Cummings, 2005; Lee & Thorpe, 2010). The Korean war occurred from 1950-1953, and was ultimately to no avail as practically all gained territory from either side was eventually lost, costing the lives of over 3 million people (Cummings,

2005; Imperial War Museum, 2025). Upon an armistice agreement, a line was drawn at the 38th parallel, forming the demilitarised zone: a 4km buffer zone, stretching 258km across the peninsula separating the two Koreas, roughly where the division was pre-war (Cummings, 2005; Imperial War Museum, 2025; Sheposh, 2025). Despite multiple inter-Korean exchanges, summits, and peace talks over the last 8 decades (Shin, 2018; Ministry of Culture, Sport, and Tourism, 2025), there has never been an official peace agreement and the two Koreas technically remain at war (UNC, 2025).

### *1.2. The Korean language:*

Linguists have classified Korean as belonging to the Altaic family, including Turkic, Mongolian, and Tungusic languages (Kim, 2016b). This categorisation reflects similar aspects of Korean and Altaic languages such as vowel harmony and agglutination, and the absence of certain grammatical elements; relative pronouns, articles, genders, and conjunctions (Kim, 2016b). Korean has been heavily influenced by Chinese. Chinese characters, known in Korean as *Hanja*, was the writing system of the elites of Korea before the 15th century and thus a significant proportion of Chinese loan words infiltrated Korean over time (Takayama, 1995; Kim, 2016b). Literacy was reserved for the elite up until the invention of the Korean alphabet *Hangeul* by King Sejong in 1443 (National Hangeul Museum, 2025). Aimed to improve the literacy rates at the time, *Hangeul* was designed with simplicity in mind, and is famously considered easy to learn with much of the original alphabet still used today (National Hangeul Museum, 2025). A divided Korea, accompanied by 80 years of vastly different levels of exposure to the rest of the world, has produced two distinct variations of Korean: South Korea has been heavily influenced by globalisation, utilising sino-korean (words of Chinese origin), Japanese, German, and English loan words, whereas North Korea has actively worked to create a pure version of the Korean language, rejecting other cultures and languages (Yim, 1980; Kim, 2016b; Oh & Son, 2024).

### *1.2.1. South Korean and English loanwords:*

The use of loan words is pertinent in modern South Korean language with English loanwords accounting for approximately 5% of modern Korean vocabulary (Sohn 1994; Lee, 2020a). However with the rapid advancements in technology and spread of both Korean culture (see Adams, 2022 for the Hallyu wave) and the English language, it is not unreasonable to assume this number has and will continue to grow. Thus, it is common to encounter English words in street signs, advertising, menus, and in conversation between South Koreans (Shim, 1994; Fayzrakhmanova, 2016; Lee, 2020a; Kim, 2022c; Choi, 2023).

Although the phrase ‘loan words’ is used to cover all words with alternative language origin in Korean, they fall into two categories: phonetic loan words, and ‘koreanised’ English words or English for Korean purposes (Fayzrakhmanova, 2016). As explored by Fayzrakhmanova (2016), Phonetic loan words are words taken directly from English and are typically nouns with more modern/western connotations, such as 인터넷, *inteo-net*, internet or 피자 *pi-ja*, pizza, and are recognisable to English speakers. Alternatively, Koreanised English comprises of words that have English origins but their meanings have been altered to suit Korean purposes; for example 서비스, *seo-bi-seu*, service, meaning on the house/free, and 화이팅, *hwaiting*, fighting, roughly translating to ‘good luck’ or ‘lets do our best’. The meaning for these loan words would not be obvious to English speakers, but make sense within the Korean cultural context purposes (Fayzrakhmanova, 2016). Whether due to globalisation or the trendiness of English, the role of English in everyday South Korean speech cannot be overstated.

### *1.2.2. Language Ideology in North Korea:*

If a nation, such as North Korea, is not open to globalisation and has minimal communication with the rest of the world, loanwords are less likely to bleed into

their linguistic foundations. The rejection of loanwords however, was not a natural consequence of being a hermit kingdom, but purposely and rigorously enforced on a macro-level.

North Korean language policy and reform has been formulated as early as 1946 (Yim, 1980) and used as a vehicle for demonstrating nationalism and patriotism, and reinforcing propaganda. The North Korean variety of Korean does not exhibit the same features as their Southern counterparts. This is due to two reasons: the promotion of the Juche ideology, and specific language policy promoting and enforcing an alternative version of a standard Korean language known as ‘cultural language’ (Yim 1980; Terrell, 2007).

As with all policy in North Korea, language policy has been guided by Juche ideology: An ideology created by the first dictator of North Korea, Kim Il-Sung, most directly translated as ‘self-reliance’ (Terrell, 2007). Essentially, the Juche concept advocates for a nation that relies solely on internal resources, rejecting external/foreign influences politically and economically. Juche rejects external culture, religion, products, and even vocabulary (Terrell, 2007). According to Juche, allowing foreign linguistic influence over the Korean language fails to demonstrate the strength and self-reliance of the nation, and instead promotes weakness (Terrell, 2007).

It is with Juche in mind that North Korea has taken drastic steps to erase historical references to foreign words, and prevent future use of foreign loan words. In 1966, Kim Il-Sung adopted the *munhwa-eo* ‘cultural language’ as the standard version of Korean, distancing itself from Seoul dialect and legitimising this version of Korean language as the most ‘pure’ version (Yim, 1980; Terrell, 2007; KBS, 2019b). In an attempt to further nationalise the Korean language, the key feature of ‘cultural language’ is the absence of foreign loan words, including translating Sino-Korean words into pure Korean, and banning all loan words (Yim, 1980). This transformation into ‘cultural language’ demanded all new words be strictly pure Korean, the renaming of domestic products to only pure Korean words, new and existing words for foreign scientific concepts and military commands to be translated into pure Korean, and the exclusive use of Korean

names for places and landmarks, replacing former Sino-Korean names (Kim 1966 in Terrell, 2007).

More recently, the North Korean regime has also implemented bans on using South Korean dialect (Ahn, 2021; Mun, 2023). Although in theory North Koreans are prohibited from accessing South Korean content and media, people have long been smuggling goods across the Chinese border to be distributed and sold at local markets, exposing South Korean culture and language (Ahn, 2021). In 2023, Article 6 of the Pyongyang Cultural Language Protection Act: The Principles of Legal Punishment Toward People Who Spread the Puppet Language states that “the State shall treat anyone who imitates or spreads the puppet language as garbage contaminated with puppet culture and as criminals. Anyone, regardless of the seriousness of the matter, shall face serious legal sanctions, including the death penalty.” (Daily NK, 2023, p.4). The ‘puppet language’ refers to the variety of Korean spoken in South Korea, alluding to the perceived illegitimacy of this type of speech; described in Article 2 of the same act as “a jumbled together language that has completely lost the essentials of the Korean language due to its vocabulary, grammar and intonation becoming Westernized, Japanized and Sinocized... (and) a lowly and disgusting garbage language that exists nowhere else in the world.” (Daily NK, 2023, p.3).

With the ‘purification’ of Korean and the establishment of ‘cultural language’ in combination with the persecution of the supposedly contaminated South Korean speech, it is clear that the use of language in North Korea is instrumental as a tool for the North Korea propaganda machine, in tandem with the maintenance of Juche ideology and as a source of nationalism.

### *1.3. English fever in South Korea:*

Education has long been considered a valuable asset in South Korea as a means of self betterment and a way of achieving higher status, and with the investment in an increasingly neoliberal and globalised society, an ‘English fever’ has swept South Korea (Park, 2009). Examples of ‘English fever’ were observed with the government launching plans to introduce English education across all elementary

school levels by 1995, and the revision of the university entrance exam to include a more communicative English competence focus over grammatical knowledge (Park, 2009). The realisation of the value of English in the globalisation process emerged in the aftermath of the 1986 Asian Games, the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games, and the recovery from the Korean financial crisis of 1997 (Demick 2002; Park, 2009). As ‘English fever’ began to spread, so did the promise of success.

The ‘Promise of English’ as coined by Park (2011) has facilitated a drive towards English language education in South Korea, as people hold the belief that English skills will ultimately lead to good university placements, good jobs, and upwards social mobility in a competitive job market (Park, 2011). English has been marketed as not only a key skill to improve socioeconomic standing, but something that can be achieved by anyone who invests sufficient effort into bettering their English (Park, 2015; Choi, 2024). Consequently, parents will invest significant amounts of money into their children's education as the private education industry soars: A 2024 survey by civic group No Worry About Private Education found that parents spend an average of 1.061 million won per month (approx \$766 USD) on private education services (Moon, 2025), with the industry as a whole profitting at an all-time high of 29.2 trillion won (\$20.1 billion USD) in 2024 (Choi, 2025). The focus of English education has prompted the popularity of short-term study abroad programmes (Chun & Han, 2015) and English-medium kindergartens, as some parents aim to start their children learning English as young as two years old (Lee, 2023b).

English as a medium of instruction (EMI) lectures are also increasing across South Korean universities: Korean students must continue to hone their English skills in order to take the TOEIC exam (Test of English for international communication) to graduate, with universities requiring scores ranging anywhere from 500, up to 900 out of 990 for the most prestigious universities (Park et al, 2020; Um, 2025; Korean TOEIC Committee Newsletter, 2025). Whilst TOEIC is used as a measure of English competency and is both a graduation and often employment application requirement, to stand out in the competitive job market, students need to aim for higher scores beyond that of graduation requirements if they wish to receive the social advancement they were promised (Park, 2011; Lee,

2014; Choi, 2021). When endeavouring to realise the ‘promise of English’, South Korean students have no choice but to work increasingly harder, dedicating over 10 years of their lives to the study of English so they can reap the benefits that have been promised to them throughout their lives, or fall to the bottom of the resume pile.

#### *1.4. Evolving English education in North Korea:*

For nations such as North Korea, who promote self-reliance, reject globalisation and deny freedom of movement for its citizens, is there any reason to learn English? Historically, no. Post-Korean war, English was removed entirely from the national curriculum, and the singular foreign language taught in North Korean classrooms was Russian due to ties with the Soviet Union (Son, 2002; KBS World, 2019a). English was reinstated into the curriculum in 1964 with leader at the time Kim Il-Sung suggesting in a 1980 address to North Korean educators that English be utilised in order for North Koreans to access foreign scientific and technical knowledge (Song, 2002; 2019; Kim & Kim, 2024), as well as to help in the inevitable conflict with the USA and for the purpose of revolution (Song, 2002; KBS World, 2019a). However, this evolved into a method to maintain and promote the cult of personality for the Kim family and the Juche ideology which frequently appears in North Korean English textbooks (Song, 2002; 2019; Park & Shin, 2016; Ahn & Lee, 2022). English lessons focussed on words of praise and affirmation towards the leader, and military commands such as ‘drop your weapon’, or ‘surrender or die’, rather than the everyday conversational English one would find in a typical EFL (English Foreign Language) classroom (Song, 2002, p.49).

It has been said by North Korean refugees that those who received English education typically were not provided with a sufficient education, and were demotivated by English classes as it seemed a pointless to learn due to the lack of opportunities to use it (Ahn & Lee, 2022; Shin & Park, 2018). Therefore, when arriving in South Korea, the vastly different emphasis on English skills is a significant culture shock, and can cause resettlement issues (Shin & Park, 2018; KBS, 2019b).

North and South Korean language varieties and the pursuit of foreign language education have taken starkly different routes. In the North, linguistic evolution which should take generations to successfully incorporate was achieved in a matter of a couple of decades, harnessed by a ruthless propaganda campaign and the strength of the cult of personality of the Kim regime, reinforcing Juche ideology and nationalism amongst the North Korean people (Terrell, 2007). Whereas in the South, in the name of globalisation and neoliberalism, English has become naturally and seamlessly incorporated into everyday Korean society, with the sweeping 'English fever' boosting the increasingly important value of English in South Korea, becoming cultural capital, a status symbol, and tool for socioeconomic advancement (Park 2009; Park 2011). These differing perspectives, experiences, and knowledge of English thus contribute to increasing communication issues between the two nations and acts as a source of contention as to the legitimacy of either government as the 'real' Korea.

#### *1.5. Language and Refugee Identity:*

The experiences of refugees has been widely researched, providing readers with rich data on resettlement processes and barriers which refugees need to overcome in their new environments (Curry, Smedley, & Lenette, 2017; Tip, et al, 2019; Wood, et al, 2020; Coumans & Wark, 2024; Shahimi, Block, & Alisic, 2024). Language has long been identified as a key factor influencing the ease of adjustment for refugees: Not only does increased language proficiency aid in access to employment and education, which fosters self-sufficiency, but language skills also encourage increased contact with the majority population leading to improved wellbeing and reduced feelings of loneliness and isolation (Phillimore, 2011; Vervoort, Dagevos, & Flap, 2012; Blake, Bennetts Kneebone & McLeod, 2017; Tip et al, 2019; Morrice et al, 2021).

Whilst proficiency in the majority language of the new environment undeniably helps the resettling process for refugees, using this new language often goes hand in hand with re-scaling the importance and priority of languages in their repertoire (Blommaert, 2005; Blommaert, Collins & Slembrouck 2005). Although praised as

an impressive skill, there exists different levels of acceptability within multilingualism, as not all languages are considered equal in the context of immigration (Filhon, 2017). Blommaert (2005), and Blommaert, Collins and Slembrouck (2005) explore the relationship between language practices and spaces: when entering a new space, it brings with it new standards of legitimacy and value for a person's linguistic repertoire. Thus, in the context of refugees, they will rearrange their linguistic repertoire according to the values held by their new environment, typically placing the new dominant language at the centre, with their L1 or other known languages relegated to the periphery (Blommaert, 2005; Blommaert Collins & Slembrouck. 2005). This rejection of a first language can cause identity crises: Refugees contend with attempting to resettle in a new space, feeling inferior as their knowledge/linguistic skills are no longer valued. This leads to questioning who they are, compared to who they're supposed to be, in order to be accepted in new spaces.

In a study by Erdoğan-Öztürk and Sağın-Şimşek (2023), when interviewing two Syrian refugees resettled in Turkey, both participants reveal how their English skills were valued, whilst their Arabic/Kurdish skills were sidelined due to racism and illegitimacy linked to Arabic and Kurdish in Turkey. Despite having adequate proficiency in Turkish and at least two additional foreign languages, English elicited a more positive, accepting response in public spheres, compared to Arabic, where upon using it they feel marginalised, criticised, and isolated from Turkish society (Erdoğan-Öztürk & Sağın-Şimşek, 2023). An additional study by Davila (2019) expands on linguistic skills to forming identity among refugee groups. Working with teenage Congolese refugee students in the USA, Davila (2019) discussed how multilingual identities were embraced by the students in English classrooms and amongst their community. The students demonstrated translingual practices (Garcia, 2009; Garcia & Wei 2014), switching between English, French, and Lingala as a way to connect to their African community as well as facilitate learning and exchanges of knowledge within the classroom (Davila, 2019). Here, no singular language was considered more valuable and all were used as tools for communication.

The above studies demonstrate how the multilingual practices of refugees can impact a sense of belonging and identity for refugee communities. North Korean refugees are no exception to this, although they lack the same positive sense of community as observed among the Congolese refugees, and are swayed more towards the Syrian refugees' experiences of marginalisation.

#### *1.6. The North Korean refugee experience:*

With records beginning in 1998, 34,352 North Koreans have made the journey to South Korea as of March 2025 (Ministry of Unification, 2025). Initially this influx of North Korean refugees across the border was thought to have been prompted by the economic crisis that swept the North in the late 1990s, with devastating famine forcing people to flee (Goodkind & West, 2001; Crossing borders, 2025c; Ministry of Unification, 2025). This number peaked in 2009, with over 2900 North Koreans entering South Korea in one year (Ministry of Unification, 2025). This number steadily fluctuated between 1047-2706 people a year, dropping sharply in 2020 to 229 following tighter restrictions due to Covid-19 and breakdowns in inter-Korean relations (Al Jazeera, 2020; King, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2022; Ministry of Unification, 2025; Rahaman Sarkar, 2025). Numbers continued to fall in 2021-22, with only 63 and 67 North Koreans making it across the border each year, but numbers have been slowly increasing in the years since (Ministry of Unification, 2025).

Typically North Koreans escape via China, a nation which North Korea borders and one of the only countries in the world with which North Korea has any kind of diplomatic relations (Fong, 2024; Liberty in North Korea, 2025a). Upon arrival in China, if identified by Chinese officials, North Koreans face deportation and subsequent death or imprisonment (Human Rights Watch, 2017; Liberty in North Korea, 2025a). Therefore, North Korean refugees can spend months to years hiding in China before heading to South Korea, often via Mongolia, Thailand or Laos (Crossing Borders, 2025b; Liberty in North Korea, 2025a). When they arrive in South Korea, North Korean refugees are welcomed as citizens and enter a compulsory 12-week period of residence at a re-education centre known as a *Hanawon* (Liberty in North Korea, 2022). Here they are taught about life in South

Korea, including; South Korean history, principles of democracy, basic human rights, explanations of capitalism, how to open a bank account, take public transport, use technology such as phones, computers, and ATMs, enroll in school or gain vocational training, and receive South Korean language and English education (Kang & Chae, 2015; Jeong & Abraham, 2019; Ji, 2022; Liberty in North Korea, 2022; Crossing Borders, 2025a). This education is vital, although often considered insufficient to truly successfully adapt to South Korean society (Kim, 2017; Yeung & Seo, 2023; Lartigue, 2025).

The standard process of attending a *Hanawon*, becoming a citizen, and receiving government assistance to settle into their new lives suggests a relatively simple route to resettling in South Korea. In reality however, North Korean refugees have consistently reported instances of discrimination upon revealing their identity to South Koreans, disrupting this simple process (Eschborn & Apel, 2014; Sung & Go, 2014; Chun, 2022; Park, 2022; Park & May, 2024; Park, 2024). This has forced many North Koreans to conceal their identity by making efforts to adjust their Northern accents to take on a Seoul accent (The JoongAng, 2020). Some purposely acquire a less desirable South Korean regional dialect as means of denying their North Korean identity when questioned on their unusual accents (Park, 2024). The cumulation of negative experiences upon exposing their North Korean identity, as well as the rejection of said identity being legitimate and valued in South Korea, has forced North Korean refugees to not simply undergo the challenge of readjusting to life in South Korea, but to attempt complete assimilation to South Korean society as a means to survive. Thus, having to contend with being what South Korean society has deemed an inferior in combination with insufficient linguistic skills (poor South Korean and English) leaves North Koreans struggling to accept themselves in their new surroundings, questioning their identities and sense of belonging in a country they risked their lives to get to (Chung, 2008; Yu, Eom, & Jeon, 2012; Kim, Cho, & Kim, 2015; Park & May, 2024).

### *1.6.1. Defector or Refugee?*

Terminology referring to North Korean refugees has developed over time, and across literature there is diversity in the terms assigned to North Koreans who have left North Korea (Kim, 2012). In modern discourse, terminology has moved on from “War refugees”, “Former Residents of Enemy Territory” or “Heroes who returned to the state” (Chung, 2008, pp.7-8), and instead include refugee, defector, escapee, migrant, or the Korean word *새터민* ‘*Saeturmin*’. Deriving from the English word ‘Settler’, ‘*Saeturmin*’ is most accurately translated as newcomer/new settler and while this can be used to refer to anyone moving to a new place it typically refers to North Korean people. Reasons for the exclusive use of one term over another must be up to the discretion of the writer, however ‘defector’ tends to be the most commonly used label (Lee, 2024). Within this review so far and in the subsequent chapters, the term ‘refugee’ will be used. I have chosen ‘refugee’ over the more common ‘defector’ due to the connotations of ‘defection’. As a term coined during the Cold War to imply escaping for political reasons (Lartigue, 2024), I feel ‘defector’/‘defecting’ places the regime at the centre of the discourse rather than the people themselves. Using ‘refugee’ centres the people who were fleeing persecution and more accurately reflects the reality that they are escaping from dire circumstances in North Korea, rather than actively denouncing a regime of which they typically had no part in creating or upholding. This is not to say any one term is incorrect.

According to a recent survey by a Seoul-based government think tank, more than half of South Koreans reject the term ‘defector’ due to its negative connotations and call for a change to the terminology (Lee, 2024). Human rights groups further agree to the use of the term ‘refugee’ as it not only encapsulates the realities that North Koreans are fleeing from, but encourages the notion that China should protect these individuals, instead of repatriating them back to North Korea to face persecution (Human Rights Watch, 2017; Lee, 2024). History has seen language linked to self-identification change and evolve over time - from the Q (Queer) in LGBTQ previously being a homophobic slur, only to be reclaimed by the community and used as an important self-identifier for many people, to the term

‘Oriental’ previously referring to a person from East Asia, but is no longer acceptable terminology. Years from now, new terminology to describe North Koreans who have left North Korea may be circulating. However with the knowledge we currently have, I feel ‘refugee’ is the most thoughtful and appropriate terminology to use.

#### *1.7. Exploration via a Systematic Review:*

As the North Korean refugee population is often unwilling to reveal their identities, it was determined that due to a lack of personal connections or access to organisations that work with North Korea refugees, it would be difficult to easily gather data from this population. I am unaware of any other systematic reviews existing on this topic and given the intricacies of collecting data myself, I decided a systematic review was best practice to explore the extent of current research and avoid the complexity of primary data collection from a difficult to access population. A systematic review critically appraises existing literature in order to answer a series of research questions, whilst analysing methodological rigour (Boland, Cherry & Dickson, 2024).

#### *1.8. Researcher positionality:*

With a background in Korean studies and having spent years studying and researching Korean history and inter-Korean relations, I feel acutely aware of the landscape of North Korea and the difficult circumstances surrounding the journeys of North Korean refugees. As much as it is well within the rights of North Korean refugees to peacefully live out their lives without being under the microscope of studies, it is nonetheless in the interest of peace that North Korean refugees be the focus of research that will improve their lives and ease the transition into these new spaces, albeit in a non-invasive, considered way. A systematic review should be well aligned with these values. As a native English speaker and non-Korean person, despite years of study on the language and the region, I am also acutely aware of my positionality as an outsider to North and South Korean culture and society and any conclusions drawn from this study must be considered through this lens.

### *1.9. Research questions:*

The aim of this systematic review is to answer the following questions:

1. What is the nature and extent of current research on the impact of English proficiency on North Korean refugees' ability to successfully assimilate into South Korean society?
2. In current research, what role does English play in shaping identity among North Korean refugees?
3. What difficulties are discussed in research for North Korean refugees with low proficiency in English when they are placed in situations which require English language knowledge?
4. How can current research inform future policy suggestions to improve the integration process for North Korean refugees?

This review aims to identify how English proficiency impacts the experiences of North Korean refugees in South Korea, exploring pedagogical and policy recommendations to aid the integration process. This research is relevant as by highlighting the voices of North Korean refugees and exploring issues pertinent to them and their everyday lives, the human impact of the division can be centred above political strife. By ascertaining where current North Korean refugees feel they are struggling in the integration process, the better equipped organisations can become to help incoming refugees and during future reunification.

## **Chapter 2 – Methodology**

The consequences of the division of North and South Korea has resulted in significant linguistic changes across the peninsula, particularly pertaining to the use and role of English. This can contribute to a hostile and discriminatory reception felt by North Korean refugees by South Koreans due to possessing perceived undervalued and illegitimate linguistic repertoires (speaking North Korean variety of Korean, and limited or non-existent English skills). This othering by linguistic discrepancies, rather than racial discrimination often faced by refugee groups, can create further disruptions to efforts towards peace on the peninsula, resulting in isolation, identity crises, and futile attempts at assimilation to South Korean society.

This systematic review will endeavour to answer the research questions stipulated above in order to rigorously analyse research that has come before: offering insights into the attitudes and experiences of North Korean refugees and how this knowledge can be utilised to improve learning experiences, and eventually inspire progress towards institutional changes and societal reflection. This chapter will outline the methodology and selection processes of the studies under review.

A systematic review aims to answer specific questions via the appraisal and synthesis of relevant data, following an exhaustive exploration of the existing literature, endeavouring to minimise risk of bias throughout a well-defined, transparent process of data selection and analysis, whilst also appraising the quality of included studies (Boland, Cherry & Dickson, 2024). Whilst a selective, narrative literature review allows researchers to explore a particular field, the lack of clarity on the search processes, reasons for including or excluding sources, or identifying databases of origin, can lead to significant albeit oftentimes unintentional bias. A systematic review on the other hand allows for more precise, formal, and systematic methodological processes for exploring the literature. Rather than simply synthesising findings of primary sources, a systematic review prioritises minimising bias, critiquing existing studies, and analysing methodological quality of sources to produce comprehensive conclusions (Boutron et al, 2022; Boland Cherry & Dickson, 2024).

Despite origins in the medical field, systematic reviews have expanded into social sciences, providing well-rounded summaries of research in a variety of disciplines. Quantitative meta-analysis tends to dominate systematic reviews, however a lot can be

said for the inclusion of qualitative studies as they provide salience and a voice to those directly impacted by an intervention, contributing to our understanding of both individual experiences and communities in a variety of contexts (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). To better understand the experiences of a group of people, like the often socially marginalised or invisible North Korean refugees, and collate testimony and research on this population, the value of qualitative data cannot be overstated in this systematic review.

I have chosen to follow Boland, Cherry and Dickson's (2024) guidebook for doing a systematic review in order to ensure a productive and effective strategy from conception to completion. This book is designed specifically for graduate students undertaking a systematic review and thus provides realistic and thorough guidance to the systematic review process from an accessible viewpoint. Additionally, this systematic review has also been prepared in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) 2020 reporting guidelines checklist in order to facilitate transparency and quality of research (Page et al, 2021).

I consulted with a variety of databases and alternative bodies that list systematic reviews such as the International Database of Education Systematic Reviews (IDESR) to investigate previous protocols in order to scope out whether a similar project had been undertaken, as well as to identify potential gaps in the literature. According to my findings, there are no such similar systematic reviews currently being undertaken or published. This search affirmed the worthwhile insight this review can offer readers into North Korean refugees where discourse on the politics of geography and ideology so often take precedence over lived experiences and identities.

Additionally, in support of open science, a protocol of this systematic review has been registered on IDESR. The protocol for this systematic review was published on 10/06/2025 and can be found at <https://idesr.org/article/IDESR000220>, under IDESR ID: IDESR000220. This was done in the interest of transparency and replicability, and to prevent duplication, thus aiming to reduce the replicability crisis in research. The protocol is available to view in appendix A.

### *2.1. Eligibility criteria:*

In order to succinctly answer the research questions and ensure the most efficient gathering of a comprehensive selection of studies, eligibility criteria for this systematic

review is outlined in the table below (2.1). By keeping a time frame of post 1998 studies only, the review will be able to analyse more pertinent data as the South Korean Ministry of Unification began recording numbers of defectors from 1998, a time when significant numbers began to emerge following famine and economic crisis in the region (Goodkind & West, 2001; Wallach 2023; Crossing borders, 2025c; Ministry of Unification, 2025). Furthermore, following the Asian financial crash and globalisation more broadly, the Seventh National English Education Curriculum of South Korea was introduced in 1997, promoting early years English education and communicative language teaching in the classroom, with the aim of advancing students’ English communication skills and spreading Korean culture globally (Kim, 2015; Han, 2023). This focus on English language ability has continued to grow and develop, creating an educational environment that expects high levels of English as standard (Park, 2009). Therefore, a post 1998 time frame allows for the examination of the North Korean experiences of English in South Korea during an optimal period of significance. Additionally, the eligibility criteria will include any studies featuring North Korean refugees of any age or gender in order to gather a wide range of opinions and experiences. Such studies will include both English and Korean language content as I am able to read and understand both languages.

Table 2.1 outlines all eligibility criteria and rationales.

Table 2.1: Eligibility Criteria

| Criteria:                           | Include:                                                 | Exclude:                                             | Rationale:                                                                                            |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. <b>Bibliographic information</b> | Studies with a full reference or sufficient information. | Studies with insufficient bibliographic information. | Studies which do not include adequate bibliographic information make the retrieval of works unviable. |

|                                          |                                            |                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>2.      <b>Time Frame</b></p>         | <p>Studies published from 1998 onwards</p> | <p>Studies from before 1998.</p>                           | <p>Ministry of Unification records on the number of North Korean refugees entering South Korea began in 1998 following the great famine in North Korea which saw an influx of refugees crossing into South Korea, and the 7<sup>th</sup> national curriculum prioritising communicative English language teaching was integrated into classrooms by 1998. Thus 1998 offers a watershed for North Korean refugees beginning to interact with English in a South Korean context.</p> |
| <p>3.      <b>Publication status</b></p> | <p>Both peer-reviewed, published</p>       | <p>Do not exclude studies based on publication status.</p> | <p>This review seeks to offset any potential publication bias by including a wide</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

|                        |                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                        | literature, and Grey literature.                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                       | range of research, including grey literature.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>4. Participants</b> | North Korean refugees of any age, gender, or occupation who have experience living in South Korea.                                                            | North Koreans who are not in South Korea, other groups of refugees, or any other groups not North Korean refugees.                    | The review does not wish to discriminate from refugee experiences based on individual differences in order to establish a well-rounded picture of the role of English from multiple perspectives, but participants still residing in North Korea are not pertinent to the research questions proposed. |
| <b>5. Intervention</b> | Studies where North Korean refugees are invited to share their experiences with English in any context, including but not limited to identity, daily life and | Studies focused primarily on the explicit improvement of linguistic skills such as vocabulary and grammar, or the teaching/curriculum | The aim of this review is to look at the socioemotional outcomes of English for North Korean refugees: focussing on their attitudes and feelings surrounding                                                                                                                                           |

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                          |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                    | communication, education settings, professional life, and in relation to equal opportunities. (via interviews and surveys etc.)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | of English within North Korea.                                                                                                                                                                    | English, and not explicit, measurable linguistic abilities, although it must be acknowledged there will be some overlap. |
| <b>6. Outcomes</b> | Studies reporting the experiences of North Korean refugees in English language learning/use context including but not limited to college or high school education, the use of English loan words in the South Korean language in daily and/or professional life, as well as studies which use data to suggest pedagogical implementations to improve the experiences of | Studies that focus exclusively on explicit linguistic outcomes such as grammar and prosody, and studies that do not include non-language outcomes such as satisfaction, happiness, engagement etc | Linguistic competence is not the focus of this review.                                                                   |

|                    |                                                                      |                                |                                                                                            |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                    | North Korean refugees.                                               |                                |                                                                                            |
| <b>7. Language</b> | Any relevant studies published in English and South Korean language. | Studies in any other language. | Unable to accurately translate alternative languages due to resource and time constraints. |

## 2.2 Information sources:

The data collection process relied solely on electronic databases and resources due to time and resource constraints. Electronic databases provide comprehensive coverage of information, with the ability to use advanced search features to yield the most relevant materials, which is particularly prevalent when undertaking a systematic review. However, whilst electronic databases typically collate peer-reviewed pieces of academic research, only looking at peer reviewed articles can lead to publication bias and a potentially limited scope of research. In order to avoid such bias, this systematic review has also included grey literature including theses and dissertations. Grey literature is typically referred to as unpublished literature not controlled by commercial publishers, including, but not limited to, dissertations/theses, government documents, and conference proceedings (Boland, Cherry & Dickson, 2024). Including grey literature in a systematic review, although it introduces a potential threat to quality as they are not peer reviewed pieces, does help to mitigate publication bias, and potentially prevalent ongoing and unpublished studies can be identified, contributing to greater diversity in sources and access to additional data (Boland, Cherry & Dickson, 2024). Additionally, to complement my search, citation chaining, also known as snowballing, was undertaken: Forward and backward searching was used in order to account for any papers missed during the initial search. After identifying key publications to be included in the review, forwards searching looks for papers that have cited said key publications, while backwards searching looks to the bibliographies of key publications to find other relevant studies (Boland, Cherry &

Dickson, 2024). Although the process can be time consuming, it is best practice in systematic reviews to ensure the full scope of relevant research has been identified.

*2.3. List of databases:*

Initially using a simple search method looking at popular databases such as JSTOR, Science Direct, as well as the University of Oxford’s SOLO library service, I was able to identify an initial scope of the existing literature and key words/phrases linked to these studies. Following discussions with a librarian at the Bodleian Education Library, we identified the most relevant databases stemming from a variety of publishers and fields of interest in order to produce a range of sources on the full scope of the topic. As this topic focuses on a Korean population, Korean language databases were also included in the search. This targeted any relevant Korean language sources or studies written in English but solely published in Korean journals (typically titles and abstracts are translated into English, with the full body being in either Korean or English, depending on the Korean publisher requirements). As I can read and understand Korean, no translator was required for the analysis of Korean language sources. Google scholar was implemented to supplement any studies or grey literature potentially missed in the databases. For a list of databases used in this review see Table 2.2:

Table 2.2: Databases:

| <b>Discipline:</b> | <b>Database/Journals:</b>                                                                         |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Linguistics        | Linguistics Collection (including LLBA)                                                           |
| Multidisciplinary  | Web of Science Core Collection, Scopus DBpia,<br>Korean studies Information Service System (KISS) |
| Education          | Education Collection (including ERIC)                                                             |

*2.4. Search string:*

When searching for studies for a systematic review, one must strike a balance between sensitivity and specificity within search terms to produce the most efficient results (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006), whilst taking into account the diversity of language across

studies. Using boolean operators, I devised a search string consisting of key words and phrases garnered from a pilot search of potential relevant literature. From this initial scoping search I identified a candidate study fitting my ideal inclusion criteria to base search terms on. Pilot searches with these devised search strings across different databases brought forward the candidate study as well as other appropriate studies, thus validating the search terms as they worked to reveal relevant studies for the selection process. Then, working with a librarian, we streamlined the search string to bring forth the most relevant studies, tailoring the string accordingly. By keeping the balance of the search string specific, we were able to address the diversity of language within the field, and keep at bay many articles that would otherwise have been excluded. For example, initially research related to the study of English within North Korea dominated a large proportion of the results, but by editing the string further, adding South Korea to the search string, many of these resources fell out of the pool of studies. Thus, the final devised strings brought forward relevant studies in manageable numbers. As per boolean standards, key concepts were separated with AND, and differing words within each concept were separated with OR. The final search stream used in this review is as follows:

“North Korean refugee\*” OR “North Korean student\*” OR “North Korean college student\*” OR “North Korean refugee student” AND English OR "Learning English" OR “English language” AND “South Korea” AND Language

For Korean databases, advanced searches are limited to a maximum of only five search terms with boolean operators. Thus, I devised a simpler version of the more detailed string above to cater to this restriction. This could be considered a limitation to the process as there lacks replicability across databases. However, by not tailoring a separate search string for Korean databases, a range of studies would have been missed, ignoring key data and rendering this review potentially unviable. Furthermore, as I read and understand the Korean language, it would be remiss to not include such data in this review. Both English and Korean search strings were implemented to ensure access to the full scope of relevant research.

The search string for Korean databases DBpia and KISS is as follows:

North Korean refugee OR North Korean refugee student AND English AND Language AND Learning English

And

탈북자 OR 북한이탈 대학생 OR 탈북자대학생 OR 새터민 AND 영어

### *2.5. Data Management:*

Following the final searches, citation information and abstracts of all sources identified during the searches were uploaded to the systematic review management software, Rayann. Rayaan is a user-friendly, free to use software designed to extradiate relevant sources for systematic reviews (Ouzzani et al, 2016). Using Rayaann for data extraction saves reviewers time as the nature of the software allows it to gather information on what kind of sources are pertinent to the review and learns to include or exclude studies accordingly and dismiss duplicates (Ouzzani et al, 2016). All sources included at each stage will be recorded in a Microsoft excel spreadsheet, detailing the database of origin, reasons for inclusion/exclusion, and should a source pass the initial title/abstract screening but fail to meet the necessary criteria upon full text screening, reasons for subsequent exclusion will also be recorded.

All evaluation took place on a Samsung Galaxy Book3 360, Windows 11 Version 24H2 operating system.

### *2.6. Selection process:*

After removing all duplicate sources via Rayyan, titles and abstracts of all sources were screened for relevance and selected based on which unambiguously complied with the criteria required of this systematic review. Upon completion of this initial screening, full texts were then screened to further ensure compatibility with the review. The final selection of included papers then underwent forwards and backwards citation chaining, until I was satisfied that no further studies remained.

In the process of citation chaining, an additional 5 relevant sources were identified, which were missed by the search strings. A full outline of the selection process is available in the PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1) in chapter 3.

### *2.7. Ensuring screening reliability:*

In order to establish inter-rater reliability and minimise risk of bias of preconceived notions on the topic impacting the systematic nature of the selection process, a second colleague familiar with the field of applied linguistics also participated in elements of

source selection. Due to time and resource limitations, 10% of all sources identified in the final search underwent secondary screening via an inter-rater. Furthermore, as this colleague is unable to read Korean, only titles and abstracts were included in secondary screening due to the inability to translate whole texts within the timeframe. If titles or abstracts of Korean language sources are not available in English, I translated accordingly. Any disagreements during the screening process were discussed between the two raters. In the event of any unresolvable disagreements as to the inclusion status of any sources, in order to measure the level of inter-rater reliability when screening studies, a Kappa score was to be utilised. In the field of education, a Kappa score of .70 (or 70%) is generally considered an acceptable level of variation (Multon & Coleman, 2018).

Thus, after being informed of the purposes and eligibility criteria of this study, a second reviewer reviewed the titles and abstracts of 10% of studies. During this process, both reviewers were blind to the screening judgements of the other in order to remain unbiased. Upon completion of the secondary screening, raters reached a 94% agreement rate, and following discussions, agreed upon a 100% inclusion/exclusion rate, suggesting the inclusion and exclusion criteria stipulated in this review were appropriate. As a 100% agreement rate was decided on, a Kappa score was not utilised at this stage.

## *2.8. Data Extraction method:*

Following the selection process, a google form was designed and implemented expressly for data extraction, with all responses exported to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. In order to ensure consistency of data included across studies in the analysis, the data extraction form included information pertinent to study overview, participants, data collection methods, outcomes, and any other relevant information to the review (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). Google forms were selected as the medium for data extraction due to its simple and adaptable interface, and suitably for smaller scale reviews (Li, Higgins, & Deeks, 2024). Following identification of all included sources, data was extracted from each source. At this stage, it is considered best practice to involve another colleague in the data extraction process to ensure reliability and balance within results. However, due to time constraints and language barriers for Korean language sources, a second extractor was not employed at this stage. See Appendix B for Data Extraction Form Template.

## *2.9. Quality appraisal:*

Even a peer-reviewed piece of research published in a reputable journal has the capacity to suffer from bias and can impact the reliability of its findings by skewing results, crossing ethical boundaries, lacking replicability, or overstating the impact of conclusions (Boland, Cherry & Dickson, 2024). In order to accurately and critically analyse the studies selected in a systematic review, an important factor of the process is appraising the quality and trustworthiness of a piece of research. If a study is found to be lacking in quality, its inclusion in a review without proper explanation of its shortcomings may impact the validity of any conclusions of said review. By considering the quality of a study, a systematic review is better positioned to draw meaningful conclusions from data, and develop a deeper understanding of the studies and their results (Boland, Cherry & Dickson, 2024).

Based on the initial pilot search and nature of the research questions, an overwhelmingly qualitative outcome for data extraction was anticipated. Thus, the JBI Global Checklist for Qualitative Research as the critical appraisal tool for use in systematic reviews was implemented, designed to assess the methodological quality of a study and to determine the extent of the possibility of bias in design, conduct, and analysis (JBI Global, 2020). The JBI appraisal checklist format allows for succinct and efficient screening of research, with a simple layout and structure: it is comprised of ten questions covering methodology, collection of data, results, positioning of author, participant inclusions, and ethics with a 'yes', 'no', 'unclear' or 'not applicable' checkbox option for each question. Although the scoping search and nature of the questions to be addressed by this systematic review lends itself to qualitative studies, 10 mixed methods studies were also identified. As these studies were in the minority, the mixed methods appraisal tool (MMAT) was utilised to assess the quality of said studies. Whilst this difference presents a limitation to this review as not all included studies will have been appraised via the same tools, by utilising separate quality appraisal tools this review is able to still ensure direct comparisons between qualitative and mixed methods studies and also ensure the quality of all aspects of said studies have been fully taken into account. See Appendices D and E for both JBI and MMAT quality assessment templates.

Due to the somewhat subjective nature of quality appraisals, a strong systematic review will engage a colleague to appraise a sample of the included studies: by having more than

one individual assess the quality of a piece of research ensures consistency across findings, minimises error, and mitigates bias (Boutron et al, 2022). A secondary inter-rater could not be utilised during the time frame of this review, therefore, whilst differing from the protocol, I reassessed a random 10% of all included studies to undergo a secondary quality assessment screening and compared my findings across each round.

### *2.10. Data synthesis:*

A narrative synthesis was adopted to analyse the data in the included studies, supplemented with corresponding tables/ graphs as visual aids. Furthermore, as the studies are predominantly qualitative, a meta-analysis of findings would not be appropriate (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006) and thus was not undertaken. The process of data synthesis followed Petticrew and Roberts' (2006)'s three-step process:

- Organise studies into logical categories.
- Analyse findings within each category.
- Synthesise findings across all studies.

A narrative synthesis focuses on the story-telling of individual experiences, including how individuals use these experiences to shape their identity (Hecker & Kalpokos, 2025). This narrative synthesis will be followed up by a thematic synthesis. By adopting both a narrative and thematic synthesis, the review will be in the best position to answer the outlined research questions via individual narratives as well as examining if any of the themes of these experiences are homogenous across studies.

#### *2.10.1. Thematic coding and analysis:*

In order to identify any overarching themes present across the included studies, thematic analysis was undertaken. Using open coding in which codes were not pre-decided, but identified and developed throughout the process (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017), preliminary ideas about themes were identified during the data extraction process. For example the themes of identity and difficulties in learning/using English were pertinent to the research questions of this review and thus were predicted to likely make an appearance in thematic coding.

Following the data extraction process, each included study was scrutinised in order to identify codes. As I was concerned with answering the research questions of this review,

segments of data which revealed something relevant to the research questions were coded, rather than line-by-line coding (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Although line-by-line coding can ensure a more thorough exploration of potential codes within a text, due to time constraints and the scale of the work, this was not possible for this review. The next step saw codes being consolidated into themes and subthemes. A breakdown of codes and themes are available in appendix I, and in table 3.2 and figure 9 in chapter 3, and an example of a coding a segment of text is available in appendix J.

In the following chapter, results of the screening and data extraction process, as well as the narrative and thematic synthesis will be explored.

### **Chapter 3 - Results**

This chapter presents the results of the search and selection process (3.1), the general characteristics of the included studies (3.2), a breakdown of the quality appraisal results for each study (3.3), and thematic analysis findings (3.4). Sections 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 preliminarily answers question 1 of this review by presenting the extent of current research, while section 3.4 focuses on addressing question 2,3 and 4 of this review, identifying recurring themes.

#### *3.1. Search and selection process:*

The PRISMA flow diagram in Figure 1 outlines each stage of the search, screening, and selection process, including exclusion reasoning and the results of citation chaining.

From the 6 databases selected for this review (see table 2.2), 234 studies were identified. 64 duplicates were subsequently removed, leaving 170 for title and abstract screenings. Using Rayyan, 105 studies were excluded for not meeting the inclusion criteria for the following reasons; Criteria 1 (insufficient bibliographic information) (n=1), Criteria 4 (wrong population) (n=76), Criteria 5 (wrong intervention) (n=16), Criteria 6 (wrong outcome) (n=11), and Criteria 7 (wrong language) (n=1), resulting in 65 studies sought for retrieval (See table 2.1 for criteria details). One potentially relevant study (Lee, 2020b) was unable to be retrieved due to the full text being inaccessible online and an uncontactable author. The potential limitations of the exclusion of this unretrievable study will be explored in the discussion chapter.

64 studies underwent full-text screening, from which 43 were excluded for the following reasons; Criteria 4 (wrong population (n=6), Criteria 5 (wrong intervention) (n=25), and Criteria 6 (wrong outcome) (n=10), and duplicates (n=2). 21 studies identified from databases were ultimately selected for inclusion in the review. These 21 studies underwent forwards and backwards citation chaining in order to identify any additional relevant studies. 5 additional studies were identified, leaving a final 26 studies for the indepth review. During the initial screening process, three pairs of studies were found to be a thesis and a published article version of the same study. Two pairs did not meet eligibility criteria so both were subsequently excluded regardless (Pyo, 2016 (thesis), & Pyo & Kim, 2017 (journal article), and No, 2016 (thesis) & No & Oh, 2016 (journal article)). For the third pair, the published journal article was selected as although the thesis provided a wide scope of research, the journal article took precedence due to its

more rigorous assessment and screening via a peer-review process, likely resulting in a more trustworthy study (Park, 2017 (thesis) and Study 21 Park, 2022). During citation chaining, an eligible thesis by Jung (2009) was identified but was not included as the published article (Study 5 by Jung & Im, 2009) had already been included during the initial selection process. Citing chaining uncovered a full report by Jung et al (2014), published by the Korea Institute for Curriculum and Evaluation. A condensed journal version of this study was previously identified in the initial search and selection process. The full report offered richer, policy-relevant data, and thus was selected to be included over the journal article by Jung and Kim (2015).

Following an extensive search, screening, and selection process, a total of 26 studies were identified for the indepth review. For organisation in the following discussions, each included study was allocated an identification number in alphabetical order according to the author in Table 3.1. The completed references for each included study is available in Appendix F.

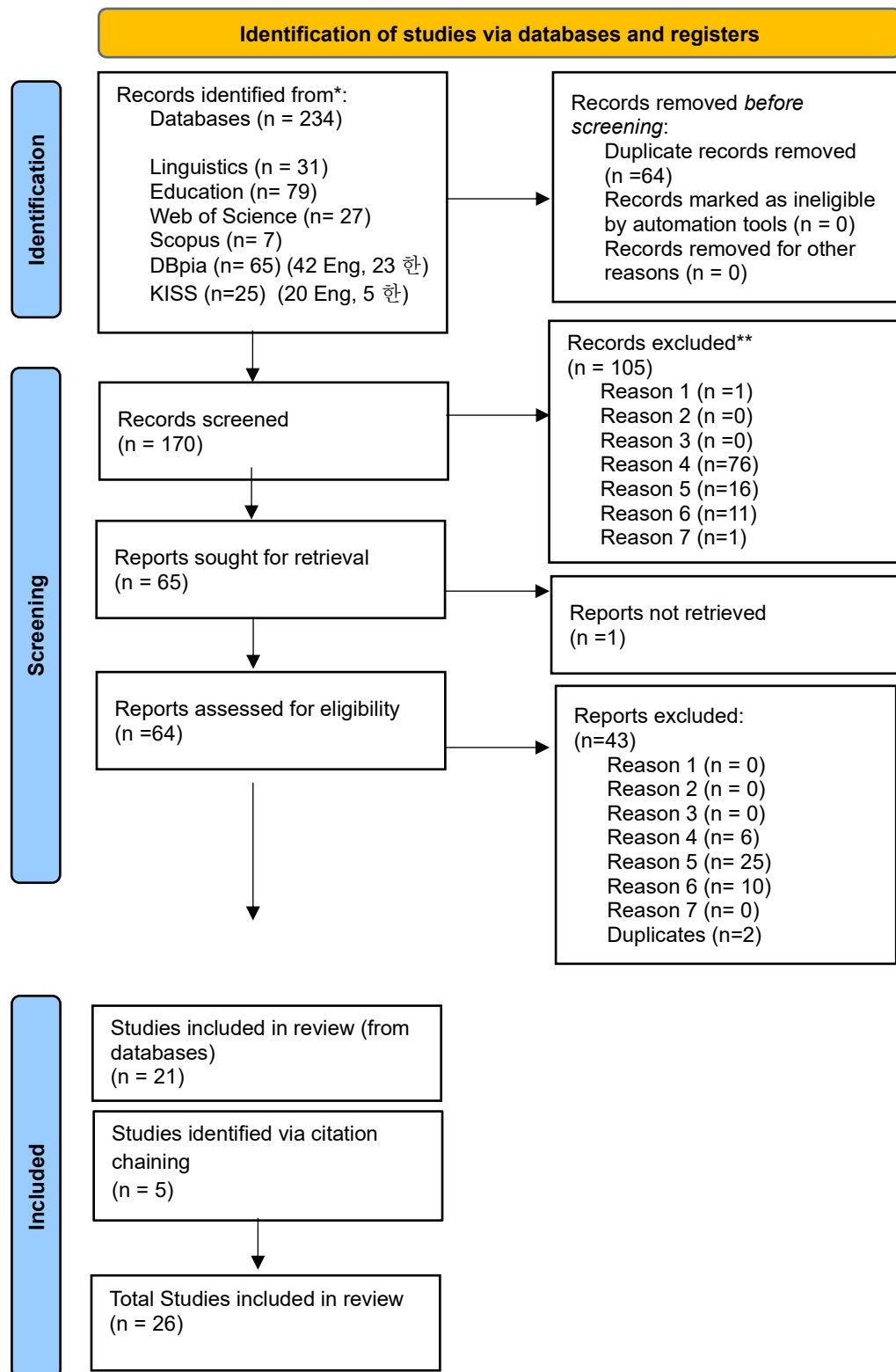


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow diagram of the screening process  
(Template from Moher et al., 2009)

Table 3.1

Study Identification Numbers

| ID | Study                         |
|----|-------------------------------|
| 1  | Bok & Cho (2018)              |
| 2  | Choi (2014)                   |
| 3  | Hwang & Jeon (2020)           |
| 4  | Jo (2019)                     |
| 5  | Jung & Im (2009)              |
| 6  | Jung, Min, Park, & Kim (2014) |
| 7  | Kim (2013)                    |
| 8  | Kim (2016)                    |
| 9  | Lee (2014)                    |
| 10 | Lee (2015)                    |
| 11 | Lee (2016)                    |
| 12 | Lee & Ahn (2016)              |
| 13 | Lee, Han, & Hyun (2016)       |
| 14 | Lee (2017)                    |
| 15 | Lee & Park (2025)             |
| 16 | Oh (2008)                     |
| 17 | Oh & Kim (2024)               |

|    |                    |
|----|--------------------|
| 18 | Park & Kim (2014)  |
| 19 | Park (2020)        |
| 20 | Park (2021)        |
| 21 | Park (2022)        |
| 22 | Park & Lee (2022)  |
| 23 | Park (2023)        |
| 24 | Shin (2019)        |
| 25 | Shin & Park (2018) |
| 26 | Yang & Lee (2012)  |

### *3.2: General Characteristics:*

The following section details the general characteristics of the 26 included studies, including publication details, research design, sample characteristics, and data collection measures. Appendix G expands on general characteristics in more detail, and Appendix K provides individual narrative summaries.

#### *3.2.1. Publication details:*

Figure 2 displays the range of years of publication of eligible studies. Relevant studies began appearing from 2008 onwards, with two appearing in 2008 (16) and 2009 (5) respectively. A surge of relevant scholarship was published between 2014-2016, with 9 eligible studies, followed by a steady decrease to the latest publication in April 2025 (16).

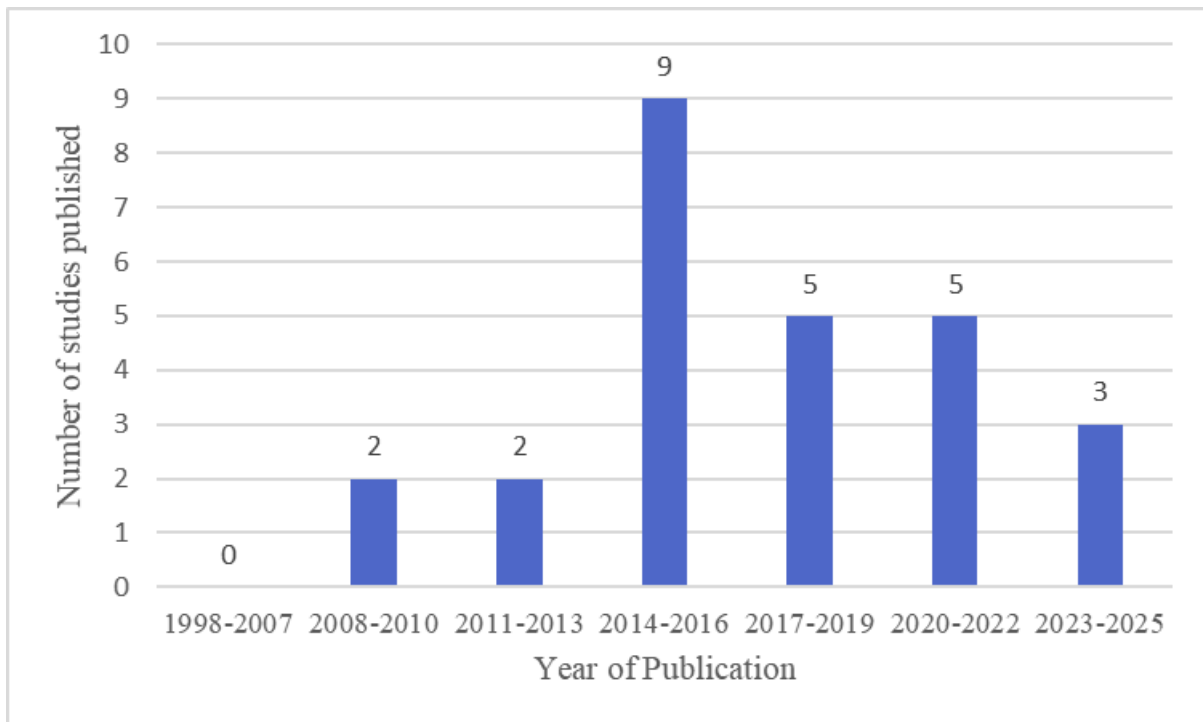


Figure 2. Number of published studies per year.

### 3.2.2. Publication status:

As demonstrated in Figure 3, the majority of studies included in this review are journal articles ( $n=21$ ), followed by Masters dissertations ( $n=3$ ), one doctoral thesis, and one report.

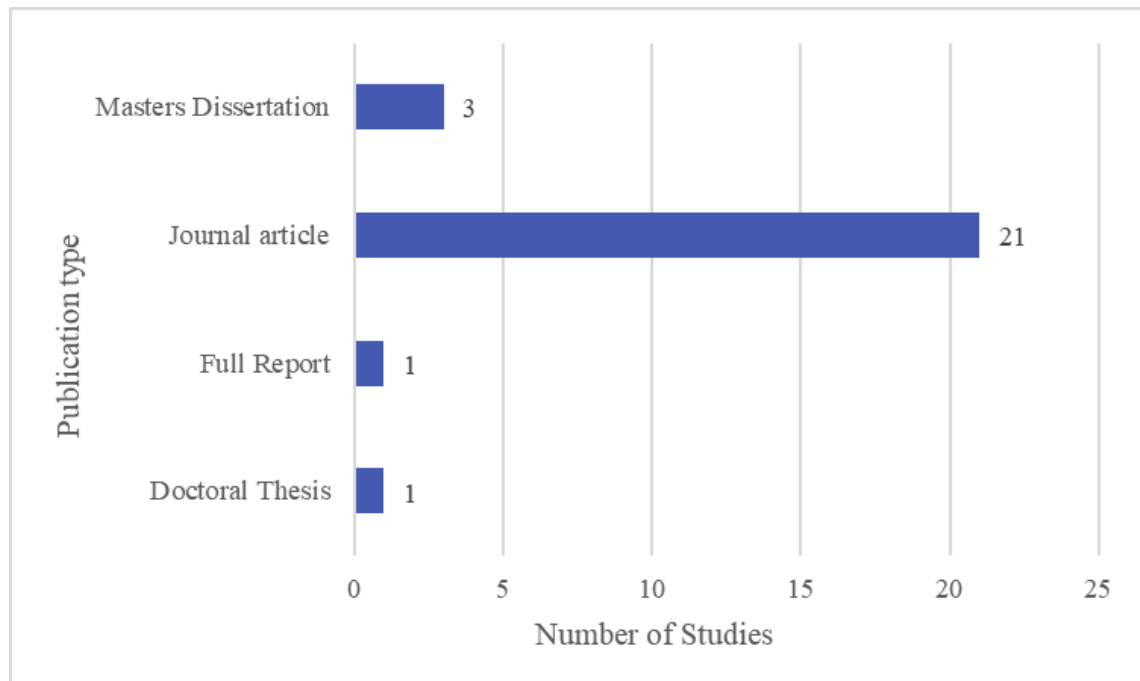


Figure 3. Publication type.

### 3.2.3. Geographical context and Language of publication:

All studies included were conducted in South Korea, with one study (25) including interviews conducted with participants in both South Korea and Los Angeles: the Los Angeles participants had previously lived in South Korea for an extended period before emigrating and thus were still eligible participants in this review. Both English and Korean databases were consulted in the search and screening processes. As per figure 4, English language sources made up a small majority of 15 studies, with Korean language being used in the remaining 11 sources.

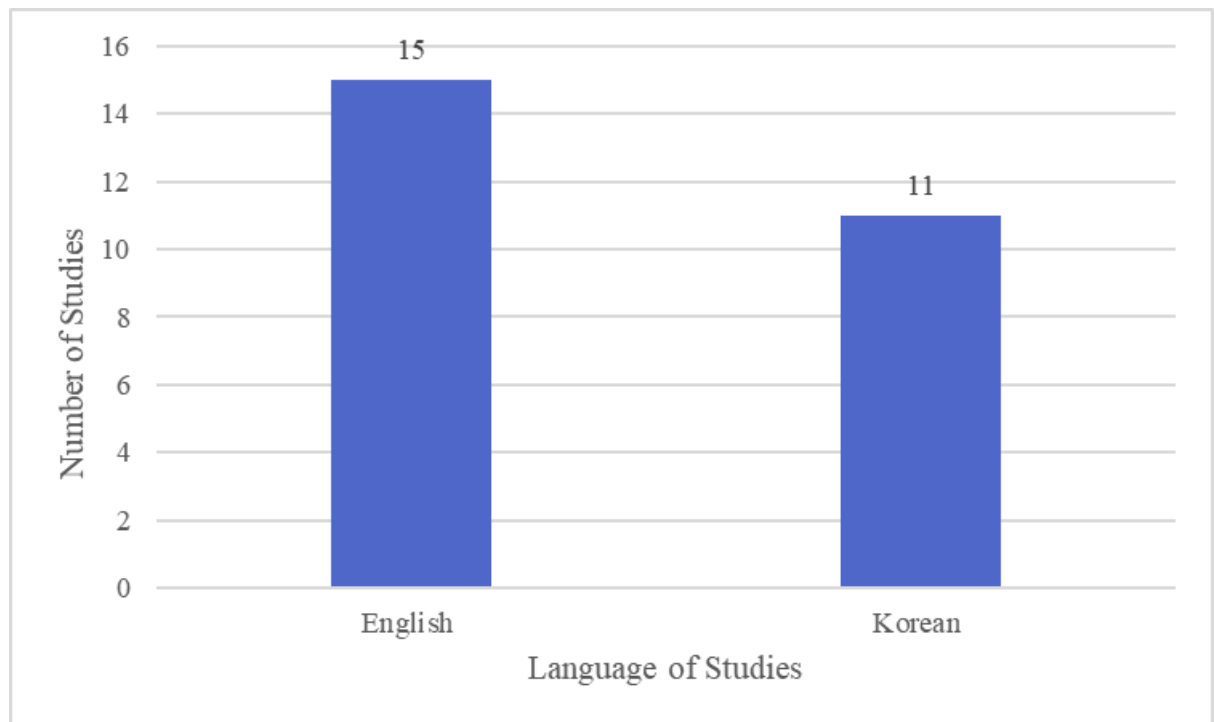


Figure 4. Language of Publication

### 3.2.4. Research designs:

Figure 5 displays the breakdown of types of research designs included in the review. The research designs were largely qualitative, making up 61.5% of the total studies (n=16), followed by 38.5% being mixed methods (n=10). No solely quantitative designs were included.

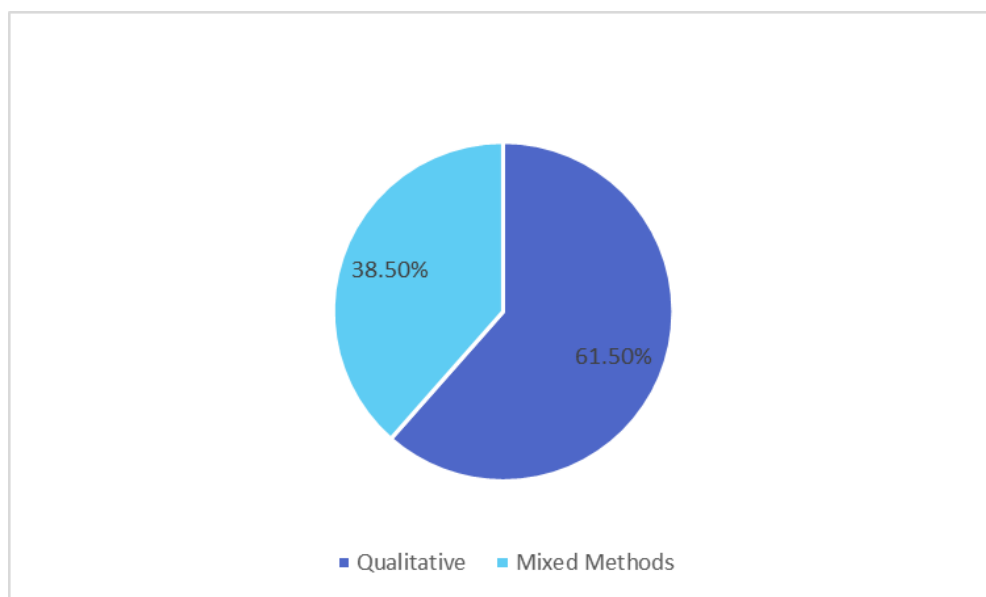


Figure 5. Research designs

#### *3.2.5 Methods for data collection:*

As per the eligibility criteria, all data collection methods invited North Korean refugees to offer their experiences and perspectives of English language use and learning in South Korea. Interviews were utilised by 24 studies (all except studies 4 and 24), and were often supplemented by additional data materials such as reflective journal entries, audio recording or field notes from observations to aid in structuring interviews and providing a foundation for discussions. Across studies, interview lengths ranged from 30 to 140 minutes when specified, taking place either in person, over skype, by phone, or KakaoTalk, a popular Korean messaging app. For mixed method studies, surveys were also utilised, but the majority of studies did not explicitly stipulate how materials were circulated to participants. In figure 6, 'Other' includes field notes, motigraphs, language autobiographies, language tracking forms, and visual learner histories.

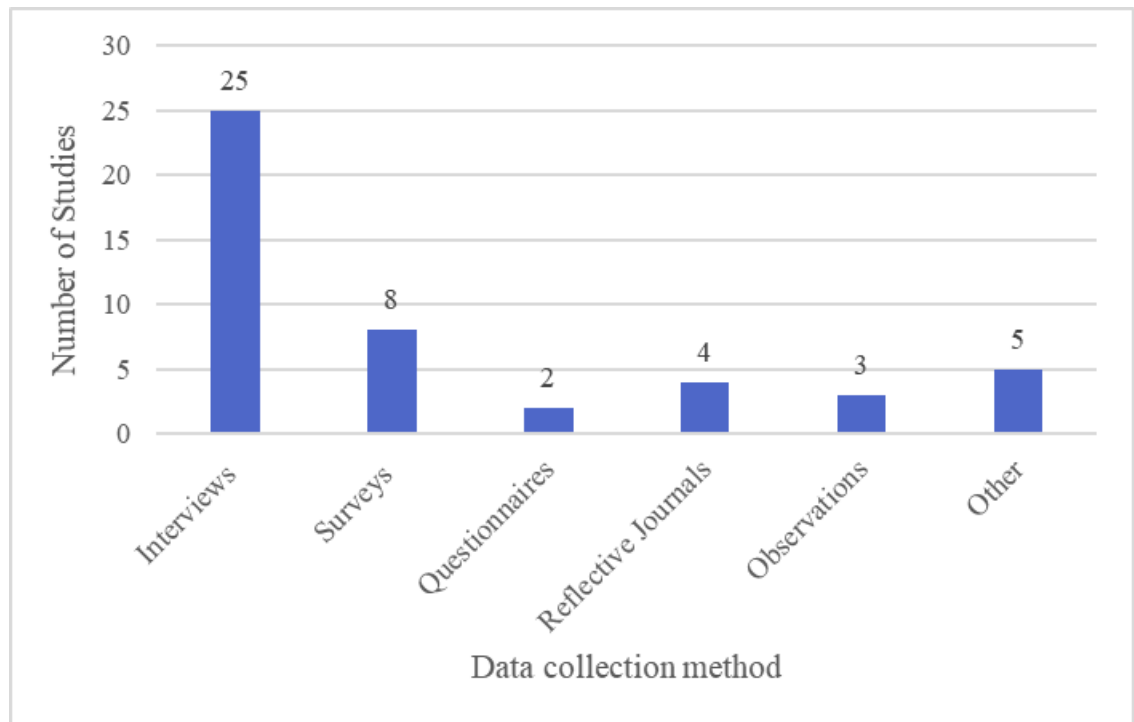


Figure 6. Methods of Data Collection

#### 3.2.6. Sample characteristics:

The full table of all participant details can be found in Appendix H, including; age, gender, age upon leaving North Korea, duration of time in South Korea, and level of education received in North Korea as well as any baseline imbalances and other relevant sociodemographics.

As discussed in chapter 1, North Korean Refugees typically harbour concerns over exposing their identities, which contributes to difficulties accessing willing participants for studies on the North Korean population. This inaccessibility is evident in the sample sizes of the included studies: 5 studies had only 1 participant, 10 studies had sample sizes of fewer than 5, and the maximum number of participants in qualitative studies was only 15. Mixed methods studies saw sample sizes of 11 to 105, as participants were often more comfortable with the added layers of anonymity that surveys provide. These studies often saw a drop off in participants for the interview section of the studies. For example, Study 5 had a sample of 105 participants for the survey, but only 5 interviewees, as well as Study 18 having 31 participants for the survey portion and only 18 for interviews. Although this variation in sample sizes in mixed method studies reflects the desire for anonymity among North Korean refugees, it may also be a consequence of participant

availability, time constraints, or work loads of researchers. 6 studies also included interviews with teachers/ tutors to supplement the North Korean refugees' testimonies.

In a series of studies by Park and colleagues (15, 22 & 25), the same participant data was utilised. In the original study (25) by Shin and Park (2019), 4 participants were interviewed, investigating their identity transformations as learners of English. However, the testimony of 'Min', was used in additional studies (22 & 15) for further analysis. Researchers deemed the testimony of Min to be particularly unique due to his pride towards his North Korean identity, maintaining his North Korean accent, and his idealised future self as an invaluable resource for Korean reunification. His perspective is not in line with current research, and offers researchers a fresh testimony for the North Korean refugee experience, and thus was used as the basis for further studies. A similar phenomenon was identified in studies 18 and 19, as the same set of data was used in each publication albeit answering different research questions. Implications of the replication of data will be explored in chapter 4.

6 studies used snowball sampling (4,5,13,14 & 25), in which one participant is sourced and then via this initial participant additional participants were also recruited. 8 studies (1,2,9,12,15,21,22 & 24) utilised personal connections of the researcher to encourage participation in their respective studies, for example via North Korean refugees at institutions they worked at (12). 3 studies reached out directly to institutions working with North Korean refugees such as universities, schools, or North Korean refugee associations to recruit participants (10, 16 & 19), and 10 studies did not adequately disclose how their participants were sourced (3,6,7,8,11,17,18,23 & 26).

### *3.2.7. Occupations and Gender*

University students featured in 15 studies, school students in 10 studies, and members of the workforce in 3 studies, as seen in figure 7. Participants of unknown occupations were featured in 4 studies, and others, including those preparing for university, awaiting admission to university, and graduate students, were featured in 3 studies. As a significant amount of studies were focused on English in an educational context, school/university students dominated featured occupations.

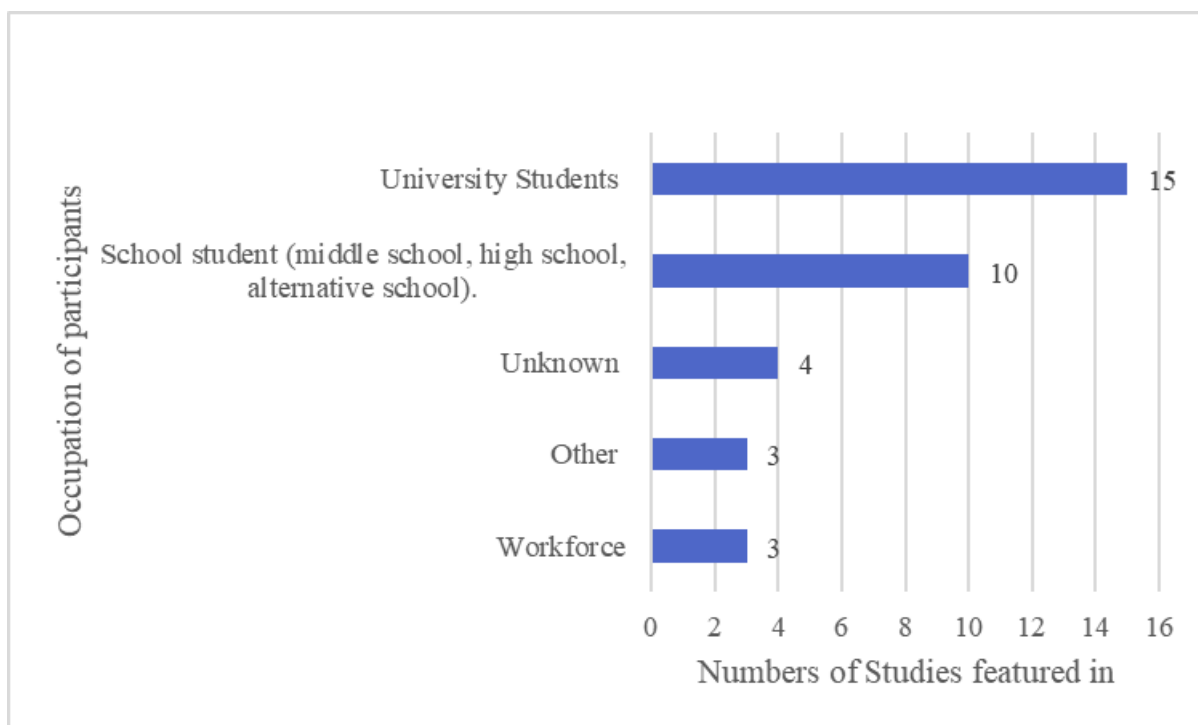


Figure 7. Occupations featured in studies.

Participants had spent from 1 month to 17 years in South Korea. On average, a higher proportion of female participants were featured, making up 60% of participants (figures comprised from studies where a gender breakdown was available). Whilst it may be considered a limitation of the studies for not including balanced perspectives by gender, these figures are somewhat in line with the Ministry of Unification statistics which observe a significantly higher proportion of women making the journey from North Korea, comprising of 72.1% of the population of North Korean refugees (Ministry of Unification, 2025). In this respect, participants involved in the research reflect the general population of North Korean refugees living in South Korea. Full participant characteristics in Appendix H.

### 3.3. *Quality Appraisal:*

This section outlines the quality appraisal of each of the included studies. As this study was anticipated to largely produce qualitative data outcomes, the JBI qualitative appraisal checklist was chosen for quality appraisal. 16 qualitative studies (1,2,3,8,10,11,12,14,15,17,20,21,22,23,25, & 26) were assessed via the JBI checklist. However, following data extraction, 10 studies were identified as mixed methods

(4,5,6,7,9,13,16,18,19 & 24). Due to the number of mixed methods studies, the MMAT was also utilised for accurate appraisal. This does differ from the protocol, but using two forms will allow for direct comparison between all qualitative studies, and all mixed methods studies respectively.

Tables 3.2 and 3.3 outline the results of the JBI checklist and the MMAT. Each table features green, red, and yellow, representative of 'yes', 'no' or 'unclear' (JBI)/ 'Can't tell' (MMAT). The full templates for the JBI checklist can be found in appendix D and the MMAT in appendix E.

Table 3.2. JBI Checklist Results

| Study ID | Congruity between philosophical perspective and research methodology | Congruity between the research methodology and research question/objectives | Congruity between research methodology and data collection methods | Congruity between research methodology representation and analysis of data | Congruity between research methodology and interpretation of results? | Statement locating the researcher culturally/theoretically | Addresses the influence of the researcher on the research, and vice- versa. | Participants are adequately represented | Research is ethical according to current criteria or, evidence of ethical approval by an appropriate body? | Conclusions drawn in the research report flow from the analysis/interpretation of the data |
|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1        |                                                                      |                                                                             |                                                                    |                                                                            |                                                                       |                                                            |                                                                             |                                         |                                                                                                            |                                                                                            |
| 2        |                                                                      |                                                                             |                                                                    |                                                                            |                                                                       |                                                            |                                                                             |                                         |                                                                                                            |                                                                                            |
| 3        |                                                                      |                                                                             |                                                                    |                                                                            |                                                                       |                                                            |                                                                             |                                         |                                                                                                            |                                                                                            |
| 8        |                                                                      |                                                                             |                                                                    |                                                                            |                                                                       |                                                            |                                                                             |                                         |                                                                                                            |                                                                                            |
| 10       |                                                                      |                                                                             |                                                                    |                                                                            |                                                                       |                                                            |                                                                             |                                         |                                                                                                            |                                                                                            |
| 11       |                                                                      |                                                                             |                                                                    |                                                                            |                                                                       |                                                            |                                                                             |                                         |                                                                                                            |                                                                                            |
| 12       |                                                                      |                                                                             |                                                                    |                                                                            |                                                                       |                                                            |                                                                             |                                         |                                                                                                            |                                                                                            |
| 14       |                                                                      |                                                                             |                                                                    |                                                                            |                                                                       |                                                            |                                                                             |                                         |                                                                                                            |                                                                                            |
| 15       |                                                                      |                                                                             |                                                                    |                                                                            |                                                                       |                                                            |                                                                             |                                         |                                                                                                            |                                                                                            |
| 17       |                                                                      |                                                                             |                                                                    |                                                                            |                                                                       |                                                            |                                                                             |                                         |                                                                                                            |                                                                                            |
| 20       |                                                                      |                                                                             |                                                                    |                                                                            |                                                                       |                                                            |                                                                             |                                         |                                                                                                            |                                                                                            |
| 21       |                                                                      |                                                                             |                                                                    |                                                                            |                                                                       |                                                            |                                                                             |                                         |                                                                                                            |                                                                                            |
| 22       |                                                                      |                                                                             |                                                                    |                                                                            |                                                                       |                                                            |                                                                             |                                         |                                                                                                            |                                                                                            |
| 23       |                                                                      |                                                                             |                                                                    |                                                                            |                                                                       |                                                            |                                                                             |                                         |                                                                                                            |                                                                                            |
| 25       |                                                                      |                                                                             |                                                                    |                                                                            |                                                                       |                                                            |                                                                             |                                         |                                                                                                            |                                                                                            |
| 26       |                                                                      |                                                                             |                                                                    |                                                                            |                                                                       |                                                            |                                                                             |                                         |                                                                                                            |                                                                                            |
|          | 14                                                                   | 15                                                                          | 16                                                                 | 16                                                                         | 15                                                                    | 3                                                          | 4                                                                           | 15                                      | 1                                                                                                          | 15                                                                                         |
|          | 0                                                                    | 0                                                                           | 0                                                                  | 0                                                                          | 0                                                                     | 10                                                         | 10                                                                          | 0                                       | 9                                                                                                          | 0                                                                                          |
|          | 2                                                                    | 1                                                                           | 0                                                                  | 0                                                                          | 1                                                                     | 3                                                          | 2                                                                           | 1                                       | 6                                                                                                          | 1                                                                                          |

Table 3.3. MMAT Results

|          | Screening       |                             | Qualitative                 |                                     |                  |                           |                             | Quantitative Descriptive   |                       |                          |                              |                                  | Mixed Method       |                                   |                                             |                        |                                      |
|----------|-----------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Study ID | Clear Questions | data collection suitability | Appropriateness of approach | Adequate methods of data collection | Derived findings | Sufficient interpretation | Coherence between each step | Relevant sampling strategy | Representative sample | Appropriate measurements | Low risk of nonresponse bias | Appropriate statistical analysis | Adequate rationale | Effectively integrated components | Adequately interpreted output of components | Divergencies addressed | Adherence to criteria of each method |
| 4        |                 |                             |                             |                                     |                  |                           |                             |                            |                       |                          |                              |                                  |                    |                                   |                                             |                        |                                      |
| 5        |                 |                             |                             |                                     |                  |                           |                             |                            |                       |                          |                              |                                  |                    |                                   |                                             |                        |                                      |
| 6        |                 |                             |                             |                                     |                  |                           |                             |                            |                       |                          |                              |                                  |                    |                                   |                                             |                        |                                      |
| 7        |                 |                             |                             |                                     |                  |                           |                             |                            |                       |                          |                              |                                  |                    |                                   |                                             |                        |                                      |
| 9        |                 |                             |                             |                                     |                  |                           |                             |                            |                       |                          |                              |                                  |                    |                                   |                                             |                        |                                      |
| 13       |                 |                             |                             |                                     |                  |                           |                             |                            |                       |                          |                              |                                  |                    |                                   |                                             |                        |                                      |
| 16       |                 |                             |                             |                                     |                  |                           |                             |                            |                       |                          |                              |                                  |                    |                                   |                                             |                        |                                      |
| 18       |                 |                             |                             |                                     |                  |                           |                             |                            |                       |                          |                              |                                  |                    |                                   |                                             |                        |                                      |
| 19       |                 |                             |                             |                                     |                  |                           |                             |                            |                       |                          |                              |                                  |                    |                                   |                                             |                        |                                      |
| 24       |                 |                             |                             |                                     |                  |                           |                             |                            |                       |                          |                              |                                  |                    |                                   |                                             |                        |                                      |
|          | 6               | 6                           | 6                           | 6                                   | 9                | 8                         | 8                           | 5                          | 2                     | 6                        | 1                            | 6                                | 8                  | 8                                 | 10                                          | 1                      | 3                                    |
|          | 4               | 0                           | 0                           | 0                                   | 0                | 0                         | 0                           | 0                          | 1                     | 0                        | 6                            | 0                                | 0                  | 1                                 | 0                                           | 1                      | 6                                    |
|          | 0               | 4                           | 3                           | 3                                   | 0                | 1                         | 1                           | 5                          | 7                     | 4                        | 3                            | 4                                | 2                  | 1                                 | 0                                           | 8                      | 1                                    |
| Total    | 10              | 10                          | 9                           | 9                                   | 9                | 9                         | 9                           | 10                         | 10                    | 10                       | 10                           | 10                               | 10                 | 10                                | 10                                          | 10                     | 10                                   |

A rigorous systematic review would establish inter-rater reliability at this stage to mitigate potential bias from these judgements. As a secondary inter-rater was not available, I implemented a procedure where I selected a random 10% of studies to undergo a secondary round of quality appraisal. This was done to establish consistency in my findings. Studies 4, 10, and 20 were randomly selected, and the second round of quality assessments were overwhelmingly the same except for the following shown in table 3.4. The final results are visible in tables 3.2 and 3.3.

Table 3.4. Quality appraisal comparisons:

| JBI Checklist | 6. Is there a statement locating the researcher culturally or theoretically? |                  | 9. Is the research ethical according to current criteria or, for recent studies, and is there evidence of ethical approval by an appropriate body? |                  |
|---------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
|               | First screening                                                              | Second screening | First screening                                                                                                                                    | Second screening |
| Study 10      |                                                                              |                  |                                                                                                                                                    |                  |
| Study 20      |                                                                              |                  |                                                                                                                                                    |                  |
|               |                                                                              |                  |                                                                                                                                                    |                  |
| MMAT          | Low risk of nonresponse bias                                                 |                  | Adequate rationale                                                                                                                                 |                  |
|               | First screening                                                              | Second screening | First screening                                                                                                                                    | Second screening |
| Study 4       |                                                                              |                  |                                                                                                                                                    |                  |

### 3.3.1. Studies reporting Qualitative data:

The JBI checklist seeks methodological congruency between each aspect of the research process. Congruency refers to the idea that each step of the research process should align across the study (Willgens, et al, 2016). For example, the philosophical perspective of the researcher should align with the methodology, the methodology should align with the data extraction process, and analysis of data should be harmonious with findings and conclusions (Willgens, et al, 2016). 13 studies consistently demonstrated congruency

between methodology, research questions, analysis of data, and interpretation of results. However, studies consistently failed to include statements locating the researcher culturally/theoretically, or stipulating the influence of the researcher on the research and vice-versa, with no studies succeeding in meeting all criteria. Questions 6 and 7 were highlighted as areas of weakness for the vast majority of studies. 15 studies received a 'no' or 'unclear' for questions 6, and 14 for question 7. A high-quality study should recognise the influence a researcher has on qualitative data collection, and should mitigate any potential underlying biases by including an explicit statement on their positioning within the data collection framework. This was demonstrated by 4 studies (14, 20, 21 & 23), whose authors explicitly commented on their identity and influence as researchers in relation to the data collection they were undertaking. Additionally, all studies except for study 3 lacked unambiguous evidence for ethical approval by an appropriate body (Question 9).

### *3.3.2. Studies reporting mixed method data:*

Out of the 10 mixed methods studies, 4 studies did not have explicit research questions which made the assessment of trustworthiness difficult to ascertain. 6 studies achieved 100% in the qualitative section, leaving only those without sufficient research questions to be found lacking. Only study number 6 lacked clarity on the interpretation of results substantiated by data, and coherence between each step of the study. For quantitative assessment, all of the included mixed methods studies fell into the category of quantitative descriptive. Having a low risk of non-response bias proved to be the area where all studies struggled, categorised as no (n=6), or unclear (n=3), except study 9. Additionally, it was difficult to tell how effectively studies had addressed the divergencies between quantitative and qualitative finding (n=8) within each mixed methods study as there often appeared to be few, if any, divergencies to report. All studies sufficiently demonstrated adequate interpretation of the output of the integration of both qualitative and quantitative components and displayed findings that were accurately derived from the data.

### *3.3.3. Summary of quality appraisals:*

There were a number of methodological issues present. A significant issue for qualitative studies was in stipulating the role and impact of the researchers, as well as a lack of clarity on the ethical approval processes undertaken to produce their work. For the mixed

methods studies, 4 studies did not articulate explicit research questions, and the majority had a high risk of non-response bias or failed to adequately address divergences in data types. The results of this quality appraisal could therefore impact the reliability of the findings of this systematic review, and thus must be considered during the exploration of the findings of the studies.

### *3.4. Findings of studies:*

The following section presents the findings of the thematic analysis of the included studies in an attempt to address the research questions proposed by this review.

#### *3.4.1. Thematic analysis:*

All studies underwent thematic analysis to identify any overarching themes. Appendix I details the codes drawn from each study, with extracts from each study as supportive evidence. All codes were analysed and grouped into similar categories and assigned a main theme, as seen in table 3.3. In order to ensure credibility of themes, cross-check findings and mitigate bias, I ran a random 10% of studies through Breyta AI software to see suggested themes, as well as personally reassessed 10% of studies.

Table 3.5: Codes and Initial themes

| <b>Codes:</b>                                                             | <b>Initial Themes:</b>                  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Inferiority, low-confidence, self-depreciation                            | Perceived Inferiority of North Koreans  |
| Reconstructing and negotiating identity, resistance, belonging, adjusting | Reconstructing and negotiating identity |
| motivation to integrate/ by force/ for future, satisfaction, impatience   | Motivation                              |
| Difficulties with materials/content                                       | Challenges within an education setting  |
| Metacognitive skills, time consuming efforts/constraints                  | Lack of individual metacognitive skills |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Lack of systematic education, disruption to education, competitiveness of South Korean education system                                                                                               | Unconventional educational experiences           |
| Negative Interactions with teachers                                                                                                                                                                   | Support and understanding from others            |
| Economic/emotional hardships, systematic disadvantages, lack of support, fear of discrimination, anxiety over being discovered to be North Korean, External influences (e.g. North Korean propaganda) | Systematic disadvantages                         |
| Lack of basic English/cultural or general knowledge, skill gap between South Koreans and North Koreans                                                                                                | Educational shortcomings                         |
| Importance/ necessity of English, English as a means for integration/adaption/communication                                                                                                           | English as important and valuable in South Korea |
| Limited South Korean Language                                                                                                                                                                         | Linguistic accessibility                         |
| Lacking/insufficient support, Disparity between linguistic needs and levels of support                                                                                                                | Necessity for additional support                 |

I then reviewed the emerging themes, and following Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines, came to the conclusion that some themes should be considered subthemes due to overlapping constructs. A final breakdown of themes and subthemes are as seen in figure 8. An example of actual text coding can be seen in appendix J.

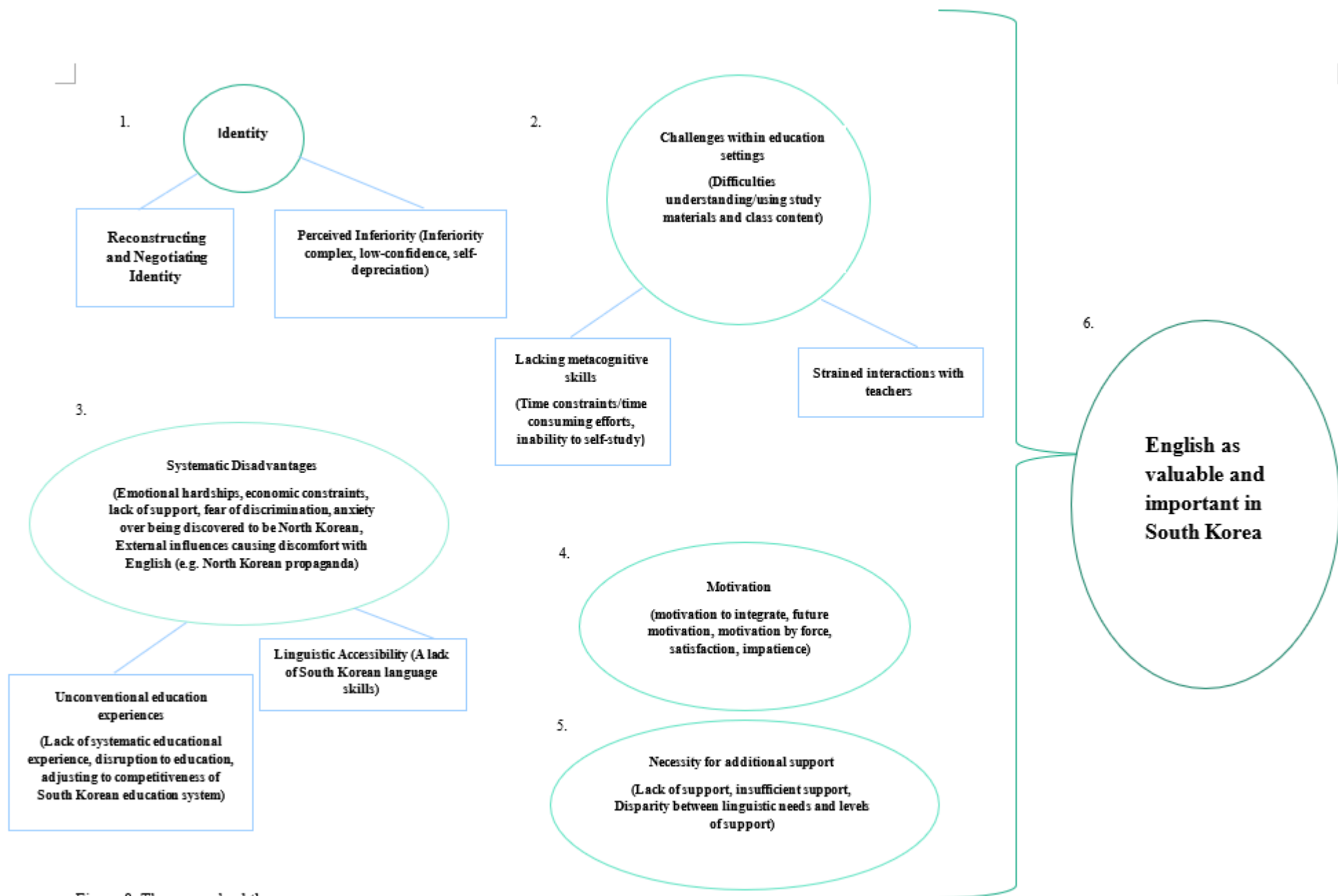


Figure 8. Themes and subthemes.

### *1. Identity:*

The theme of identity was prevalent across 17 studies (1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, & 25), highlighting how the undesirable linguistic capital of North Korean speakers with limited English prompted development of a perceived inferiority complex, with South Koreans as the perceived superior. Transitioning from a society where English was used as a propaganda tool (Son, 2002; 2019), participants must negotiate their identities as supposedly inferior learners of English and what that means for their place in South Korean society. North Koreans wish to foster a sense of belonging in South Korea, but their inferior linguistic repertoire puts up an additional barrier, denying access to what South Korean society has to offer.

### *Reconstructing and negotiating identity:*

10 studies examined North Korean refugee identity transformation (1, 8, 12, 15, 20, 21, 22, 23 & 25). Participants acknowledged how the move to South Korea prompted a jarring shift, repositioning English from a useless, unnecessary skill in North Korea, to social/cultural capital for survival in South Korea. Studies 8, 11 and 20 demonstrated that part of a struggle to negotiate a new identity as learners/users of English is due to difficulties discarding language ideologies instilled in them from their upbringing in North Korea and resisting the newfound importance of English. The excessive focus on English in education and the use of loan words have been considered an affront to Korean language, with one participant in study 20 describing the phenomenon as an “assault on national identity” and “jeopardising the integrity of Korean language” (Park, 2021, p.227).

Studies 1, 8, 15, 20, 21, 22, 23 and 25 revealed the future imagined self/community is the cornerstone of identity acceptance. By accepting that English is instrumental in achieving their goals, participants transitioned into active learners of English, endeavouring to become thriving members of South Korean society. Realising the unique role North Korean refugees can play during reunification prompts reconciliation with current identities: Participants began to transition their identities away from marginalised North Koreans, to active learners of English and as unique members of a globalised society, with bidialectical/bicultural skills being recognised as an asset to South Korean society, not a source of shame.

### *Inferiority:*

Perceived inferiority as North Koreans is prevalent in studies 1, 3, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 18, 19, and 21: studies demonstrate how being assigned the role of someone with poor English developed feelings of inferiority, low confidence, and shame, constructing marginalised identities as North Koreans. Study 12 observed North Korean refugee students demonstrating “unconditional agreement” with their South Korean English tutors whilst disqualifying their North Korea-related knowledge as unimportant; They positioned themselves as the inferior to the South Korean superior in an attempt to demonstrate their legitimacy in South Korean society (Lee & Ahn, 2016, pp.46-49). The participant in study 21 likened North Korean refugees to “infants who don’t know anything” and “blind fools”, perpetuating the idea that North Koreans are not simply marginalised members of society, but as incompetent and useless (Park, 2022, pp.6-7). Although endeavouring to conform to the necessary linguistic skills required of them, instead of using English to shed their displaced identities, participants' lack of knowledge further cemented their marginalised identity prescribed by South Korean society.

### *2. Challenges within education settings:*

13 studies identified challenges within educational settings for North Korean refugees when learning/using English (2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 13, 14, 18, 19, & 26).

Studies 3, 7, 6, 14, 18, 19, 25 and 26 emphasise a lack of basic English is a key difficulty for North Korean refugees, who struggle with class content due to the difficulty of the level of English they are learning. Students are placed at age appropriate levels, yet class content is significantly more advanced than they can handle, with some even struggling with the alphabet (3, 7 & 24). As a result of the struggle with content, the unbridgeable gap between the English ability of North Korean refugees and their South Korean counterparts is continually featured as a significant challenge for the North Korean refugees (2, 3, 5, 10, 11, 14, 18, 19 & 26). North Korean refugees are burdened with feeling that they can never catch up with their South Korean peers in competitive educational and job markets (3 & 14), contributing to withdrawal from classroom participation (6).

Additionally, a lack of general knowledge, including proper nouns, countries, media, and holiday traditions are a source of difficulty (18 & 19): textbooks and materials with pop

culture or historical references, or the use of proper nouns, are still grey areas for North Koreans due to the controlled narrative of North Korean education.

### *Lacking Metacognitive skills*

Metacognitive skill is the ability of individuals to monitor their own learning: to self-regulate and be able to recognise their own abilities in order to adapt to new ways of learning as part of problem solving strategies (Sword, 2021). In this context, North Korean refugees, due to their unique educational backgrounds, struggle to harness the necessary skills to identify how to improve their English or make use of their time effectively (2, 3, 4, 5, 16 & 18).

Time management is an area of difficulty for North Korean refugees studying English (2,3,4,5 & 18): Using English learning materials is incredibly time consuming for North Korean refugees due to their ability level compared to the content of the materials they must engage with. In Study 2, a participant mentions how it can take up to an hour to dissect a single page of English text when preparing for class, thus taking time away from other areas of study. Study 18 discusses how participants do not have the time to study English to the level they are required to in order to attend English classes whilst balancing other subjects and responsibilities. Unfamiliarity with testing procedures (3 & 18), textbook exercises (19), and a lack of self-studying and reflection skills (16) also contribute to challenges learning English as students struggle to know where/how they can improve.

### *Strained interactions with instructors:*

Strained interactions with English instructors appear in studies 2, 4 , 6, 9, 14, 24 and 26. Participants in study 24 highlight a desire to be taught by Korean teachers, who are often more understanding of their situations, compared to native teachers. Native teachers are difficult to communicate with as they typically cannot speak Korean and are often less informed on the backgrounds of North Korean refugees (2 & 14). This linguistic and cultural disconnect from native teachers results in further isolation as the students struggle to approach their teachers to ask for help as they lack the basic English communication skills to express themselves or explain their situation (2 & 14). However even Korean instructors with knowledge of North Korea can dismiss students' contributions to class discussions, as seen by the instructor in study 9 imposing a

hierarchy of knowledge by insinuating that he as the South Korean has more legitimate knowledge.

### *3. Systematic disadvantages:*

Systematic barriers prevent North Korean refugees from accessing the necessary help with English they require to close the skill gap between themselves and South Koreans (2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 14, 16, 19, & 26). Economic barriers, emotional hardships and lack of familial support are cited as disadvantages faced by North Korean refugees in their pursuit of English (3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 14, 19, & 26). Financial limitations prevent North Korean refugees from taking part in study abroad programmes (14) or accessing tutoring or private academies, as participants must prioritise working over studying (26). In study 3, a participant noted how having no family members with them in South Korea leaves them with no-one but themselves to rely on (Hwang & Jeon, 2020, p.97.) This lack of familial support not only adds to financial burdens but can be isolating. Finances are a source of stress for North Korean refugees in higher education, as many rely on scholarships which are dependent on their maintaining certain grades (19). English class in particular then becomes the centre of this stress as participants worry about their low English grades jeopardising their funding.

Furthermore, the residual impact of life in North Korea negatively impacts the adjustment to the English centricities of South Korea: study 16 concludes that the greater the influence of the closed-off nature of North Korea, the more unwelcome English was due to the influence of anti-American thought, and the higher the anxiety about settling in South Korea, the higher the difficulty of first encountering English. Additionally, in study 26, anxiety over their North Korean identities being discovered and fear of discrimination contributes to apprehension from family members towards allowing North Korean youth from unnecessary interaction with South Korean peers outside of school. Thus, contributing to restricted social interactions with South Koreans, as well as denying potential support systems.

### *Unconventional educational experiences:*

Studies 2, 3, 6, 11, 17, and 26 notes how a lack of consistent, formal education, irregular school attendance, and insufficient English education before and throughout the escape

process puts North Korean refugees further behind their South Korean peers. Furthermore, those hiding out in China do not attempt to receive education due to fear of being caught and repatriated back to North Korea, and prioritise learning Chinese over English as a survival tool (3 & 18).

#### *Linguistic Accessibility:*

A limited proficiency in South Korean language is an additional obstacle to being active users/learners of English (6, 7, 10 & 17). Difficulties understanding Korean study resources (6, 10, 7 & 17), and explanations of grammar terminology (10) due to limited proficiency in South Korean, contributes to North Korean refugees' difficulties with learning and improving their English.

#### *4. Motivation*

To cultivate a sense of belonging whilst navigating a new environment, participants across studies 1, 3, 7, 14, 17, and 24 experienced high levels of motivation to acquire the English needed to form relationships, expand cultural awareness, communicate, and gain admission to society.

Envisioning future goals is key to the integration process. Studies 4, 7, 8, 14, and 16 mention entering and graduating university and passing/understanding English classes as motivators to study English. Studies 14, 15, 17, 21 and 22 also stipulate career prospects as a motivating factor for engaging in English learning practices. Future goals, future self, and the potential of belonging to a future imagined community motivated English learning. However, the competitive nature of South Korean society cultivates motivation to learn English out of force (14 & 23). North Korean refugees have little choice but to conform to new linguistic requirements to secure their futures, with the motivation to study English “rooted in a feeling of necessity” (14) (Lee, 2017, p.21). A need for constant self-improvement is emphasised as participants “feel like if (they) don’t learn English” they “might fall behind” (23) (Park, 2023, p.90). Study 3 also notes participants struggled with impatience at the slow return on any evidence of their improvement, leading to low confidence and frustration.

### *5. Necessity of additional support*

Suggestions for pedagogy and policy reforms across studies highlight the necessity of additional support to improve the experiences of North Korean refugees in their learning of English and subsequent assimilation to South Korea.

In order to target improvements in the classroom and close the skill gap, North Korean refugee students' classes should be adjusted to appropriate levels of English (4). Studies suggest additional after school programmes (8 & 18), exchange programmes (2&14), one-on-one tutoring/mentoring (3, 6, 7, & 24), life-oriented content to promote general knowledge (10), customised/specialised curricula and textbooks/resources to increase engagement and understanding (3, 5, 7, 9, 16 & 18) as well as Korean language education to aid understanding of resources (17). To provide this specialist education, studies 5, 8, and 26 suggest additional teacher training to improve teaching methods, and develop greater sensitivity and understanding toward North Korean students' struggles.

Additionally, North Korean refugees lack awareness of government and education institutes offering additional support/resources (14). Thus, there should be increased efforts to promote support programmes, and greater financial support from local and government institutions for English language learning opportunities (2 & 14).

All of the above themes highlight important facets of North Korean refugees' attempts at assimilating to South Korean society and English learning/using experiences. However, an overarching theme which encompasses all is English as valuable and important in South Korea.

### *6. English as valuable and important in South Korea*

English has transformed from a foreign language into valuable cultural capital to improve social mobility: with an overemphasis of loan words (5, 10, 11, 14, 17, 20 & 21), English to enter and graduate University, and as job requirements forcing people to study (3, 12, 13, 14 & 23), securing a successful future rests on one's English ability, as seen across studies 7, 9, 12, 13, 14, 22, 23, 25, and 26.

English is at the heart of the perceived linguistic insufficiencies and educational challenges of North Korean refugees, preventing North Korean refugees from being able to comfortably converse with South Koreans, thus significantly hindering social interaction (5, 10, 11, 14, 17, 20, & 21). Essentially, English has been placed on a

pedestal. Across all included studies, the pursuit of English is relentless; competition is rife and North Koreans are left with little choice but to pursue English, fighting against systematic barriers in desperate need of additional support. If Park's (2011) promise of English was rejected, and English lost its prestige and level of expectation, difficulties of assimilation for North Korean refugees could be lessened. Regardless, the reality is thus: English is incredibly valuable and important in South Korean society, and cannot be neglected. This is demonstrated across the included studies. See appendix I for full evidence from each study via thematic coding.

In summary, this review identified 26 qualitative and mixed methods studies which primarily utilised interviews and surveys in order to extract data on the experiences of North Korean refugee participants. The participants largely consisted of university and school students, and were majority female (60%). Thematic analysis uncovered 6 themes; Identity, challenges within education settings, systematic disadvantages, motivation, and necessity for additional support all of which are encapsulated in the overarching theme of English as valuable and important in South Korea. These findings offered a comprehensive overview of the current research and synthesised recommendations for improvements for policy and pedagogy. However, methodological quality was lacking across the range of studies and thus must be addressed as a challenge when reflecting on findings and conclusions. In the following chapter, I will discuss how research questions were addressed, implications of findings, and assess the strengths and limitations of included literature and the systematic review process.

## **Chapter 4 – Discussion**

This chapter will analyse the findings in order to answer the research questions stipulated in chapter 1, as well as examine the strengths and limitations of the included studies and the review process. Additionally, this chapter will explore the implications of the findings, and the potential for future studies.

### *4.1 Main findings:*

The main findings of this review revolve around 6 key themes identified during thematic analysis; identity, challenges in educational settings, systematic disadvantages, motivation, the necessity of additional support, with the overarching theme of English as valuable and important in South Korea.

A diminished sense of belonging, a perceived inferiority complex, and the reconstruction and negotiation of identity among North Korean refugees due to linguistic illegitimacy is amplified across studies. Challenges in educational settings explore difficult class level content, inappropriate resources and materials, a lack of metacognitive skills to self-improve, and strained relationships with teachers and instructors. Systematic disadvantages address the economic and emotional hardships of North Korean refugees, the unbridgeable skill gap between North and South Koreans, unconventional educational experiences and poor South Korean language ability. The theme of motivation - motivation to integrate, future prospects as a motivator, and motivation by force - featured heavily. North Korean refugees reported high levels of motivation to improve their English but were impatient for results. All studies contributed to the theme of necessity for additional support, outlining a series of pedagogical and policy suggestions to ensure improvements for the successful assimilation of North Korean refugees. Overall, English is considered valuable and important in South Korea; the use of English loan words, English requirements in higher education and the job market, and the prestige of the language is impactful across all themes.

### *4.2 Answering the research questions:*

This section will examine the extent to which the findings of this review were able to successfully answer the questions posed in this review.

*1. What is the nature and extent of current research on the impact of English proficiency on North Korean refugees' ability to successfully assimilate into South Korean society?*

This review has explored the current research in accordance with the inclusion criteria for this review. Findings indicate that all included studies utilised qualitative elements of data collection and no studies were solely quantitative. The use of qualitative data, primarily sourced via interviews and surveys, allowed for the voices of North Korean refugees to be the focal point of each of these studies. The qualitative nature of the research not only provides depth and nuance to findings, but acknowledges the human element of experiences and phenomena (Dunwoodie, Macaulay, & Newman, 2022). Regarding quality, none of the studies included stood out as particularly methodologically strong, with the majority of sources lacking researcher positionality, or unambiguous ethical approval.

## 2. In current research, what role does English play in shaping identity among North Korean refugees?

The reconstruction of identity after displacement has been extensively studied (see Camino & Krulfeld, 2005; Smeekes, et al, 2017; Shahimi, Block & Alisic, 2024), determining that the post-settlement experiences of refugees can be negatively influenced by language barriers and acculturation issues (Smeekes, et al, 2017; Tip et al, 2019). Unsurprisingly, the themes of identity, reconstructing and negotiating identity, and perceived inferiority frequented included literature.

North Koreans are entering a country where they are considered to be ethnically homogenous, with the same historical, cultural and linguistic background. Although typically remaining connected with one's social or ethnic group can help mitigate the negative effects of identity loss as refugees in a new space (Beiser and Hou, 2006; Smeekes et al, 2017), the shared ethnic homogeneity of North and South Koreans does not provide a sense of belonging for North Koreans resettling in South Korea. Instead, negative perceptions of North Koreans heighten identity crises, leaving North Koreans reeling from a sudden devaluation of their personhood. The transition from a North Korean in North Korea to negotiating one's place in a new South Korean society led to participants experiencing a crisis of identity and ideological conflict. According to the findings, English plays a significant role in this identity crisis: the forced daily use of English not only directly contradicts the pure language ideology of North Korea, but further cemented their place in society as a marginalised group whose linguistic skills

were not valued. The use of the North Korean language combined with insufficient English separated North Korean refugees from South Koreans excluding them from social networks and forming relationships.

Seargeant (2009) talks of the language regulation scenario, the attempt to relate actual language practice to the normative standards of a person's environment: the act of conforming or diverging from the prescribed normal standards acts as a method of distinguishing between groups of people. Here the findings of this review emerge; North Koreans do not conform to the normative linguistic practices of their new environment, and thus are distinctive from South Koreans as soon as they use their linguistic repertoire. In this context, the participants in featured studies attempt to regulate their language by learning English as this is a significant feature of the normative standards of South Korean speech.

Language is not only a social means of communication, but is ideology loaded (Woolard & Stanlaw, 2020). North versus South Korean ideological confrontations go far beyond the conflict of communism and capitalism. As discussed in chapter one, the globalisation of South Korea(n) and its embracing of loan words, harshly contradicts the pure language ideology of North Korea (Terrell, 2007). Findings of this review demonstrate how this shifting perspective on the significance of loan words, and thus English, causes conflicts within the North Korean refugee community as their knowledge of North Korean over South Korean labels them illegitimate speakers of Korean who must relearn their own language. This can also lead to North Korean refugees feeling unsettled by the way the Korean language has evolved as a result of globalisation, conflicting from the propaganda-filled language policies of their upbringing

English as a factor in shaping identity also lies in the hierarchy and scaling of languages. Blommaert (2005), and Blommaert, Collins and Slembrouck (2005) discuss the spatial trajectories of language learning, claiming how transitioning across spaces influences the language practices of an individual causing them to rescale the hierarchy of their languages based on what is considered valuable/useful within this new space. Therefore, as discussed in study 13 (Lee, Han, & Hyun, 2016) 20 (Park, 2021), and 25 (Shin & Park, 2018), the North Korean variety of Korean not only separates North Koreans from South Koreans, but it is not valued in this new environment as much as English. English has replaced South Korean as the language of social capital, and displaces North Korean

further to the periphery. The rejection of their native dialect, in combination with the higher value of English, of which they typically have little knowledge, further marginalises North Korean refugees as inferior and undesirable, forcing them to reject many facets of their identities to conform to the linguistic and social practices of their new environment.

To combat these feelings of inferiority North Korean refugees must instead reconstruct new identities as members of this new society, or negotiate how to maintain their North Korean identity whilst also embracing English - something which they do not have a choice in if they wish to survive in South Korean society.

### 3. What difficulties are discussed in research for North Korean refugees with low proficiency in English when they are placed in situations which require English language knowledge?

The findings of this review highlight how often situations requiring English language proficiency appear in South Korea, and the diverse range of issues faced by North Korean refugees as a consequence. The sphere of English influence is both in and outside of the classroom, highlighting the shortcomings of the North Korean refugees' knowledge, and the institutional and societal failings for this community.

#### *Daily life:*

As explained throughout this review, English is frequently used in signage, shop names, and loan words, appearing on menus and advertisements (Kim, 2022c; Choi, 2023) and unfamiliarity with the meaning of these words shuts out a huge area of South Korean society. Combined with language variations, a lack of conceptual knowledge of facets of both South Korean and global society increases difficulties in assimilating. An example in study 6 by Jung et al (2014) showed students not knowing the word for 'grape' in English as they did not even know what a grape was at all, having not encountered any in North Korea. Additionally in study 11 by Lee (2016), the participant avoided meeting friends at coffee shops due to fears of being unable to understand the English menu. These encounters are discouraging to North Korean refugees by adding another barrier to social interactions, hindering integration (Lee, 2016).

#### *In the classroom:*

North Korean refugees are often able to access higher education via affirmative action admissions procedures, with lower grade requirements, often combined with financial aid/scholarships (Kim & Kim, 2023). On the surface this is a positive action to help mitigate the highly competitive nature of the typical university entry process. However, as English is a required course in order to graduate from university, and with many courses now being EMI (Choi, 2014), North Korean refugee students are not only ill prepared for these requirements, but are at a significant disadvantage compared to their South Korean classmates.

North Korean refugees struggle to understand class content, and lack the metacognitive skills to consolidate their learning, manage their time effectively, and engage in self-study, despite high motivations. Native teachers also leave students unable to effectively communicate with their teachers and explain their situations. Additionally, anxiety over their identities being discovered, combined with the skill gap between them and their South Korean peers, perpetuates feelings of shame, leaving them unable to ask for help or learn from their peers (Kim, 2016a). Findings also stipulate inappropriate resources/materials causing difficulties in English classrooms, as North Korean refugees struggle to understand content and the Korean terminology used for explanations.

#### *Successfully resettling and Interpersonal-relationships:*

Facilitating friendships for refugees can have long-term positive effects on well-being and successful resettlement (Haswell, 2025), yet struggles with English contribute to difficulties for North Koreans to form relationships within their new communities. Strained ability to communicate with South Korean peers, teachers, or even other North Koreans in a way that is comfortable and familiar can lead to loneliness, reinforcing social withdrawal (Kim et al, 2023). In study 21, the participant felt so inferior due to their status as a North Korean and struggled with his relationships and studies, that it led to suicidal ideation (Park, 2023). Despite desires to integrate and learn from South Koreans, prejudices towards North Koreans in South Korea, (see Hough & Bell, 2020), encourages a lack of understanding and sensitivity from South Koreans. This leaves North Koreans struggling to form relationships, impacting progress with their linguistic abilities, but also their ability to assimilate successfully.

#### 4. How can current research inform future policy suggestions to improve the integration process for North Korean refugees?

The findings expand on the role policy and pedagogy can play in improving integration. Systematic reviews have long been considered a useful practice for evidence gathering that can be effectively used by policy makers to inform decision making: Evidence based approaches to policy making are being increasingly utilised, with policy makers moving on from local studies, instead optimising the use of synthesised findings of systematic reviews (Lavis, 2009). As the findings of this review highlight the necessity for additional support via increased accessibility of support programmes, customised resources and curriculums as well as economic and psychological support, policy makers can consult this synthesised package of evidence to inform policy decisions.

The importance of English in South Korea is strongly acknowledged by participants across studies. Thus, if North Korean refugees wish to assimilate to South Korea, English must be utilised as the survival tool it is claimed to be, and in doing so rigorous pedagogical change needs to take place. The findings of this review outline the desires of North Korean refugees to improve their English, learning experiences, and the inadequacies of current curricula, resources, and levels of support. This outlines failings to policy makers, and identifies areas for improvement.

The rhetoric surrounding North Korea and North Koreans is largely focussed on the political landscape. Therefore, by highlighting the voices of North Korean refugees in this review and exploring issues pertinent to their everyday lives, the human element can be centred and solutions put forward to remedy the assimilation process.

#### *4.3. Fitting within existing literature:*

The findings of this review fit in with the current dialogue in literature surrounding the nature of South Korean society, the rise and prominence of English in South Korea, and the struggle of North Korean refugees. This rise of English has continued to grow since the 1990s, prompting a trend of English as a valuable but expected skill in South Korea. The studies in this review therefore, have provided a synthesis of rich opinions and experiences as to the role of English in South Korea from a fresh perspective as newcomers to this society, who have not grown up with English in the foreground of their everyday lives.

In light of the wider literature, the data synthesised in this review provides a fresh perspective towards issues that have long been explored in literature on South Korean society, education, and the role of English. By looking at the realities of the role of English in South Korea through the lens of a North Korean refugee, this data can help demonstrate the extent to which English can dominate in South Korea and what issues can arise because of this for North Korean refugees, as well as other migrants, or South Koreans with learning differences.

#### *4.4 Implications of findings:*

This section will explore the implications of the findings of this review; the issue of data reanalysis, and potential future research.

##### *4.4.1. Min and the reanalysis of data:*

As mentioned in the previous chapter, a series of studies by Park and colleagues (25, Shin & Park, 2019; 22, Park & Lee, 2022; 15, Lee & Park, 2025) utilised the same interview transcript from a participant known as ‘Min’ in order to further explore his views on his identity as a North Korean learner of English. Min provided rich data on his experiences transitioning from newcomer North Korean to coming to terms with the newfound necessity of English skills. He offered novel insights as a North Korean refugee who outwardly embraces his origins by not hiding his North Korean accent, using his story as a testament to his resilience and determination. Whilst it is expected that a rich source of data providing a rare perspective would be sought after, the reuse of the data by these additional studies raise questions as to the implications of the reanalysis of data.

When reanalysing data, researchers will pose new questions and use the data in new ways compared to the original study, such as investigating differing themes and topics (UK data service, 2025). This is done without the intention of undermining the analysis of the original study, only expanding on findings from a fresh perspective (UK data service, 2025). The original study explores themes of linguistic scaling: how the participants scale the importance and value of their languages (North Korean, South Korean, and English) and how this changes across time and spaces. The two additional studies look instead to Min’s transnational identity. This is distinct from the original findings, however there is a lot of overlap and similarities between the two newer studies, calling into question the purpose of publishing more than one additional study using this data. Although study 15 undergoes thematic analysis to answer explicit research questions whilst study 22 has no

clear research questions, the outcome of both offer little deviation: highlighting Min's transnational identity, how it transitioned over his time in North Korea, South Korea, and USA. Both studies offer similar L2 pedagogical recommendations; a renewed focus on transnational identities and personal experiences, and utilising students' goals and imagined futures as motivators.

Despite benefits to reanalysis, in an era of research oversaturation, researchers should be cautious as to what their studies will contribute to existing literature. Although studies 15 and 22 have slightly different intentions for their research, the bulk of the analysis results in overlapping findings and conclusions.

#### *4.4.2 Future research:*

Although the scope of potential research on such an under-represented, unique group of people is vast, the vulnerability and willingness of North Korean refugees impacts the type of research available to be undertaken. The included studies in this review focused primarily on the English language experiences of students, whilst adults in the workplace remained under-represented, with only study 3 by Hwang and Jeon (2020) exclusively looking into adult North Korean refugees. Future studies would benefit from exploring the experiences of this population, comparing the experiences of older North Korean refugees with the younger, and examining any fundamental differences and variables accounting for English usage experiences within age brackets and environments.

Furthermore, as a consequence of the pedagogical and policy reform suggestions derived from this review, future studies may produce useful findings by designing and implementing customised curricula and materials, such as the work of study 9 by Lee (2014). Results from a study investigating the impact of new curriculum/materials may encourage greater attention from the government to implement practical changes to the systematic education of North Korean refugees. This could also be transferable to other groups of refugees in terms of foreign language learning.

Finally, recurring themes of feelings of shame and inferiority are present across the findings. This refers to the way North Korean refugees feel about themselves throughout the resettling and English learning processes when comparing themselves with South Koreans. Questions remain however as to what South Koreans actually feel about the North Koreans they know and whether this inferior-superior relationship extends in both directions. It could be worth looking into this relationship in future research.

It must be acknowledged also, that a single systematic review is not sufficient in adequately and thoroughly informing policy makers in their decision making process (Boland, Cherry & Dickson, 2024). Therefore, it should be encouraged that further research including secondary systematic reviews of a similar nature be undertaken to provide policy makers with the sufficient foundation to make sound decisions and implement improvements.

#### *4.5. Generalisation of findings:*

To determine the generalisability of findings in a systematic review, the link between evidence and practice must be established (Kamper, 2020). An example of generalisability of evidence can be the applicability to alternative populations, but as this scope of research is specific to the North Korean refugee experience in South Korea, this would be an inappropriate measure of generalisability. Looking at the sample sizes within studies, there lacks large enough samples to confidently generalise to the entire North Korean refugee population, but the overwhelmingly homogenous results across the studies can offer us a sense of generalisability. However, as the primary data collection method across studies was interviews, the influence of the researcher within individual studies impacts the generalisation of findings. Each interview reported similar outcomes, yet the specificities of rapport and relationships between researchers and participants make these findings difficult to generalise. Nevertheless, generalising the results of this review, in order to facilitate changes to pedagogy and practice, could encourage positive changes for the North Korean refugee community regardless. Generalising findings may allow opportunity for the development and customisation of teaching and materials targeting specific areas of English language learning and the development of additional support programmes, all of which would not negatively impact the North Korean community.

#### *4.6 Strengths and Limitations of Included Literature:*

In terms of strengths, participants are provided with ample opportunity to share their experiences, offering sought after testimony which can help researchers more deeply understand the lived experiences of North Korean refugees. The use of semi-structured interviews facilitated nuanced and in-depth data which cannot be achieved by surveys alone. Furthermore, findings covered both practical and psychological difficulties with English, allowing for a wide scope of understanding on how the intersection of practical

English abilities impact North Korean refugees everyday lives, but also contributes to internal conflict. Included studies offer useful solutions to improving the wellbeing and education of North Korean refugees, based largely on the participants' own testimonies, thus inviting their voices to be heard beyond just the results of the studies. Due to such data, the literature in this review was able to successfully and thoroughly answer the research questions presented, positing itself within existing literature, and identifying areas for potential future research

However, there are limitations. Firstly, the majority of studies explored student experiences, with the adult working population of North Korean refugees only being explicitly included in 3 studies. Missing out on the testimony of a key demographic, who represent the future for North Korean refugee youth, could be considered a limitation of the included studies. Additionally, the majority of studies fell short when considering the implications and influences of their researcher: including positionality statements can increase the integrity and transparency of research, whilst mitigating bias. Without statements addressing the influence of researchers, readers must reconsider the credibility of results and conclusions. Furthermore, due to the vulnerable nature of the population, the lack of explicit ethical approval must be considered a limitation. Studies must undergo rigorous screening procedures in order to be published, and theses and dissertations must also undergo ethical clearance before research can commence. By not acknowledging these steps to ensure ethical data collection has taken place, the reader cannot be sure to what extent this has occurred.

#### *4.7 Strengths and limitations of the review process:*

The strengths of this review lie in the distinct research questions and development of a rigorous methodology. Following PRISMA (2020) guidelines, this review ensured transparent, replicable processes, utilising succinct eligibility criteria and concise search strings across a variety of databases. Replicability was further cemented by uploading a protocol to IDESR, allowing others to examine the intentions of this review and what was set out to be achieved from concept to completion.

Due to the nature of the topic, there is not a large abundance of research which utilises the personal testimonies of North Koreans themselves. Thus, by finding 26 eligible studies, this review has managed to find a well-rounded representative sample of studies. This is a testament to the strength of the search string at bringing forth relevant data. Furthermore,

citation chaining and the inclusion of grey literature assisted in solidifying the robustness of this review, ensuring no eligible studies were missed. One potentially relevant study by Lee (2020b) was unable to be retrieved for full text screening and not included in the review process. Based on the available abstract and title, this should not have impacted the overall findings of the review.

Efforts were made throughout the process to ensure rigorous inter-rating within the screening and selection phases. 10% of all studies were inter-rated during title and abstract screening to mitigate bias, offering credibility to the selection of sources derived from the search string. However, due to time constraints, a second inter-rater could not be sourced for quality appraisal inter-rating. Alternatively I undertook a secondary appraisal of 10% of the included studies, in order to compare with my original findings and check for consistency amongst results. The same method was utilised for secondary thematic screening of 10% of sources during the thematic coding process. However, no full-text screening or data extraction inter-rating occurred. Therefore, this review may be complicit in having some degree of subjectivity.

Whilst the use of English and Korean language sources allowed for access to the full scope of literature, I am not a native speaker of Korean. Therefore, errors in translations during data extraction should be acknowledged as a possibility and limitation.

Furthermore, there is debate in the academic community as to the appropriateness of qualitative data in systematic reviews, particularly surrounding the issue of how to accurately appraise and synthesise data (Dixon-Woods & Fitzpatrick, 2001). Quantitative studies and meta-analyses dominate systematic reviews with reputable methods/materials readily available for quality appraisal and data synthesis. Thus, whilst qualitative systematic reviews have begun establishing their place in the systematic review field, it still remains less explored and underdeveloped.

Another potential limitation is that inclusion criteria looked at North Korean refugees from any background and occupation. A more specific breakdown focusing on only one group of the population, such as only alternative school students, may garner interesting results and be able to address specific questions pertinent to different groups within the North Korean refugee community. This may allow for a more succinct and comparable synthesis of experiences.

In summary, this review has endeavoured to produce a systematic exploration of existing literature on North Korean refugees, successfully answering a set of research questions by drawing from narrative synthesis and thematic analysis. Implications of the findings of this systematic review highlight how North Korean refugees testimony is invaluable in the pursuit of increased awareness of their experiences and the shortcomings of the South Korean government and education system. The focus on the role of English is instrumental to understanding the linguistic landscape of South Korea and the influential nature of language in refugee resettlement and assimilation processes. For future studies, a renewed focus on specific groups within the North Korean refugee community who are underrepresented, such as adult workers, may produce valuable findings. Furthermore, the results of quality appraisals suggest methodological shortcomings, thus future studies should endeavour to be more rigorous in their research proceedings

## **Conclusion:**

This systematic review examined the intersection between English proficiency and North Korean refugees' experiences in South Korean society. Following PRISMA (2020) guidelines and a self-constructed protocol, this review identified 26 eligible studies of which 16 were qualitative, and 10 mixed methods. Participants were majority female school and university students. Distinctive themes of identity, challenges in educational settings, systematic disadvantages, motivation, the necessity of additional support, and English as valuable and important in South Korea emerged via thematic analysis.

The role of English in South Korean society, although acknowledged by North Korean refugees as integral for integration, communication and accessing community, contributed to perceptions of inferiority, and internal ideological and linguistic identity crises. Despite high motivations to learn English, systematic disadvantages such as economic and emotional hardships, and the residual impact of unconventional educational experiences extended an unbridgeable English skill gap between North and South Koreans. To close this gap, specialised/customisable curriculum and resources, teacher training, and increased access to support programmes is a necessary step in the right direction to improving English language use/learning experiences for North Korean refugees.

No included study was of high methodological quality, which consequently creates challenges to derive sound conclusions from this review. Efforts should be made in future studies to endeavour to ensure improved methodological rigor. This should include, but not be limited to, the use of explicit research questions, researcher positionality, and statements of explicit ethical approval processes. In terms of topics of future studies, the included studies selected majority student participants, neglecting other groups within the North Korean community such as adults in the workforce. Therefore, studies specifically looking at the experiences of this group could yield interesting results. It must also be acknowledged that due to time and resource constraints, a total absence of bias in this review cannot be guaranteed. More inter-rating is required at each stage in future projects to mitigate this, including additional inter-rating for data extraction and quality appraisals.

In summary, this systematic review produced a well-rounded, albeit somewhat methodologically flawed collection of studies to investigate the phenomenon of the

intersection of English proficiency and the experiences of North Korean refugees in South Korea. Utilising a systematic review, research questions were successfully answered using largely qualitative data collection methods which extracted rich and nuanced data via the voices of North Korean refugees. By gathering the available data from those willing to share their stories speaks to the benefits of a systematic review as a method for data collection and collaboration. Despite this, limitations present in both the review itself and the included studies leads to the conclusion that more rigorous research should be conducted in order to address the concerns outlined in this review.

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## **Appendices:**

### Appendix A: IDESR Protocol

**Title:** Language and identity: A systematic review on the intersection between English proficiency and North Korean refugees' experiences in South Korean society.

**Main contact/ corresponding author:** Liesl Buchan, University of Oxford, [liesl.buchan@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:liesl.buchan@education.ox.ac.uk), Department of Education, 15 Norham Gardens, Oxford, OX2 6PY.

### **Review Questions:**

- What is the nature and extent of current research on the impact of English proficiency on North Korean refugees' ability to successfully assimilate into South Korean society?
- In current research, what role does English play in shaping identity among North Korean refugees?
- What difficulties are discussed in research for North Korean refugees with low proficiency in English when they are placed in situations which require English language knowledge?
- How can current research inform future policy suggestions to improve the integration process for North Korean refugees?

**Rationale:** North Korean refugees are unique in their position as refugees in South Korea as despite the ethnic homogeneity of the Korean people across the peninsula, after 80 years of separation, the Korean language has evolved to the extent that the two groups struggle to communicate (Hamad, 2018). Literature has discussed how this language barrier has impacted the quality of life within South Korea, particularly pertaining to English loan words in the South Korean variation of language (Hamad, 2018; Ray, 2024). This review aims to identify how English proficiency impacts the experiences of North Korean society with the aim to make both pedagogical and policy recommendations as to the integration process. This research is relevant as highlighting the experiences of North Korean refugees and how their experiences can be improved is imperative for future generations of refugees as well as for future Korean reunification.

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**Inclusion/ Exclusion Criteria:**

| Criteria:                           | Include:                                                 | Exclude:                                             | Rationale:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. <b>Bibliographic information</b> | Studies with a full reference or sufficient information. | Studies with insufficient bibliographic information. | Studies which do not include adequate bibliographic information make the retrieval of works unviable.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 2. <b>Time Frame</b>                | Studies published from 1998 onwards                      | Studies from before 1998.                            | Ministry of Unification records on the number of North Korean refugees entering South Korea began in 1998 following the great famine in North Korea which saw an influx of refugees crossing into South Korea, and the 7 <sup>th</sup> national curriculum prioritising communicative English language teaching was integrated into classrooms by 1998. Thus 1998 offers a watershed for North |

|                              |                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                              |                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                    | Korean refugees beginning to interact with English in a South Korean context.                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>3. Publication status</b> | Both peer-reviewed, published literature, and Grey literature.                                     | Do not exclude studies based on publication status..                                                               | This review seeks to offset any potential publication bias by including a wider range of research, including grey literature.                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>4. Participants</b>       | North Korean refugees of any age, gender, or occupation who have experience living in South Korea. | North Koreans who are not in South Korea, other groups of refugees, or any other groups not North Korean refugees. | The review does not wish to discriminate from refugee experiences based on individual differences in order to establish a well-rounded picture of the role of English from multiple perspectives, but participants still residing in North Korea are not pertinent to the research questions proposed. |
| <b>5. Intervention</b>       | Studies where North Korean refugees are invited to share their experiences with                    | Studies focused primarily on the explicit improvement of linguistic skills                                         | The aim of this review is to look at the socioemotional outcomes of English                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                    | English in any context, including but not limited to identity, daily life and communication, education settings, professional life, and in relation to equal opportunities. (via interviews and surveys etc.)                                                                                                                                                                            | such as vocabulary and grammar, or the teaching/curriculum of English within North Korea.                                                                                                         | for North Korean refugees: focussing on their attitudes and feelings surrounding English, and not explicit, measurable linguistic abilities, although it must be acknowledged there will be some overlap. |
| <b>6. Outcomes</b> | Studies reporting the experiences of North Korean refugees in English language learning/use context including but not limited to college or high school education, the use of English loan words in the South Korean language in daily and/or professional life, as well as studies which use data to suggest pedagogical implementations to improve the experiences of the NK refugees. | Studies that focus exclusively on explicit linguistic outcomes such as grammar and prosody, and studies that do not include non-language outcomes such as satisfaction, happiness, engagement etc | Linguistic competence is not the focus of this review.                                                                                                                                                    |

|                    |                                                                      |                                |                                                                                            |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>7. Language</b> | Any relevant studies published in English and South Korean language. | Studies in any other language. | Unable to accurately translate alternative languages due to resource and time constraints. |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

### **Information Sources:**

The list of databases below were consulted for the collection of sources for this systematic review, stemming from linguistics, education, and multidisciplinary fields in order to succinctly cover the wide and varied range of the social sciences. All were accessed electronically via the University of Oxford's Bodleian Library subscription service. Google Scholar will also be consulted in order to uncover any grey literature not present in databases. Furthermore, forward and backward searching will be used in order to account for any papers missed during the initial search. After identifying key publications that fit the inclusion criteria, forwards searching will look for papers that have cited said key publications, while backwards searching looks to the bibliographies of key publications to find other relevant studies (Boland et al, 2024, p.84). This is done to ensure the full scope of relevant research has been identified. The databases are as follows:

Linguistics: Linguistics Collection (including LLBA)

Multidisciplinary: Web of Science Core Collection, Scopus

Education: Education Collection (including ERIC)

Grey Literature: via Google Scholar

Searches for Korean language sources will also be carried out in the following databases:

- DBpia
- Korean studies Information Service System (KISS)

Korean language sources will also be consulted in order to target any relevant Korean language studies or studies conducted in English but published in Korean journals (typically majority of titles and abstracts are translated into english, with the full body being in either Korean or english, depending on the Korean publisher requirements). As this author can read and understand Korean, no translator would be required for the analysis of Korean language sources. These databases were chosen as they provide comprehensive coverage of multidisciplinary studies from which this

review can draw relevant studies, thus endeavouring to maintain a systematic approach of searches to as much as possible.

### **Search Strategy:**

With the aid of a librarian from the University of Oxford Department of Education, a search string was devised in order to bring forth the most relevant studies, and tailored accordingly to bring forth the most relevant results. By keeping the search string specific and not too broad or abstract, we were able to address the diversity of language within the field, and keep at bay articles that would otherwise have been excluded. For example, initially research related to the study of English within North Korea dominated a large proportion of the results, but by specifying more by adding South Korea to the search string, many of these resources fell out of the pool of studies. As per boolean standards, key concepts were separated with AND and differing words within each concept were separated with OR.

The final boolean search string is as follows:

“North korean refugee\*” OR “North Korean student\*” OR “North Korean college student\*” OR “North Korean refugee student” AND English OR "Learning English" OR “English language” AND “South Korea” AND Language

For Korean databases, advanced searches are limited to a maximum of only five search terms with boolean operators. Thus, I devised simpler versions of the more detailed string above to cater to this restriction. Two different search strings will be implemented to search full-texts, one in English and the other in Korean. The search strings for Korean databases DBpia and KISS are as follows:

North Korean refugee OR North Korean refugee student OR North Korean Defector AND English AND Learning English

And

탈북자 OR 북한이탈 대학생 OR 탈북자대학생 OR 새터민 AND 영어

### **Data Management:**

Citation information and abstracts of all sources identified during the searches will be uploaded to systematic review management software, Rayann. Rayaan is a user-friendly, free to use software designed to extradiate relevant sources for systematic reviews (Ouzzani et al, 2016). All sources will be stored on Zotero, an open-source software that manages bibliographic data, and copies will be stored on Microsoft OneDrive, on the University of Oxford secure system. Furthermore, all sources included at each stage will be recorded in a Microsoft excel spreadsheet, detailing

reasons for inclusion or exclusion, and should a source pass the initial title screening but fail to meet the necessary criteria upon abstract or full text screening, reasons for subsequent exclusion will also be recorded in Microsoft Excel. Notes on data from final reports marked for inclusion will also be recorded in Microsoft Excel.

All evaluation will take place on a Samsung Galaxy Book3 360, Windows 11 Version 24H2 operating system.

Ouzzani, M., Hammady, H., Fedorowicz, Z., & Elmagarmid, A. (2016). Rayyan—A web and mobile app for systematic reviews. *Systematic Reviews*, 5(1), pp. 1–10.

### **Selection Process:**

After removing all duplicate sources, Rayaan will screen titles, and abstracts of all sources and select those which unambiguously comply with the criteria required of this systematic review. Upon completion of this initial screening, full texts will then be screened to ensure compatibility with the review. The final selection of included papers will then undergo both forwards and backwards citation chaining, until this author is satisfied that no further studies remain to be identified.

In order to ensure inter-rater reliability and minimise risk of bias of preconceived notions and opinions of the topic of interest, which could impact the systematic nature of the selection process, a second colleague familiar with the field of applied linguistics will also undertake screening of sources. Due to time and resource limitations, only 10% of sources will undergo secondary screening. Furthermore, as this colleague is unable to read Korean, only titles and abstracts will be included in secondary screening due to the inability to translate whole texts within the timeframe. If titles or abstracts of Korean language sources are not available in English, this author will translate accordingly.

Any disagreements during the screening process will be discussed between the two raters. To measure the level of inter-rater reliability when screening studies, a Kappa score will be utilised. In the field of education, a Kappa score of .70 (or 70%) is generally considered an acceptable level of variation (Multon and Coleman, 2018). In the event of an outstanding disagreement after discussion, a third reviewer will be consulted.

Multon, K. and Coleman, J. (2018). 'Inter-Rater Reliability'. In: Frey, B (ed) *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Educational Research, Measurement, and Evaluation*. SAGE Publications, California, pp. 863-865.

### **Data Collection Process:**

A google form was designed and implemented expressly for data extraction, with all responses exported to a Microsoft excel spreadsheet. In order to ensure consistency of data included across studies in the analysis, the data extraction form includes information pertinent to study overview, participants, intervention, outcomes, and any other relevant information to the review (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006).

Petticrew and Roberts (2006) *Systematic Reviews in the Social Sciences : A Practical Guide*.

Malden, Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell. Available at:

<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,shib&db=nlebk&AN=141287&authtype=shib&site=ehost-live> (Accessed: 9 March 2025).

### **Data Items:**

A prospective study by Park (2022) was used to formulate a data item extraction form on google forms, which will then be exported to Microsoft excel to collate all data items across sources.

Park, S.J (2022) 'From an alienated to an active English learner: The case of a North Korean refugee in South Korea', *System*, 107, pp. 1-11 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2022.102812>

General: Reference citation, Publication type, Document source

Study overview: Research questions, Study design, Data type, Study duration, Location of study, Language of publication

Participants: Number of participants, Age, Gender, Age when they defected, Duration of time living in South Korea, Current occupation, Level of education received in North Korea, Other relevant socio demographics.

Intervention: Description of intervention, Length of intervention, How were participants sourced/selected by the researcher(s)?, Baseline imbalances, Attrition - did any participants leave the study and why?

Outcomes: Descriptive outcomes, Time points measured - how many data collections took place and when? Conclusions drawn by study

### **Risk of bias/trustworthiness of individual studies:**

Based on the initial pilot search and nature of the research questions posed, it is anticipated that there will be an overwhelmingly qualitative outcome for data extraction. Thus, I will be using the

JBIChecklist for Qualitative Research as the critical appraisal tool for use in systematic reviews, designed to assess the methodological quality of a study and to determine the extent of the possibility of bias in design, conduct and analysis (JBIChecklist, 2020). The JBIChecklist format allows for succinct and efficient screening of research, with a simple layout and structure: it is comprised ten questions covering methodology, collection of data, results, positioning of author, participant inclusions, and ethics with a ‘yes’, ‘no’, ‘unclear’ or ‘not applicable’ checkbox option for each question and comment box to address inclusion or exclusion reasoning. In order to ensure inter-rater reliability within this review and minimise bias, a colleague will also appraise English language papers (Korean papers will not be included in inter-rater appraisals due to language barrier). By having more than one individual assess the quality of a piece of research this review aims to further minimise the risk of preconceived notions of this author impacting the results and minimise error during assessment (Boutron et al, 2022).

#### References:

Boutron I, Page M.J, Higgins J.P.T, Altman D.G, Lundh A, and Hróbjartsson A (2022) ‘Chapter 7: Considering bias and conflicts of interest among the included studies’. In: Higgins J.P.T, Thomas J, Chandler J, Cumpston M, Li T, Page M.J, and Welch V.A (eds). Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions version 6.5. Available from [www.training.cochrane.org/handbook](http://www.training.cochrane.org/handbook). (Accessed 10th March 2025).

JBIChecklist (2020), Critical Appraisal Tools. <https://jbi.global/critical-appraisal-tools> (Accessed 11th March 2025)

#### Data Synthesis:

A narrative synthesis will be adopted to analyse the data presented in the included studies, supplemented by corresponding tables and graphs as a visual aid of the extracted data. Furthermore, as the data will largely be purely qualitative, a meta-analysis of findings would not be appropriate in the study (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006) and thus will not be undertaken. The process of data synthesis will aim to follow Petticrew and Roberts’ (2006)’s three-step process:

- Organise studies into logical categories.
- Analyse findings within each category.
- Synthesise findings across all studies.

A narrative synthesis focuses on the storytelling of individual experiences, including how individuals use these experiences to shape their identity (Hecker and Kalpokos, 2025). This narrative synthesis will be followed up by a thematic synthesis in order to identify any overarching themes across all studies. By adopting both a narrative and thematic synthesis, the review will be in the best position to answer the outlined research questions via individual narratives as well as examining if any of the themes of these experiences are homogenous across studies and participants.

#### References:

Hecker, J. & Kalpokos, N. (2025) The Ultimate Guide to Qualitative Research - Part 2: Handling Qualitative Data: Narrative analysis in research. Available at: <https://atlasti.com/guides/qualitative-research-guide-part-2/narrative-research> (Accessed: 10th March 2025).

Petticrew, M. & Roberts, H. (2006) Systematic Reviews in the Social Sciences : A Practical Guide. Malden, Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/doi/book/10.1002/9780470754887> (Accessed: 9 March 2025).

#### Meta-biases:

In order to minimise language biases, this study will include studies in both English and Korean. As the author of this study can understand Korean and based on the nature of this topic and population of interest, the inclusion of Korean language source will allow the study to endeavour to explore a wide scope of research pertinent to this review. Due to the scale and time anticipated to complete this systematic review, studies in any additional languages will not be considered for inclusion, as per the criteria of this system review.

Furthermore, whilst electronic databases typically collate peer-reviewed pieces of academic research, this can lead to publication bias and a potentially limited scope of research. In order to avoid such bias, this systematic review will also include grey literature, primarily sourced from Google scholar, including theses and dissertations.

#### Confidence in cumulative evidence:

The quality of the cumulative evidence from this systematic review will be assessed in accordance with the AMSTAR-2 checklist.

Chapman, S.J., et al (2022). 'The AMSTAR-2 critical appraisal tool and editorial decision-making for systematic reviews: Retrospective, bibliometric study', *Learned Publishing*, 35(4), pp. 529-538. doi:<https://doi-org.ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/10.1002/leap.1463>

## Appendix B: Data Extraction Form Template

### General:

- Title of source
- Reference citation
- Publication type
- Document source

### Study overview:

- Research questions
- Study design
- Data type
- Study duration
- Location of study
- Language of publication

### Participants:

- Number of participants
- Age
- Gender
- Age when they defected from North Korea
- Duration of time living in South Korea
- Current occupation
- Level of education received in North Korea
- Other relevant socio demographics

### Intervention:

- Description of intervention/method of data collection
- Length of intervention//method of data collection
- How were participants sourced/selected by the researcher(s)?
- Baseline imbalances
- Attrition - did any participants leave the study and why?

Outcomes:

- Descriptive outcomes
- What themes are prevalent?
- Time points measured - how many data collections took place and when?
- Conclusions drawn by study

Appendix C: Example of Completed Data Extraction Form

|                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b><u>General:</u></b>                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Title of source                                | “I want to keep my North Korean accent”: Agency and identity in a North Korean defector’s transnational experience of learning English                                                                                                                                                          |
| Reference citation                             | Park, E. S., & Lee H. (2022). “I want to keep my North Korean accent”: Agency and identity in a North Korean defector’s transnational experience of learning English', TESOL Quarterly, 56(1), pp.19–40. doi: <a href="https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.3016">https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.3016</a> |
| Study author(s) contact details (if available) | eunsungp@sogang.ac.kr AND hlee@middlebury.edu                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Publication type                               | Journal Article                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Document source                                | Linguistics Collection                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b><u>Study overview:</u></b>                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Research Questions                             | 1.How has Min’s view of English and English learning changed in different transnational fields?<br><br>2. How has Min’s transnational experience shaped his agency and identities across time and space?                                                                                        |
| Study design                                   | Observational                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Data type                                      | Qualitative                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Study duration                                 | Three years – December 2016 - January 2019                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

|                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Language of publication                               | English                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b><u>Participants:</u></b>                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Number of participants                                | 1                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Age                                                   | 29 – (born 1990 - approx. 29 at T3)                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Gender                                                | Male                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Age when they defected from North Korea               | 24                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Duration of time living in South Korea                | 5 years at T3                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Current occupation                                    | University student                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Level of education received in North Korea            | Completed 2 years of university                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Other relevant socio demographics                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Defected alone</li> <li>- a family member had become involved in a political situation which placed him under unfavourable circumstances with the North Korean regime</li> </ul> |
| <b><u>Intervention/method of data collection:</u></b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Description of intervention/method of data collection | Three semi-structured interviews, 1 x phone call, 2 x video calls via KakaoTalk (A popular Korean messaging app)                                                                                                          |
| Length of intervention/ data collection               | <p>December 2016 - 60 minutes - Phone call</p> <p>June 2018 - 37 minutes - Voice call via KakaoTalk</p> <p>January 2019 - 67 minutes - Voice call via KakaoTalk</p>                                                       |

|                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| How were participants sourced/selected by the researcher(s)? | Personal connections - Participant was a part of a separate study by one of the authors, built up a rapport with him and was asked to participate in some additional interviews for this study.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Baseline imbalances                                          | N/A                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Attrition - did any participants leave the study and why?    | No.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b><u>Outcomes:</u></b>                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Descriptive outcomes                                         | <p>Interviews revealed the following about Min's transformation on his attitudes towards English:</p> <p>Min demonstrates dynamic and self-contradictory views of English due to transnational experience studying the language in North Korea, South Korea + USA.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In North Korea – he never felt the need to study it, nor did he see any opportunity to actually use English - “a pure waste of time.” p.30</li> <li>- In South Korea - “English is very important [in South Korea]. “You need to be good at English to realize your dreams here.” P.30</li> <li>- Came to realise the importance of English and its status as an essential tool and cultural asset.in South Korean society - could help him “realize his personal desires and achieve professional success.” p.31</li> <li>- USA - realised that good English skills were instrumental to communicate and work with people around the globe - views English as a</li> </ul> |

|                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                       | <p>valuable linguistic resource that can enable him to “transcend the physical spaces he has lived in and enter transnational social fields where he has never been before”. p.32</p> <p>- “I believe that the fact that I came from North Korea is my strength” p.33 – he does not hide his North Korea identity despite being aware of the negative perceptions in SK. Hopes to use his English skills to further his career to become an influential politician to reunite Korea. Has an imagined identity—that of someone who will work for North Koreans one day when the two countries are reunited—is situated in his imagined community, which transcends “territorial, cultural, or national boundaries”. p.34</p> |
| What themes are prevalent?                                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Multifaceted views of English and English learning,</li> <li>- North Korean identity as cultural capital, - - Agency and investment for an ideal future self.</li> <li>- English as a cultural asset</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Time points measured - how many data collections took place and when? | Three - December 2016, June 2018, January 2019                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Conclusions drawn by study                                            | <p>Examined significant shifts in Min’s perceptions and attitudes toward English across different learning locations (North Korea, South Korea, and the USA) – “Min came to view his own native North Korean accent as an important linguistic capital as he solidified his dream of becoming a powerful person who could contribute to the reunification of Korea.” p.36</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

|  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|--|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | <p>Pedagogical implications for English or L2 language programmes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- should promote a focus on transnational identities and life experiences of North Korean refugees to encourage them to relate their learning to their own lives</li> <li>- "Important for scholars and educators to dispel stereotyped assumptions about refugee students as marginalized and deficient learners; instead, educators must seek to adopt asset-based and strengths-based approaches"</li> </ul> <p>p.37</p> <p>"Shift the focus from a deficit-oriented to a more asset-oriented discourse and pedagogy" by focusing on career aspirations and motivations. p.37</p> |
|--|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

## JBI CRITICAL APPRAISAL CHECKLIST FOR QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Reviewer\_\_\_\_\_Date\_\_\_\_\_

Author:\_\_\_\_\_Year\_\_\_\_\_Record Number\_\_\_\_\_

|                                                                                                                                                    | Yes                      | No                       | Unclear                  | Not<br>applicable        |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Is there congruity between the stated philosophical perspective and the research methodology?                                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the research question or objectives?                                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the methods used to collect data?                                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the representation and analysis of data?                                                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the interpretation of results?                                                          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. Is there a statement locating the researcher culturally or theoretically?                                                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. Is the influence of the researcher on the research, and vice- versa, addressed?                                                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. Are participants, and their voices, adequately represented?                                                                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. Is the research ethical according to current criteria or, for recent studies, and is there evidence of ethical approval by an appropriate body? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

10. Do the conclusions drawn in the research report flow from the analysis, or interpretation, of the data? ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

## DISCUSSION OF CRITICAL APPRAISAL CRITERIA

*How to cite: Lockwood C, Munn Z, Porritt K. Qualitative research synthesis: methodological guidance for systematic reviewers utilizing meta-aggregation. Int J Evid Based Healthc. 2015;13(3):179–187.*

### 1. Congruity between the stated philosophical perspective and the research methodology

Does the report clearly state the philosophical or theoretical premises on which the study is based? Does the report clearly state the methodological approach adopted on which the study is based? Is there congruence between the two? For example:

A report may state that the study adopted a critical perspective and participatory action research methodology was followed. Here there is congruence between a critical view (focusing on knowledge arising out of critique, action and reflection) and action research (an approach that focuses on firstly working with groups to reflect on issues or practices, then considering how they could be different; then acting to create a change; and finally identifying new knowledge arising out of the action taken). However, a report may state that the study adopted an interpretive perspective and used survey methodology. Here there is incongruence between an interpretive view (focusing on knowledge arising out of studying what phenomena mean to individuals or groups) and surveys (an approach that focuses on asking standard questions to a defined study population); a report may state that the study was qualitative or used qualitative methodology (such statements do not demonstrate rigour in design) or make no statement on philosophical orientation or methodology.

### 2. Congruity between the research methodology and the research question or objectives

Is the study methodology appropriate for addressing the research question? For example: A report may state that the research question was to seek understandings of the meaning of pain in a group of people with rheumatoid arthritis and that a phenomenological approach was taken. Here, there is congruity between this question and the methodology. A report may state that the research question was to establish the effects of counselling on the severity of

pain experience and that an ethnographic approach was pursued. A question that tries to establish cause-and effect cannot be addressed by using an ethnographic approach (as ethnography sets out to develop understandings of cultural practices) and thus, this would be incongruent.

**3. Congruity between the research methodology and the methods used to collect data**

Are the data collection methods appropriate to the methodology? For example:

A report may state that the study pursued a phenomenological approach and data was collected through phenomenological interviews. There is congruence between the methodology and data collection; a report may state that the study pursued a phenomenological approach and data was collected through a postal questionnaire. There is incongruence between the methodology and data collection here as phenomenology seeks to elicit rich descriptions of the experience of a phenomena that cannot be achieved through seeking written responses to standardized questions.

**4. Congruity between the research methodology and the representation and analysis of data**

Are the data analyzed and represented in ways that are congruent with the stated methodological position? For example:

A report may state that the study pursued a phenomenological approach to explore people's experience of grief by asking participants to describe their experiences of grief. If the text generated from asking these questions is searched to establish the meaning of grief to participants, and the meanings of all participants are included in the report findings, then this represents congruity; the same report may, however, focus only on those meanings that were common to all participants and discard single reported meanings. This would not be appropriate in phenomenological work.

**5. There is congruence between the research methodology and the interpretation of results**

Are the results interpreted in ways that are appropriate to the methodology? For example:

A report may state that the study pursued a phenomenological approach to explore people's experience of facial disfigurement and the results are used to inform practitioners about accommodating individual differences in care. There is congruence between the methodology and this approach to interpretation; a report may state that the study pursued a phenomenological approach to explore people's experience of facial disfigurement and the results are used to generate practice checklists for assessment. There is incongruence

between the methodology and this approach to interpretation as phenomenology seeks to understand the meaning of a phenomenon for the study participants and cannot be interpreted to suggest that this can be generalized to total populations to a degree where standardized assessments will have relevance across a population.

**6. Locating the researcher culturally or theoretically**

Are the beliefs and values, and their potential influence on the study declared? For example:

The researcher plays a substantial role in the qualitative research process and it is important, in appraising evidence that is generated in this way, to know the researcher's cultural and theoretical orientation. A high quality report will include a statement that clarifies this.

**7. Influence of the researcher on the research, and vice-versa, is addressed**

Is the potential for the researcher to influence the study and for the potential of the research process itself to influence the researcher and her/his interpretations acknowledged and addressed? For example:

Is the relationship between the researcher and the study participants addressed? Does the researcher critically examine her/his own role and potential influence during data collection? Is it reported how the researcher responded to events that arose during the study?

**8. Representation of participants and their voices**

Generally, reports should provide illustrations from the data to show the basis of their conclusions and to ensure that participants are represented in the report.

**9. Ethical approval by an appropriate body**

A statement on the ethical approval process followed should be in the report.

**10. Relationship of conclusions to analysis, or interpretation of the data**

This criterion concerns the relationship between the findings reported and the views or words of study participants. In appraising a paper, appraisers seek to satisfy themselves that the conclusions drawn by the research are based on the data collected; data being the text generated through observation, interviews or other processes.

## Appendix E: Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool Checklist Template

The figure originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright.

## Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) - Version 2018 User Guide:

### Qualitative Studies:

#### 1.1. Is the qualitative approach appropriate to answer the research question?

Explanations: The qualitative approach used in a study (see non-exhaustive list on the left side of this table) should be appropriate for the research question and problem. For example, the use of a grounded theory approach should address the development of a theory and ethnography should study human cultures and societies. This criterion was considered important to add in the MMAT since there is only one category of criteria for qualitative studies (compared to three for quantitative studies).

#### 1.2. Are the qualitative data collection methods adequate to address the research question?

Explanations: This criterion is related to data collection method, including data sources (e.g., archives, documents), used to address the research question. To judge this criterion, consider whether the method of data collection (e.g., in depth interviews and/or group interviews, and/or observations) and the form of the data (e.g., tape recording, video material, diary, photo, and/or field notes) are adequate. Also, clear justifications are needed when data collection methods are modified during the study.

#### 1.3. Are the findings adequately derived from the data?

Explanations: This criterion is related to the data analysis used. Several data analysis methods have been developed and their use depends on the research question and qualitative approach. For example, open, axial and selective coding is often associated with grounded theory, and within- and cross-case analysis is often seen in case study.

#### 1.4. Is the interpretation of results sufficiently substantiated by data?

Explanations: The interpretation of results should be supported by the data collected. For example, the quotes provided to justify the themes should be adequate.

#### 1.5. Is there coherence between qualitative data sources, collection, analysis and interpretation?

Explanations: There should be clear links between data sources, collection, analysis and interpretation.

## Quantitative – Descriptive:

### 4.1. Is the sampling strategy relevant to address the research question?

Explanations: Sampling strategy refers to the way the sample was selected. There are two main categories of sampling strategies: probability sampling (involve random selection) and non-probability sampling. Depending on the research question, probability sampling might be preferable. Nonprobability sampling does not provide equal chance of being selected. To judge this criterion, consider whether the source of sample is relevant to the target population; a clear justification of the sample frame used is provided; or the sampling procedure is adequate.

### 4.2. Is the sample representative of the target population?

Explanations: There should be a match between respondents and the target population. Indicators of representativeness include: clear description of the target population and of the sample (such as respective sizes and inclusion and exclusion criteria), reasons why certain eligible individuals chose not to participate, and any attempts to achieve a sample of participants that represents the target population.

### 4.3. Are the measurements appropriate?

Explanations: Indicators of appropriate measurements include: the variables are clearly defined and accurately measured, the measurements are justified and appropriate for answering the research question; the measurements reflect what they are supposed to measure; validated and reliability tested measures of the outcome of interest are used, variables are measured using ‘gold standard’, or questionnaires are pre-tested prior to data collection.

### 4.4. Is the risk of nonresponse bias low?

Explanations: Nonresponse bias consists of “an error of nonobservation reflecting an unsuccessful attempt to obtain the desired information from an eligible unit.” (Federal Committee on Statistical Methodology, 2001, p. 6). To judge this criterion, consider whether the respondents and nonrespondents are different on the variable of interest. This information might not always be reported in a paper. Some indicators of low nonresponse bias can be considered such as a low nonresponse rate, reasons for nonresponse (e.g., noncontacts vs. refusals), and statistical compensation for nonresponse (e.g., imputation). The nonresponse bias is might not be pertinent for case series and case report. This criterion could be adapted. For instance, complete data on the cases might be important to consider in these designs.

### 4.5. Is the statistical analysis appropriate to answer the research question?

Explanations: The statistical analyses used should be clearly stated and justified in order to judge if they are appropriate for the design and research question, and if any problems with data analysis limited the interpretation of the results.

## Mixed Methods Studies

5.1. Is there an adequate rationale for using a mixed methods design to address the research question?

Explanations: The reasons for conducting a mixed methods study should be clearly explained. Several reasons can be invoked such as to enhance or build upon qualitative findings with quantitative results and vice versa; to provide a comprehensive and complete understanding of a phenomenon or to develop and test instruments (Bryman, 2006).

5.2. Are the different components of the study effectively integrated to answer the research question?

Explanations: Integration is a core component of mixed methods research and is defined as the “explicit interrelating of the quantitative and qualitative component in a mixed methods study” (Plano Clark and Ivankova, 2015, p. 40). Look for information on how qualitative and quantitative phases, results, and data were integrated (Pluye et al., 2018). For instance, how data gathered by both research methods was brought together to form a complete picture (e.g., joint displays) and when integration occurred (e.g., during the data collection-analysis or/and during the interpretation of qualitative and quantitative results).

5.3. Are the outputs of the integration of qualitative and quantitative components adequately interpreted?

Explanations: This criterion is related to meta-inference, which is defined as the overall interpretations derived from integrating qualitative and quantitative findings (Teddle and Tashakkori, 2009). Meta-inference occurs during the interpretation of the findings from the integration of the qualitative and quantitative components and shows the added value of conducting a mixed methods study rather than having two separate studies.

5.4. Are divergences and inconsistencies between quantitative and qualitative results adequately addressed?

Explanations: When integrating the findings from the qualitative and quantitative components, divergences and inconsistencies (also called conflicts, contradictions, discordances, discrepancies, and dissonances) can be found. It is not sufficient to only report the divergences; they need to be explained. Different strategies to address the divergences have been suggested such as reconciliation, initiation, bracketing and exclusion (Pluye et al., 2009b). Rate this criterion ‘Yes’ if there is no divergence.

5.5. Do the different components of the study adhere to the quality criteria of each tradition of the methods involved?

Explanations: The quality of the qualitative and quantitative components should be individually appraised to ensure that no important threats to trustworthiness are present. To appraise 5.5, use criteria for the qualitative component (1.1 to 1.5), and the appropriate criteria for the quantitative component (2.1 to 2.5, or 3.1 to 3.5, or 4.1 to 4.5). The quality of both components should be high for the mixed methods study to be considered of good quality. The premise is that the overall quality of a mixed methods study cannot exceed the quality of its weakest component. For example, if the quantitative component is rated high quality and the qualitative component is rated low quality, the overall rating for this criterion will be of low quality

Appendix F: Completed Reference List of Included Studies

| ID | Study                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | Bok, E., & Cho, Y. (2018). 'Case Study on One North Korean Defector College Student's Journey to Learning English in South Korea', <i>Modern English Education</i> , 19(2), pp. 63–74. doi: <a href="https://doi.org/10.18095/meeso.2018.19.2.07">https://doi.org/10.18095/meeso.2018.19.2.07</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 2  | Choi, Y.H. (2014). 'English Education Context of North Korean Defectors in South Korean Universities: Issues and Policies', <i>Journal of Research in Curriculum Instruction</i> , 18(4), pp. 869 - 892. doi:10.24231/rici.2014.18.4.869                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 3  | Hwang, M.H., & Jeon, J.H. (2020). 'Dae-an-hak-gyo seong-in tal-bug-min yeong-eo-hak-seub-ja-deul-ui yeong-eo-hak-seub gyeong-heom yeon-gu:geun-geo-i-lon-eul jung-sim-eu-lo' [A study on English learning experience of adult North Korean refugees: Focusing on grounded theory], <i>English Language Teaching</i> , 32(3), pp. 87-115. doi: <a href="https://doi.org/10.17936/pkelt.2020.32.3.5">10.17936/pkelt.2020.32.3.5</a>                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 4  | Jo, M.W, (2019) 'Nam-han-ui yeong-eo-gyo-yuk hyeon-hwang-e dae-han tal-buk-dae-hak-saeng-deul-ui in-sik go-cha' [A Study on a Perception of the Current Status of English Education of North Korean Defectors in the South Korean Universities.], <i>The Journal of Modern British &amp; American Language and Literature</i> , 37(1), pp. 223-256. doi: <a href="http://dx.doi.org/10.21084/jmball.2019.02.37.1.223">http://dx.doi.org/10.21084/jmball.2019.02.37.1.223</a>                                                                                                                        |
| 5  | Jung, S.R, & Im, H.W (2009) 'Buk-han-i-tal-ju-min-deul-ui gwan-jeom-e-seo bon nam-buk-han-e-seo-ui yeong-eo hak-seub' [North Korean Refugees' Experiences of Learning English in South Korea], <i>Secondary Education Research</i> , 57(3), pp.85-111. doi:10.25152 ser.2009.57.3.85                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| 6  | Jung, C.K, Min, H.G., Park, Y.H, & Kim, S.Y. (2014) 'Buk-han-i-tal-go-deung-hak-saeng yeong-eo-hak-seub sil-tae-jo-sa mich ji-won-bang-an tam-saeg' [Exploring the Reality of the English Language Learning and Supporting System: A Study on North Korean Refugee Youth at the High School Level in South Korea], <i>Korea Institute for Curriculum and Evaluation</i> , pp.1-134. Available at: <a href="https://www.kice.re.kr/resrchBoard/view.do?seq=42930&amp;s=kice&amp;m=030102">https://www.kice.re.kr/resrchBoard/view.do?seq=42930&amp;s=kice&amp;m=030102</a> (Accessed 20th June 2025) |
| 7  | Kim, S.H. (2013). Han-guk-nae sae-teo-min dae-hak-saeng-deul-ui yeong-eo hak-seub-yeon-gu [A Study on the English Learning of Saeturmin Students in a Korean University], Master's Thesis, Chongshin University. Available at: <a href="http://www.riss.kr/link?id=T13232321">http://www.riss.kr/link?id=T13232321</a> (Accessed 20 <sup>th</sup> June 2025)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| 8  | Kim, M.H (2016) 'A North Korean Defector's Journey Through the Identity-Transformation Process', <i>Journal of Language, Identity &amp; Education</i> , 15(1), pp.3–16. doi: <a href="http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2015.1090764">http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2015.1090764</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

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| 9  | Lee, M.W (2014) ‘A participatory EFL curriculum for the marginalized: The case of North Korean refugee students in South Korea’, <i>System</i> , 47(1), pp.1-11. doi: <a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2014.09.013">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2014.09.013</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 10 | Lee, Hyun-joo. (2015) ‘Tal-buk hak-saeng-deul-ui yeong-eo-gyo-yug jeung-jin bang-an yeon-gu: yeong-eo-gyo-yug hyeon-jang-ui sil-je-wa gae-seon-bang-hyang’, [Improvement of English learning for North Korean refugee students in South Korea: English educational contexts and issues.], <i>Modern English Education</i> , 16(3), pp.231-250. doi: <a href="http://dx.doi.org/10.18095/meeso.2015.16.3.11">http://dx.doi.org/10.18095/meeso.2015.16.3.11</a>                                                                     |
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| 12 | Lee, M. W., & Ahn, S.-H. G. (2016) 'Relocation in space, language, and identity: Dislocated North Korean undergraduates in South Korean universities.', <i>Language &amp; Communication</i> , 47, pp.43-52. doi: <a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2015.11.005">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2015.11.005</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
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| 24 | Shin, M.J. (2019) <i>Sae-teo-min dae-hak-saeng-deul-ui yeong-eo hak-seub dong-gi mich dae-hak gyo-yang yeong-eo su-eob man-jog-do jo-sa</i> [A Study on the Motivation of English Learning and College English Class Satisfaction of North Korea Refugee students]. Masters Dissertation. Yonsei University. Available at: <a href="https://www.riss.kr/link?id=T15301282">https://www.riss.kr/link?id=T15301282</a> (Accessed 21st June 2025) |
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Appendix G: General study Characteristics

| Study ID | Publication type | Data source                               | Study design  | Data type     | Method of data collection | Study duration (include start date, end date, duration if possible) | Location of study  | Language of Publication |
|----------|------------------|-------------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|
| 1        | Journal article  | Korean Studies Information Service System | Observational | Qualitative   | Interviews                | September 2015 - January 2016.                                      | South Korea        | English                 |
| 2        | Journal article  | DBpia                                     | Observational | Qualitative   | Interviews                | unclear - interviews took place in 2012, study published 2014       | Seoul, South Korea | English                 |
| 3        | Journal article  | Korean studies information service system | Observational | Qualitative   | Interviews                | October-December 2019                                               | South Korea        | Korean                  |
| 4        | Journal article  | Korean studies information                | Observational | Mixed methods | Questionnaire/Surveys     | Feb 19th - March 16th 2018 - 25 days                                | South Korea        | Korean                  |

|           |                      |                                                       |               |               |                                                                                                    |                           |             |         |
|-----------|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------|---------|
|           |                      | service system                                        |               |               |                                                                                                    |                           |             |         |
| <b>5</b>  | Journal article      | Korean studies information service system             | Observational | Mixed methods | Interviews and surveys                                                                             | Unknown                   | South Korea | Korean  |
| <b>6</b>  | Full report          | Korean studies information service system             | Observational | Mixed methods | Interviews, surveys, and observation                                                               | August-October 2014       | South Korea | Korean  |
| <b>7</b>  | Masters Dissertation | DBpia                                                 | Observational | Mixed methods | Interviews and Surveys                                                                             | October to December 2012  | South Korea | Korean  |
| <b>8</b>  | Journal article      | Taylor and Francis - Identified via Citation chaining | Observational | Qualitative   | Interviews and reflective journals                                                                 | September - December 2012 | South Korea | English |
| <b>9</b>  | Journal article      | Web of Science                                        | Observational | Mixed Methods | Audio recordings of class observations, interviews, field notes, + implemented curriculum, surveys | March - June 2013         | South Korea | English |
| <b>10</b> | Journal article      | Korean studies information service system             | Observational | Qualitative   | Interviews                                                                                         | October 2014 - March 2015 | South Korea | Korean  |

|    |                      |                                                                              |               |               |                                                           |                                                                                                                                     |             |         |
|----|----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|---------|
| 11 | Journal article      | Scopus                                                                       | Observational | Qualitative   | Interviews and language autobiographies                   | Unknown                                                                                                                             | South Korea | English |
| 12 | Journal article      | Linguistics Collection                                                       | Observational | Qualitative   | Interviews, audio recordings, and written journal entries | Minimum 12 weeks, exact dates unknown                                                                                               | South Korea | English |
| 13 | Journal article      | Scopus                                                                       | Observational | Mixed methods | Interviews and language tracking form                     | Unknown                                                                                                                             | South Korea | English |
| 14 | Journal article      | The English Teachers Association in Korea - identified via citation chaining | Observational | Qualitative   | Interviews                                                | Initial study was conducted in December of 2013 to February of 2014 - follow-up study was conducted in January and February of 2015 | South Korea | English |
| 15 | Journal article      | Web of Science                                                               | Observational | Qualitative   | Interviews                                                | December 2016 - December 2021                                                                                                       | South Korea | English |
| 16 | Masters Dissertation | RISS - identified via citation chaining                                      | Observational | Mixed Methods | Surveys and Interviews                                    | survey 6 <sup>th</sup> -21 <sup>st</sup> May 2008, interviews 16 <sup>th</sup> -22 <sup>nd</sup> May 2008                           | South Korea | Korean  |
| 17 | Journal article      | DBpia                                                                        | Observational | Qualitative   | Interviews and motigraphs                                 | Unknown                                                                                                                             | South Korea | Korean  |

|    |                      |                                             |               |               |                                                                                                             |                                            |                             |         |
|----|----------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------|
| 18 | Journal article      | Korean studies information service system   | Observational | Mixed Methods | Questionnaire and Interviews                                                                                | 2013 – no specific dates available         | South Korea                 | Korean  |
| 19 | Journal article      | Education Collection                        | Observational | Mixed Methods | Surveys and Interviews                                                                                      | N/A                                        | Seoul, South Korea          | English |
| 20 | Journal article      | Education Collection                        | Observational | Qualitative   | Interviews                                                                                                  | N/A                                        | South Korea                 | English |
| 21 | Journal article      | Scopus                                      | Observational | Qualitative   | Interviews and reflective journals                                                                          | January - March 2017                       | South Korea                 | English |
| 22 | Journal article      | Linguistics collection                      | Observational | Qualitative   | Interviews                                                                                                  | Three years – December 2016 - January 2019 | South Korea                 | English |
| 23 | Doctoral Thesis      | ProQuest - identified via citation chaining | Ethnographic  | Qualitative   | Interviews, reflective journals, visual learner histories, & participant observations in English classrooms | August 2021 - January 2022                 | South Korea                 | English |
| 24 | Masters Dissertation | DBpia                                       | Observational | Mixed Methods | Survey - including long form open-ended answers                                                             | September 2018- April 2019                 | South Korea                 | Korean  |
| 25 | Journal article      | Linguistics collection                      | Observational | Qualitative   | Interviews                                                                                                  | N/A                                        | Los Angeles, USA and Seoul, | English |

|           |                 |       |               |             |            |                         |             |       |
|-----------|-----------------|-------|---------------|-------------|------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------|
|           |                 |       |               |             |            |                         | South Korea |       |
| <b>26</b> | Journal article | DBpia | Observational | Qualitative | Interviews | October - November 2011 | South Korea | Korea |

Appendix H: Participant characteristics:

| <b>Study ID</b> | <b>Number of Participants</b>                                                                   | <b>Age (what is the age range and number of participants at each age?)</b> | <b>Gender (include gender breakdowns where available)</b> | <b>Age when defecting (at what age did the participant leave North Korea)</b> | <b>Duration of time living in South Korea</b> | <b>Current occupation (e.g. High school student, University student, in the workforce)</b> | <b>Level of education received in North Korea</b>        | <b>Other relevant sociodemographics</b>                          |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1</b>        | 1 focal participant (supplemented with tutor interviews - number of tutors interviewed unknown) | 23                                                                         | Female                                                    | 17                                                                            | Approx..6 years                               | University student                                                                         | Unknown                                                  | N/A                                                              |
| <b>2</b>        | 11                                                                                              | 21-32 years old (21, 22, 30, 17, 21, 26, 32, 25, 25, 23, 30 yrs)           | M n= 4, F n=7                                             | Exact age unknown - left 1996-2008                                            | arrived 2005-2009                             | University students                                                                        | Range from Primary school 2nd year - University 2nd year | N/A                                                              |
| <b>3</b>        | 6 (supplemented with 2 English teachers)                                                        | 19-32 years old                                                            | No gender breakdowns for North Korean                     | Unavailable                                                                   | Arrived 2017-2019                             | Students at alternative school                                                             | Unknown                                                  | All participants had been in China from min. 3 months - 15 years |

|          |                                          |                                                                                                            |                                                     |                                 |                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                |                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                 |
|----------|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|          |                                          |                                                                                                            | Refugees - majority female, teachers F n=2          |                                 |                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                |                                                                                          | 4 participants were very fluent Chinese speakers<br>All had studied English for less than a year before defecting, and between 1 -3 years in SK |
| <b>4</b> | 50                                       | 20s n=29 58%, 30s n=10 20%, 40s n=11 22%                                                                   | F n= 36 72%, M n=14 28%                             | Unavailable                     | <5 years n=11 22%, 5-10yrs n=29 58%, +10yrs n=10 20%                                                                               | University students                                                                            | Primary school n=8 16%, Middle/High school equivalents n=42 84%                          | Stays in third countries before entering SK<br>- YES n=32 64%<br>- NO n=18 36%                                                                  |
| <b>5</b> | 5 (interviews), 105 (surveys)            | interviews - 17-37 years old (17, 27, 33, 36, 37 yrs old), surveys - 10s n=11, 20s n=71, 30s n=10, 40s n=7 | interviews - M n=1, F n=4, surveys - M n=52, F n=48 | Unavailable                     | interview - approx. 2-3 yrs (2y n=4, 3yrs n=1) survey less than 1 yr n=37, 1-2yrs n=10, 2-3yrs n=9, 3-5yrs n=10, +5 yrs n=302-3yrs | school student n=1 university student n=1 preparing for work n=2 workforce - in production n=1 | Graduated secondary school n=2, high school dropout n=1, Vocational college graduate n=2 | Married n=3, Single n=2                                                                                                                         |
| <b>6</b> | 29 -survey 12 - interviews (+9 teachers) | Surveys students - born 1994-                                                                              | F n=13, M n=16 surveys, interviewees                | Surveys unknown - entered South | Surveys 6 years on average                                                                                                         | High School students                                                                           | Unavailable                                                                              | Surveyed participants: Did learn English in NK                                                                                                  |

|   |                                                                                              |                                                                                |                              |                                                                                    |                                                        |                     |                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|---|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|   | 1 -observations<br><br>unsure if there is an overlap if the interviewees also did the survey | 1998, approx. 16-20 years approx. Interview students 1995-98, average of 18yrs | unknown , F n=1 observations | Korea between 2000-2013, Interviewees unknown entered Sout Korea between 1997-2011 | between 2000-2013, Interviewees 3-17 years (1997-2011) |                     |                                                                             | <p>N=11 YES - 8 since first grade of middle school, 1 since third grade of elementary school</p> <p>N=18 NO - majority cited being too young or not going to school, of the four skills; n=3 all four, n=3 reading, speaking, writing, n=2 reading + writing, n=2 reading, n=1 writing</p> <p>Interviewees - general/mainstream schools n=12, alternative schools n=3</p> |
| 7 | 13                                                                                           | Unknown                                                                        | F n= 9 M n= 4                | Unknown                                                                            | 1-11 years (arrived 2001-2011)                         | University students | primary school dropout n=1, high school dropouts n=4, graduated high school | <p>Received English education in NK n=6</p> <p>Did not receive English education in NK n= 7</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

|           |                                                                                                   |                          |                    |              |                         |                                                                     |                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                         |
|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|--------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|           |                                                                                                   |                          |                    |              |                         |                                                                     | n= 6,<br>university<br>student n=1,<br>South<br>Korean<br>education<br>only (night<br>school) n=1 |                                                                                                                         |
| <b>8</b>  | 1                                                                                                 | 33 years old             | Female             | 22 years old | 11 years                | University<br>Student (final<br>year)                               | Attended<br>High School                                                                           | - Divorced with one<br>daughter<br>- No English<br>learning experience<br>in North Korea -<br>learnt Russian<br>instead |
| <b>9</b>  | 13                                                                                                | average age<br>20.8 yrs. | M n=6, F n=7       | Unavailable  | Unavailable             | Students at an<br>alternative<br>school.                            | Unknown                                                                                           | N/A                                                                                                                     |
| <b>10</b> | 5 (supplemented<br>with 5 teachers)                                                               | Unavailable              | M n=3, F n=2       | Unavailable  | 2 yrs n=3, 3<br>yrs n=2 | High School<br>students - fifth<br>grade n=3 and<br>sixth grade n=2 | Unknown                                                                                           | All spent time in<br>China after fleeing<br>NK (one participant<br>also spent time in<br>Thailand).                     |
| <b>11</b> | Phase 1 -<br>language<br>autobiographies<br>- n= 27<br>Phase 2 -<br>individual<br>interviews - n= | Average age<br>21 yrs    | M n= 9, F n=<br>18 | Unavailable  | 1-7 years               | High school<br>students                                             | Unknown                                                                                           | N/A                                                                                                                     |

|           |                                                                      |                                                             |                  |                                                                                                       |                                          |                                                                       |                                                                    |                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|           | 10 (selected from phase 1)                                           |                                                             |                  |                                                                                                       |                                          |                                                                       |                                                                    |                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>12</b> | 4 North Korean (supplemented with 4 South Korean volunteers tutors). | 20-23 (20 n=2, 21 n=1, 23 n=1)                              | M n=2, F n=2     | Unavailable                                                                                           | 3 yr - 5yr 8mo.                          | University students                                                   | Unavailable                                                        | N/A                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>13</b> | 11                                                                   | 20 - 25 (20 n = 2, 21 n= 3, 22 n=2, 23 n=2, 24 n=1, 25 n=1) | F n=8, M n=3     | Unavailable                                                                                           | 3yrs - 6yrs 11mo                         | High school students                                                  | Unknown                                                            | All spent time in China before arrival in South Korea (9 mo.- 4yrs).                                                                      |
| <b>14</b> | 15                                                                   | early 20s n=7 , late 20s n=8                                | F n= 4 , M n= 11 | unknown - likely teen s- or early/late twenties at time of study, based on when they left North Korea | Unavailable                              | University students                                                   | Elementary school n=8, Elementary, middle and high school n=7      | Many participants who attended Elementary school only did so intermittently, skipping classes due to economic struggles.                  |
| <b>15</b> | 1                                                                    | 26-31 (over the course of the study                         | Male             | 23                                                                                                    | 2-7 years (over the course of the study) | Graduated a South Korean university 2021 - current occupation unknown | Completed primary and secondary school and two years of university | - Completed Summer English study programme in Los Angeles (two months)<br>- Was an Exchange student, University of Missouri (nine Months) |

|           |                             |                                    |                |             |                                 |                                                      |                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                  |
|-----------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------|-------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>16</b> | 35                          | 16-26 years old- average .20 years | F n=23 M n=12  | Unavailable | 1mo-7years-average. 2yrs2mo.    | Alternative school students                          | Uneducated n=3, peoples school dropouts n=15, peoples school graduates n=2, high school drop outs n=9, high school graduate n=1. Unanswered n=2 | N/A                                                              |
| <b>17</b> | 2                           | 15 and 19 years old                | M n=1, F n=1   | Unavailable | approx. 4 years & 6 years       | Middle school student n=1<br>High school student n=1 | Unknown                                                                                                                                         | Both born in China to (at least one) North Korean refugee parent |
| <b>18</b> | 31 (18 only for interviews) | Average 23 years old               | F n=16, M n=15 | Unavailable | average 7 years (2-15yrs range) | University student                                   | primary school n=9, secondary school n=15, university n=5, none n=2                                                                             | Experience learning English -YES n=18, NO n=13                   |

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| <b>19</b> | 32 | mean age 23<br>(19-30 yrs)         | M n=16, F<br>n=16 | mean age<br>15.4 yrs                                                                                       | mean age at<br>entrance to<br>South Korea<br>18.5 (7-27<br>yrs)  | University<br>student                                                                                                            | Secondary<br>school<br>(75%),<br>Tertiary ed.<br>(5%)<br>N/A (6%)            | N/A                                                                                                                              |
| <b>20</b> | 4  | 29-49 (29, 34,<br>45, 49 yrs)      | M n=2, F n=2      | not explicitly<br>stated, based<br>on duration in<br>South Korea<br>likely range<br>between 21-<br>43 yrs. | 3-8 yrs (3,<br>3.5, 6, 8yrs)                                     | University<br>student n=2<br>Graduate student<br>n=1<br>Fabric company<br>worker n=1                                             | High School<br>n=1, 5-year<br>university<br>n=2, 2-year<br>University<br>n=1 | Christian n=1                                                                                                                    |
| <b>21</b> | 1  | 32                                 | Male              | left 2001 aged<br>16                                                                                       | 11 years at<br>time of study<br>(entered SK<br>2006 aged<br>21). | prospective<br>university<br>student (dropped<br>out in 2012,<br>readmitted and<br>awaiting<br>commencement<br>at time of study) | secondary<br>school<br>(unknown if<br>completed)                             | Hometown was the<br>northernmost town<br>of North Korea,<br>where resources for<br>both living and<br>education were<br>limited. |
| <b>22</b> | 1  | Born 1990 -<br>approx. 29 at<br>T3 | Male              | 24                                                                                                         | 5 years by<br>T3                                                 | University<br>student                                                                                                            | Completed 2<br>years of<br>university                                        | - Defected alone<br>- a family member<br>had become<br>involved in a<br>political situation                                      |

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|           |   |                                                          |              |                                                            |                               |                    |                                                                                                                   | which placed him under unfavourable circumstances with the North Korean regime                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>23</b> | 8 | 25-31 years old (25 n=3, 26 n=2, 27 n=1, 30 n=1, 31 n=1) | F n=7, M n=1 | 7-25 years old (7, 11, 17, 18, 19, 24 (n=2), 25 years old) | entered 2010-2020 (1-11years) | University student | unknown/not specified n=3, no public education n=1, elementary school n=1, middle school grad n=1, University n=3 | English ed. in NK. (n2 received none)<br><br>Erin- 5 years (3 years in elementary school and 2 years in middle school)<br>Gina- 6 years (6 years in middle school)<br>Hannah- 6 years (5 years in middle school and 1 year in nursing school)<br>Ian- 8 years (4 years in middle school and 4 years in university)<br>Jun-e 6 years (6 years in middle school)<br>Sue- 7 years (3 years in middle school and 4 years in university) |

|           |    |                              |                 |             |                                               |                                                          |                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
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| <b>24</b> | 81 | Average of 24.8yrs           | F n=62 , M n=19 | Unavailable | 2-12 years old (2006-2016)                    | University student                                       | primary school n=17, middle school n=54, other n=10                           | <p>N=59 72.8% attended university in Seoul<br/>N=14 17.3% in a different big city/metropolitan area<br/>N=18 9.9% other</p> <p>2nd year n26<br/>3rd year n28<br/>4th year n27</p> <p>Experience learning English pre university – n=44<br/>YES, n=37 NO<br/>Experience learning a third language (not English) – n=37<br/>YES, n=44 NO</p> |
| <b>25</b> | 4  | 25-42 (25, 32, 41, 42 years) | M n=3, F n=1    | Unavailable | range of 5-12 yrs.<br>(Approx.5, 9, 9, 12yr ) | University student n=1<br>workforce n = 1<br>unknown n=2 | secondary school n=2,<br>2 years of university n=1, 3 years of university n=1 | Participants A and B - married couple, left South Korean in 2009, moved to USA.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |

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| 26 | 7 (supplemented with 1 teacher) | Average 16.5 years, 16 n=2, 17 n=5 | F n= 3, M n= 4 | Unavailable | 1-5 years | Middle school students | No education n=1, primary school n=1 1st grade, middle school n=1, 2nd yr n=2, primary school 3rd grade, primary school 4th grade n=2 | N/A |
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## Appendix I: Thematic Coding

| Study ID | Codes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Evidence from the text                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
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| 1        | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Inferiority</li> <li>2. Identity</li> <li>3. Motivation/importance of English</li> <li>4. Belonging</li> </ol>                                                                                                   | <p>(1) - "Feeling "miserable and ashamed," she started to see herself as different from her South Korean peers." p.69<br/> "...low sense of belonging and positioning herself in opposition to her South Korean peers undermined her self-confidence" p.69<br/> "I liked being with the people from North Korea together. I did not feel inferiority because we were all similar" p.70</p> <p>(2) "...insufficient English competency also led Mihee to position herself in opposition to her South Korean peers and as a result, Mihee marginalized herself from the English learning community." p.69<br/> "She was conscious of the differences between her and her classmates not only in terms of their English proficiency but also their Korean accents." p.69</p> <p>(3) "Mihee had a desire to belong to her new country and to establish a stable life in a new environment, and this motivated her to study to enter the university, which in her mind would help her to get a decent job." p.68<br/> "...became gradually aware of the importance of English in South Korea." p.68<br/> "...fully aware that she needed to have a certain level of English proficiency to graduate and seek further education...shifted to playing the role of a student who takes English learning seriously." p.69</p> <p>(4) "...learning English was not only about learning the language, but building a sense of belonging and thus, being able to position herself as aligned with her South Korean peers" p.70</p> |
| 2        | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Difficulty understanding materials</li> <li>2. Time consuming efforts</li> <li>3. Lack of systematic education experience</li> <li>4. Strained interactions with teachers</li> <li>5. Lack of support</li> </ol> | <p>(1) "...expressed that the level of reading proficiency to comprehend required textbooks was far advanced than theirs" p.879<br/> "...difficulties in comprehending the content of lectures and textbooks"<br/> "I don't know the English jargons used in the field of Social Statistics. There are a lot of terminologies in English. .... Without previewing, it's impossible to understand the major EMCs." p.882</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |

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|   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <p>(2) "...reading speed is noticeably slower than their peers; as a result, they cannot manage a vast amount of reading" p.880<br/> "My reviewing speed was so slow that I couldn't catch up at all." p.880<br/> "It takes about 30 minutes to an hour to read a single page... Since there is so much that I don't know, it takes a lot of time. So, reviewing was really hard" p.882</p> <p>(3) "...did not highly evaluate the effectiveness of the education in North Korea and pointed out a problem with missing classes. " p.875<br/> "...lack consistent and systematic pre-university English education because of their diverse English educational background" p.877</p> <p>(4) " It's extremely difficult to understand even a single word stated by native professors." p.880<br/> "...difficulties of comprehending American English in that North Korean students are exposed to British English," p.880<br/> "Korean instructors have a better background knowledge of the English level or educational and social adjustment problems of NKDs, they are more lenient in grades...native instructors often seem insensitive to their needs or do not provide detailed explanation of unknown words since they lack understanding of NKDs." p.881<br/> "...expressed that most of their professors and official academic advisors or department chairs have no or little information on their background such as their English barriers and educational challenges" p.883</p> <p>(5) "Interviewees indicated that none of their universities has any special concern for them nor an official university-wide administrative system for them including orientation, academic staff, mentoring programs, and financial support, especially for their English problems" p.883<br/> "There are no specific aids for NKDs only." p.883</p> |
| 3 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lack of systematic education</li> <li>2. Economic and emotional insecurities</li> <li>3. Difficulties understanding materials and class content</li> <li>4. Lack of basics</li> </ol> | <p>(1) "...did not have sufficient English language learning experiences while living in North Korea and China." p.95<br/> "...most of the interviewees were unable to travel freely and had to hide their identities, making it impossible for them to attend school. " p.95</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

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|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Lacking Metacognitive strategies</li> <li>6. Motivation to integrate</li> <li>7. Low confidence and Impatience</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(2) "Living conditions are often insufficient, making it difficult for them to take the time necessary to learn English." p.96<br/> "I can't go to school because I don't have enough money" p.96<br/> "It's kind of hard for me here at school because I'm independent and I have to do everything by myself" p.97</li> <li>(3) "English learning materials on the market do not compensate for the language gap experienced by North Korean defectors " p.98<br/> "The difficulty of implementing level-specific classes and the lack of appropriate English textbooks for North Korean refugees have contributed to the difficulties of adult North Korean English learners." p.97</li> <li>(4) "...they (North Korean refugees) complained of a lack of grammar knowledge, difficulty memorizing vocabulary, confusion over the alphabet, and lack of knowledge of pronunciation rules" p.98<br/> "When I saw the Korean kids, I thought, "I'm not good at studying" and I thought, "I wonder if I can keep up with them because they're born here and I have to learn from scratch." p.105</li> <li>(5) "...lack time management strategies for planning and reflecting on their learning, assessing their English language proficiency, and effectively implementing English language learning," p.99</li> <li>(6) "Integration into South Korean society through English was identified as a very important motivator for the interviewees." p.100<br/> "They learn English in the hope of smooth integration into South Korean society, to understand English words that appear intermittently in Korean, to speak English as well as South Koreans, or to hide the fact that they are North Korean refugees" p.101</li> <li>(7) "...perceived English as a big mountain to overcome in the process of settling in South Korean society, but their English proficiency did not improve as quickly as they hoped, and the difficulties they felt in the process of learning English led to impatience" p.104<br/> "I'm in a hurry to learn as fast as I can, I want to speak English like them so badly" p.104<br/> "...low confidence in English due to frequent failures and lack of success in the English learning process. " p.104</li> </ul> |
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| 4 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Motivation to improve</li> <li>2. Difficulties with materials</li> <li>3. Interactions with Teachers</li> <li>4. Time management</li> <li>5. Adjusting to South Korea</li> <li>6. Systematic Disadvantages</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) "North Korean university students are highly motivated to improve their English language skills" p.240<br/>"Despite the challenges they face in English classes, they have a positive and motivated attitude toward learning English, 87.8% of them study English for more than one hour a day, and 96% of them use English language programs to improve their English." p.250</li> <li>(2) "English classes were found to be one of the biggest difficulties that North Korean university students face in adjusting to school life. Among the difficulties encountered in English classes, 'The quality of schoolwork is high' was the highest with an average of 3.66, followed by 'Difficulty understanding the content of the textbook' with an average of 3.48" p.250</li> <li>(3) "English classes were found to be one of the biggest difficulties that North Korean university students face in adjusting to school life...Difficulty understanding the teacher's explanation' with an average of 3.40." p.250</li> <li>(4) "“Difficulty having enough time' with an average of 3.40 showed that North Korean university students complained of a lack of time to actually study English” p.244</li> <li>(5) "Difficulty in English classes' was found to be one of the most important obstacles for North Korean university students in adjusting to South Korea." p.248</li> <li>(6) "North Korean university students mentioned financial support such as tuition fees and educational expenses so that they can attend the same university as South Korean university students." p.249<br/>"They are not satisfied with the lack of levelled classes" p.251</li> </ol> |
| 5 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Necessity of English</li> <li>2. Economic and Time constraints</li> <li>3. Gap in abilities/lack of basics</li> <li>4. Systematic Disadvantages</li> </ol>                                                            | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) "...felt uncomfortable because they had trouble communicating with two South Koreans because of the foreign words that were frequently used in everyday conversations in South Korea" p.98</li> <li>(2) "I wish I could go to school and learn as a professional, but I can't, and I have to earn money and work, so I have to think of other things while I'm earning money, and that's all I can do, and I feel so sorry for myself." p.100<br/>"Due to the immediate job preparation (Kim Myung-ae, Choi Young-nam) and economic activities (Lee Jin-cheol), the time and economic resources that can be invested in learning English were limited." p.106</li> <li>(3) "They say its basic English but it's not basic. The level of difficulty is no joke. I don't know the words and I can't interpret them." p.99</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |

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|   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <p>" Interviewees described the difficulty of keeping up with the gap between the English they learned in the North and the English required in the South, while also recognizing the differences in English proficiency between themselves and their South Korean counterparts. They saw their confidence in their English language skills decline". p.99</p> <p>(4) "North Korean refugees were able to learn English from high school and middle school, while they were very conscious of the fact that South Koreans could receive English education from a very young age." p.99</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 6 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Disruption to education</li> <li>2. Lack of basics</li> <li>3. South Korean language ability</li> <li>4. Anxiety over identity being uncovered</li> <li>5. Interactions with teachers</li> <li>6. Economic disadvantages</li> </ol> | <p>(1) "They had gaps in learning ranging from as little as six months to as long as three years, and had travelled through China, Thailand, and elsewhere during their defection." p.76</p> <p>(2) "Students felt that they were very lacking in basic English knowledge such as words, idioms, and grammar required in South Korean high school English education" p.80<br/> "There are endless questions to ask. In the case of Student 10, she said that she feels 'depressed and sleepy' just thinking about learning English, and that her lack of basic English skills affects her English learning and class participation." p.80</p> <p>(3) " South Korean language is a major obstacle to learning English." p.81<br/> " For North Korean high school students, adjusting to language in South Korea is like learning a foreign language." p.81<br/> " Another English teacher complained that she had to explain the word "grape" before explaining the English word "grape" because some students in her English class did not know what a grape was." p.81</p> <p>(4) "North Korean youth do not have to disclose their identity at school if they do not want to. Several of the students we interviewed described being teased by South Korean children when they were younger for being from North Korea or being bullied by South Korean children whenever North Korea used force in the news." pp.86-87</p> |

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|  |  | <p>" These students found it difficult to concentrate in class because they were worried about their identity being exposed, and in the end, these incidents interfered with their English learning at school." p.87</p> <p>(5) "Most English teachers are not even aware of the existence of North Korean high school students in their English classes, making it difficult for them to help the students with their difficulties." p.87</p> <p>(6) " Economic condition was an environmental factor that contributed to their decision to become English-speaking students." p.83</p> <p>"...difficult for parents to support their children's English learning. Even when scholarships and study support programs for North Korean refugee youth are available, they are not enough for these students to get the private education they really want." p.84</p> <p>"I don't attend private tutoring... I want to go to 00 academy, but since we have no money, my mum said to quit" p.84</p> |
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| 7 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Motivation/Importance of English</li> <li>2. Metacognitive strategies</li> <li>3. Belonging</li> <li>4. South Korean Language Ability</li> <li>5. Economic hardship</li> <li>6. English for adaption to South Korea</li> <li>7. Lack of basics</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) " 7 out of 13 North Korean defector university students (53.8%) are enthusiastic about learning English and are studying it relatively diligently. This indicates that they perceive English as an important issue for adapting to Korean society and for their future participation as members of Korean society after university graduation." p.39</li> <li>(2) " Three students were asked why they were not studying diligently, and they all stated that they recognised the necessity of English but did not know how to study effectively." p.39<br/>"I want to study hard but don't know how" p.40</li> <li>(3) "Upon defecting many chose alternative schools where they could feel more comfortable and interact with peers of similar ages." p.74</li> <li>(4) "Interviews revealed that not only English, but also Korean is a major obstacle for ordinary defectors and college students to adapt to Korean society." p.64</li> <li>(5) "The majority of North Korean defectors are in their 40s and 50s, who have already passed the school-age period, making their chances of entering university relatively low. Additionally, a significant number of younger individuals are unable to attend university due to financial and environmental difficulties." p.62</li> <li>(6) "...expressed concerns that English would pose a major challenge when seeking employment and in the workplace... faced significant difficulties adapting to South Korea's social environment, which has relatively high exposure to English." p.61</li> <li>(7) "They expressed the opinion that they 'lack of basic knowledge, so don't understanding anything'. They also stated that these reasons make it easy for them to give up learning English and cause them to feel frustrated." p.35<br/>"Since this person learnt Russian, they don't even know A, B, C." p.65</li> </ol> |
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| 8 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Resisting change</li> <li>2. Identity transformation/negotiation/ importance of English</li> <li>3. Inferiority</li> <li>4. Motivation</li> </ol> | <p>(1) "One of the biggest challenges was to deal with tension from the mismatch between a persistent desire to maintain her original self as a North Korean and a practical need to develop a new self that would live in accordance with new social values" p.9<br/> "Even though she was physically "transplanted" into South Korea, her values, perspectives, and beliefs that had been cultivated in North Korea still persisted and exerted heavy influence on her. She was aware of the need to negotiate for a new identity, but she resisted" p.9<br/> "Why should I learn English? I can live without knowing English at all!" p.10</p> <p>(2) "...Started to gradually negotiate for her identity as a somewhat active learner" p.11<br/> "I came to realize that English is such an important language nowadays that cannot be ignored." p.13</p> <p>(3) " She always felt inferior and miserable in the English class" p.11<br/> " Though I was much older, I was like a baby in the class. They all seemed very good at English, but I wasn't. " p.11<br/> "I was ashamed of myself" p.11<br/> "...Unequal relations of power between Young Ja and her classmates. Once she entered the field of English learning, she could not resist the marginalized, subordinate identity imposed upon her, and so she built up defence walls behind which she could hide, so as to reduce her trauma" p.11</p> <p>(4) " I want to pass this English course. This is the most important thing at this moment." p.13<br/> " As I have been given free English lessons, I want to pay it back to somebody else in need." p.13</p> |
| 9 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Motivation to learn/importance of English</li> <li>2. Marginalised/inferior knowledge</li> <li>3. Interactions with teachers</li> </ol>           | <p>(1) " Perceived English as the most crucial subject" p.5<br/> "Students were "ready to" take part in the class actively if the curriculum itself was a little more favourable to them like this participatory curriculum." p.8</p> <p>(2) "...North Korea-related knowledge was neglected and how (s)he was positioned as "the powerless" or "the marginalized" in the discourse" p.7</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |

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|    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <p>(3) "OK, OK, be quiet, students! Be quite!" insufficient understanding of his students" p.7</p> <p>" The teacher refused to learn new knowledge imposing the unseen hierarchy between "their" knowledge and "his" knowledge" p.7</p> <p>"the North Korean refugee students' lack of the ability was something inferior and anything he did in the classroom could be justified because he was basically helping them" p.7</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 10 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lack of cultural understanding/general knowledge</li> <li>2. English to integrate</li> <li>3. Marginalisation/Inferior learner</li> <li>4. South Korean language ability</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) "North Korean students have a very poor understanding of contemporary Korean culture, which is defined as the current cultural phenomenon in South Korea in terms of its closeness to Western culture, the general use of English vocabulary, and the culture and education of their peer groups...North Korean students are not familiar with the basic units of measurement, children's fairy tales, and general knowledge of South Korean society." p.241</li> <li>(2) "...need to learn English that is directly relevant to their lives in order to be able to cope and use it practically in their new society as they adjust to South Korea." p.241</li> <li>"One of my friends said I want to be able to order a burger at Burger King or McDonald's properly, because I don't know what kind of burger it is, and it has a lot of weird English words on it, so I want to be able to see that and order it properly." p.241</li> <li>(3) "English proficiency gap between North Korean and South Korean students is an area for further research, it also suggests that the educational gap and psychological burden felt by North Korean students has the potential to lead to further marginalization in public education" p.242</li> <li>"Some people at school make fun of me because I don't speak English well" p.243</li> <li>" North Korean students' understanding of grammatical terminology is often lacking in the higher grades." p.243</li> <li>(4) "The decline in grammar and reading comprehension skills, which are important components of South Korean schooling, is directly related to North Korean students' ability to learn English in school." p.243</li> </ol> |

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| 11 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Desire to conceal identity/fear of discrimination</li> <li>2. English to integrate</li> <li>3. Disruption to education</li> <li>4. Disparity between linguistic needs and levels of support</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) "She was aware that the North Korean accent was negatively stereotyped in the South Korean society (Lee 2014; Lee and Ahn 2016) and thus she wanted to conceal her North Korean identity" p.747</li> <li>(2) "...had to learn a great deal of English vocabulary that is frequently used in daily life without a Korean translation" p.747<br/> "I was afraid of ordering coffee or juice that had English names" p.747<br/> "...ignorance of these words hindered the North Korean refugee students' integration into the South Korean society because their normal daily communication was impaired" p.749<br/> "...desire to learn loanwords from English and Sino-Korean words was grounded in their fundamental wish to be integrated into the society. In other words, their primary concern was to be recognized as members of the South Korean society, and their needs were directly related to these concerns" p.750</li> <li>(3) "Students tended to perceive the academic hardship that they experienced at school as part of a general adjustment problem caused by their prolonged discontinuation of schooling " p.749</li> <li>(4) "... (Hanwons) helped them join the South Korean society but did not fully prepare them to live "normal" South Korean lives." p.748<br/> "I wished I could have learned more of them (loan words) here." p.748<br/> "... were not aware of their eligibility for KSL programs " p.749</li> </ol> |
| 12 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. inferior North Korean/Superior South Korean</li> <li>2. Importance of English</li> </ol>                                                                                                               | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) "unconditional agreement of the North Korean students with their South Korean peers...did not make any negative comments about statements made by the South Korean students" pg46<br/> ""hiding and agreeing" phenomenon"pg47<br/> "South Korean students "praised" their North Korean peers' South Korean-like pronunciation...reflected underlying scales between South and North Koreans putting the latter in the peripheral position" pg48<br/> "I didn't talk about it more because I thought it was not important here" he considered "his knowledge" related to North Korea to be "not important" reflected</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

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|    |                                                                                                                                                         | <p>his scaling process...tried to be a legitimate member of the South Korean community (Barab and Duffy, 2000) by disqualifying his North Korean-related knowledge. "pg49</p> <p>(2) " They all mentioned that the reason they did not speak North Korean was that they were not good at English...Even though they had moved to South Korea, where English is used as a foreign language, they perceived English as the central position, not South Korean" pg49</p> <p>"If you're good at English, you can get a good job, you can go to a good university, and you can be in a high position of the society. So, I want to be good at English" pg 50</p> <p>"The North Korean students believed English would help them overcome their "dislocated" identities and achieve brand-new identities...had to worry about passing College English classes in the first place, and as student G was aware of, they might be at the bottom of their classes. Therefore, in reality, English did not grant them a new identity, but rather intensified their "deficient" identity." pg 50</p>                                                                                                       |
| 13 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Value of English</li> <li>2. Inferiority</li> <li>3. Necessitation of English and self-deprecation</li> </ol> | <p>(1) "The participants emphasised English as the most powerful, useful, and beneficial language in South Korea" p.298</p> <p>"Everybody wants to speak English well, and you need to be good at English to go to a good university or get a good job. I mean...you need to be good at English to be successful in this country." pg298</p> <p>(2) "The inner-circle language of the participants, North Korean, was unfortunately assigned the lowest value and the participants were reluctant to use it, especially in combination with Chinese." p.300</p> <p>"Instead of demonstrating 'negotiable and negotiated' or 'fluid and transient' (Aronin and Singleton, 2008) identities as a result of their mobility, they just accepted the 'inferior' positioning assigned by their social reality. Their reasons for accepting the externally-given self-representations could be attributed to their own insecure position as refugees in South Korea. " p.300</p> <p>(3) " English was a necessity in South Korea mainly because of 'upward mobility'" "...and not being able to speak in English was something to be ashamed of ('I was very ashamed of my poor English')". p.299</p> |

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|    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <p>"English works as a concrete commodity that should be acquired to succeed in the competitive society" " strong desire to be good at English was to acquire the 'symbolic power' (Bourdieu, 1991) of the language, which could override the disadvantages of speaking 'socially unfavourable' accented North Korean as their native language." p.299</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 14 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Necessitation of English as a motivator</li> <li>2. Competitiveness of education</li> <li>3. The gap between South Korean and North Korean English ability</li> <li>4. Economic difficulty</li> <li>5. Interactions with teachers</li> </ol> | <p>(1) " needed to learn English just to be able to understand basic conversations in South Korea which often use Konglish or borrowed words from the English language" pg 116</p> <p>"Although two participants discussed an intrinsic or instrumental desire to learn English, for most, the motivation to learn English is connected to the ultracompetitive environment in South Korea where English proficiency is often imperative in the education system and job market... referred to as instrumental motivation" pg120</p> <p>"...need to be proficient in English to excel in university and have better prospects in the job market. English can also aid in getting promotions in some companies. They need to become actively engaged in the language learning process" p.121</p> <p>"North Korean refugees need to learn English to be able to navigate South Korean society where English is used frequently in everyday life. The motivation to learn English may be rooted in a feeling of necessity...pushed by the desire to thrive or at least have a comfortable lifestyle which may heavily depend on English proficiency. " pg121</p> <p>(2) "I really worry that my score will not be high enough. Even if I am good at my major and other things, it means nothing if my English scores are low." p.118</p> |

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|    |                                                                                                           | <p>(3) "...try very hard to catch up with their South Korean peers, it is almost impossible because of the English educational gap." p.118<br/> "I could not learn a lot when I was in North Korea, so I do not have basic knowledge, but I am expected to know what South Korean people know at the same age. That includes advanced English" p.119</p> <p>(4) " Exchange programs are also very popular in South Korea, and many students go to English-speaking countries to help improve their language proficiency. Without financial sponsorship, this is nearly impossible for most North Korean refugee students." p.117</p> <p>(5) "University students are often required to take English classes that are taught by native English speakers who may not be able to communicate with students in Korean which can present a major problem for North Korean students who are taking the classes" p.117<br/> "could not ask questions that they had about the class because they lacked the vocabulary needed or they were embarrassed to talk to the professors because of their low English level" p.118</p> |
| 15 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Negotiating Identity</li> <li>2. Future as Motivator</li> </ol> | <p>(1) " Min's North Korean background served as a facilitating aspect of his interactions rather than an impediment. They highlight how he effectively leveraged his transnational identity as an asset, transforming potential challenges into opportunities for connection and understanding." p.7<br/> "Min's approach to embracing his transnational identities involves drawing on his unique experiences and perspectives to enrich his English learning and expand his global outlook...His ability to maintain cultural ties while adapting to new environments highlights the practical advantages of embracing a transnational identity in his English-learning journey." p.7<br/> " But I personally see my North Korean background as a strength"<br/> "I will keep my North Korean accent because I want to preserve my North Korean identity." p.8</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |

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|    |                                                                                                                                                                               | <p>"His transnational identity, therefore, extends beyond his present circumstances, encompassing his future aspirations and serving as a key motivator for his linguistic development" p.9</p> <p>(2) " 'I need good English skills to communicate with people around the world ... in this era of globalization'. This statement highlights the importance of English as an international language, " p.6</p> <p>"Min's approach to language learning became increasingly more proactive." p.6</p> <p>"I want to be a politician so that I can help with the process of reuniting the two Koreas. I will need good English to do that' p.7</p> <p>"Min's motivation and investment in learning English stem from his vision of becoming an effective multilingual individual within his imagined community. "pg8/9</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| 16 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. External influences causing discomfort with English</li> <li>2. Metacognitive strategies</li> <li>3. Future as motivator</li> </ol> | <p>(1) "The greater influence of the closed-off nature North Korean society, the more unwelcome English was due to the influence of anti-American thought, and the higher the anxiety about settling in South Korea, the higher the difficulty of first encountering English" p.54</p> <p>(2) "even if North Korean students are motivated to study, they do not know how to fill their own shortcomings, so they are only using the textbooks and supplementary textbooks suggested by the English teacher... guidance on how to study English on their own to fill their own shortcomings may be necessary in consideration of the fact that they had little learning experience or had a long gap period." p.46</p> <p>"The students who used to learn in this study habit (spartan style) are not accustomed to learning on their own, so the teachers teach hard, but the students may not be able to keep up" p.46</p> <p>(3) "The results of a survey on the reasons why North Korean teenagers study English show the following: In order to prepare for the immediate passing of the GED (8.6%, 3 students), 14.3% (5 students) were interested in English itself, and 71.4% (25 students) were the highest in order to prepare for college entrance and employment." p.42</p> |

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| 17 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. South Korean Language ability</li> <li>2. English to adapt/communicate</li> <li>3. Motivation</li> <li>4. Disruption to education</li> </ol>                                         | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) "In addition to the necessity of learning English, (participant) experienced greater linguistic difficulties in Korean itself" p.87<br/>"I'm not very good at Korean, so learning is English is also pretty difficult...because of Korean...if my Korean was okay it wouldn't be too difficult. It would be good"p.88</li> <li>(2) "Since Korean used a mix of English a lot, if you don't know English you can't converse, and you can end up very alone" p.86<br/>"The goal of learning English was working strongly to supplement the most essential areas of the South Korean settlement process, such as participation in communication and peer relationship formation" p.91</li> <li>(3) "As a motivating factor for learning English, strong awareness of the necessity of learning English for peer formation and cultural adaptation with Koreans and English learning goals for communication and employment were found in common." p.85<br/>"In the case of Choi Dong-wook, the participant, the qualification exam for middle school graduation was ahead, and for this purpose, it can be seen that the motivation to learn English has increased (Excerpt 9). In addition, Ji-young Yoon is a high school student preparing for employment, not a college entrance exam, and unlike China, she reiterated that English is essential for employment in Korea" p.86</li> <li>(4) "Educational disadvantage due to gaps in their educational backgrounds during the process of entering South Korea... including academic failure and difficulties in communicating with peer groups" p.91</li> </ol> |
| 18 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Inferiority</li> <li>2. Gaps in ability</li> <li>3. Lack of basics</li> <li>4. Time constraints</li> <li>5. Metacognitive strategies</li> <li>6. Unconventional education</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) "Level difference ends up being a huge barrier for them to overcome, leading to a decline in confidence and motivation to learn, and ultimately causing many of them to drop out" p.347</li> <li>(2) "They (North Korean refugees) are making efforts to learn English, but when the gap is so wide that results do not appear immediately, they perceive participation in English classes and academic achievement as impossible ("I'm not motivated right now, because it's obvious. It's the first time I've ever been so discouraged")." p.347</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

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|  |  | <p>"The North Korean refer to themselves as like 'elementary school students' and the regular South Korean students as like 'high school students' p.347</p> <p>(3) "The most frequently mentioned part by the interview participants was the difficulty due to the lack of foundation. Participants mentioned that because they did not know the basic parts that were omitted during class, they often did not understand the next step based on this premise, and that the part that they did not know was aggravated and they eventually gave up" p.347</p> <p>(4) "The students were very motivated to study English, but they complained of the lack of time during the semester. Most students recognize that they have to work many times harder than ordinary students because they are admitted without reaching the level of English proficiency at a university in Korea, but they do not have enough time to invest in their major and other subjects during the semester because they also have to invest a lot of time to catch up" p.347</p> <p>(5) "...cited the unfamiliarity of tests and assignments in class. They complained that they had difficulty preparing for the test because the test type was unfamiliar, and that there were cases where he did not understand English questions or did not understand the way to solve the problem itself even after looking at the example... they also mentioned that there were many cases of doing wrong because they did not understand what the task was or did not know how to do it." p.348</p> <p>(6) " 10 out of 31 study participants mentioned Chinese as a third language, and it was found that they learned Chinese as a survival language rather than at school" p.343</p> |
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| 19 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lack of basics</li> <li>2. Lack of general knowledge</li> <li>3. Gaps in ability among peers</li> <li>4. Low confidence/self-depreciation</li> <li>5. Economic hardship</li> <li>6. Insufficient support</li> <li>7. Lack of metacognitibe skills</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) "The professors assume that we know the basics; but I don't know the basics, so I need to fill in the basics on my own somehow." p.118</li> <li>(2) "The participants' lack of cultural capital pertained not only to their L2 knowledge, but also to their background knowledge and structural familiarity, which may have become second nature to young South Korean students. These included proper nouns such as names of cities, countries, people and holidays, which frequently appear in textbooks, as well as knowledge about (or familiarity with) quizzes, assignments, and other institutional protocols. " p.118<br/> "They (North Korean refugees) do not share the lived experiences of locally born South Korean students" p.118<br/> "They (North Koreans) were "shocked" to find out that classes were conducted in English and that they were expected to speak only in English" p.118</li> <li>(3) " All participants reported that their English skills lagged far behind those of their South Korean peers" p.117<br/> "...felt very insecure about their English skills." p.118<br/> "...remarked on how miserable and helpless they felt in their first class, and how daunting it was for them to witness the "exorbitantly high" proficiency level of their South Korean peers. They mentioned how they had "lost their self-confidence from Day One" and stayed "completely mute" " p.118</li> <li>(4) " , "I feel very small, like an elementary school kid trying to compete with a high school student." Such sense of inadequacy and self-deprecation was expressed by the majority of the participants" p.118</li> <li>(5) "I try to avoid taking English classes because they will end up lowering my GPA significantly and jeopardize my chance of receiving a scholarship ... I cannot afford to lose my scholarship." p.121<br/> "Participants were extremely anxious about their grades since their financial support was contingent upon maintaining good grades. They also dreaded the potential financial hardship (with which many of them had painful experiences) associated with the lack of sustained scholarship support and how their low grades might affect their career prospects." p.121</li> </ol> |
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|    |                                            | <p>(6) "There still existed what appeared to be an unbridgeable gap between the foundation and the core courses. " p.120</p> <p>"Completing the foundation courses proved to be inadequate in bridging the divide between refugee-background students and South Korean students." p.121</p> <p>(7) "They (North Korean students) also had trouble with the required textbooks, which did not use the Korean script and included interactive activities that they were not accustomed to" p.118</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 20 | 1. Identity reconstructing and negotiating | <p>(1) "[So when I saw that] South Korea has brought a lot of foreign words into Korean, it damaged my self-esteem [as a Korean]. Because I had learned the 'ideology of ethnic superiority' (<i>joseonminjok jeiljuui</i>), which says that ethnic Koreans are the best" p.277</p> <p>" Encountering South Korea's widespread use of English loanwords felt like an assault on his national identity, and accepting it meant not only challenging, but eventually abandoning, his existing ideologies." p.277</p> <p>"Hyunsoo experienced a reduction in his resistance towards learning loanwords 'out of necessity for daily communication'" p.278</p> <p>" Over time, the participants sought to challenge their undesirable, imposed identities as North Korean refugees and to construct more desirable and potentially useful identity positions through imagining legitimate membership (Kanno &amp; Norton, 2003) in a future, reunified Korea. " p.280</p> <p>" A major challenge for her North Korean participant while learning English was the conflict between her desire to maintain her 'original self' and her need to construct 'a new self' " p.283</p> |

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| 21 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reconstructing Identity</li> <li>2. Inferiority complex</li> <li>3. Motivation</li> </ol> | <p>(1) " He was positioned by South Korean society as a 'North Korean outsider.' " p.6<br/> " English language brought a sense of difference to him and made him feel like an outsider to South Korean society. As he could not understand the loan words that South Koreans frequently used, he could not successfully participate and engage in South Korean society." p.6<br/> "...could not help but compare himself to South Korean classmates. He found that he was inferior, whereas they were superior." p.7 "...Positioned himself as an outsider and an incompetent and powerless member of his university" p.7<br/> "'I did not know if I was a South Korean or a North Korean. I asked who I was. I felt so much confusion.' To avoid discrimination, Dohyun initially denied his identity as a refugee." p.7<br/> "...new identity was intertwined with his future vision as a North Korean human rights activist and psychotherapist. With these goals in mind, he felt a strong need to learn English." p.7<br/> "The acknowledgment of the power and importance of English transformed Dohyun into an active and more motivated learner of English." p.7<br/> "Dohyun's present and future narratives revealed how a minoritized refugee could transform into an active participant and agent of learning English, and there were complex processes of positionings that enabled it" p.8</p> <p>(2) "Dohyun described North Korean refugees as 'infants who do not know anything.' The lack of engagement in South Korean society due to his poor English skills not only positioned him as an outsider but also as an incompetent member of society." p.6<br/> "North Koreans are just blind fools. We are just being fools, and that brings us a sense of shame. " p.7<br/> "He always felt lonely in his classroom. He could not help but compare himself to South Korean classmates. He found that he was inferior, whereas they were superior... having positioned himself as an outsider and an incompetent and</p> |
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|  |  | <p>powerless member of his university, ended up suffering from severe depression." p.7</p> <p>(3) "The reason why I want to learn English [again] became clearer because of my vision as a psychotherapist for teenagers. " p.7</p> |
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| 22 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identity</li> <li>2. Important of English</li> <li>3. Motivation</li> </ol> | <p>(1) "Min had developed a new vision for learning English as a transnational individual who can communicate with people globally and work anywhere in the world" p.31<br/>         " I will keep my North Korean accent because I want to preserve my North Korean identity. " p.33<br/>         "Min's identity is not solely tied to his current living community in South Korea. His imagined identity—that of someone who will work for North Koreans one day when the two countries are reunited—is situated in his imagined community, which transcends "territorial, cultural, or national boundaries"" p.34</p> <p>(2) "English ultimately became an important form of cultural capital, which could help him realize his personal desires and achieve professional success." p.31<br/>         "I need good English skills to communicate with people around the world" p.31<br/>         "Min came to realize that good English skills were instrumental not only to be successful in South Korea but also to communicate and/or work with people around the globe. He currently views English as a valuable linguistic resource that can enable him to transcend the physical spaces he has lived in and enter transnational social fields where he has never been before" p.32</p> <p>(3) "To achieve this goal, he believes that an advanced level of English proficiency is necessary to upscale his position in South Korean society: If you want to achieve big [dreams], you need good English skills. I need to speak English well in order to make my dreams come true in South Korea... My ultimate goal is to become an influential politician" p.34<br/>         "Min's vision of a united Korea and the potential role he might play in that imagined community are the driving forces motivating him to continuously hone his English skills and obtain other types of cultural capital " p.35</p> |
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| 23 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identity</li> <li>2. Necessity of English</li> <li>3. Motivation by force</li> </ol> | <p>(1) " When the participants went to South Korean schools, a level of English proficiency became a trait that characterized and positioned NKR as others." p.114</p> <p>" "You got bad grades because you are North Korean." Morgan's country of origin, therefore, was linked to her poor academic performance, which further assigned her identity as an incompetent student." p.114</p> <p>"...Learning English and receiving good grades, to Morgan, was a way to negotiate her identity in her classroom and prove the characteristic that she was associated with was not something permanent" p.114 "compared themselves to South Korean students who had better English skills and could not compete with them as a legitimate member of a class community." p. 119</p> <p>"She purposefully evoked the prevalent stereotype of NKR as incompetent English speakers and users to explain and justify her bad English skills to her professor. This reflected her ideology regarding the dichotomy between NKR as incompetent English speakers and South Korean students as competent and good English speakers." p. 119</p> <p>" Hannah described herself as someone who was not "normal" in South Korean society because of her status as an NKR (North Korean refugee). However, the abnormality gave her confidence as an English user because she did not belong to South Koreans, and thus, not had to compare herself to other South Korean students" p.127</p> <p>"by highlighting her strengths, she was resisting the dominant ideology where North Korean students are considered poor English speakers and empowering herself as a confident English speaker" p.129</p> <p>"To realize his dream, Ian was actively utilizing his status as an NK" p.132</p> <p>(2) "I agreed with the ideology that having good English skills in SK meant occupying an advantageous position in a highly competitive labour market" p.89</p> <p>"...having good English skills is followed by upward social mobility." p.89</p> |
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|    |                                                                                                                                                                 | <p>"Participants, therefore, have internalized and reinforced the dominant ideology of English as “necessitation” (Park, 2004) in a local South Korean context. The anxiety of losing their social status or falling behind, as Ian mentioned, created a constant need for self-improvement and development and a high level of investment in learning English (Park, 2010)" pp.91/92</p> <p>"The idea that English is a necessity is deep in everyone’s heart." p.94 " I did not even know they were using English words at that time, because there were too many differences already. Once you learn English, you know it is English. However, I lived in North Korea for only 11 years, so I did not learn English there. I did not think it was English but thought the South Korean language was just unfamiliar and odd." P.113</p> <p>" In order to access and achieve his clear and strong imagined identity as a member of an elite community, acquiring English was crucial to Ian. This facilitated his investment in learning the language" p.133</p> <p>(3) "I feel like if I don’t learn English, I might fall behind." p.90</p> <p>"...required or forced to study English because of media discourse and an institutional policy, such as a graduation or a job requirement. Therefore, the motivation to constantly self-improve and develop their English skills was shaped by institutional and media discourse" p. 92 "This ambiguousness of ‘good English skills’ led them to be forever dissatisfied with their own English skills and recognize their English skills as something that needs to be constantly improved" p.95</p> |
| 24 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Skill gap between peers</li> <li>2. Motivation/Satisfaction factors</li> <li>3. Interactions with teachers</li> </ol> | <p>(1) “It’s a required liberal arts class, but my listening, speaking, and writing skills are not as good as my peers, so I was frustrated because I couldn’t understand or speak English well in many parts.” p.62</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

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|  |  | <p>"I wish there was a separate class for newcomers, because it's hard for us who barely know the alphabet to follow along when we're in a class with our South Korean friends." p.62</p> <p>"I always felt self-conscious because I was behind my classmates even after reviewing." p.62</p> <p>"The most common was the difficulty level. For students who struggle to keep up with the pace of the class, the large number of assignments, presentations, and skill gaps with their South Korean counterparts undermines their confidence in the class and hinders their motivation to learn English." p. 63</p> <p>(2) "Integrative motivation had the highest mean of 4.68 (SD=.12), followed by self-confidence (M=4.45, SD=.13), and instrumental motivation (M=4.15 SD=.14). The finding that integrative motivation was higher than other motivations was consistent with the findings of Lee (2018). This can be explained by the fact that newcomer students enjoy learning English more than South Korean students, and their interest in the foreign language itself increases as they are exposed to various foreign cultures and become more interested in them after moving to South Korea, which increases their integrative motivation compared to other motivations. " p.43</p> <p>"Instrumental motivation, which is the desire to become a member of society's needs such as employment in South Korean society, seems to be at play." P.44</p> <p>"...believed that the deficiencies in basic English learning before entering university have contributed to the low academic achievement of newcomer students as well as their motivation to learn English. " p.50</p> <p>" In terms of satisfaction with liberal arts English classes, students with intercultural experience (M=3.95 SD .80) scored higher than students without (M=3.73 SD=.87). Furthermore, the t test to examine the difference in the level of motivation to learn English and satisfaction with the general education English class among newcomer college students according to their English cultural experience showed that students with English cultural experience had higher levels of integrative motivation (t=2.525, p&lt;.05) and</p> |
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|    |                                                                                                             | <p>intrinsic motivation (<math>t=2.435</math>, <math>p&lt;.05</math>) than students without English cultural experience." p.51</p> <p>"Results indicate that intrinsic motivation can increase the satisfaction with course materials and classroom environment among Saturnine university students. In other words, intrinsic motivation is a factor that positively affects course materials and classroom environment, and it can be interpreted that the higher the intrinsic motivation, the higher the satisfaction with course materials and classroom environment." p.59</p> <p>"These results indicate that newcomer college students' self-confidence increases their satisfaction with the classroom group. In other words, self-confidence is a factor that positively affects the classroom group, and as self-confidence increases, satisfaction with the classroom group increases" p.61</p> <p>(3) "There was a time when I didn't know what the assignment was, so I went to the native professor and asked him to write it down in English". p.62</p> <p>"It was hard because the professor didn't speak Korean." p.62</p> <p>"I wish my professor could speak Korean." p.62</p> <p>"I wish my professor would teach in a way that I can understand." p.62</p> <p>"I wish my professor was Korean so I could send him emails in Korean. p.62</p> <p>"...Communication problems with non-native Korean-speaking instructors. In addition to the problem of not being able to understand the lectures due to the fact that they are taught in English, students who are unable to communicate with the instructor due to class difficulties or personal questions are more likely to give up taking the class if they cannot ask questions to the instructor who does not speak Korean... students are more likely to drop out of a class if they cannot communicate with the instructor." p.63</p> |
| 25 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Negotiating Identity</li> <li>2. Importance of English</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) "A and B, who scaled South Korea as far inferior to North Korea in various aspects, including the quality of English education"p.335</li> <li>(2) "It is possible that their attempt to build social networks in South Korea may have been let down precisely because they felt obliged to hold on to their old</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

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|  |  | <p>values that had been cultivated in their early years in North Korea and resisted the need to adjust and rescale their beliefs and values in their new space. " p.335</p> <p>"North Korea has remained at the absolute top of the hierarchy across spaces, relegating new spaces as peripheral resources. Such a scale may have, at least in part, affected their attitudes toward English, leading them to devalue the instrumental or neoliberal value of English in South Korea, and to romanticise the education they received in their homeland." p.336</p> <p>"D did not view himself as inferior to his classmates in regard to his English skills, but scaled himself as any other South Korean student" p.337</p> <p>" I keep my North Korean accent not because I like the North Korean government, but because it is also my identity as a North Korean." p.337</p> <p>" D was strategically building an imagined identity for himself and working step by step towards achieving that goal while also going through a process of rescaling his linguistic resources (both English and Korean)." p.337</p> <p>"while the interview results show that Participants A and B downscaled South Korea education and society, they themselves did not use the North Korean accent, opting to speak with South Korean accent throughout the interview... unbeknownst to Participants A and B themselves, they may have recognised the extent to which their linguistic resources were valued and appraised in their new spaces (Blommaert, 2005)– namely, the negative evaluation of North Koreans in South Korean society." p.339</p> <p>(2) " C and D are more concerned with the symbolic power and instrumental value of English in accomplishing personal and professional goals associated with neoliberalism" p.336</p> <p>"(participant c) fully recognised the importance of obtaining English skills as a useful linguistic capital and provided several reasons for wanting to improve his English." p.336</p> |
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|  |  | <p>"He needed to improve his academic English as he considered it important to get into graduate schools in Seoul"</p> <p>"In South Korea, however, he instantly recognised English as a valuable linguistic capital necessary for social and economic success, which further fuelled his motivation and prompted him to re-scale his language resources. " p. 337</p> <p>"He perceives the English language as a useful resource that can help him access the core of South Korean society. " p. 338</p> |
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| 26 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Skill gap</li> <li>2. Importance of English</li> <li>3. Factors prompting difficulties with English</li> <li>4. Disruption to education</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) " The research subjects said that the level difference with Korean students was too large, which made it difficult for them to learn English." p.70<br/>" I think it's difficult when I feel that other people (Korean students) are good at everything and I can't do it." p.71</li> <li>(2) " Although the participants who were experiencing English education in regular schools all agreed that English is important and necessary in South Korean society," p. 71<br/>" I know it's necessary, but I honestly don't want to do it because it's difficult." p. 71<br/>" I wish I could give up on things like English, but they say I need it for college, so I have to do it whether I like it or not." p. 71</li> <li>(3) "There is a significant difference in the degree of difficulty in learning English depending on when the participants arrived in South Korea...because of her early arrival, she has adapted to English education in South Korea faster than other students, so she does not feel the gap with South Korean students"<br/>"In North Korea, they speak British English and in South Korea, they speak American English, and it's a little different." p.69<br/>"Family problems, and economic problems that occurred during the process of entering South Korea were also partially responsible for the obstacles to learning English" p.71</li> <li>(4) "In North Korea, I took a break from studying English, but when I came here, I couldn't study for another few years, so I had to study again." p.69</li> </ol> |
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## Appendix J: Example sample of text coding for thematic analysis.

Extract from Study 19 page 118.

Park, E.S (2020) 'Refugee-Background Students' Experience with College English Requirements: The Case of North Korean Students in South Korea', *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 19(2), pp.111-124. doi: 10.1080/15348458.2019.1650278

The participants' lack of cultural capital pertained not only to their L2 knowledge, but also to their background knowledge and structural familiarity, which may have become second nature to young South Korean students. These included proper nouns such as names of cities, countries, people and holidays, which frequently appear in textbooks, as well as knowledge about (or familiarity with) quizzes, assignments, and other institutional protocols. This may be expected given the students' North Korean refugee habitus that is very different from that of South Korean students as they do not share the lived experiences of locally born South Korean students. In addition, the participants were not informed about college life in general. For example, they were "shocked" to find out that classes were conducted in English and that they were expected to speak only in English. This further added to their anxiety and frustration, since many of them were used to merely memorizing and performing mechanical drills (Kim & Choi, 1999; Park & Kim, 2014). They also had trouble with the required textbooks, which did not use the Korean script and included interactive activities that they were not accustomed to. Hence, having gone through different life and academic experiences in North Korea, they were not equipped with the knowledge and skills that South Korean students take for granted. Their lack of L2 skills and background knowledge combined with the fact that they were not sufficiently informed about graduation requirements and the level of English proficiency needed to meet the academic demands made matters worse, further stalling their adjustment process. All the participants who took the regular set of required core English courses (n = 18) remarked on how miserable and helpless they felt in their first class, and how daunting it was for them to witness the "exorbitantly high" proficiency level of their South Korean peers. They mentioned how they had "lost their self confidence from Day One" and stayed "completely mute" in class for the rest of the semester. One second-year student majoring in Political Science even likened himself to an elementary school student, saying, "I feel very small, like an elementary school kid trying to compete with a high school student." Such sense of inadequacy and self-deprecation was expressed by the majority of the participants (n=18) who had had the experience of taking the core courses with the regular South Korean students.

Key:

Lack of general knowledge

Lack of metacognitive skills

Skill gap between North and South Koreans

Inferiority, low self-confidence and self-deprecation

## Appendix K: Narrative Summaries of Included Studies

### 1. Bok & Cho (2018)

This study focusses on the positioning of one single female university student, before and after defecting to South Korea, in relation to being an English language learner. Bok and Cho (2018) conducted in-depth interviews with participant Mihee and her English teachers and used primary data from observations of Mihee's tutoring sessions. Data showed that initially she neglected English in North Korea due to its uselessness as a subject in the closed-off country. However, this attitude continued despite transitioning to South Korea where English is significantly more important. She kept an emotional distance from her tutors, positioning herself as opposed to them due to her poor English, and thus avoided English learning opportunities. Upon admittance to university, she experiences second order positioning, feeling ashamed of her English proficiency. She had a low sense of belonging, positioning herself in opposition to her South Korean peers. Coming to terms with the necessity for English, Mihee shifted her perspective and began to take learning English seriously. Once she began tutoring with peers at a similar English level to her, she built up a sense of belonging and positioned herself as aligned with her peers and instructors. Findings of this study offer suggestions for English education for North Korean refugees such as specialised English programs which consider the experiences and characteristics of North Koreans as well as a greater understanding from instructors.

### 2. Choi (2014)

Choi (2014) conducted semi-structured interviews with 11 participants, lasting 60-140 minutes per person. All participants were university students who came from a diverse range of educational backgrounds and stayed in other Asian countries before arriving in South Korea, which majorly disrupted their education. Participants were unconcerned about their English when applying to university due to the lenient admission process and were unprepared for the level of English required of them. Participants identified comprehension of textbooks and lectures, American pronunciation (compared to British English), insensitive native instructors, and a lack of time to prepare for classes as difficulties they experienced whilst dealing with English courses at university. These difficulties lead to feelings of discouragement at their inability to catch up with their South Korean peers no matter how hard they worked on their English. Interviews revealed a distinct lack of systematic university-wide administrative system or support for North Korean students, as they were not sufficiently informed of university practices and graduation requirements and received no additional support via mentoring programmes or financial aid. The study called for improved partnerships among government and local administrative agencies and academic institutions to develop support pre and post university admission. Examples include, a tailor-made secondary school curriculum of English, after-school programmes, social welfare workers, financial support for additional English classes, and adjusting admission criteria for North Koreans.

### 3. Hwang & Jeon (2020)

Via semi-structured interviews with 6 adult North Korean refugees and 2 English teachers, Hwang and Jeon (2020) examined the central phenomenon in the English learning process, focussing on grounded theory. All participants revealed they were acutely aware of the need for English, and felt frustrated, fearful, and embarrassed at the burden of learning English due to the gap between their abilities compared with their South Korean peers. They lacked basic English and did not receive appropriate levels of support within classes. Armed with strong Chinese skills, learnt out of a need to survive when hiding in China, the participants attempted to close this gap. They experienced learning English

far too advanced for their level and felt impatient due to the slow progress of learning English compared to how easily they learnt Chinese. They used English as a comparator between them and South Koreans and so were motivated to learn English to integrate into South Korean society and/or hide their North Korean identities. However, this motivation to learn reduced the longer they remained in South Korea, becoming more of a choice than obligation. Economic insecurities and emotional anxiety impact efforts to learn English, with finances limiting levels of investment into education and anxiety about the future, and the overwhelming loneliness felt from living alone in a foreign country prevents them from focussing on learning English. The study calls for level-specific instruction, support via counselling, customised classes, and self-directed learning strategy-based instruction.

#### 4. Jo (2019)

Using a questionnaire, Jo (2019) aims to examine the extent to which English language affects adjustment to university life among North Korean college students. Responses from 50 participants showed majority of students (54%) were satisfied with English classes in South Korea, yet 96% felt the need to improve their English skills. English classes were found to be one of the biggest difficulties that North Korean university students face in adjusting to school life. Difficulties when studying included high quality of schooling, difficulty understanding the content of the textbook, understanding the teacher's explanation, having enough time to study English, and economic difficulties. Ideological factors such as anti-American sentiment and influence of North Korea's closed society were not significant challenges. Educational improvements for North Korean refugee students were suggested; 1:1 tutoring, levelled classes, customised education and textbooks, economic support, additional online courses, opportunities to study abroad, and the systematic provision of English education for North Korean refugees from primary to secondary school.

#### 5. Jung & Im (2009)

The aims of Jung and Im's (2009) study was to explore how North Korean defectors experience English language learning in the disparate environments of North Korean and South Korean society. 105 people were surveyed, and 5 interviewed. In terms of experience with English in North Korea, a lack of need, materials, and interest was reported via interviews, and although the majority of people surveyed responded that yes, they had experience learning English in North Korea, interest increased significantly after arriving in South Korea. Interviewees stipulated a greater need to learn English in South Korea in order to communicate with South Koreans, and successfully enter society (via university, jobs, computers etc). The vast amounts of loan words were cited as an important factor for communication. Participants mention the gap between North and South Koreans English proficiency as a challenge as they have difficulties keeping up with their South Korean peers. Participants believed learning English in South Korea is more effective than North Korea as people are exposed to English from an early age and naturally accept English and foreign words. A lack time and financial resources (all participants were trying to engage in economic activities, finding jobs etc) and difficulties accessing information (e.g. finding schools that teach adults) are additional factors limiting the improvement of English skills. Suggestions for improvement included free/low-cost English for North Korean refugees, appropriate customised textbooks, volunteer tutors, and that the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology could consider expanding the multicultural teacher program to North Korean defectors: prospective English teachers should also be encouraged to participate in opportunities to understand the characteristics of North Korean adolescent and adult learners through educational outreach.

#### 6. Jung, Min, Park, & Kim (2014)

In this report, Jung et al (2014) aim to enhance the understanding of North Korean refugee high school students, to identify the learning difficulties they are experiencing in relation to English and explore support measures that can be utilized in school settings through policy recommendations. This was achieved via surveys, interviews with both students and teachers, and class observations. Surveys revealed North Korean refugees lack basic education which places them in lower school years despite their older ages, impacting the formation of personal relationships. Little support is offered in terms of help with English; despite this they have positive attitudes towards learning English and are aware of its value in South Korea. Interviews identified a lack of basic English skills, lack of South Korean language ability, economic and family hardships, and the issue of identity exposure in school impacted English learning, effecting concentration and prompting desires to give up with English due to these difficulties. Observations took place in an English class for students with learning difficulties, which North Korean refugees were included in. Observational analysis concluded that no unusual peer relationships were evident. However, North Korean refugees should not be lumped together with South Korean students with learning difficulties due to their unique characteristics, and English language learning support measures should be tailored to these characteristics. The study reaffirms that tangible and intangible support for North Korean high school students is essential, identifying the need to investigate what kind of support is needed specifically. Recommendations include establishing a centralised management system and infrastructure for English language learning support for North Korean high school students, providing learning support information to North Korean refugee high school students through regional education support offices and local schools. Types of support includes customised learning support, real-time online interactive classes, 1:1 mentoring programmes, and regular offline gatherings with instructors and fellow students to create a learning community centred on the teachers, who can impart knowledge about learning English and help build character.

#### 7. Kim (2013)

In this Masters dissertation by Kim (2013), they endeavour to identify how and what is learnt in North Korean English classes, what North Korean refugees think about their current English learning in South Korean universities and their present English communicative competence, and what English learning support they want to have in their future. Using both interviews and surveys from 13 participants, results showed about half had experience English education in North Korea where they learnt British English, and textbook content was primarily related to Juche ideology and idolising the Kim regimes. Many did not feel the need for English before and during the defection process. Prior to entering university, the majority had not engaged in English learning, and upon arrival to university began studying English from 1-2 hours a week. English classes were considered difficult, citing a lack of basic knowledge as the reason, but over half expressed high levels of enthusiasm for English, which they perceived as an important issue for adaption and participation in South Korean society, thus studying for investment in their futures. Despite this motivation to study, participants had financial hardships, lacked self-studying skills, and perceived their own English proficiency level as low. None reported anxiety over settling in South Korea (potentially due to the length of time they'd already been living there). However, some were influenced by North Korea's closed-off nature which negatively impacted their English learning, prompting calls to establish a support system to help new settlers overcome the closed nature they experienced in North Korea. Additionally, participants expressed a desire for levelled classes and 1:1 mentoring programmes.

#### 8. Kim (2016)

Kim explored how the social identities of a college student from North Korea transformed over time while she was learning English, and what factors were associated with her identity transformation, using interviews and reflective journals. Initially the participant resisted negotiating a new identity or changing her views on English, wishing to retain her original self as a North Korean who considered English as the language of the enemy. She was then confronted with her need to learn English at university, initially positioning herself as inferior compared to her classmates and thus transformed her identity into English learner. As she began to understand more, she eventually transformed into an active English learner, rather than a passive learner, who developed a vision of her future, hoping to actively respond to those in need, in the current South Korean society and a reunified Korea of the future, becoming fully aware of the place of English globally. To ease the burdens of English learning and identity crises among North Korean refugees, Kim urges special care for English learning, aiding their smooth adaptation, better social integration, and future unification. After-school programs, individualised lessons, and peer tutoring should be invested in, as well as additional teacher education so they can better understand the needs of North Korean refugees and provide appropriate care.

#### 9. Lee (2014)

Lee introduced a participatory EFL programme for 13 North Korean refugee students from an alternative school to address the inadequacies identified in the mainstream English curriculum for North Korean refugee students. The mainstream curriculum was considered boring and old-fashioned, which did not motivate learners. However, teachers defended their curriculum and teaching style claiming the students' English proficiency was too low and their attitudes demonstrated they were not ready for studying. Teachers stigmatised North Korean refugee students, positioning them as marginalised with inferior knowledge compared to the superior knowledge of the teacher. This again was justified by the North Korean students' lack of English ability and that the teacher was helping them to learn. The participatory curriculum transformed students into active agents of learning, who were ready to actively take part in this new level-appropriate class. This new curriculum provided opportunities for North Korean refugee students to utilise their own knowledge, pursue self-driven activities, and empower themselves to become autonomous members of South Korean society, not inferior citizens.

#### 10. Lee (2015)

Via interviews from 5 North Korean refugee students and their teachers, Lee (2015) looks into challenges North Korean students face with English language learning in South Korea, the challenges of teaching North Korean students, and what effective English language instruction looks like for these North Korean refugee students. The study produced the following themes: Life-oriented English education, English education reinforcing modern Korean cultural elements, English Education to improve classroom skills, and customized English Language Instruction for North Korean Students. North Korean refugees require life-oriented English education which could motivate them to learn English, following difficulties navigating public spaces and conversations due to use of loan words and thus adjusting and understanding South Korean society. English can be used to reinforce modern Korean culture as North Koreans have a weak cultural understanding of South Korea including its closeness to western culture, the use of English vocabulary, units of measurements, and fairytales. Thus, an education that utilises these features can improve English skills and cultural awareness at the same time. Participants also felt their English proficiency is lower than that of South Korean students contributing to a loss in confidence and psychological stress. Finally, the study declares it necessary to produce customised English language instruction for North

Korean students as preparation for future reunification and to aid in social integration: Extracurricular activities, such as speaking competitions, English-language newspapers, field trips, and human resource exchanges with Korean students are needed to increase motivation and confidence in learning English, as well as the enjoyment and satisfaction of English language learning activities.

11. Lee (2016)

Lee (2016) investigates the linguistic challenges that the North Korean refugee students face in spite of existing language-support programs via interviews and language autobiographies. Primary linguistic challenges uncovered were pronunciation difficulties and loan words. Ten participants stated that they have been ostracized by their South Korean peers because of their accent, with a further four saying they were afraid of being stigmatised for their accents. Language autobiographies stipulated how significant amounts of English vocabulary had to be learned to be used in daily life, which their time at the Hanawon language support programme did not adequately prepare them for. Lack of knowledge of loan words hindered the North Korean refugee students' integration into South Korean society as it greatly impacted daily communication, interpersonal communication skills, and navigation of public spaces. This led to feelings of shame surrounding unknown English words. Current language programmes fail to meet the needs of North Korean refugees as they lack authentic North Korean voices, perpetuating South Korean superiority, prompting abandonment of their North Korean language which negatively impacts healthy identity formation in South Korea. Modifications are required to empower the population.

12. Lee & Ahn (2016)

In this study by Lee and Ahn (2016), English tutoring sessions between North Korean refugee university students and South Korean volunteer tutors observed in combination with audio recordings, journal entries, and semi-structured interviews to discover how North Korean undergraduates interact with and position themselves in relation to their South Korean peers. Interactions were passive, with North Korean refugees only ever offering unconditional agreement with their South Korean partner, never initiating conversation, asking questions, or make negative comments about statements from the South Korean students. They also hid their accents and never discussed North Korea despite having multiple opportunities to do so, and even at times being asked explicitly by their partners. The North Korea students viewed English as the central language of society, not South Korean, believing if they had good English they would have a better life in this new society. By studying English, the North Korean students attempted to overcome their dislocated identities but the difficulties they faced when studying English and the superior abilities of their South Korean peers instead intensified their inferior and marginalised identities. North Korean students had to realign their linguistic scales, placing English at the centre and North Korean on the periphery, making them feel even more distanced from the centre of society, reflecting their inferiority.

13. Lee, Han, & Hyun (2016)

Using language tracking and interviews, Lee, Han and Hyun (2016) explored how North Korean refugee students use the languages in their repertoire and their perceptions of each language, English, Chinese, South Korean, and North Korean. English was used the least frequently but was emphasised as the most powerful and beneficial language in South Korea to be used as a commodity for upward social mobility and symbolic power. South Korean was the social favoured language, with North Korean being used as an inner-circle language used only with other North Koreans. Chinese was spoken by several North Korean students and was used as an exclusionary tool: distinguishing the Chinese-haves (some North Koreans), from the Chinese-have -nots (South Koreans and some North

Koreans). However, all eleven participants devalued Chinese due to negative perceptions of Chinese speakers with a North Korean accent. North Korean positioned themselves as linguistically inferior due to the societally prescribed low status of their languages

14. Lee (2017)

Lee studies how North Korean refugees describe their English language experiences, the English challenges they face at university in South Korea, and what changes can be made to improve English education for North Korean refugees in South Korea. The majority of participants experience English language education in North Korea, describing it as impractical. Upon arriving in South Korea, the prominence of English to understand basic conversations, the role of loan words, and English in public spaces was mentioned by several participants as a source of difficulty. They also mention how they can never catch up to the level of English of their South Korean peers who have been studying English practically their entire lives whilst they still lack the basics. The competitive university environment and job market pushes English to the forefront of participants educational endeavours as they are required to use English textbooks, take English classes, and get a high TOEIC score to graduate and get a good job. Thus, motivation is rooted in necessity rather than interest in foreign language learning. Participants recommend more flexible university policies for North Korean refugees (such as altering TOEIC score graduation requirements), tailored English classes (e.g. English for academic purposes and business English), and access to opportunities to practice with native speakers or study abroad

15. Lee & Park (2025)

Lee and Park (2025) examine how North Korean refugee Min's experiences with learning and using English in various social contexts shape his transnational identities and how he leverages them as assets in learning English. Interviews with Min cover his identity transformation across North Korea, South Korea, and USA. Initially in North Korea, Min never felt the need to study English, which was taught for propaganda purposes with no real opportunity to use it. In South Korea, Min realised how English was now important cultural capital, shaping his motivation to learn English to realise his future goals. Min went on to spend time as an exchange student in USA which expanded his views on English as not just cultural capital and a graduation requirement, but as a key to global opportunities and communication. However, throughout this process, Min does not neglect his North Korean identity and instead uses it as a strength to be used to his advantage, preserving his accent. Min also expressed aspirations to help in a reunified Korea, as he harbours uniquely useful linguistic skills, thus extending his identity beyond past and present, and into an imagined future. Lee and Park (2025) note the implications for English language instructors, highlighting the importance of recognising refugee-background students' unique backgrounds, linguistic abilities, and experiences, embracing transnational identities.

16. Oh (2008)

In this Masters dissertation, Oh (2008) uses interviews and surveys to study English education for North Korean students in alternative schools. The majority of students were studying English to prepare for university of employment and claimed to experience difficulties with English. Although the majority of participants were somewhat satisfied with their English classes 45.7% desired more communicative oriented classes over the more common grammar/translation classes. Students also lacked knowledge on how to supplement their learning with self-study or identify the gaps in their English knowledge and where they need to improve. The poor resources of alternative schools create

difficult environments to maximise learning: there are no projectors/audio systems, students and volunteer teachers must copy materials from old books, and there exists financial barriers to creating materials for alternative teaching styles such as the styles required for North Korean refugee students. Furthermore, a significant correlation was found between feeling difficulties learning English and the effects of North Korea's closed-off nature, anti-American sentiment, and anxiety about settling in South Korea. Furthermore, Chinese language knowledge helped with grammar and pronunciation of English and speaking a difficult second language helped increase self-esteem and confidence for North Korean refugees when learning English. To conclude, Oh stipulates that customised teaching/guidance is needed to systematically build foundations of English before the University entrance exams and for continuous learning.

#### 17. Oh & Kim (2024)

Oh and Kim (2024) explore the English learning motivations of third country-born North Korean defections (n=2) via motigraphs and interviews. Both participants were born in China where they lacked goals/purposes for studying English, and the learning methods of repetition and memorising were generally demotivating. This transformed upon arrival in South Korea where motivation increased due to the perception of the need for English for adapting and gaining access to South Korean society, with goals of communication with South Koreans, building relationships, education, and employment as motivators factors for learning English. South Korean language skills were also noted as a difficulty for studying English for third country-born North Korean defectors whose L1 is Chinese rather than Korean, making active class participation difficult. Despite this, both participants noted greater satisfaction with their English learning than before they settled in South Korea due to the preferred learning method of understanding rather than memorisation, and the comfortable academic atmosphere and strong relationships with others in class. Educational support such as Korean language education, mentoring and career counselling should be extended to third country-born North Koreans, and policy should emphasise the need to understand the individual academic backgrounds of North Korean defectors and develop a systematic approach to teaching them from the lower grades, with teachers who can provide emotional support in the classroom.

#### 18. Park & Kim (2014)

Park and Kim investigate the characteristics and backgrounds of North Korean refugees entering university in South Korea, what challenges these students face, and their initial reactions to the newly implemented Basic English classes. English education in North Korea was not viewed as positive or successful. Upon entering South Korean university, students mentioned that everything was difficult as they lacked the foundations of English to understand the fundamentals, the explanations of which were often omitted during class, as well as experiencing difficulties with professors, the curriculum, and a lack of time to study during semesters. North Korean refugee students are motivated learners but the English skill gap between themselves and their South Korean peers is so large, and time must also be dedicated to other classes so much so that they cannot catch up, and feel progress is slow. Participation in class is also difficult: liberal arts courses are 100% in English, so they have a hard time understanding the content of the class itself, making it difficult for them to understand assignment details, as well as experiencing unfamiliarity with testing materials and struggling to understand test questions. Some students mentioned that it was difficult to distinguish words that are easily distinguished by the general public, such as proper names, people's names, holidays, etc in textbooks. These challenges cause a decrease in confidence and motivation. This low confidence and underperforming in English combined with pressure to maintain high grades in order to receive financial aid, can lead to many dropouts. Taking the newly implemented Basic English courses

allowed them to build a foundation in English and gain confidence in English and English classes but still felt a gap with their peers when returning to regular required English classes with general students. The study calls on universities to review the admissions processes for North Korean students, who often do not need to take an English proficiency test, and offer urgent support. In order to prevent them from giving up easily, it is important to encourage them to fully understand that English, unlike other subjects, requires patience and persistence, and that it will naturally require more effort and time than students who have been exposed to English since elementary school.

#### 19. Park (2020)

Park (2020) investigates the English-learning experiences of North Korean refugee students before and after arriving in South Korea, the challenges they experience in tertiary-level English classes, and what kinds of support systems should tertiary institutions provide to help these students' English learning needs. Before entering South Korea, English education in North Korea was considered not useful and impractical. However, upon arrival to South Korea, participants realised they lacked the linguistic capital required to integrate into South Korean society. They recognised the important symbolic capital of English which were allow them access to society and upwards economic and social mobility, but they lacked basic English and felt the prominent skills gap between themselves and their South Korean peers. The foundational English classes offered by their university increased motivation to study and they felt satisfied by the classes and reassured by the progress they were making. University policies such as English only classes and grading on a curve policies helps to maintain inequality between the North Korean refugee students and their South Korean peers, and should be adjusted as so not to demotivate and exclude North Korean refugees from tertiary education by threatening their economic security (All who were interviewed relied on financial aid most of which was provided on the basis of maintaining high grades). Admission policies must be revised beyond allowing North Korean refugees into universities where they will struggle with English language education, admitting those who they deem able to handle the academic requires, and offering additional support following admission such as weekly peer-led study groups, encouraging L2 development and interpersonal relationships.

#### 20. Park (2021)

Park (2021) investigates how North Korean refugees in South Korea adapt to a new variety of Korean and construct their own language ideologies and identities. Loan words were discovered to be one of the most significant challenges for North Korean refugees, having to reject the linguistic purism ideology promoted to them in North Korea and adapt to the daily us of loan words. These contrasting values towards language led to self-esteem issues and internal conflicts for the North Korean refugees having to relearn their language and abandon their existing ideologies. Participants realised the value of English in South Korea over their North Korean variety of speaking, taking on inferior positioning as North Koreans who struggled with English and spoke an undesirable form of Korean. Imagining a future reunified Korea helped participants to challenge their inferior identities, recognising that their ability to speak North and South Korean will be valuable assets in the event of reunification. In terms of recommendations, Park (2020) noted that integration programs could train and employ North Korean migrants in order for them to utilise their bidialectal and bicultural experiences as well as training and encouraging teachers to understand refugees' experiences and adapt their teaching accordingly all of which can ease the integration process as North Korean refugees can become more active and valued members of South Korean society.

#### 21. Park (2022)

Park (2022) investigates the positioning of one North Korean refugee across the past, present, and future, and how these narratives impact his identity as and English learning and his learning experiences. Being considered an outsider by South Korean society and lacking in English skills, the prominent use of English in South Korea via loan words increased the participants feelings of being an outsider who was unable to participate in south Korean society or engage socially and thus was considered an incompetent member of society. In university classes he compared his skills to that of his South Korean classmates and felt inferior and lonely and could not identify himself as an English learner due to his low proficiency. After dropping out of university due to mental health struggles, the participant began to embrace his North Korean identity whilst working for a North Korean human rights union. He developed clear goals of being a human rights activist and psychotherapist and felt a renewed desire to study English in order to achieve his goals. He was able to acknowledge the power of English in becoming a member of the global community who is able to share his thoughts on North Korea with people from across the world, thus negotiating a new identity as a North Korean in South Korea. The participant thus transformed into a motivated English learner, envisioning his future. He additionally criticised the overemphasis on English proficiency in South Korean society and instead highlights the need to cultivate individuals' diverse skills and the role they can play in an international community.

#### 22. Park & Lee (2022)

Park and Lee (2022) use the interview testimony of Min to examine how his views of English and English learning have changes and how his transnational experience has shaped his agency and identity. Initially in North Korea, Min did not feel the need to study English due to the lack of opportunity to actually use it. In South Korea, he determined the importance of English as a cultural asset and form of cultural capital which will aid in the pursuit of his dreams. During his time in the USA, Min realised that English was useful not only for life in South Korea, but for communicating and working with people around the world, transcending the boundaries of the physical place you are in. Min maintains pride in his North Korean identity across all these spaces and imagines his future in a reunified Korea and the value his linguistic skills will have in this imagined place. In terms of pedagogical implications for English or L2 language programmes in general, this study calls for a shift from highlighting what learners lack and focussing more on what assets they have, particularly the transnational identities and life experiences of refugees.

#### 23. Park (2023)

In this doctoral thesis, Park (2023) examines how North Korean refugees negotiate their identities as English learners, the relevance of language ideologies in South Korea and how they intersect with North Korean refugees' identities as English learners, and how the negotiated identities of North Korean refugees in South Korea are shaped by investment in English language learning. 8 university students took part in this ethnographic study. All participants viewed English as a method to access upwards social and economic mobility and had high motivation and constant desire to improve their skills, feeling ashamed that they were not good enough. Participants experienced linguistic racialisation and responded in a variety of ways. North Koreans were assigned identities as uneducated and incompetent due to their linguistic repertoires of low English proficiency and undesirable Korean variety and negotiated their English learner/user identities in response. One participant used this incompetent North Korean narrative to justify her poor English to her professors, taking on a peripheral identity, whereas other participants utilised different identities entirely, such as being pregnant/ a mother, or identity of social class. One participant used the ideology of North

Koreans as poor English speakers to empower her to become a confident English speaker, and another used future goals of studying abroad, where the deficient North Korean ideology would not be so prominent, as a motivator. Christian organisations also influenced two participants to invest more in their English learning as they enabled contact with English speakers and thus helped shape their identities as North Koreans in South Korean society. The intersectionality between Christianity, North Korean identities, and investment in English demonstrated how religious sites could offer opportunities, and resources for English learning that government organisations failed to provide.

#### 24. Shin (2019)

Shin's (2019) Masters dissertation explored the motivation of English learning and class satisfaction of North Korean refugee students. Overall motivation was above average, with North Korean students being more interested in foreign languages and cultures after arriving in South Korea and they believed studying English is necessary for settling in Korean society. Female students had higher instrumental motivation, suggesting that female students have a stronger innate language-oriented personality and are more motivated to have a role as members of South Korean society who are needed for employment and other social purposes. The most common problems identified among participants was difficulty with course content (pace of the class, numerous assignments, and presentations), the gap between their English proficiency and that of the South Korean students, and communication problems with native English instructors. These challenges could lead to decreased confidence and diminished satisfaction and motivation to learn. Participants cited that they prefer conversation classes that focus on practical English that will help them in real life, rather than classes that are designed for exams. Furthermore, citing that they are at a basic level different from university students from South Korea, the North Korean students wished for levelled instruction, considering the level of individual students. Shin (2019) concludes with recommendations of 1:1 mentoring, exchange programmes, and on/offline course for TOEIC and business English, Korean instructors and personal support from teachers via meetings throughout the year to encourage communication.

#### 25. Shin & Park (2019)

Shin and Park (2019) examined how 4 participants viewed their English learning experiences in North Korea, how their attitudes towards L2 learning evolved as they transitioned to South Korea and the US, and to what extent English is used as a tool for adaptation. Participants A and B (a married couple living in America) praised their experiences of learning English in North Korea as positive and useful thanks to North Korea's superior education system, whereas C and D expressed that it was not helpful and they had little motivation to study. For A and B North Korean remained at the top of their language hierarchy, not recognising the value of English in South Korea. Contrastingly, C and D both realised the power and value of English in South Korea and its role for achieving goals and success, greatly improving motivation to study English. C rescaled his languages, prioritising English, whereas D still considered North Korean to be the most important language followed by English. This was because although English could help him achieve his goals of becoming a politician, his ultimate goal was to work towards reunification and thus still valued North Korean.

#### 26. Yang & Lee (2012)

The aim of Yang and Lee (2012) was to examine the current situation of English learning in public middle schools, where North Korean refugees are educated alongside other South Korean youth and propose suggestions on how to make English learning more effective for North Korean refugees. The North Korean refugee students recognise the importance of learning English in South Korean society, but struggle with the difficulty levels. Difficulties include listening skills, and the difference in

teaching methods in North and South Korea (diverse teaching methods, American vs British pronunciation). Timing of entry to South Korea also impacts difficulty levels with English learning, as later arrivals struggle with the gap between their skills and the high levels and standards of English of their South Korean peers. No participants attended private tutoring classes due to economic reasons and due to the fact that schools and local children's centres provide adequate support to North Korean teenage refugees. They also try to avoid unnecessary contact with Korean students outside of regular schools. According to the participants, North Korean defectors value their adaptation to South Korean society and want integrated education with South Korean students. However, the problem with integrated education is that it cannot provide education according to their level. The authors conclude that in order to effectively learn English, teachers should be given additional training to ensure teaching reflects the specificities of English language teaching for North Korean refugees, and it is worth considered considering exchanges with alternative schools that have curricula and teaching materials for North Korean defectors. Researchers also call for additional research on English curriculums in North Korea in order to gain a better understanding of the level and type of English education North Korean refugees receive prior to escaping.