Article

"I Feel Safe When I listen to Korean Music!": Musical Engagement and Subjective Well-being Amongst Korean International Students in the UK

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ABSTRACT

By addressing the research question, "How do Korean international students engage in music for their own well-being in the UK?", this study aims to understand a group of international students' experiences of their temporary migrant status and the coping mechanisms they employ in the pursuit of subjective well-being in response to these experiences. After semi-structured interviews, the thematic analysis resulted in five themes: (1) music as a tongbanja 동반자 (companion), (2) music as a safe konggan 공간 (space), (3) music for gwangye 관계 (relationships), (4) music for gibun 기분 (moods), and (5) musical demands of international students. This led to discussions of music as: 'Being' a companion and safe space, and 'doing' in relationships and moods, including doing K-pop for 're-membering'. Therefore, this study adds depth to understanding of how Korean international students in the UK engage with music to address the challenges they face and, thus, enhance their subjective well-being.

Keywords: International students, Korean international students, musical engagement, subjective wellbeing, wellbeing

International Students and their Well-being

International students are individuals who physically relocate to a country other than their country of origin for education (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2023). Studies have shown that many international students suffer from mental health issues during their studies

abroad (Forbes-Mewett & Sawyer, 2019; Lee & Ciftci, 2014; Ra, 2016). Although both domestic and international students face similar stressors, such as new experiences in the university setting, financial difficulties, and concerns about new relationships (Bradley, 2000), international students have additional stressors, such as language barriers (Sümer et al., 2008), the loss of familiar social support networks, isolation, loneliness, homesickness (Lacina, 2002; Olivas & Li, 2006; Tidwell & Hanassab, 2007), cultural misunderstandings, racial discrimination, and cultural isolation (Lee, 2010; Yakunina & Weigold, 2011). Recent studies have indicated that international students also have difficulties adapting to a new educational system and social norms, as well as greater financial challenges (Koo et al., 2021b; Koo et al., 2021c; Xing & Bolden, 2019). These difficulties have the potential to influence their mental well-being (Forbes-Mewett & Sawyer, 2019). If there are many differences between the host culture and the culture of origin, their adjustment stress is even greater (Prieto-Welch, 2016). However, seeking help for mental health problems has been shown to be undesirable for many international students due to their cultural background, language barriers, and lack of social support (Alharbi & Smith, 2018; Brunsting et al., 2018; Forbes-Mewett & Sawyer, 2019).

Korean International Students and their Well-being

Korean international students in the UK are considered a minority group among the international students cohort (Universities UK International & IDP Connect, 6 Sep 2021). Previous research on Korean international students is primarily limited to North America, and further limited in scope but suggests that Korean international students have additional difficulties that could impact their mental health, such as the tolerance and repression of personal emotions (Lee et al., 2014; Koo et al., 2021b). The suppression of emotions is associated with Korean cultural values, and Korean students may encounter challenges in seeking help for emotional difficulties due to cultural stigma (Lee et al., 2014). In addition, the acculturative stress experienced by Korean international students may vary based on their age and gender (Ra, 2016). In the USA, older and female Korean international students reported experiencing more stress compared to their younger and male peers (Ra, 2016) and younger international students were less prone to acculturative stress when compared to their older counterparts (Sümer et al., 2008). Korean international students also belong to a collectivist culture where social support is crucial for mental well-being (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; McKenna et al., 2017) and has a positive influence on facilitating healthy responses to stressors and reducing overall stress levels (Dunkley et al., 2006; Finch & Vega, 2003). International students from collectivist cultures however are thus at an increased risk of experiencing mental health issues when they lack social support and a sense of connectedness (Liu, 2009). This creates further vulnerability for Korean students. In addition, Korean international students in the USA often have a mix of emotions about their Korean ethnic identity, associated with both positive and negative affect (Lee,

2010). Positive ethnic identity is linked to higher levels of subjective well-being and reduced psychological distress among various ethnic and racial minority groups, spanning different age groups (Crocker et al., 1994; Greene et al., 2006; Lee et al., 2005). Hence, ambivalent ethnic identity for Korean international students could negatively impact on their subjective well-being.

Musical Engagement and Subjective Wellbeing

Subjective well-being measures how individuals perceive and assess their overall well-being within specific domains and activities in their lives (National Research Council, 2014). Having agency, individuals experience well-being differently, and strategies for well-being also vary on an individual basis. Regarding such strategies, music listening was the most effective stress coping strategies for university students during the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) period, and was as effective as exercise, sleep, and changing location (Vidas et al., 2021). Music has a therapeutic function for people's wellbeing in the diaspora, and Klein (2005) employed Fortier's (1999) notion of 're-membering', which underscores the significance of nostalgic recollection within migrant community spaces and connections.

Saarikallio (2008) highlighted music's role in mood regulation in everyday life and developed the Music in Mood Regulation (MMR) scale consisting of seven key factors. These factors include entertainment, revival, strong sensation, diversion, discharge, mental work, and solace. These factors provide an understanding of how music can influence and regulate one's emotional state for their subjective well-being. Music has been shown to facilitate the 'removing' of challenging aspects of reality, which can be 'refurnished' through expression and communication (DeNora, 2016). Musical engagement has played a significant role in enhancing the subjective well-being of elderly men in the UK, encompassing two dimensions: 'Being,' which involves the connection of embodied emotions through music, and 'doing,' which pertains to shared, communal experiences with others through music (Lindblad & de Boise, 2020). Another study in where proved that music enhances reminiscence for older people, which can improve later-life depression and well-being (Engelbrecht et al., 2021). While diversely located and isolated, these studies suggest that music can have an impact on the subjective well-being of individuals in various life stages and contexts.

Among different forms of musical engagement, such as listening to music, playing an instrument, singing, dancing, creating or composing music, and/or attending musical concerts, theatre or events, an Australian study of individuals who participated in activities like dancing or attending musical events with music demonstrated notably higher subjective well-being scores compared to those who did not engage with music in these ways (Weinberg & Joseph, 2017). Nonetheless, it is important to note that music is not exclusively harnessed for the promotion of subjective well-being, as previous research has demonstrated that music can elicit negative emotions, including anger, anxiety, bitterness, despair,

fear, and guilt (Peltola & Eerola, 2016). Furthermore, young individuals sometimes use music that leads to a deterioration in their emotional state (Saarikallio et al., 2015).

Among different music genres, K-pop (Korean popular music) continues to gain increasing attention from young people including university students globally. Several studies have investigated the relationship between K-pop and its psychological impact on young adults between the ages of 20 and 40 (Fitri et al., 2021). These studies have reported varied results regarding the associations between K-pop fandom and psychological well-being, with some indicating positive correlations and others revealing negative connections (Fitri et al., 2021). Furthermore, in a study involving Korean-Canadian youth, K-pop was recognized as a tool for reaffirming ethnic and global identities, seen as a process that contributes to the formation of both national and global identities, which related to their well-being (Yoon, 2019).

Such increasing recognition of the interconnectedness of music with people's everyday experiences, particularly in how they use music to maintain their well-being and cope with challenging life situations (Batt-Rawden & DeNora, 2005), underscores the importance of understanding its specific value in the subjective well-being of Korean students studying abroad. Among various cohorts of international students, this study aims to explore how Korean students engage with music to enhance their subjective well-being while studying in the UK.

Research Aim: To explore the ways in which a group of Korean international students engage with music to enhance their subjective well-being in the UK, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of this subset within the broader international student community.

Research Question: How do Korean international students engage in music to promote their own well-being in the UK?

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework (Figure 1) was developed from the literature to serve as a structural guide for exploring a research question, exploring how Korean international students engage in music for 'being' and 'doing' musical activities for their subjective well-being.
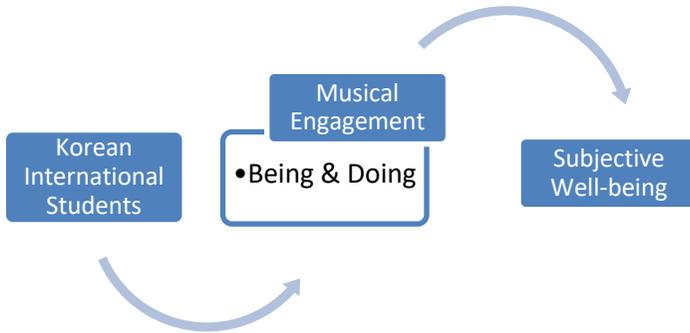
Figure 1 Conceptual Framework: Musical Engagement and Subjective Well-being among Korean International Students

METHOD

Design

Based on the above qualitative interview-based conceptual framework, ten semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide of open-ended questions organized into five main areas: a) general information about gender, age, occupation and social life; b) ways of engaging in music; c) preferred music; d) Korean identity and music activities; and e) motivations and rewards from engaging in music in relation to wellbeing.

Participants

The study interviewed ten Korean international students aged 22 to 32 years currently studying in various universities in the UK. Fourteen students were initially recruited for the study, but only ten were interviewed because four of them did not share their participant consent forms. Table 1 presents the participants' information.

Procedures and Data Analysis

Participants were enrolled using snowball sampling (Parker et al., 2019). To establish a sense of security and trust, participants were given the choice of interview settings, and the most common choices were a café, campus, or their own homes, either individually or in groups. A total of five interviews were conducted in person, and five online, considering geographical constraints and participants' preferences. Each interview lasted 60 to 90 minutes and was audio-recorded. A coffee or grocery voucher worth £10 was given as a reimbursement after conducting each interview. The interviews were transcribed verbatim in Korean, and subsequently analyzed using thematic analysis, following the guidelines outlined in Clarke and Braun (2017), 12 sub-themes emerged, which were grouped into five themes and translated into English.

Positionality

Recognizing the researcher's own position in the research is important as the researcher's position, whether insider or outsider, can impact various aspects of the research, including data collection and interpretation (Qin, 2016). My previous experiences as a South Korean international student positioned me as an insider and my professional experiences as a music therapist, clinical psychotherapist, and lecturer positioned me as an outsider in this study. Both positions were of value in understanding the various contexts of the study participants.

FINDINGS

Music played an essential role in the daily lives of the ten Korean international students during their time studying in the UK. Listening to music was their predominant musical activity. One student had to transfer their musical engagement types from actively playing music to primarily listening to it due to limited access to musical instruments, time constraints, and the unavailability of music tutors.

In terms of music preferences, the students displayed a diverse range of tastes, encompassing various genres such as classical, rap, rock, ballad, new age, British pop, and K-pop. Notably, some highlighted how their musical preferences had changed since their migration to the UK. In particular, many interviewees mentioned that they developed a newfound appreciation for K-pop, a genre they had not enjoyed much in their home, Korea, before embarking on their study abroad journey.

Five main themes emerged for explaining the role of music in the students' well-being: (1) music as a *tongbanja* 동반자 (companion), (2) music as a safe *konggan* 공간 (space), (3) music for *gwangye* 관계 (relationships), (4) music for *gibun* 기분 (moods), (5) musical demands of international students (Table 2).

Table 2: Themes and Subthemes

No.	Themes	Subthemes
1	Music as a *tongbanja* 동반자 (companion)	Music as a *tongbanja* to avoid the silence Music as a *tongbanja* on behalf of their family and friends
2	Music as a *konggan* 공간 (space)	Music as a safe *konggan* for self-protection Music as a safe *konggan* for self-reflection
3	Music for *gwangye* 관계 (relationships)	Building new relationships through music Maintaining old relationships through music Reconstituting inner relationships through music
4	Music for *gibun* 기분 (moods)	Modifying moods via music Reinforcing moods via music
5	Musical demands	Music playlists Musical avenues Musical enveloping campus

Article

Table 1: Korean International Students in the Study

Name	Gender	Age	Major	Degree	Length of staying in the UK	Musical engagement
P1	Male	23	English	BA exchange student	10 months	Listens to different genres (K-pop, hip-hop, J-pop, etc.) via YouTube and Melon (a South Korean online music streaming service), talking about music with friends, and goes to concerts with friends occasionally
P2	Female	Mid 20s	Sport	PhD student	About 2 years	Listens to classical music, and old & newest K-pop via YouTube with headphone. Dances to the music, sing along to music, talking about music with friends
P3	Male	30	Sociology of Sport	PhD student	About 8 months	Listen to various musical genre ranging from rap, hi-hop, K-pop, to new age, talking about music with friends
P4	Female	22	Sport Science	BA student	About 2 years	Listens to ballad, rap, K-pop, talking about music with friends
P5	Male	30	Sociology of Sport	PhD student	About 8 months	Listens to old Korean pop music, K-pop, British-pop, and classical music, talking about music with friends
P6	Male	23	Sport Science	BA student	About 2 years	Listens to K-pop and pop
P7	Female	26	Advertising Design	MA student	Less than 1 year	Listens to movie original sounds track, old Korean pop, K-pop via Spotify, Instagram, TikTok, talking about music with friends
P8	Female	27	Advertising Design	MA student	Less than 1 year	Listens to movie original sounds track, British pop, K-pop, talking about music with friends
P9	Female	32	Media Studies	MA student	Less than 1 year	Used to play violin for classical music, but cannot anymore due to the absent of instrument and tutors. Enjoys listen to classical music, talking about music with friends
P10	Male	Mid 20s	Math	BA student	Less than 2 years	Listens to different genres via YouTube, talking about music with friends

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Theme 1: Music as a *Tongbanja* 동반자 (companion)

For the Korean students in the UK, who found themselves far from their homeland, families, and close friends, music served as an unwavering companion in their daily lives. It was there for them whenever they felt alone and isolated. Many students feared the silence of their rooms, as it intensified their homesickness. In this context, music stepped in as a surrogate for their absent loved ones. The participants shared the sentiment that being alone in a quiet room was a significant challenge while studying abroad, but music offered them solace, making these solitary spaces more bearable.

P2 expressed, "Studying here without music is unimaginable. Silence feels strange... When you're abroad without your family, silence becomes especially daunting, triggering anxiety. During such times, music can be 'tongbanja', providing tremendous comfort. I can't imagine living here without it." Tongbanja, in English, this means 'companion'. Many other students also disliked the silence of being alone in a room but found a companion in music, helping them avoid the void (subtheme: Music as a tongbanja to avoid silence).

Participants also noted the difficulties of having conversations with their family and friends back home when needed. Despite the Internet improving communication for international students, time zone differences still made it challenging to connect with family and close friends from their home country. In those moments, music became their companion for comfort and support. "It feels like music fills a void that relationships can provide, but I cannot have it now," P3 noted.

According to these students, feelings of loneliness were an inevitable part of the Korean international student experience. Whenever they felt lonely during their study abroad, music offered companionship whenever they needed it. Music was an important companion, allowing them to be alone while studying, commuting, packing their luggage, eating, showering, sleeping, and working out at the gym. Music stood in as a tongbanja on behalf of their family and friends while they were studying in the UK (subtheme: Music as a tongbanja on behalf of their family and friends).

Theme 2: Music as a Safe *Konggan* 공간 (space)

The students use music to create safe spaces for their well-being, seeking security while studying abroad, where they are distanced from their comfort zones and support networks. Music fulfils this need by providing a safe 'konggan' (space) for self-protection (subtheme: Music as a safe konggan for self-protection). For instance, when they encountered challenges while studying abroad, they recreated a virtual space by listening to music associated with specific places from their hometown. In essence, though physically in the UK, music transported them to pleasant places in Korea. P8 mentioned, "Through music, I can transport myself back to the moments when I used to ride my bicycle

along the Han River during the cool summer nights…Even though I'm here, through music, I'm there, in that safe konggan (space) in Korea, at that moment."

For some interviewees, Korean songs in their native language were especially effective in creating a secure space. Korean songs provided a relaxing haven, free from the effort of understanding English. One student expressed, "Here, you constantly feel tense... you have to use English all the time... I feel disconnected from this country, and it makes me feel lonely... *I feel safe when I listen to Korean music*. I don't need to worry about language barriers and feeling dumb... I feel like I'm in Korea while listening to Korean music. I didn't listen to Korean music when I was in Korea. Instead, I used to listen to pop music. Now that I'm living in the UK, I want to listen to K-pop or Korean songs."

Listening to music while studying abroad thus provided an opportunity for self-reflection, offering students what they often referred to as 'quality time with themselves, creating a safe konggan' (Subtheme: Music as a safe konggan for self-reflection). They expressed that music helped them embrace their true selves during their study abroad experiences, fostering self-reflection. For some students, listening to music allowed them to delve deeper into their personalities, different identities, interests, and aspirations.

Theme 3: Music for *Gwangye* 관계 (relationships)

The Korean students used music to *build* new relationships in the host country, *maintain* old relationships with their family and friends in Korea, and *reconstitute* inner relationships with themselves. Sharing music lists, talking about music, and listening to music together were significant ways of using music to establish new friendships in the host country (subtheme: Music builds new relationships).

Notably, K-pop played a vital role in helping the Korean international students in the UK make new friends in the host country. K-pop's global popularity and the Hallyu (or Korean Wave, a cultural phenomenon in which the global popularity of South Korean popular culture) significantly aided the Korean international students in forming new friendships. Just being Korean often led to new friends approaching them, and naturally fostering friendships. Most of these new friends in the host country were other international students from Asia, with some being domestic students. Korean students had to listen to and learn more about K-pop to connect with their new friends who enjoyed K-pop to facilitate communication.

The Korean international students also maintained their old relationships with their home community through music (subtheme: Music maintains old relationships) by sharing newly released music in both Korea and the UK. They faced a greater challenge in coping with a lack of a sense of belonging in their new environment rather than difficulties in cultural adjustment and acculturation. They noted that their previous travel and study experiences in the UK reduced culture shock. However, the absence of a sense of belonging in their immigrant society made them feel depressed. For them, Korean music, in

particular, served as a bridge that helped students maintain and connect with their home culture. One student expressed, "When I listen to Korean music and discuss it with my friends in Korea, it still feels like I belong to Korea, which provides me with a sense of belonging, which I hardly feel here. This sense of belonging makes me feel relieved." Another student mentioned, "Korean music reminds me of where I could belong."

Furthermore, K-pop allowed students to reconsider their cultural and ethnic identity and establish a new relationship with themselves (subtheme: Music reconstitutes inner relationships with themselves). The students arrived in the UK with negative perceptions of Korea due to their disappointment with Korean society. However, after experiencing the prominence of K-pop firsthand, they expressed a newfound sense of pride in their ethnic identity as Koreans and in Korean culture. K-pop allowed the students to view their ethnic and cultural identities positively and facilitated the establishment of a positive relationship with themselves. A student noted, "When people talk about K-pop, I think, 'Wow, it seems like being Korean is quite all right!'"

Theme 4: Music for *Gibun* 기분 (moods)

Study participants utilized music to adjust their moods, employing a range of genres like funk, rock, new age, classical, rap, pop, and K-pop to uplift, maintain, and reinforce their moods. When they sought a change in their emotional state, listening to music alone was the primary activity, though occasionally, they sang along with friends or even danced to K-pop for an extra boost.

As noted above, their previous travel and study experiences and media exposure eased acculturation stress in the UK, but the students still revealed psychological challenges related to language barriers, academic pressures, racial discrimination incidents, financial concerns, and worries about future employment. Seasonal depression due to the UK's weather was also reported. Seeking assistance for their psychological well-being proved difficult due to uncertainty about where to turn, a lack of understanding of its importance, and social stigma.

All students concurred that studying abroad would have been significantly more challenging without music to help regulate negative emotions and moods stemming from these psychological difficulties (subtheme: Modifying moods via music). They turned to music to alleviate negative emotions and moods, and find inner peace when frustrated or angry. Additionally, listening to sad music allowed them to immerse themselves deeply in feelings of melancholy before ultimately transforming their moods from a state of depression to positivity.

In their temporary migration situation, where access to support resources was limited, music provided the most accessible and immediate way to regulate their emotions. One student noted, "In the life of a student studying abroad, I cannot always have social supports I want, right? That's when music helps me change and maintain my mood!" Another student shared, "I sometimes feel inadequate when I'm here, especially when I struggle with English and feel

foolish. That's when I listen to music to comfort myself, empower myself, and become stronger. I use it to shake off feelings of sadness."

They also turned to music when they desired to immerse themselves in a particular emotional state to reinforce positive feelings (subtheme: Reinforcing moods via music). "I think music has the power to reinforce my positive moods," P9 noted. P7 explained that music accelerates their positive emotions when needed. All participants acknowledged this role of music, using it to savor the moment and infuse themselves with the vitality needed to thrive while living alone in a foreign country.

Nevertheless, some students acknowledged that music does not always help with mood regulation. At times, it could evoke negative experiences or reinforce negative emotions, leading them to opt for everyday background noise over music. Students reported that the same music could sometimes elicit positive emotions and, at other times, negative emotions, with the reasons for this variability often remaining unknown.

Theme 5: Musical Demands

The ten Korean international students expressed their desire for universities and professionals to provide advice or resources regarding music use to enhance their well-being while studying in the UK. Given that listening to music is the most common musical activity due to limited resources during their international study, they sought regular recommendations for situation-specific and mood-appropriate playlists. P3 participant stated, "Receiving an email every week with updated music recommendations tailored to different scenarios would be great..." All participants expressed their interest in receiving email with recommendations for music playlists curated by experts, as they often found themselves stuck listening to the same genre and songs (subtheme: Providing music playlists).

Additionally, students expressed their hope for opportunities to build social connections through music. They recognized the limited avenues for students to make friends while studying abroad, especially in the case of one-year Master's degree programs in the UK, where socializing opportunities are limited. They proposed the establishment of students' music-sharing societies or clubs, allowing even introverted students to participate comfortably without the need for special equipment or instruments. They emphasized the need for university support to ensure such opportunities. They also observed a limited level of interaction between domestic and international students, resulting in a sense of exclusion for those from abroad. They propose that universities should take the initiative to provide opportunities for socialization and integration between international and local students. In this regard, the Korean international students strongly believed that music could serve as a key to this initiative. Thus, they wanted universities to offer musical avenues that facilitate interaction between host and international students (subtheme: Musical avenues).

Participants stressed the importance of host universities facilitating the organization of pop-up concerts by students or professional musicians,

ensuring that accessibility was a primary consideration. They also expressed the idea that having music playing from student busking performances at various locations within the campus would be great, making music readily available throughout the campus (subtheme: Musical enveloping campus).

DISCUSSION

The selected Korean students in this study engaged with music for their subjective well-being by using music as a companion and a safe space and for building, maintaining and reconstructing their intra and inter-relationships, and for converting and deepening their current moods. They engaged with music mainly via listening to music alone and with others. Talking about music with others was also one of the leading musical activities among the students.

Music: Being as a Companion and Safe Space

This study corroborates Lindblad and de Bose's (2020) concept of "Being" through music, where individuals connect with their emotions, and extends their findings by offering an additional dimension to music, where it serves as both a companion and a safe space. This dual meaning of being with music explains how the 'presence' (being) of music enabled students to 'exist' (to be) as themselves. This was because music was there with the students as both a companion and a secure space, allowing them to exist in their essence connecting with their emotions and feelings.

The discomfort expressed by Korean students in this study when they are alone in their rooms, separated from their family and friends aligns with previous research that suggests international students from collectivist cultures are at a higher risk of mental health issues when they lack social support and connectedness (Liu, 2009). For these Korean students, music became their most accessible companion, reducing their feelings of loneliness while studying abroad.

Although earlier studies (Ra, 2016) suggest that participants who are relatively younger age (aged 22-33 years old) experience less acculturative stress, supporting the previous studies (Ra, 2016), these Korean students all experienced the challenges that general international students face. These included language barriers, financial constraints, difficulties adapting to new educational systems, and feelings of homesickness (Koo et al., 2021a; Koo et al., 2021b; Koo et al., 2021c; Xing & Bolden, 2019) and expressed their negative impacts on mental well-being (Forbes-Mewett & Sawyer, 2019).

Thus, the Korean students in this study while young in age, still required, and searched for a sense of well-being something which they found when they were 'being' in music. Music provided a 'safe space' where they could 'remove' themselves from the reality they faced. Their conceptual use of music aligns with DeNora's (2016) perspective, which illustrates how music functions to 'remove'

individuals from the external realities associated with their lives as the Korean international students in host countries. DeNora (2016) emphasized that people detach themselves from their reality for the sake of ontological security. Music created an imaginary safe space for Korean students, a concept that resonates with prior research on Irish traditional music, which served as a means for the Irish diaspora to remain connected to their "home" - a space existing solely in their spatial memories (Collins, 2010). Likewise, providing a secure space through music also promoted their self-reflection, allowing them to reconnect with their cultural roots and identity, and enhanced their sense of 'being' as themselves. The music's reminiscence effect proved by previous study (Engelbrecht et al., 2021; Rubin & Schulkind, 1997), could trigger the students' autobiographical memory, which was different from their reality (Engelbrecht et al., 2021).

Music: Doing for Relationship and Moods

The students actively engaged in 'doing' with music for their well-being, and music, in turn, was 'doing' for students' well-being. In this study, the concept of 'doing' does not refer to physical activities like 'playing music' or 'attending concerts' as in Lindblad and de Boise's (2020) study, but rather to their active efforts to build, maintain, re-establish intra and inner-relationships, and modify and strengthen their moods.

Engaging with music helped the Korean students in the host country build new relationships while maintaining connections with old relationships from their homeland. The role of music in helping students build and maintain relationships underscores how music can serve as a source of social support. Previous studies have shown that social support positively influences healthy responses to stressors and reduces overall stress (Dunkley et al., 2006; Finch & Vega, 2003). This social support is especially crucial for the mental well-being of international students from collectivist cultures, such as those from East Asia, including Korea, because individuals from these cultures place a strong emphasis on social relationships and the networks formed among people (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; McKenna et al., 2017).

Moreover, music enabled Korean students to (do) work on their inner relationship identity-related issues. Korean international students were able to reshape their cultural and ethnic identity in a positive way, through music, especially K-pop. These reformed identities allowed them to reframe their relationship with themselves, which will be discussed in the later section: *Doing K-pop: Re-membering.*

The findings indicate that music helped the Korean international students 'do' with their emotions by regulating their moods. Korean students participating in this study reported difficulties seeking support for their emotional well-being. The students tended to tolerate and suppress their personal emotions (Lee & Ciftci, 2014) and faced challenges in sharing their feelings (Koo et al., 2021b). They also encountered challenges when seeking support for their mental

health, which can be ascribed not solely to their cultural backgrounds but also to language barriers and the limited social support available in the host country, similar to the issues faced by other international students (Alharbi & Smith, 2018; Brunsting et al., 2018; Forbes-Mewett & Sawyer, 2019).

For those Korean international students in this study who mentioned having difficulties discussing one's emotions, music has been used to effectively self-regulate their negative moods and enhance positive moods, enabling them to manage their moods more easily. The functions of music as a mood regulator (entertainment, revival, strong sensation, diversion, discharge, mental work, solace) has been explained by Saarikallio (2008) and more explicit information about these mechanisms might help Korean international students to regulate their moods. Consistent with DeNora's (2016) concept of 'refurnishing', thus, the results demonstrate that music motivated students to act (or to do something) to enhance their relationships across different levels and regulate their moods, effectively 'refurnishing' the challenging reality they were facing.

Doing K-pop: Re-membering

The findings also indicate that study participants were able to perceive their cultural and ethnic identity more positively through Korean music, especially K-pop, and that this allowed them to reframe their relationship with themselves. The Korean international students in this study observed that upon their initial arrival in the UK, they held negative perceptions of Korea. However, K-pop was positively valued in the UK, their host country, and when being associated with the homeland of K-pop, the Korean students could make friends and feel welcome, which has led to a positive reassessment of their cultural and ethnic identity. This new positive ethnic identity can have implications for their well-being, as research has shown that a positive ethnic identity is associated with greater subjective well-being and lower psychological distress among ethnic and racial minority groups of various age groups (Crocker et al., 1994; Greene et al., 2006; Lee et al., 2005).

Thus, I borrow the concept 're-membering' from Klein (2005) and Fortier (1999) to explain the experience of K-pop among the Korean international students in the study. Although Klein (2005) used the Fortier's concept to explain the transferring of the collective memory in the songs from first-generation immigrants to the next generation of immigrants, here, I use the term to explain the international students' remembering their own ethnic and cultural identity, and rejoining (re-membering) the group identity as Koreans in a positive view, even if they previously held a negative perception.

The function of K-pop in 'remembering' for Korean international students is unique and distinct from the experiences of non-Korean young adults or Korean Canadian youth. For non-Koreans aged 20 to 40, K-pop was associated with celebrity worship and psychological well-being (Fitri, 2021). In a study of Korean Canadian youth, K-pop was used as a means of reaffirming ethnic and global

identities, considering it as a process for shaping both national and global identities (Yoon, 2019).

Thus, the findings suggest that amendments needed to be made to the conceptual framework (Figure 2). This framework provides a more in-depth understanding within the context of Korean international students regarding "being" and "doing" in musical engagement for subjective well-being.
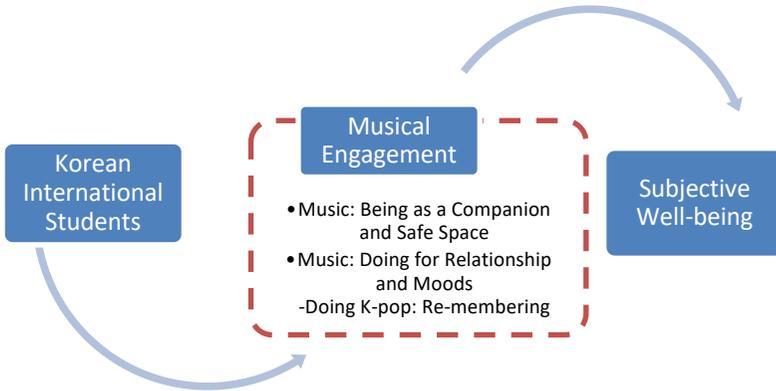

Figure 2: Amended Conceptual Framework: Musical Engagement and Subjective Well-being among Korean International Students

Implication for Research and Practice

The findings regarding students' musical demands offer valuable insights for both research and practical application. First, the Korean international students in the study expressed a need for "providing music playlists curated by experts" as they highlighted challenges in selecting music for their well-being, sometimes resulting in undesirable emotions. Previous research has shown that music can evoke negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, bitterness, despair, fear, and guilt (Peltola & Eerola, 2016), which can be risky for some international students who may be in a psychologically vulnerable state. Therefore, future research is necessary to develop music playlists in music listening to promote international students' well-being. The playlists should be curated with the assistance of professionals such as music therapists and music psychologists.

Previous study shows that individuals who engage in activities like dancing or attending musical events with music tend to experience significantly higher subjective well-being scores than other musical activities (Weinberg & Joseph, 2017). While the context may different, it is essential to acknowledge the strong interest of Korean students in diverse musical activities. The circumstances, characterized by a lack of physical and social resources, have led Korean students to primarily rely on listening to music for their well-being. Therefore, host institutions should explore the various "musical avenues" that

can be made accessible on campus, as the students suggested. For the avenues, the accessibility would be particularly important for international students who may not be familiar with the systems in their host countries.

The students expressed their desire to listen to music at various locations across the campus, hoping to have a "musically enveloping campus". Some students noted that hearing unexpected Korean music in campus made them feel welcome and could be part of the host culture. In this regard, it is also worth considering filling the campus with various cultural music from international students' backgrounds. In terms of cultural music, students discussed experiencing psychological comfort while listening to Korean songs in their native language. Future research could investigate the impact of music in their native language on international students' wellbeing, as this area appears to hold significance for further exploration.

Through K-pop, the Korean international students in this study were able to establish positive relationships with others and oneself, which are important for their subjective well-being (National Research Council, 2014). As K-pop has become a global trend among young adults, including university students, future studies need to compare the role of K-pop in the subjective well-being of Korean international students, local students, and other international students.

CONCLUSION

The present study explored how Korean international students in the UK engage in music to enhance their subjective well-being. These findings offered comprehensive insight into the role of music in the Korean international students' 'being' and 'doing' in staying abroad, concerning their well-being, expanding the concept previously proposed by Lindblad and de Boise (2020). These findings also highlighted the significant role of K-pop in 're-membering' the cultural and ethnic identities of Korean international students. Furthermore, this research has implications for host universities and future research, as it provides an understanding of the difficulties that Korean international students face during their study abroad experience and the potential benefits of using music to address these challenges. Beyond creating curated music playlists and diverse accessible musical avenues for Korean international students, the study indicates the potential use of cultural music for international students' well-being. In a period of intense fiscal pressure on many tertiary institutions, the thoughtful use of music to enhance student wellbeing is also valuable for the same pragmatic reasons that the students in this study engaged in it – its relative to affordability in relation to other institution led professional engagements.

As for the limitation of this study, the number of participants (ten students) is limited, thus, future studies should consider a larger sample size from different contexts. Nevertheless, this study ultimately deepens the understanding of the experiences of Korean international students in

temporary migrant status and what support is needed for their subjective well-being.

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