September Interviews

Interviewee: Nae
Capacity: Mentor

Hello Nae, how are you today?

I am good, and as you can tell I'm not on the server as much, I'm pretty busy otherwise.

We are here to interview you as a mentor for the yearbook. To start off, could you please introduce yourself?

Hello to everyone who is going to be reading this. I am Nae, and of the many tasks I do on the server, being a mentor is one of them.

How long have you been on the server?

2 years. 아미 KSG turns 2 years old this coming November. So it's been almost 2 years.

You have been here since the beginning, how has the server improved?

Yeah I have been here pretty much since the beginning and it has changed a lot. There's so many different ways. Firstly, how we operated because we started out with the Soundcheck and it was only people that were a part of the course that were able to join, then we eventually branched out into having general members to Soundcheck in general and then a lot of things happened, we lost a lot of members so we eventually switched to the general member system which we have now and it wasn't as elaborate as this. We had to think of activities and courses and clubs and something new as well. Since I've been here it has been through a lot of changes. I have been here a while to see all those changes, I was part of the reason some of those changes were implemented and I can say in the 2 years at 아미 KSG has been around it has definitely improved a lot and I'm super excited to see where it will go in the future.

How have you impacted in this improvement

Okay so, when I started out with 아미 KSG I was just an organizer, I wasn't a mentor back then. It was just Dani, Ka and I and just us 3 making the decisions basically. We would have times where we would just meet and bounce ideas off each other. So I would have some ideas and run it by Ka and Dani and we would talk it out to see how would this go, how would that go and if it was something we could do, if we had enough staff to be able to do it as well, then it became a feasible idea. Clubs were actually my idea, I don't remember when, but yeah the idea of having different clubs and what they do and all that.

What does a mentor do?

Okay so since the switch over to just general members, it has changed a lot because there's not a lot that mentors do now compared to when we had Soundcheck. When there was Soundcheck we had this focused course, kinda like Beginner Korean 1 + 2 course, if you are familiar with it. So we would have weekly lessons that would be sent out and there would be homeworks. We also had sessions, it's a lot different from what I do now, but the sessions would consist of mentees asking any questions and we would answer them, we would also have a few activities that we would go through and the homework would be there, tests and all of that. It's a lot different from the general courses. So mentors would have to mark the homework, at that time we gave feedback via Google Classroom, so it was like pdf forms and we would leave comments as feedback and mark all of that. Then we would have the tests and mentors would also mark the tests. We were also coming up with lessons, it was a make lessons as you go type of thing. It wasn't that lessons were already done. We were also hosting the sessions and doing different activities within the sessions. But now, since Soundcheck has not been reinstated, mentors don't have a lot to do right now. Well there is a lot to do but at the same time there isn't. We have a lot of courses but the mentors aren't really needed because most of the courses have answer keys so the org staff is in charge of that. But as for the things they do, as you know we have C&S (Chat & Speaking) happening this month and so whenever a mentee does their Chat & Speaking session, a mentor is in charge of checking that submission, writing out the feedback and then sending it to the mentee. There is also a section where even though organizing staff collects the

course homeworks, there are times where they don't know a sentence mentee has sent in is correct or if they are using a grammar structure correctly, so there is a channel where they can ask questions to mentors and mentors have to answer those questions as well. The quizzes also, not the Kahoot, the quizbot quizzes with the different grammar points and all that, mentors are the ones who come up with questions for those. Yeah and then also a big part of what we do right now is the subject channels. Whenever a member has a question about anything, if you are familiar with the subject channels; words, pronunciation, grammar, reading etc. So whenever we get pinged we want to make sure we are answering the question as soon as possible. I'm also hoping to incorporate mentors into the Beginner Korean course and so hopefully by then we will have a lot more to do, as of now that's just what mentors do.

Is there a system mentors use?

It actually goes for all staff but yeah we do have this Google Sheet where we basically keep track of who does what. We have a section where you basically tick off your tasks that you do. We track in a 2 week period, so say from the 4th September to the 17th September and you need to fulfill a quota. Mentors have a quota that they need to complete, like general members as well. So you need to do a certain amount of tasks in order to complete your quota. We keep track and try to encourage the mentors and mentor helpers to update their trackers frequently so at the end we can see what everyone has been doing and if we need to be brushing up anywhere.

When did you decide to become a mentor?

The funny thing is I didn't decide it actually, well that sounds like I didn't have a choice but I did have a choice. It was actually way, way back I think maybe around December of 2021. We had the Soundcheck course, mentors and everything planned out. But then this mentor, we shall not name, they just up and ghosted us. They left Discord, they left Twitter, they left Google Classroom. I think they even blocked us. It was a whole thing and we couldn't get in contact with them, there was no message to say "hey, this is not gonna work out" or anything like that. Up until that very point they were very willing to help out and everything. And so, because of that, there was now

this empty space and it needed to be filled quickly because the time of the course was coming up. At that time I was at a considerably okay level in Korean so I thought you know what, my knowledge is okay, and it's not like it was complex lessons or anything so I think I can do this so for now. I decided to fill the position and in the future, if there was a mentor that we could get to take over then I would hand it over to them and just go back to being an organizer. That did not happen, though, so I've been a mentor since then.

And how do you find your experience?

It has been great. I don't regret becoming a mentor. It is double the work with the organizer duties but it has been pretty great. I find that I like teaching others about Korean, especially for things I consider myself to have mastered. And up until now we've taught pretty basic stuff and it's been pretty good. It's also pretty rewarding to see the fruits of your labor, you know. Like when you see the mentees actually grasping the concept and putting it into practice and they are doing well. Then they also give you feedback as well because that is something we encourage as well. Letting us know if there is a fault in our teaching or if they are not understanding anything so that when they come and say "hey thanks to you I was able to understand this", it's a very gratifying feeling.

Mentors are responsible for creating materials, what's your favorite material you've made?

Hmm.. this probably sounds biased but the Beginner Korean course that i recently went through. Mostly because I did everything for it. And then after we had seen it happen it was pretty great. It had a lot to it, there were a lot of lessons, a lot of activities for those lessons. There was homeworks, tests and then I created answer keys for all of those as well just in case, and then there was extra practice outside of that. So watching it all come together into a course was pretty fun. But yeah I think the Beginner Korean course was my favorite material I've created.

Would you say the Beginner Korean course is your favorite part about being a mentor, or did you have something else in mind?

I wouldn't say the Beginner Korean course in particular because I did enjoy Soundcheck as well. And I guess I did create Beginner Korean as like a

Soundcheck sibling basically. I was intending for it to be Soundcheck 2.0 but then the lack of mentors, it wasn't gonna work out. So I wouldn't say the Beginner Korean course is the best part since it's pretty new but courses on a whole and being able to have your weekly classes and just interacting with the students and getting the assignments, having those extra practices because we try to have extra speaking practices as well so all of that definitely helped. But I think I enjoyed speaking the most. I know a lot of my mentees will look at this and say "really?" because they tend to be afraid of speaking but it's probably the best part for me.

What is your favorite task to do as a mentor?

I don't want to sound repetitive and say creating materials because that can also get tiresome sometimes to be honest. I also like answering questions in the subject channels, particularly word and grammar questions and sometimes pronunciation questions. Sometimes there will be some really, really interesting questions from mentees and it will really make me think. Sometimes I have like this random piece of knowledge that I've been wanting to share and a mentee asks this perfect question and I'm like yes, my time. Sometimes I have this knowledge, sometimes there are questions that I can answer like hanja. I don't really study hanja but you pick up a few things here and there like "oh this word is Sino-Korean and it means this which is why this word means this", so on and so forth. And being able to explain this to the mentees as well is a pretty great feeling. So yeah, aside from creating materials, I would say answering questions in the subject channels.

What are some of the challenges you have faced while being a mentor?

There is so much work. Particularly I think before there were general members there was a lot more challenge. We started out pretty great but then let's say mid way into the course we had a lot of issues with the other mentors, they are all gone. I think only Tisha and Moonie have remained. But we had mentors that had fallen back on their work and eventually it came to a point where I was taking care of the students in my class, and then like 2 other classes. I had to be showing up to sessions, marking and assigning their homeworks, sending out the lessons and I had to be keeping track of all that so it got tiresome after a while. But shifting into the general member only theme there hasn't been much issue it's just for certain tasks like C&S that I

will have to be on the mentors and remind them its C&S month, the submissions are piling up and so it often ends up that, say we have C&S for august and feedback is just being given back in september so if you had just done your C&S like 5th August, you're getting your feedback 1st September and by then it's like why do you even bother, you know? So definitely that. Yes I think mostly for C&S because as I mentioned we don't have much else to do. The questions are pretty much okay, they are answered relatively quickly and it's not just mentors as well so it's mostly for C&S and like I mentioned in the early Soundcheck days where I had to be taking care of a lot of classes.

How have you managed to deal or overcome these challenges?

I wouldn't say overcome, I just had to, you know, do it because it was like "I don't wanna do this because it's not my job", but at the same time I was like "even though I don't wanna do it, the mentees are being affected." So, even though I want be on the mentors like "hey this is your job I'm not going to do it for you", at the same time if I don't send that lesson to the mentees they are gonna be behind, if I don't give them feedback for their homework they won't see what they haven't grasped. It was just making up my mind that even if I have spoken to the mentors a lot of times and they don't want to listen, I just had to do it for the mentees. So I guess basically just thinking about the mentees and how it would impact them kind of helped push me to complete it even when it was kinda overwhelming. There was also Ka - love you Ka! - who helped out a lot. Ka had like triple the duties but she was there as well and of course Moonie. They have been the rocks of the mentors. It has been me, Ka and Moonie through it all, so I'm really grateful to them all because they were also there helping out with the other tasks as well, leading up until this very moment.

You mentioned in the staff introduction channel that you are studying accounting in university. Do you feel like your duties as a mentor impact your studies?

I love accounting, I do. But I swear, I don't know if it's because of the pandemic and being online because mind you I have not had a face to face class, it's all been online, I don't - this sounds bad - but I don't put a lot of effort into school. I think of it like if I pass I pass and I do aim to pass but at

the same time I admire people who are studying from like 9am to 5pm or even more or pulling all nighters. That's not me. I guess I tend to do a lot of server work more than I do school work. But I think a part of it is because I'm pretty good at accounting, and this may seem bold of me to say but since high school I've been pretty good at accounting. It's kind of the reason I chose this course. So I don't struggle to keep up in my classes as others would if they had other work. Also I take breaks as well, as you can see even now a part of the reason why I'm away from the server is because of the new semester and so I kind of want to get settled in and everything, get my foot in, before I get back to server work. Apart from that I also take breaks away from the server and it just works out for me. I end up passing my courses, and I do it all over again. So it hasn't been a great distraction both ways so my school work doesn't take much from server work, and server work doesn't take much from school work. I guess they are equal.

On top of school you also study Korean, do you think that has an impact?

You see, the relationship between me and Korean is a very on and off one, which is very bold to say when I teach Korean here. But I have those times where I completely take a break away from studying Korean. It's not something I do everyday or every week but the thing is once I start, then it's like a complete focus mode maybe for the next few months or so. I don't wanna be presumptuous but I think I'm at a comfortable level right now. And I'm not really in a race to get fluent or anything like that and so it's not where I feel like I'm losing my Korean studying time or anything like that. So I try sometimes to find time to study and studying for me isn't always taking a textbook and writing notes and doing exercises. Studying for me is also reading a korean story, or listening to songs or watching dramas or movies because I find that after I have looked at some vocab, learnt some grammar then it settles more in my brain if i actually see it in use and I find that I recognise a lot more. Even recently I have found that watching Vlives, well I guess you can call them Weverse Lives, has been a lot easier. I don't have to rely on a translator because I am able to understand most of what they are saying, minus the times they are all speaking at once, because if its an OT7 live then I definitely need a translator but if its like 2 or 3 of them or just 1 of them then it's pretty easy for me to understand. So then when I'm at a point where I'm settled in and don't have a lot to do then I start again with Korean

studying. So I guess I try to not overwhelm myself so if I have server work and school work going on I'm not gonna add Korean studying into the mix. I guess I kinda know how to balance my time.

How long have you been studying Korean for?

It has been 3 years. So I started in the summer of 2019 and this is gonna sound crazy but for the first year of my Korean studies it was strictly hangul and I probably mention this a lot as well but like if you ask my students at the Beginner Korean course, because it was such a new alphabet for me, the sounds were different, the way the structure, everything was just new. How words were formed, how syllables were formed and then you have those sound change rules to add into it. So it was a lot and I decided before I even moved on to learning introductions or anything of the sort I would get the pronunciation down to a T. The summer of 2019 all the way until the summer of 2020, that's not the exact time frame but somewhere around there I was just focusing on hangul and making sure I got everything down and so basically 2020 until now, I've been actually studying grammar and all of that.

How did you get into learning Korean?

It was like an on a whim decision. I've been an ARMY since 2017 and then 2019 it just randomly came to me. I think I was watching RUN BTS or something, I don't remember. I do remember I was watching something and then it occurred to me I could learn Korean. Because I have always had the desire to learn languages. I started out with Spanish and French and decided why not add another to the mix and so just one random day I decided I should start learning Korean. And so I did, I found a video on youtube, it was Go Billy's video on Hangul and I watched it and it has been since then.

How do you find working with the other mentors?

So for Ka and Moonie, as I mentioned they are the OGs, they are the ones that have been here with me since the beginning. So I've gotten to know them a lot better than I got to know the others who are relatively new. It has been great working with them, Ka and Moonie I mean, we've been working since 2020, they are nice and they do the work which is a great thing. Because I dislike laziness, you know what you have to do so do it and they do it. They help out. With the newer mentors and mentor helpers it's a bit

harder to gauge as I was saying there is not a lot that we do right now so it's kinda hard to gauge how well we work together. I don't know if I mentioned this earlier or anything, I'm hoping to have the Beginner Korean course include all the mentors and mentor helpers in the next cycle. And so I think I will have a more solid answer by then, but for now they are usually up to their own things so as to how well we work and how I think we are there's not really a solid answer there.

I believe you guys work with org staff too, how exactly do you and org staff work together? How is working with them?

In terms of mentor work, there's not a lot of overlap with our tasks. We do have a channel however, where org staff can ask mentors and mentor helpers questions about things they're unsure of. Take the courses for example; org staff is in charge of giving feedback there but if they aren't sure about a certain answer or topic, they can ask the mentors. This also goes for when material is being created. Org staff will create the material and then have mentor staff look over it to make sure everything is good. Outside of that, our roles don't overlap. If you mean personally, then as an organizer, I essentially oversee all tasks performed by org staff along with the other organizers. if there are new ideas, they suggest them to us, we discuss the feasibility and then work on implementing it on the server. We also have shared tasks that rotate weekly. Two or more org staff members will be assigned to a task and they'll work together to get it done. This way it gets things done quicker and also ensures that too much responsibility is not on one member. The team is great. They're always willing to work together and help each other out and I'm excited to see how much we'll grow in the months and even years to come.

I don't believe there are any mentor trainees currently, however there have been previously. Have you trained any?

The process is pretty new, we had 2 trainees, well 3 but one left, and I trained one of them. As I mentioned earlier, the process is pretty new and pretty quick. We don't have a lot for mentors to do at the moment so training does not involve a lot. It's not as organized as mod or org training would be. So when I train it's just introducing them to the sheet that we use to track, and to the tasks that we do. So answering questions, coming up with material;

that's most of what we do. So yeah I would do that and also give them a chance to do the task themselves to see if they get it, it's pretty easy to get. Once that's done, basically just let them go and complete the tasks so it's not a lot right now but we hope in the future when I implement the Beginner Korean course with all of the mentors there will be a lot more to do and so if we have any new mentors by then then there will be a lot more to train on but for now its super new and super quick process.

Keeping mentor trainees in mind, what advice would you give to anyone wanting to apply to be a mentor?

Unless you aren't at a solid level in Korean, don't be afraid to apply. I know I've seen a lot of people who are interested in being a mentor or mentor helper but they are like "I'm not at the level yet or anything", it's okay. Once you are not fumbling with the basics or anything like that, but at the same time we don't want anyone from Begin level. But don't be afraid to apply if you have a solid knowledge and of course if you meet the age requirement because we don't want a child. But yeah, the other mentors are gonna be there to help you with it. We are also still learning, we are not fluent or anything so we have spaces where the more proficient mentors are there to help you and if you have a question it's okay to ask, you won't know everything even with the questions in the subject channels we have discussions among ourselves sometimes to say "hey is this correct because I don't know", sometimes there is a word or grammar point that we aren't familiar with so it's okay, you don't need to be harboring a lot of knowledge and you don't need to have perfect speech or anything to join mentors, just once you have a solid knowledge where you don't need to be constantly asking questions about every single thing. Then yeah, go ahead and join, we are always here to help and we also really appreciate the help. So don't be afraid.

As you mentioned you were a mentor when Soundcheck was happening, do you miss the course? Do you wish it could come back?

Yeah, definitely. I mentioned it's one of the reasons why I created the Beginner Korean course. It was going to be the Soundcheck but the lack of mentors so for now I'll just keep it as a Beginner Korean course and I'll go ahead with the teaching but I definitely miss Soundcheck. I am counting

down the days until we can implement it again, just the whole sessions every week, the feedback from the mentees, the homeworks, the tests and just genuinely helping people learn Korean. It was pretty fun and so yeah I definitely hope it comes back soon. We're just praying for new mentors.

You are in charge of Beginner Korean 1 & 2 courses, how did you come up with the idea?

Oh my gosh, that kind of ties into the last question. Actually I miss Soundcheck a lot and it was during my summer holiday. I have a lot of summer now compared to when I was in high school, so I had a lot of time. I didn't really have anything else to do. So I said you know what, I can just start creating materials. I actually hadn't planned to make everything, I just planned to start but I started and was like this isn't that bad and I know all of this stuff so it was just putting it onto paper basically. It took me a while honestly, I'm not gonna say I got it done pretty quickly but the thought of having Soundcheck sooner was definitely a big motivation and so I worked on it through the summer. I think I finished in - when did the course start..? May. so I definitely started before summer but I had a lot more time to finish then. I think I finished April. And then yeah I was able to implement it in May or June.

How do you find creating the materials?

I'm not gonna lie it was a lot sometimes because it was so much. Each course was like 10 lessons for the Beginner Korean 1 and then 11 for Beginner Korean 2. So it was a lot, I then also had to create activities to go with the lessons, we call them session activities. I also had answer keys for those session activities. Then it was onto creating the homework for all of the lessons and then the answer key for the homework and then the test. By the time I got to the test I was like you know what, no answer key, I'll just look at their answers and determine if it's right or not. And then also because some of the questions are like not set in stone, not objective type questions and I was like I'll leave it. But it definitely, because it was so much it took a while. I think the most challenging part was coming up with the tests and the homework because with the lessons I have the knowledge in my head already so its just writing it down but for the test and homework I had to think of different ways of asking them because its like translating gets tiring after a while so it

was like "oh I wanna build your writing, I wanna build your listening, I wanna build your speaking" and so I had to be thinking of different ways I could do that so the most challenge I had was with the tests and the homeworks but outside of that it was pretty okay.

You hosted 4 classes per week, plus tests, plus slides, plus speaking classes, plus homeworks not to mention the corrections, as well as more. How did you handle all of it? Did it ever get overwhelming?

I mostly just worked until I felt lazy or well tired and I couldn't continue so I would say I did maybe like 3 lessons all in one go and for like 2 weeks i didn't do anything because 3 lessons in one go took a lot out of me, so I took this like huge break and I was back at it again. Then it was like 4 lessons all in one go. So basically I just worked until my mind was like "okay this is where we stop" and we stopped and then we regained a little strength and we were back at it again. And so I think working like that, working until I decided I need to stop and taking the rest and starting again was a pretty okay way to go about it. It got me to finish in time and it wasn't where I was trying to complete everything all at once, so it wasn't too overwhelming.

Edit: Hi it's Nae! I realize I didn't actually answer the question so here I am now doing so. When BK was first introduced and that first cycle began, I had a lot of free time, and I was very enthusiastic about starting something new. The classes ran pretty smoothly as I was comfortable with the material and had the slides prepared already. Grading did get a bit exhausting from time to time as this cycle was a relatively large one. I was grading 20+ assignments per week and that same amount when it was time for the tests. Sometimes I had the energy to do it all in one go while other times I could only mark half of one submission before needing to lie down haha. This of course had nothing to do with the students' work. It was simply a matter of finding the motivation to do it. The students made it worth it. I continue to say that my first batch of BK students were the best. They were present, punctual, attentive, and participative, which is really all I ask of my students. If any of my past students read this, I want to say thank you. You all made it worth it!

Is there anything you wish you could improve?

So definitely the practice they get for the skills. They are mostly getting reading practice, well translation really. But for the skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking the course doesn't tackle it as much as I would have liked it to have done and I have to keep thinking of ways to combat that. One such way is by having those speaking sessions that we had where we set a time outside of the class, give them questions ahead of time and then we would go ahead and practice answering the questions. But otherwise there wasn't much practice with their listening, their speaking, their reading and writing so definitely those areas. Because it's okay to learn new grammar and all of that but you also want to make sure that you are able to use it in all of the different ways. So definitely trying to incorporate the skills into the course more is something I would want to improve.

Lastly, do you have any final suggestions in regards to courses or mentors in general?

At the moment, no. One thing that has been on my mind is to have an intermediate course like the Beginner Korean course because I know a lot of intermediate learners want a course like that and the beginners appreciate it so having a Soundcheck course or Beginner Korean course which I guess you could call IK - Intermediate Korean. So definitely something geared towards intermediate learners is something I would want to see happen. And I guess as a mentor and as an organizer I would have to make it happen so yeah that's definitely something I want to work towards - making a new course for intermediate learners where they can have their weekly lessons, their homework, their tests, and hopefully also their skills practice for speaking, listening, reading and writing but outside of that nothing new as of yet.

Thank you for attending the interview Nae~