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KOREAN LANGUAGE EDUCATION AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (KFL) IN KAZAKHSTAN: CURRENT STATUS AND CHALLENGES

This study aims to investigate the current status and future directions of Korean language education as a second foreign language in Kazakhstan. Amidst the strengthening of diplomatic, economic, and cultural ties between the Republic of Korea and Kazakhstan, Korean language education has experienced significant quantitative growth, evolving from a research-oriented academic discipline into a widely offered general elective and second foreign language across various higher education institutions. Through an empirical analysis of nine representative universities, including SDU University, Kazakh National Women's Teacher Training University, Satbayev University (Kazakh National Research Technical University), International Taraz Innovative University, M.Kh. Dulaty Taraz Regional University, IT University, Maqsut Narikbayev University (MNU), Korkyt Ata Kyzylorda University and Almaty Management University (AlmaU) this research identifies several critical challenges such as a fragile institutional foundation, high dependency on dispatched faculty, and a shortage of localized physical instructional materials.

To facilitate a strategic transition from quantitative expansion to qualitative maturity, this study suggests several key policy directions. First, it emphasizes the necessity of securing and professionalizing local full-time faculty through specialized training programs like the «K-Teacher» initiative. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of establishing stable supply chains for physical textbooks and supporting the localization of curricula to reflect the unique cultural and linguistic characteristics of Kazakhstan. Finally, the study proposes the promotion of academic-industrial linkages to enhance the social utility and career-related efficacy of Korean language learning. While limited by its scope, this research provides a foundational framework for building a sustainable and professional KFL (Korean as a Foreign Language) ecosystem in Kazakhstan.

Keywords: Korean as a Foreign Language (KFL), Kazakhstan Higher Education, Teacher Professionalization, Curriculum Localization, Educational Infrastructure, Academic-Industrial Linkages, Qualitative Growth.

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Қазақстандағы шетел тілі ретінде корей тілін оқыту (KFL): қазіргі жағдайы мен мәселелері

Бұл зерттеудің мақсаты – Қазақстандағы екінші шет тілі ретіндегі корей тілі білімінің қазіргі жағдайы мен болашақ даму бағыттарын сараптау. Корея Республикасы мен Қазақстан арасындағы дипломатиялық, экономикалық және мәдени байланыстардың нығаюымен қатар Қазақстан аумағындағы корей тілін оқыту айтарлықтай сандық сандық өзгерістерге тап болды. Академиялық пән ретінде түрлі жоғары оқу орындарында кеңінен ұсынылатын жалпы элективті және екінші шет тілі ретінде дамыды. Сулеймен демирель университеті, Қазақ ұлттық қыздар педагогикалық университеті, Сәтбаев университеті (Қазақ ұлттық техникалық зерттеу университеті), Халықаралық Тараз инновациялық университеті, М.Х. Дулати атындағы Тараз өңірлік университеті, IT университеті, Мақсұт Нәрікбаев университеті (MNU), Қорқыт Ата атындағы Қызылорда университеті және Almaty Management University (AlmaU) сияқты тоғыз жетекші университетке жүргізілген эмпирикалық талдау арқылы бұл зерттеу институттық негіздің әлсіздігі, сырттан жіберілетін оқытушылар құрамына жоғары тәуелділік және жергілікті оқу-әдістемелік материалдардың жетіспеушілігі сияқты бірнеше маңызды мәселелерді анықтайды. Сандық өсуден сапалық жетілу кезеңіне стратегиялық тұрғыдан көшуді қамтамасыз ету үшін бұл зерттеу бірнеше негізгі саяси бағыттарды ұсынады. Біріншіден, «K-Teacher» бастамасы сияқты арнайы оқыту бағдарламалары арқылы жергілікті штаттық оқытушылар құрамын қалыптастыру мен олардың кәсіби деңгейін арттыру қажеттілігіне баса назар аударады. Сонымен қатар баспа оқулықтарымен қамтамасыз етудің тұрақты тізбегін құрудың және Қазақстанның бірегей

дени-лингвистикалық ерекшеліктерін көрсететін оқу бағдарламаларын жергілікті жерге бейімдеудің маңыздылығын атап өтеді. Соңында, корей тілін үйренудің әлеуметтік пайдалылығы мен мансаптық тиімділігін арттыру үшін академиялық-өндірістік байланыстарды нығайтуды ұсынады. Бұл зерттеу өз көлемімен шектелгенімен, Қазақстанда тұрақты және кәсіби KFL (корей тілі шет тілі ретінде) экожүйесін құру үшін іргелі негіз болып табылады.

Түйін сөздер: шетел тілі ретіндегі корей тілі (KFL), Қазақстанның жоғары білім беру жүйесі, оқытушылардың кәсібиленуі, оқу бағдарламаларын жергіліктендіру, білім беру инфрақұрылымы, академиялық-өндірістік байланыстар, сапалы даму.

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Преподавание корейского языка как иностранного (KFL) в Казахстане: текущее состояние и проблемы

Данное исследование направлено на изучение текущего состояния и перспектив развития преподавания корейского языка как второго иностранного в Казахстане. На фоне укрепления дипломатических, экономических и культурных связей между Республикой Корея и Казахстаном, образование в области корейского языка пройдя путь от узкоспециализированной академической дисциплины до востребованного общего элективного курса и второго иностранного языка в различных высших учебных заведениях продемонстрировало значительный количественный рост. На основе эмпирического анализа девяти репрезентативных университетов, включая Университет Сулеймен Демирель, Казахский национальный женский педагогический университет, Университет Сатпаева (Казахский национальный исследовательский технический университет), Международный Таразский инновационный университет, Таразский региональный университет им. М.Х. Дулати, IT-университет, Университет Максута Нарикбаева (MNU), Кызылординский университет им. Коркыт Ата и Almaty Management University (AlmaU), данное исследование выявляет ряд ключевых проблем, таких как слабая институциональная база, высокая зависимость от командированных преподавателей и нехватка локализованных учебных материалов.

Для обеспечения стратегического перехода от количественного расширения к качественному развитию в данном исследовании предлагается несколько ключевых направлений политики. Во-первых, подчеркивается необходимость обеспечения и профессионализации местных штатных преподавателей через специализированные программы обучения, такие как инициатива «K-Teacher». Кроме того, отмечается важность создания стабильных цепочек поставок печатных учебников и поддержки локализации учебных программ, отражающих уникальные культурные и лингвистические особенности Казахстана. Наконец, исследование предлагает развивать академическо-индустриальные связи для повышения социальной значимости и карьерной эффективности изучения корейского языка. Несмотря на ограниченность охвата, данное исследование закладывает фундаментальную основу для построения устойчивой и профессиональной экосистемы KFL (корейский язык как иностранный) в Казахстане.

Ключевые слова: корейский язык как иностранный (KFL), система высшего образования Казахстана, профессионализация преподавателей, локализация учебных программ, образовательная инфраструктура, академическо-отраслевые связи, качественный рост.

Introduction

Recently, the burgeoning interest in the Korean language and culture within Central Asia has positioned Korean language education as a vital catalyst for fostering cultural and interpersonal exchanges, transcending its role as simple linguistic instruction. Notably, since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Korea and Kazakhstan in 1992, Korean language education has expanded significantly. This growth began with the founding of the Department of Korean Studies at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, followed by the opening of the Korean Education Center in Almaty in 1991.

Choi (1997) examined the status of Korean language education in Kazakhstan, the history of the Koryo-saram (ethnic Koreans), and the pedagogical shifts following Kazakhstan's independence, while identifying systemic challenges and future strategies. Kim (2004) conducted a comparative analysis of Korean language programs and student satisfaction levels at Korean Education Centers across Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. Furthermore, Hwang (2007) analyzed the historical trajectory and current issues of Korean language education in Kazakhstan, proposing specialized training programs for local instructors based on a comprehensive needs analysis. Han et al. (2009) examined

the status and characteristics of Korean language education in three Central Asian countries – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan – highlighting the evolving educational landscape, existing challenges, and necessary areas for improvement.

As of the 32nd anniversary of the establishment of Korean Studies and the 34th year of Korean language education in Kazakhstan, the current educational landscape reflects significant growth. According to recent data, 25 primary and secondary schools (K-12) have adopted Korean as either a regular or after-school elective subject. Furthermore, 16 universities across the country now offer Korean language courses as part of their major or liberal arts curricula.* While these figures undoubtedly represent significant quantitative and outward growth, persistent challenges remain within the field of Korean language education. Despite this expansion, disparities in educational infrastructure across regions and institutions, coupled with an imbalance in institutional support from both Korea and local universities, act as major constraints to achieving qualitative advancement. Consequently, there is an urgent need for a comprehensive analysis of Korean language education in Kazakhstan that transcends individual institutional cases.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the current status of Korean language education, specifically focusing on universities that offer Korean as a Foreign Language (KFL) rather than those with established Korean Studies departments. It evaluates both the achievements and limitations of these programs. Furthermore, based on this comprehensive situational analysis, this research seeks to propose practical strategies for the qualitative growth and sustainable development of KFL education in Kazakhstan.

The scope of this study encompasses universities offering Korean as a Foreign Language (KFL) courses, including Suleyman Demirel University (SDU), Kazakh National Women's Teacher Training University, Satbayev University (Kazakh National Research Technical University), Almaty Management University (AlmaU), International Taraz University, M.Kh. Dulaty Taraz Regional University, Astana IT University, Maqsut Narikbayev University (MNU), and Korkyt Ata Kyzylorda University. Data collection was conducted through direct surveys administered to both Korean and local faculty members currently teaching at these institutions.

* Korean Education Center in Almaty. (February 2026). Current Status of Korean Language Adoption. Retrieved from, <https://koreacenter.or.kr/state.php>

Methods. Results and discussion

Current Status of Korean Language Education in Kazakhstani Universities

Universities Specializing in Korean Studies and Korean Language Education

Following the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between Korea and Kazakhstan in 1992, Korean Studies and Korean language education began to take root, primarily within universities that inaugurated dedicated Korean Studies majors. A landmark development occurred in 1994 when Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, the nation's premier public institution, established the Department of Korean Studies within the Department of Far Eastern Studies under the Faculty of Oriental Studies. Since the early 2000s, there has been a notable increase in institutions offering Korean not as a major, but as a second foreign language or as a general elective course. The following «Table-1» presents the current status of universities in Kazakhstan that offer specialized majors in Korean Studies. These institutions serve as the primary academic hubs for professional education in Korean Studies and the Korean language within the country.

As illustrated in «Table-1», most of these institutions established Korean Studies majors during the mid-to-late 1990s. By offering comprehensive graduate programs – including both Master's and Doctoral degrees alongside undergraduate courses – they have functioned primarily as research-oriented universities. In contrast, Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University, given its nature as a teaching-oriented institution, focuses its Korean language instruction within the Department of Linguistics and Translation rather than as a standalone Korean Studies major. Notably, its graduate offerings are currently limited to the Master's level.

Current Status of Korean Language Education in Non-Korean Studies Major Universities

The following «Table-2» presents a comparative overview of universities in Kazakhstan that offer Korean as a second foreign language or a general elective. By focusing on key parameters – such as institutional names, the commencement year of Korean courses, departmental affiliations, and the modes of educational delivery – this section aims to identify the institutional foundations and operational patterns of Korean language education across these diverse academic environments.

Table 1*Status of Universities with Korean Studies Majors in Kazakhstan**(October 2025)**

University Name	Type	Founded / Location	Year Established / Department Name	Faculty Count (Local/Korean)	Degree Programs Offered
Al-Farabi Kazakh National University (KazNU)	National	1934 / Almaty	1994 / Dept. of Korean Studies (within Dept. of Far Eastern Studies)	21 (16/5)	BA, MA, PhD
Ablai Khan Kazakh University of International Relations and World Languages	Private	1993 / Almaty	1998 / Dept. of Korean Studies	22 (17/5)	BA, MA, PhD
Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University	National	1928 / Almaty	Re-established in 2021 (Originally 1990-2002) / Dept. of Oriental Languages and Translation	4 (3/1)	BA, MA
L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University (ENU)	National	1998 / Astana	1999 / Dept. of Oriental Studies	3 (2/1)	BA, MA, PhD

Table 2*Status of KFL in Non-Major Universities in Kazakhstan**(October 2025)*

No.	University Name	Type	Founded / Location	Commencement Year / Department Name	Educational Provision Type
1	Korkyt Ata Kyzylorda University	National	1937 / Kyzylorda	2003 / Faculty of Foreign Languages & Translation (Dept. of English and Korean)	Mandatory General Elective
2	International Taraz University	Private	2008 / Taraz	2013 / Faculty of Foreign Languages	Mandatory General Elective
3	M.Kh. Dulaty Taraz Regional University	State	1998 / Taraz	2001 / Faculty of Humanities (Dept. of World Languages)	Mandatory General Elective
4	Maqsut Narikbayev University (MNU)	Private	1994 / Astana	2021 / School of Liberal Arts	Mandatory General Elective
5	IT University	Private	2019 / Astana	2024 / Department of General Education	Mandatory General Elective
6	Satbayev University	National	1934 / Almaty	2024 / Department of Foreign Languages	Mandatory General Elective
7	Kazakh National Women's Teacher Training University	National	1944 / Almaty	2023 / Dept. of Foreign Language Teaching Methods & Intercultural Communication	Mandatory General Elective
8	SDU University	Private	1996 / Almaty	2016 / Faculty of Education & Humanities (Two Foreign Languages Major)	Mandatory General Elective
9	Almaty Management University (AlmaU)	Private	1988 / Almaty	2025 / Korean Language Center (Operated/Commissioned by KT&G Scholarship Foundation)	General Elective

* All tables are based on a field survey conducted by the author in October 2025.

The universities identified in this study are primarily distributed across the southern (Kyzylorda, Taraz), southeastern (Almaty), and northern (Astana) regions of Kazakhstan. Among the nine institutions surveyed, three are national, one is state-run, and five are private. The data indicates that Korean language instruction as a second foreign language or general elective primarily emerged in two waves: the early 2000s and a more recent expansion in the mid-2020s. A common structural characteristic is that Korean language programs are housed within broader departments, such as the Department of Foreign Language Education or the Department of Translation and Interpretation, rather than existing as independent Korean Studies departments. Furthermore, with the exception of Almaty Management University (AlmaU), most of these institutions employ a curriculum system where students majoring in English Education are required to select a mandatory second foreign language. In this framework, Korean competes as a popular elective alongside other major world languages, including Chinese, Japanese, and French.

In this framework, while English Education serves as the primary major within the Department of Foreign Language Education, Korean effectively functions as a secondary major. Ideally, this secondary track should comprise specialized curricula in Korean Language Education or Translation and Interpretation. However, the survey results reveal a significant discrepancy: instead of offering professional courses in pedagogy or translation, most programs are predominantly limited to speaking-oriented instruction.

At Maqsut Narikbayev University (MNU), located in Astana, Korean language instruction was first introduced within the School of Liberal Arts in 2021. The program is structured as a mandatory requirement for students majoring in Foreign Language Education across all levels, from the first to the fourth year. However, the survey found that the Korean curriculum managed by the Department of Foreign Language Education lacks specialized pedagogical subjects; instead, it is exclusively composed of conversation-oriented courses. Despite these curricular limitations, MNU demonstrates a high degree of operational flexibility. The university allows students to be exempted from mandatory Korean classes if they achieve a specific level on the Test of Proficiency in Korean (TOPIK). Furthermore, the system is designed to be adaptable, enabling students to enroll in advanced courses that

exceed their current academic year based on their actual proficiency. This approach suggests a focus on individual competency within the existing institutional framework.

In contrast, the Korean language program at Astana IT University is structured as a short-term, mandatory general elective exclusively for first-year students. This indicates a more restricted curricular integration compared to other institutions. Meanwhile, Almaty Management University (AlmaU) demonstrates a unique model of institutional cooperation. The KT&G Scholarship Foundation, a South Korean private entity, established an on-campus Korean Language Center to provide courses to AlmaU students. A distinctive feature of this program is its accessibility; rather than being restricted to a specific department or major, the Korean courses are offered as general electives available to the entire student body. This open-enrollment system reflects a high level of student interest and a flexible approach to cultural and linguistic education.

Current Status and Key Characteristics of KFL by University

The following «Table-3» provides a comprehensive summary of the current status of institutions offering Korean as a second foreign language in Kazakhstan. As illustrated in the table, these data allow for a detailed examination of the actual operational practices and curricular structures of Korean language courses across the surveyed universities.

(1) Case Analysis: Korkyt Ata Kyzylorda University

At Korkyt Ata Kyzylorda University, the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Translation offers Korean language education both as a second foreign language for students majoring in English and Korean and as a general elective. Currently, a single Korean language instructor dispatched by the National Institute for International Education (NIED) is responsible for approximately 380 students. The curriculum is organized strictly by academic year, without taking into account the individual proficiency levels or private learning gaps among students. Approximately three hours of Korean language instruction are provided per week. Although the program is technically part of a translation and interpretation major, no specialized courses related to these fields are offered. Instead, the curriculum focuses predominantly on grammar and speaking-oriented instruction using the «Sejong Korean» textbook series.

Table 3*Operational Status of Korean Language Programs in Selected Kazakhstani Universities**(October 2025)*

No.	University Name	Faculty (Local/ Korean)	No. of Students	Textbooks & Distribution	Instructional Level / System	Hours per Week
1	Korkyt Ata Kyzylorda University	1 (0/1) [NIED]*	(SFL) 140 / (GE) 240	Sejong Korean (PDF)	Grade-specific classes	3 hours
2	International Taraz University	1 (0/1) [Locally hired]**	73	Practical Korean (PDF)	Grade-specific classes	4 hours
3	M.Kh.Dulaty Taraz Regional University	1 (0/1) [NIED]	136	Korean for Overseas Koreans (PDF)	Grade-specific classes	3 hours
4	Maqsut Narikbayev University (MNU)	2 (1/1) [NIED]	110	Sejong Korean & Practical Korean (PDF/E- book)	Grade-specific; Failure (Repeat) system	Basic: 6 hrs / Int-Adv: 3 hrs
5	Astana IT University	2 (1/1) [NIED]	100 (Freshmen)	Sejong Korean 1A-2A	General Elective for Freshmen	Offline: 3 hrs / Online: 2 hrs
6	Satbayev University	2 (2/0)	70	Korean for Kazakhs	Freshmen classes	3 hours
7	Kazakh National Women's Teacher Training University	3 (3/0)	133	Ewha Korean (PDF)	Grade-specific classes	3 hours
8	SDU University	5 (3/2) [Locally hired]	404	Sejong Korean Conversation (PDF)	Grade-specific classes	3 hours
9	Almaty Management University (AlmaU)	3 (1/2) [Locally hired]	90	Korea University Korean 1A-5B (Physical books)	Proficiency-based; TOPIK prep; Culture	3 days (90m), 2 days (120m), 1 day (150m)

* Korean language teachers dispatched by the National Institute for International Education (NIED)

** Locally hired native Korean instructors.

(2) Case Analysis: International Taraz University

At International Taraz University, a single locally hired native Korean instructor provides four hours of Korean language instruction per week to approximately 70 students. Similar to other institutions, the courses are categorized by academic year rather than the students' actual proficiency levels.

Students majoring in English Education within the Faculty of Foreign Languages are the primary participants in these Korean courses. However, the curriculum remains disconnected from the students' major fields of study. Despite being part of a professional education track, the Korean language program does not offer any specialized subjects or credits related to the students' primary academic or professional focus.

(3) Case Analysis: M.Kh. Dulaty Taraz Regional University

At M.Kh. Dulaty Taraz Regional University, a single Korean language instructor dispatched by the National Institute for International Education

(NIED) provides Korean language instruction to 136 students. The curriculum utilizes the "Korean for Overseas Koreans" textbook series and offers three hours of instruction per week. Following the general trend, classes are organized by academic year rather than proficiency levels, focusing on Korean for General Purposes (KGP).

A notable logistical challenge at this institution is the lack of physical textbooks for students. Instead of printed materials, the instructional content is delivered through PDF files of the textbook and PPT presentations developed personally by the instructor. This highlights a significant reliance on digital supplementary materials due to the absence of a stable physical textbook supply chain.

(4) Case Analysis: Maqsut Narikbayev University (MNU)

At Maqsut Narikbayev University (MNU), Korean language instruction is delivered to 110 students by a teaching team consisting of one local instructor and one Korean instructor dispatched by the National Institute for International Education (NIED).

While the program is fundamentally organized by academic year, MNU distinguishes itself through a rigorous and flexible academic management system.

Notably, the university implements a mandatory retention (failure) policy, where students who fail to pass the end-of-year examinations are required to repeat the level within their academic year. Conversely, the system rewards proficiency; students who achieve high scores on the Test of Proficiency in Korean (TOPIK) may be granted course exemptions or allowed to skip grades (accelerated placement) to join advanced classes. Furthermore, the instructional hours are differentiated by proficiency: six hours per week are allocated to basic-level students to ensure a solid foundation, while intermediate and advanced learners receive three hours per week.

(5) Case Analysis: IT University

At Astana IT University, located in Astana, Korean language courses are exclusively offered as general electives for first-year students. The program is managed by a teaching team consisting of one local instructor and one Korean instructor dispatched by the National Institute for International Education (NIED), serving a total of 100 freshmen.

The curriculum utilizes a blended learning model, providing three hours of offline instruction per week alongside approximately two hours of online components. The online portion is primarily utilized for students to engage with pre-recorded video lectures and complete assigned coursework. This structure indicates a more focused, short-term introductory approach to Korean language education compared to universities with four-year continuous programs.

(6) Case Analysis: Satbayev Kazakh National Research Technical University

At Satbayev Kazakh National Research Technical University, Korean language courses were newly introduced within the Department of Foreign Languages in 2024. Compared to other institutions, this program is a very recent addition. It is structured as a one-year curriculum for first-year students, providing three hours of instruction per week.

The choice of instructional materials is left to the individual discretion of the faculty. Currently, the program utilizes «Korean for Kazakhs (Beginner)», a Russian-translated textbook series published with the support of the Korea Foundation (KF). A distinctive characteristic of this university is its faculty composition; unlike most other programs that rely on native speakers, the Korean language courses here are delivered to approximately 70 students by

two non-native (local) instructors, without the presence of a native Korean teacher.

(7) Case Analysis: Kazakh National Women's Teacher Training University

Korean language courses were introduced at Kazakh National Women's Teacher Training University in 2023. As a national institution, it shares a similar faculty structure with Satbayev University, operating with three non-native (local) instructors and no native Korean faculty, serving a total of 133 students. Given its status as a teacher training university, the institution is structurally positioned to cultivate future Korean language educators. However, the current curriculum lacks specialized pedagogical subjects required for teacher training, focusing instead on Korean for General Purposes (KGP).

The program utilizes the «Ewha Korean» textbook series. Developed by a university-affiliated language institute in Korea, this series is designed for intensive academic purposes, typically requiring a substantial number of instructional hours. In the context of this university, where only three hours of instruction are provided per week, the faculty is essentially tasked with compressing a curriculum designed for 200 hours into just 48 hours over a 16-week semester.* Under such significant time constraints, it is difficult to characterize the instruction as either professional teacher training or even effective speaking-oriented education.

(8) Case Analysis: SDU University

At SDU University, Korean language courses are offered within the Faculty of Education and Humanities as part of the «Two Foreign Languages» major. The program serves a significant student body of 404 students majoring in Foreign Language Education, with a teaching staff comprising two native Korean instructors and three local instructors. Like other institutions, students who select English as their primary major choose Korean as one of several elective foreign language options, attending three hours of instruction per week.

The curriculum utilizes «Sejong Korean Conversation», a textbook designed for general communicative purposes. SDU presents a positive pedagogical model in that it facilitates collaboration between native and non-native faculty members. However, from the perspective of educational efficiency, a significant challenge remains: a team of only five

* Most Korean language institutes affiliated with universities in South Korea operate on an academic schedule that provides 200 hours of instruction over a 10-week period. These 200 hours include examinations and extracurricular activities such as cultural experiences.

instructors is responsible for over 400 students. This high student-to-teacher ratio potentially undermines the quality of individualized instruction and the overall effectiveness of the language program.

(9) Case Analysis: Almaty Management University (AlmaU)

Finally, at Almaty Management University (AlmaU), a unique educational model has been in operation since 2025 through the support of the KT&G Scholarship Foundation, a South Korean private entity. This partnership led to the establishment of an on-campus Korean Language Education Center, which serves a dual purpose: providing credit-bearing general electives for AlmaU students and offering free Korean language outreach programs for the local community.

The program at AlmaU is characterized by its proficiency-based grouping, moving away from the rigid grade-specific structures seen in other institutions. Furthermore, the courses are not restricted to specific departments but are open as general electives to the entire student body. Another distinctive feature is the stable supply of instructional materials. While many universities predominantly rely on digital files that lack copyright protection, AlmaU ensures the provision of physical textbooks to its students at a 50% subsidized rate. This consistent provision of high-quality physical resources is made possible through the continuous financial and logistical support of KT&G.

In conclusion, the survey of these nine institutions reveals a diverse landscape of Korean language education in Kazakhstan, characterized by varying levels of institutional support, faculty composition, and pedagogical approaches. While some universities excel in administrative flexibility and external partnerships, others continue to face challenges related to high student-to-teacher ratios and insufficient physical infrastructure.

Current Challenges and Strategic Recommendations for Future Development

Korean language education in Kazakhstan has a long-standing history among Central Asian nations. Historically centered around specialized Korean Studies departments, the field has now expanded significantly, repositioning itself as a popular second foreign language and a general elective for non-major students.

Furthermore, the demographics of both learners and educators have undergone a profound transformation. In the past, Korean was primarily taught as a heritage language for ethnic Koreans (Koryo-saram)

in Kazakhstan, with ethnic Korean professors who spoke Russian serving as the primary educators*. However, as of 2026, the vast majority of learners are local students whose mother tongues are Kazakh or Russian. Remarkably, the teaching staff has also evolved to include a diverse group of native Koreans and, increasingly, local Kazakhstani professors who have professionally majored in the Korean language.

While the status of the Korean language in Kazakhstan has risen and experienced explosive quantitative growth over the past decade, significant limitations remain. To transition from mere numerical expansion to qualitative excellence, these hurdles must be overcome. This section identifies the immediate challenges faced by Kazakhstani universities and proposes practical measures for improvement.

Human Resource Support for Educators

The expansion of KFL (Teaching Korean as a Foreign Language) in Kazakhstan has progressed in parallel with diplomatic, economic, and cultural cooperation between the two nations. This growth is marked by a gradual shift from research-oriented Korean Studies departments to foreign language universities and, more recently, to general comprehensive universities.

However, despite this horizontal expansion, the institutional foundation of Korean language education remains relatively fragile, showing clear limitations in terms of continuity and systematicity. For Korean language courses to be firmly established as permanent, long-term components of the university curriculum, securing a stable faculty is an absolute prerequisite. Currently, Kazakhstani universities exhibit an excessively high reliance on native Korean instructors dispatched by the National Institute for International Education (NIED).

To prevent educational gaps that occur when a dispatched instructor's term ends and to maintain the continuity of the curriculum, it is essential to expand the recruitment of full-time local faculty. University administrations must move beyond treating Korean as a one-off elective and instead integrate it into the core curriculum of the regular academic system, securing dedicated faculty positions (TO) accordingly. Local instructors, who are proficient in both the local context and languages (Kazakh/Rus-

* As noted by Han, Kim, and Kim (2009), Korean language education in the three Central Asian nations, including Kazakhstan, has been undergoing a significant shift in its primary agents – moving away from an ethnic Korean-centered model toward a broader Kazakh-local framework.

sian), are uniquely positioned to manage academic administration and ensure the long-term stability of the program.*

As evidenced by the case of Kazakh National Women's Teacher Training University, a significant gap exists between the institution's primary mission and its actual pedagogical practice. Despite being a pedagogical university, the current curriculum lacks specialized subjects essential for teacher cultivation, such as Teaching Methodologies and Curriculum & Material Development.

To address this, it is imperative to strengthen Korean as a Foreign/Second Language (KFL/KSL) majors or establish Teacher Certification Programs within key regional pedagogical universities. The goal must shift from producing individuals who are merely proficient in the language to cultivating professional educators equipped with pedagogical expertise.

Furthermore, this local effort should be integrated with South Korean government scholarship programs, such as the Global Korea Scholarship (GKS). By expanding opportunities for prospective local instructors to obtain Master's and Doctoral degrees (MA/PhD) at graduate schools in South Korea, the academic professionalization of the local faculty can be significantly enhanced. This high-level academic training will ensure that the future of Korean language education in Kazakhstan is led by experts who possess both linguistic fluency and advanced pedagogical knowledge.

And to effectively integrate the rapidly evolving EdTech environment and modern KFL pedagogical theories into the classroom, sustained support for active faculty members is indispensable. This necessitates the institutionalization of «Localized Teaching Methodology Workshops» tailored specifically to the unique educational context of Kazakhstan.

As observed in the cases of Astana IT University and Almaty Management University (AlmaU), there is a critical need to activate professional Teacher Associations to facilitate the sharing of specialized instructional know-how.** Key areas

for knowledge exchange include blended learning models (combining synchronous and asynchronous instruction) and proficiency-based class management. Such peer-to-peer networks will allow innovative practices at specific institutions to be adopted as regional standards.

Furthermore, to enhance the professional identity and pride of local instructors, small-scale Research Grants should be provided. These grants would empower local faculty to conduct systematic analyses of learner error patterns specific to Kazakh and Russian speakers and to develop supplementary instructional materials optimized for local needs. By fostering an environment where local instructors serve as both educators and researchers, Kazakhstan can establish a self-sustaining and high-quality Korean language academic ecosystem.

Educational Infrastructure and Instructional Resources

To achieve a qualitative leap in Korean language education in Kazakhstan, the standardization of educational tools and environments is as urgent as the enhancement of faculty competence. It is imperative to overcome the current limitations of over-reliance on digital materials and to establish a sustainable infrastructure through the following strategic support measures.

It is necessary to establish a stable supply chain for physical textbooks and to support the localization of instructional materials. A considerable number of the surveyed universities rely on PDF files with unclear copyright status or on bound photocopied materials, which undermines the professionalism of the academic environment. In contrast, Case 9 (AlmaU) demonstrated a high level of learner engagement by providing physical textbooks almost free of charge through private-sector support (KT&G).

In collaboration with organizations such as the Korea Foundation (KF) and the King Sejong Institute Foundation, it is recommended to designate key hub universities in Kazakhstan as «Korean Language Textbook Distribution Centers» and to support a logistics system that ensures the stable supply of physical teaching materials. Furthermore, efforts should go beyond merely distributing textbooks published in Korea; joint research initiatives and publication funding should be provided to develop «locally customized Korean language textbooks» that reflect the linguistic and cultural characteristics of Kazakhstan.

In addition, it is necessary to establish a hybrid learning environment through the integration of

* The local instructors identified in this survey were, for the most part, highly qualified professionals who had either completed their graduate studies at the Department of Korean Studies, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, or had obtained their Master's degrees in South Korea.

** To standardize and elevate the quality of instruction, it is highly recommended to expand the implementation and promotion of the «K-Teacher» program. Developed by the National Institute of Korean Language (NIKL) in South Korea, this specialized training curriculum is designed for the cultivation and re-education of overseas Korean language instructors.

EdTech. The blended learning model – combining both online and offline instruction – as demonstrated by the case of IT universities, can serve as an effective solution to address the shortage of instructors while enhancing learning efficiency.*

To modernize educational infrastructure, support should be provided for the development of language laboratories (Language Labs) and smart classrooms, enabling learners to indirectly experience Korea's advanced educational environment and thereby fostering greater motivation.

Furthermore, it is necessary to support the development of Korean for Specific Purposes (KSP) content tailored to different academic disciplines. At present, most universities rely on general-purpose conversational textbooks (e.g., *Sejong Korean*, *Ewha Korean*), which fail to adequately meet the professional needs of students in fields such as IT, engineering, and business.

Accordingly, depending on the characteristics of each institution, support should be provided for the development of KSP-oriented textbooks and curricula, such as «Korean for IT», «Business Korean», and «Korean for Engineering». Such initiatives would serve as a practical educational infrastructure directly linked to employment opportunities in Korean companies.

Conclusion

While extensive research and status surveys have been conducted on Korean language education within the framework of Korean Studies majors in Kazakhstan, scholarly attention toward Korean as a second foreign language or as a general elective has remained relatively sparse. Through this empirical study, it has been confirmed that Korean language education in Kazakhstan is currently experiencing rapid quantitative growth, particularly in the domain of non-major elective courses. Based on the preceding situational analysis and discussions, this section aims to synthesize the critical considerations necessary for the qualitative advancement of Korean as a second foreign language in the Kazakhstani higher education context.

First and foremost, there is a critical need to secure, cultivate, and provide continuous re-education for Korean language instructors. To ensure the sus-

tainable development of Korean language education and to facilitate a strategic transition from quantitative expansion to qualitative maturity, the role of professional non-native (local) Korean instructors is indispensable. To achieve this, specialized programs for cultivating pre-service teachers must be established within pedagogical universities and institutions specialized in foreign language education. Furthermore, robust in-service re-education programs should be developed to enhance the pedagogical competence of current faculty. By institutionalizing these training tracks, Kazakhstan can build a self-sustaining academic ecosystem led by experts who possess both linguistic proficiency and advanced instructional methodologies.

Secondly, there is an urgent need for a stable supply of physical textbooks and the development of instructional materials tailored to specific educational objectives. Currently, most materials used in Korean language programs in Kazakhstan are imported directly from South Korea without modification. However, for more effective instruction, it is essential to have customized textbooks that align with the local culture, the specific curricula of Kazakhstani universities, and diverse educational goals. To achieve this, continuous high-level consultations between the governments of both nations are necessary to establish policies that reflect local demand and the unique educational environment of Kazakhstan. Such a policy framework should not only facilitate the logistical distribution of physical books but also support the research and development of localized content – moving away from a «one-size-fits-all» approach to a more context-sensitive pedagogical model.

Thirdly, it is essential to establish standardized curricula and foster integrated research to build a robust Korean language education infrastructure. By promoting multifaceted cooperation – encompassing human resources, culture, education, and research – with universities that already host Korean Studies majors, a comprehensive infrastructure for KFL (Korean as a Foreign Language) can be developed across Kazakhstan. The foundation for mutual growth should be laid by sharing existing textbooks, instructional programs, and information regarding academic research and cultural events. This collaborative network will allow newer programs to benefit from the accumulated expertise of established departments.

Furthermore, to enhance the continuity and effectiveness of Korean language learning, these educational efforts must be linked with employment

* SDU and International Taraz University have been collaborating with Sookmyung Women's University through the «Global e-School Project», an initiative supported by the Korea Foundation (KF).

opportunities and industrial cooperation. Integrating language education with the professional sector will significantly contribute to strengthening the social value and practical utility of Korean language studies, transforming it from a purely academic pursuit into a vital tool for career development in the global era.

While numerous universities in Kazakhstan offer Korean language courses, it is regrettable that this study could not encompass every institution providing such instruction. Furthermore, due to logistical constraints, a comprehensive survey of the specific needs and demands of both Korean language learn-

ers and instructors was not included in the present scope of this research.

Consequently, a more extensive and systematic investigation into the overall landscape of Korean language education in Kazakhstan – incorporating a broader range of institutions and qualitative data from stakeholders – is deferred to future research. It is hoped that subsequent studies will build upon the findings of this paper to provide a more holistic and nuanced understanding of the evolving KFL (Korean as a Foreign Language) environment in the region.

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