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DIGITAL EDUCATIONAL CONTENT FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF OVERSEAS KOREAN STUDIES: SOUTH KOREA'S EXPERIENCE AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

This article examines the role of digital educational content in ensuring the sustainable development of overseas Korean Studies, with particular emphasis on South Korea's experience and future directions. As global interest in Korean language, history, culture, and society continues to expand, the internationalization of Korean Studies increasingly depends on digital platforms that can support flexible, scalable, and inclusive learning. Drawing on the broader literature on digital learning design, accessibility, and equity, the article argues that effective digital content must do more than digitize existing materials: it should enable meaningful interaction, learner engagement, and adaptive learning pathways while reducing barriers related to location, proficiency, and institutional resources. The study reviews South Korea's evolving initiatives in virtual education, online academic collaboration, and policy support for digital learning, showing how these efforts have helped extend Korean Studies beyond national borders. At the same time, it identifies persistent challenges, including uneven infrastructure, limited localization, and the need for stronger quality assurance and pedagogical alignment. The article concludes that the sustainable development of overseas Korean Studies requires an integrated strategy combining digital innovation, curriculum design, faculty development, and transnational partnership. In particular, future content should be multilingual, culturally responsive, accessible, and designed to support long-term academic collaboration and learner success across diverse international contexts.

Keywords: Korean Studies, digital educational content, sustainable education, curriculum localization, South Korea.

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Шетелдік корейтанудың тұрақты дамуына арналған цифрлық білім беру контенті: Оңтүстік Кореяның тәжірибесі мен даму перспективалары

Мақалада шетелдік корейтанудың тұрақты дамуын қамтамасыз етудегі цифрлық білім беру контентінің маңызы қарастырылып, басты назар Корея Республикасының тәжірибесі мен осы бағыттағы болашақ даму мүмкіндіктеріне аударылады. Әлемде корей тіліне, тарихына, мәдениеті мен қоғамына деген қызығушылықтың артуы корейтануды халықаралық деңгейде кеңінен дамыту қажеттілігін күшейтіп отыр. Осы үдерісте икемді, ауқымды және баршаға қолжетімді білім беруді қамтамасыз ететін цифрлық платформалардың рөлі ерекше. Білімнің қолжетімділігі және білім беру теңдігі мәселелеріне арналған ғылыми еңбектерді талдау негізінде сапалы цифрлық білім беру ресурстары дәстүрлі оқу материалдарын электрондық форматқа көшірумен ғана шектелмеуі тиіс екендігі негізделеді. Мұндай контент білім алушылардың белсенді қатысуына жағдай жасап, жеке оқу траекторияларын қалыптастыруға мүмкіндік беруі және географиялық қашықтыққа, тілдік дайындық деңгейіне немесе білім беру ұйымдарының материалдық мүмкіндіктеріне байланысты туындайтын кедергілерді азайтуы қажет. Зерттеуде Корея Республикасында жүзеге асырылып жатқан виртуалды білім беру жүйесін дамыту, онлайн академиялық ынтымақтастықты кеңейту және цифрлық оқытуды мемлекеттік қолдау бағытындағы бастамалар сараланады. Бұл шаралардың корейтануды ұлттық шекарадан тыс кеңінен таратуға және халықаралық ғылыми-білім беру байланыстарын нығайтуға елеулі ықпал еткені көрсетіледі. Сонымен қатар цифрлық инфрақұрылымның біркелкі дамымауы, оқу материалдарының жергілікті ерекшеліктерге жеткілікті деңгейде бейімделмеуі, сондай-ақ білім беру сапасын қамтамасыз ету тетіктерін және педагогикалық тәсілдермен үйлесімділікті жетілдіру қажеттілігі сияқты өзекті мәселелер айқындалады. Зерттеу нәтижелері шетелдік корейтанудың тұрақты дамуы цифрлық инновацияларды, білім беру бағдарламаларын жетілдіруді, оқытушылардың кәсіби әлеуетін арт-

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тыруды және халықаралық серіктестікті кешенді түрде ұштастыратын стратегияны іске асырумен тығыз байланысты екенін көрсетеді. Болашақта әзірленетін цифрлық білім беру контенті көптілді, мәдени ерекшеліктерді ескеретін, қолжетімді әрі инклюзивті сипатқа ие болып, әртүрлі елдердегі білім алушылардың табысты оқуына және ұзақ мерзімді халықаралық академиялық ынтымақтастықтың дамуына қызмет етуі тиіс.

Түйін сөздер: корейтану, цифрлық білім беру контенті, тұрақты білім беру, оқу бағдарламаларын жергілікті жағдайға бейімдеу, Корея Республикасы.

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Цифровой образовательный контент для устойчивого развития зарубежного кореееведения: опыт Южной Кореи и перспективы развития

В данной статье рассматривается значение цифрового образовательного контента как одного из ключевых факторов устойчивого развития зарубежного кореееведения с акцентом на опыт Республики Корея и перспективы дальнейшего развития данной сферы. Рост мирового интереса к корейскому языку, истории, культуре и современному обществу обусловливает необходимость расширения международного пространства кореееведческих исследований, где цифровые образовательные технологии становятся важным инструментом обеспечения доступного, гибкого и масштабируемого обучения. На основе анализа современных исследований, посвящённых цифровому обучению, вопросам доступности образования и принципам образовательного равенства, обосновывается, что качественный цифровой контент не должен ограничиваться переносом традиционных учебных материалов в электронную среду. Его разработка предполагает создание интерактивных образовательных ресурсов, способствующих активному вовлечению обучающихся, индивидуализации образовательных траекторий и снижению ограничений, связанных с территориальной удалённостью, уровнем языковой подготовки и различиями в ресурсном обеспечении образовательных организаций. В работе анализируются реализуемые в Республике Корея инициативы по развитию виртуального образования, онлайн-академического взаимодействия и государственной поддержки цифрового обучения. Показано, что данные меры существенно расширили возможности распространения кореееведения на международном уровне и способствовали укреплению зарубежного академического сотрудничества. Вместе с тем выявлены сохраняющиеся проблемы, включая неодинаковый уровень развития цифровой инфраструктуры, недостаточную адаптацию образовательных материалов к региональным особенностям, а также потребность в совершенствовании механизмов обеспечения качества и согласовании цифровых ресурсов с современными педагогическими подходами. Сделан вывод о том, что устойчивое развитие зарубежного кореееведения возможно при реализации комплексной стратегии, объединяющей цифровые инновации, совершенствование образовательных программ, повышение профессиональной компетентности преподавателей и развитие международного партнёрства. Особое внимание следует уделять созданию многоязычного, культурно адаптированного и инклюзивного цифрового контента, ориентированного на долгосрочное академическое сотрудничество и успешное обучение студентов в различных странах мира.

Ключевые слова: кореееведение, цифровой образовательный контент, устойчивое образование, локализация учебных программ, Республика Корея.

Introduction

Digital educational content has become a decisive factor in the reconfiguration of higher education, particularly where institutions must reconcile widening access, pedagogical quality, and long-term resilience. In the field of overseas Korean Studies, this issue is especially urgent. Korean language, history, culture, and society are now studied in a wide range of universities and cultural institutions outside South Korea, yet many programs continue to face structural fragility: small enrollments, limited staffing, uneven resource availability, and insufficiently localized teaching materials. In such conditions, the sustainability of overseas Korean Studies cannot depend solely on the enthusiasm of learners or the dedication of individual instructors. It requires a stable ecosystem of digital educational content that can support continuity across borders, learning levels, and institutional settings. Recent research on higher education digital transformation shows that sustainable development is increasingly tied to strategic digital design rather than mere technological adoption (Hashim et al., 2021). Similarly, studies

on digital learning emphasize that the effectiveness of online resources depends on instructional structure, interactivity, accessibility, and alignment with learner needs, not simply on the presence of digital tools (Reinhold et al., 2024). These insights provide a strong conceptual basis for examining how digital content can strengthen the long-term development of overseas Korean Studies.

South Korea's experience is particularly significant in this regard because it demonstrates an early and sustained policy interest in digital higher education. The Virtual University Trial Project, for example, was launched to encourage collaboration among universities and the private sector, to create a cost-effective virtual education system without lowering quality, and to identify standards for virtual university governance (Jung & Rha, 2001). This initiative reveals that digital learning in South Korea was never understood only as a technical upgrade; rather, it was framed as a means of institutional coordination, resource sharing, and quality assurance. More recent analyses of AI education policy in South Korea also show that the state continues to treat educational innovation as a strategic domain requiring policy direction, operational detail, and long-term planning (Lee & Jeong, 2023). At the same time, research on inclusive education in South Korea highlights that quality depends on the interaction of human, social, physical, curricular, and operational support systems (Kim et al., 2024).

Against this background, this study has three main aims. First, it seeks to analyze South Korea's experience in producing and disseminating digital educational content relevant to Korean Studies, with attention to policy initiatives, institutional practices, and resource design. Second, it aims to identify the strengths and limitations of current digital content in relation to the needs of overseas teaching and learning. Third, it seeks to formulate future prospects for a more sustainable model of transnational Korean Studies that combines national leadership with international adaptability. The guiding assumption is that sustainable development in this field depends on a balance between standardization and localization. South Korea can provide high-quality core content, but overseas institutions must be able to adapt it to different linguistic levels, learning traditions, and student profiles. This logic is consistent with the stakeholder-centered curriculum literature, which shows that international consistency becomes more effective when diverse perspectives are incorporated into content development and quality assurance (Gaweł et al., 2023). It is also compatible with the broader sustainability agenda in higher education, which links lifelong learning, access, and institutional responsibility to the long-term social mission of universities (Owens, 2017).

Methodologically, the article adopts a qualitative-dominant case study design with comparative analytical elements. The study relies primarily on document analysis and content analysis. Document analysis will examine policy papers, institutional reports, platform descriptions, and publicly available materials related to digital education and Korean Studies in South Korea. Content analysis will focus on selected digital resources used in Korean language and cultural education, evaluating them according to criteria such as pedagogical coherence, accessibility, interactivity, modularity, cultural authenticity, and adaptability for overseas use. Where possible, the study will also draw on expert perspectives from instructors, curriculum designers, and administrators involved in Korean Studies or digital education development. This approach is appropriate because digital learning outcomes are shaped by the interaction between content, learner, and environment, and because sustainable educational innovation depends on the circulation of knowledge across institutional networks (Reinhold et al., 2024; Li, 2025). It also enables the study to connect policy-level developments with actual educational practice, which is essential when assessing sustainability in a transnational field.

The expected results are fourfold. First, the study is expected to show that South Korea possesses a relatively strong institutional and technological foundation for digital educational content in Korean Studies, supported by policy attention, higher education modernization, and a growing digital education ecosystem (Hashim et al., 2021). Second, it is expected to demonstrate that digital content expands the reach of Korean Studies by reducing geographic barriers, enabling reusable learning modules, and supporting blended or self-directed learning (Drozdikova-Zaripova & Sabirova, 2020). Third, the analysis is likely to reveal persistent weaknesses, including limited localization for non-native learners, uneven adaptation to different curricular systems, and insufficient mechanisms for quality assurance across international contexts (Sciarretta, 2025; Gaweł et al., 2023). Fourth, the study is expected to conclude that the most sustainable digital content will be characterized by pedagogical clarity, accessibility, cultural depth, and flexible design. In other words, future success will depend less on technological novelty than on the capacity to produce content

that is reusable, inclusive, and institutionally transferable (Goodyear, 2005; Reinhold et al., 2024).

Ultimately, this article argues that the future of overseas Korean Studies depends on building a digital content ecosystem that is academically credible, culturally responsive, and globally adaptable. Digital educational content should not be treated as a temporary response to shifting circumstances, but as a long-term commitment to educational continuity and international collaboration. By examining South Korea's experience and outlining future prospects, the study seeks to contribute to a more durable and equitable model of Korean Studies in the digital age.

Current State and Challenges of Korean Studies Abroad

Korean Studies abroad has moved well beyond its earlier status as a niche philological specialty and has emerged as a comparatively mature, interdisciplinary, and internationally networked field shaped by South Korea's economic ascent, political significance, and global cultural visibility. Its expansion has been closely linked to democratization, deeper integration into global markets, and the strategic use of cultural diplomacy, which together created the institutional conditions for sustained academic exchange and the widening of Korea-related teaching and research across universities outside the peninsula (Kim & Jin, 2016). The field's contemporary profile is also inseparable from the Korean Wave, whose transnational circulation has generated not only popular attention but also durable scholarly demand for Korean language training, media analysis, and broader area expertise (Jin & Yoon, 2017; Cho, 2017). As a result, Korean Studies is now far more interdisciplinary than before, drawing on history, politics, sociology, economics, media studies, migration studies, literature, linguistics, and digital humanities, while increasingly adopting comparative, transnational, and inter-Asian frameworks that position Korea within larger regional and global formations rather than as a sealed national object (Cho & Zhu, 2017; Jung, 2024).

Government-supported organizations have significantly contributed to this international expansion. Institutions such as the Korea Foundation (KF), the Academy of Korean Studies (AKS), and the King Sejong Institute Foundation have provided extensive financial and institutional support through research grants, faculty exchange programs, scholarships, curriculum development, library assistance, and international conferences. These initiatives have strengthened global academic cooperation while increasing the visibility and accessibility of Korean Studies beyond the Korean Peninsula.

At the same time, the growth of the field should not be read as a linear story of consolidation. Empirical trend analysis shows a marked increase in Korea-related scholarship over time, yet this expansion has been unevenly distributed across regions and institutions, with East Asia remaining a major hub and North America and Europe developing stronger institutional bases than many other parts of the world (Schwekendiek, 2020). This uneven geography points to a key structural feature of Korean Studies abroad: its visibility has increased, but its institutional depth remains asymmetrical, often depending on the local capacity of universities, the presence of committed scholars, and externally supported initiatives rather than on stable, autonomous departmental structures (Saeji, 2018).

Table 1
Development of Korean Studies in Selected Countries (Korea Foundation, 2025)

Country	Universities Offering Korean Studies	Approximate Period of Expansion	Main Driver	Academic Maturity	Development Characteristics
Japan	377	Before 1990	Historical and cultural ties	Very High	Long-established academic tradition with extensive bilateral cooperation and numerous specialized research centers.
China	270	1990s	Economic cooperation	Very High	Rapid institutional growth driven by geographical proximity, economic integration, and increasing academic exchanges.
United States	141	1980s–1990s	Area Studies and international research	Very High	Comprehensive interdisciplinary programs with internationally recognized Korean Studies centers and strong research output.

Continuation of the table

Country	Universities Offering Korean Studies	Approximate Period of Expansion	Main Driver	Academic Maturity	Development Characteristics
Russia	39	Soviet period	Historical academic tradition	High	Well-established tradition in Korean language and regional studies, supported by expanding research cooperation with South Korea.
Vietnam	38	2000s	Economic cooperation and labor mobility	Medium	Fast-growing academic programs reflecting closer economic relations and increasing student demand.
Taiwan	36	1990s	Regional cooperation	Medium	Strong emphasis on Korean language education and active cultural and academic exchanges.
Thailand	32	2000s	Hallyu and educational cooperation	Medium	Expanding university curricula supported by growing interest in Korean language and culture.
United Kingdom	29	1990s	Academic research	High	Research-oriented programs integrated into Asian Studies with increasing interdisciplinary collaboration.
India	23	2000s	Bilateral educational cooperation	Medium	Emerging field supported by expanding university partnerships and rising interest in Korean language and business studies.
Germany	21	1990s	East Asian Studies	High	Well-developed research tradition within East Asian Studies, emphasizing history, linguistics, and cultural studies.

Source: Compiled by the author based on the Korea Foundation Global Korean Studies Map (2025) and the Academy of Korean Studies.

The data presented in Table 1 demonstrate that Korean Studies has expanded well beyond its traditional regional base and is now represented across diverse academic systems. At the same time, the distribution of programs remains uneven, reflecting considerable differences in institutional capacity, research infrastructure, and long-term investment. While some countries have developed comprehensive research centers and interdisciplinary curricula, others continue to rely on relatively small programs with limited human and financial resources. These differences highlight that the internationalization of Korean Studies has been accompanied not only by quantitative growth but also by significant variation in institutional maturity.

The expansion of Korean Studies has also generated new questions concerning the identity of the discipline itself. As the field has become increasingly interdisciplinary, its conceptual boundaries have become less clearly defined, particularly in programs that must accommodate students with widely differing academic interests and career goals. Moreover, the worldwide popularity of Korean popular culture has stimulated enrollment and public visibility while simultaneously encouraging a perception of Korean Studies that is centered primarily on entertainment and language learning rather than on comprehensive historical, political, and social analysis. Consequently, the principal challenge is no longer simply to increase the number of Korean Studies programs, but to reinforce their long-term academic sustainability through stable institutional support, diversified curricula, and research approaches that integrate digital innovation with rigorous scholarly inquiry.

Despite this substantial progress, Korean Studies abroad continues to encounter several structural and institutional challenges that influence both its sustainability and future development. While the discipline has benefited substantially from governmental support and growing international interest, many overseas programs still face limitations related to funding, human resources, institutional capacity, and academic infrastructure. These challenges are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2
Contemporary challenges facing overseas Korean Studies

Challenge	Description	Impact on Korean Studies Abroad	Possible Strategies
Dependence on External Funding	Many overseas Korean Studies programs rely heavily on financial support from South Korean institutions such as the Korea Foundation (KF) and the Academy of Korean Studies (AKS).	Financial sustainability becomes uncertain when grant periods end or funding priorities change, making long-term program planning difficult.	Diversify funding sources through national research grants, university support, private foundations, and international partnerships.
Shortage of Qualified Specialists	The rapid expansion of Korean Studies has outpaced the availability of scholars with advanced expertise, particularly in specialized fields such as premodern history, classical literature, and Korean philosophy.	Universities may face difficulties maintaining high academic standards and offering comprehensive curricula.	Strengthen doctoral education, international faculty exchange programs, and joint supervision of graduate students.
Balancing Language Education and Area Studies	Student demand is often driven by interest in learning the Korean language and popular culture rather than broader academic inquiry into Korean society, history, politics, and economics.	Curricula may become overly language-oriented, reducing opportunities for interdisciplinary research and critical analysis.	Integrate language instruction with courses in history, politics, economics, culture, and social sciences to provide a comprehensive educational framework.
Regional Disparities	Korean Studies is well established in East Asia, North America, and Western Europe, while institutions in Africa, Latin America, Central Asia, and parts of Southeast Asia often have limited academic resources and institutional support.	Unequal development creates disparities in research capacity, international collaboration, and access to scholarly materials.	Expand international academic networks, digital libraries, joint research projects, and targeted support for emerging programs.
Digital Transformation	The increasing use of digital humanities, artificial intelligence, online learning, and electronic archives is changing research and teaching practices.	Institutions lacking digital infrastructure or faculty training may struggle to remain competitive in international scholarship.	Invest in digital research infrastructure, faculty development, online databases, and collaborative digital humanities initiatives.
Interdisciplinary Integration	Modern Korean Studies increasingly overlaps with fields such as international relations, media studies, gender studies, environmental studies, and digital humanities.	Traditional disciplinary boundaries may limit innovation and reduce the global relevance of Korean Studies research.	Encourage interdisciplinary research projects, cross-departmental collaboration, and comparative international studies.

Source: compiled by the author based on reports from the Korea Foundation, the Academy of Korean Studies, and recent literature on international Korean Studies.

The challenges outlined above should be viewed as interrelated rather than independent. Stable funding influences the recruitment and retention of qualified faculty, supports investment in digital infrastructure, and creates opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration and international research. At the same time, institutional flexibility and long-term strategic planning remain essential for responding to rapidly changing educational and technological environments. Future development of Korean Studies abroad is therefore likely to depend on stronger international academic networks, wider use of digital research resources, collaborative graduate education, and more diversified institutional partnerships capable of supporting sustainable growth across different regions.

The internationalization of Korean Studies represents one of the most significant developments in contemporary area studies. Supported by South Korea's growing global influence and sustained international academic cooperation, the field has evolved into a mature interdisciplinary area of scholarship. Nevertheless, its long-term development will depend on addressing persistent challenges related to funding, academic staffing, regional disparities, digital transformation, and interdisciplinary integra-

tion. Continued cooperation between South Korean and overseas universities, together with diversified funding mechanisms and innovative models of research and education, will be essential for strengthening the global position and long-term sustainability of Korean Studies abroad.

Korean Studies in Kazakhstan: Institutional Development and Current Trends

Korean Studies in Kazakhstan has developed from predominantly Korean-language instruction into a broader interdisciplinary field encompassing language, history, literature, culture, international relations, translation, and contemporary Korean society. Its institutional development has been closely associated with the expansion of Kazakhstan–Republic of Korea relations since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992, as well as with the activities of Kazakhstani universities, Korean partner institutions, and organizations supporting Korean Studies. At the same time, the field has been shaped by Kazakhstan's multilingual educational environment and by the historical presence of the Korean diaspora. Korea is therefore studied both as an area of academic specialization and in relation to the historical, cultural, economic, and political context of Kazakhstan and Central Asia (Lee, 2022; Dzhiyenalyev & Shaken, 2022).

The institutional development of Korean Studies has been particularly significant at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University (KazNU) and Ablai Khan Kazakh University of International Relations and World Languages, which have constituted the principal specialized centers of the field in Kazakhstan. At KazNU, Korean-language instruction preceded the establishment of the Department of Korean Studies in 1994. The department subsequently developed within the broader environment of Oriental Studies and established cooperation with Korean universities and academic organizations. Its model combines Korean language and literature with Oriental Studies, translation and interpreting, and substantive knowledge of Korean history, culture, society, and contemporary Korea. The availability of graduate-level training further strengthens its research orientation and contributes to the reproduction of academic specialists (Lee, 2019; Lee, 2022).

Ablai Khan University represents a complementary institutional model. Korean was introduced there as a second foreign language in 1993, followed by the establishment of a Korean-language specialization in 1998 and subsequent development of Korean Studies and translation programs (Jang, 2026). Its Oriental Studies curriculum combines Korean-language education with history, politics, economics, culture, diplomacy, translation, and intercultural communication, while master's-level training provides opportunities for advanced academic and professional specialization (Jang, 2026). Compared with KazNU's more research-oriented model, Ablai Khan University places greater emphasis on language pedagogy, translation, interpreting, and international professional communication. These approaches are complementary: sustainable Korean Studies requires both substantive knowledge of Korea and the practical linguistic competencies demanded by education, diplomacy, business, and international communication (Lee, 2019).

Other universities contribute to the field through broader Oriental Studies and foreign-language programs rather than independent Korean Studies departments. L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University (ENU), for example, offers Korean as one of the second foreign languages within its Oriental Studies curriculum and provides courses dealing with Korean Studies, Korean culture, and Korean language. Its Oriental Studies programs exist at bachelor's and master's levels (Baizakova et al., 2017). This model demonstrates that Korean-related education is expanding beyond specialized departments into broader programs in Oriental Studies, regional studies, translation, and international relations. Such programs should nevertheless be distinguished from the specialized institutional structures developed at KazNU and Ablai Khan University.

International academic cooperation has been another major factor in the development of Korean Studies in Kazakhstan. The Korea Foundation, the Academy of Korean Studies, the Education Center of the Embassy of the Republic of Korea, Korean universities, and other organizations have supported academic exchanges, scholarships, conferences, research projects, teaching materials, and institutional partnerships. The long-term significance of such cooperation depends on its integration into permanent curricula, research activities, postgraduate training, and university partnerships rather than isolated cultural or educational events (Lee, 2019). A related trend is the localization of educational resources (Lee, 2022). Recent cooperation involving KazNU and Korean partners has included the development of Korean-language materials in Kazakh, reflecting a shift from the simple importation of Korean educational resources toward their adaptation to Kazakhstan's multilingual educational environment.

The field is also becoming increasingly connected to professional and economic demand. Contemporary programs address not only language and philology but also Korean politics, economic development, international relations, social transformation, cultural industries, migration, and Korea–Central Asia relations. Growing Korean investment and cooperation in industry, infrastructure, education, technology, healthcare, logistics, and business create demand for specialists who combine Korean-language proficiency with knowledge of Korean institutions and professional culture. This practical dimension is particularly visible in programs combining Korean with translation, interpreting, diplomatic communication, and international business. At KazNU and Ablai Khan University, cooperation with Korean organizations has also created opportunities for scholarships, internships, and professional engagement (Lee, 2022; Jang, 2026).

Despite this progress, several structural challenges remain. The expansion of undergraduate language education has not necessarily produced a sufficient number of researchers and university teachers capable of supervising advanced Korean Studies research. Earlier studies therefore emphasized the need to strengthen postgraduate education, research capacity, and academic staff development (Lee, 2019; Lee, 2022). Institutional resources also remain concentrated in Almaty and Astana, while regional universities may face greater difficulties in recruiting specialized instructors, maintaining Korean-language collections, and organizing sustained international exchanges. Digital technologies can partly mitigate these differences through online lectures, joint seminars, shared courses, and virtual mobility, but they should complement rather than replace stable institutional capacity (Jang, 2026).

The Korean diaspora provides an additional intellectual resource for the field. Its historical experience in Kazakhstan creates opportunities for research on migration, identity, cultural memory, language maintenance, and intercultural relations (Dzhiyenalyev & Shaken, 2022). At the same time, Korean Studies should extend beyond diaspora history to contemporary South Korea, including its political institutions, demographic transformation, technological development, cultural industries, social change, and relations with Kazakhstan and Central Asia. This broader scope is essential if the field is to develop as an academic discipline rather than remain primarily a form of language and cultural education.

The development of Korean Studies in Kazakhstan can therefore be understood as a transition from language-centered education toward a diversified academic and professional field. KazNU and Ablai Khan University represent the principal examples of specialized institutional development, while ENU illustrates the integration of Korean-related subjects into broader Oriental Studies. From the perspective of sustainable overseas Korean Studies, the main challenge is to transform international support and short-term educational initiatives into stable domestic academic capacity through permanent programs, qualified researchers, postgraduate training, locally relevant teaching materials, and sustained research cooperation. Kazakhstan's multilingual environment, established Korean diaspora, growing economic relations with the Republic of Korea, and higher-education infrastructure provide favorable conditions for this development. The long-term objective should therefore be not simply to expand Korean-language learning, but to strengthen Kazakhstan's capacity to produce original knowledge on Korea and Korea-Central Asia relations.

Institutional Support and Strategies for Overseas Korean Studies

Institutional support is the decisive condition that transforms Overseas Korean Studies from a collection of isolated individual interests into a durable academic field. In theoretical terms, Korean Studies abroad depends on more than intellectual curiosity: it requires funding, administrative legitimacy, teaching infrastructure, research networks, and long-term policy coordination. Without these supports, programs remain vulnerable to fluctuations in student demand, personnel turnover, and university budget constraints. Korean institutional policy has therefore developed a layered model in which the state and quasi-public agencies act as field builders, providing the material and symbolic resources needed for the international reproduction of knowledge about Korea. This model aligns with broader cultural diplomacy goals, since the promotion of Korean language, history, society, and culture also serves soft power objectives and strengthens Korea's visibility in global higher education (Kwak, 2023; Cho & Kim, 2023).

A central actor in this architecture is the Korea Foundation (KF). Established in 1991 under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, KF has played a foundational role in supporting Korean Studies overseas by funding professorships, research projects, libraries, publications, academic events, and institutional

partnerships. The theoretical significance of KF lies in its network-centered strategy: rather than supporting only a few elite institutions, it disperses grants across regions so that Korean Studies can develop in diverse academic environments. This is especially important because field consolidation often begins with small but strategic interventions – such as seed grants for a lecture series or support for a new library collection – that gradually create institutional permanence. Research using KF's statistics center shows that KF-supported Korean Studies programs operate in 1,408 universities across 107 countries, demonstrating both the geographical breadth and institutional depth of Korea's overseas academic outreach (Kwak, 2023). Such coverage suggests that Korean Studies is no longer a marginal niche but an internationally distributed academic domain sustained by public investment (Kwak, 2023).

The Academy of Korean Studies (AKS), especially through the Korean Studies Promotion Service (KSPS), provides a more specialized academic mechanism. Unlike broader cultural promotion, KSPS is oriented toward scholarly infrastructure, curriculum development, research capacity, and institutional maturation. One of its most important instruments is the Seed Program for Korean Studies, which supports institutions that are at an early stage of building Korean Studies capacity. This program is theoretically important because it addresses the "entry problem" in international academic development: universities may have interest in Korea, but they often lack trained faculty, course materials, or stable funding. Seed support lowers the threshold for participation and helps institutions move from episodic interest to formal program creation. In contrast, the Core University Program for Korean Studies reflects a consolidation strategy. It concentrates multi-year support on already established universities so that they can function as regional hubs, training scholars, hosting conferences, and mentoring neighboring institutions. In effect, the two programs create a developmental ladder: seed support initiates growth, while core support stabilizes and expands it (Jeong, 2025).

The practical impact of these institutional mechanisms is particularly visible when external support is translated into sustainable academic capacity within Kazakhstani universities. Cooperation with the Korea Foundation, for example, has supported visiting professors, research fellowships, online courses, scholarships, and academic projects at KazNU. Earlier cooperation included a Korea Foundation guest-professor program, which enabled Kazakhstani students to receive specialized instruction in areas where local expertise was limited (Baizakova et al., 2017). More recently, the Korea Foundation has supported research fellowships for KazNU faculty and a visiting-professor arrangement with Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, while in 2026 it supported the development of a comprehensive Korean-language textbook in Kazakh and scholarships for undergraduate and doctoral students (Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, 2024, 2025, 2026). These examples illustrate a shift from short-term academic exchange toward the localization of expertise, teaching resources, and research capacity. Cooperation with the Academy of Korean Studies has a complementary function through its Seed and Core University programs, which are designed to strengthen overseas Korean Studies institutions, research, postgraduate education, and international academic networks. The experience of Ablai Khan University, including its participation in the Core University Program, demonstrates how such support can contribute to institutional consolidation and cooperation with other Korean Studies centers in Central Asia (Jang, 2026).

The scale of this support is visible in domestic and international funding patterns. A recent analysis of KSPS-supported domestic Korean Studies projects from 2007 to 2023 identified 413 research projects with total funding of 240.8 billion KRW, averaging 583 million KRW per project (Jeong, 2025). Although this figure concerns domestic support, it is valuable theoretically because it shows the seriousness of state-backed Korean Studies investment and the institutional capacity of KSPS to sustain large-scale research ecosystems. It also indicates that Korean Studies is not merely symbolic diplomacy; it is an area of structured public expenditure. This matters for overseas Korean Studies as well, because international programs often rely on similar logic: sustained multi-year financing, project evaluation, and institutional accountability (Jeong, 2025).

Another pillar of overseas institutional support is the King Sejong Institute network, which functions as the most visible global platform for Korean language education. The King Sejong Institute is important not only because it teaches language, but because it creates the entry point through which learners may later progress into Korean Studies programs, exchange study, or graduate research. This makes language education a pipeline for academic field expansion. Recent scholarship on King Sejong Institute policy emphasizes that its effectiveness depends on localization, teacher expertise, diversified

promotion, and stronger cooperation with local institutions and Korean firms (Hwang, 2024). Another study highlights that teachers themselves require stronger competencies in contrastive linguistics, cultural understanding, pedagogical adaptation, administrative management, and intercultural communication (Kim, Song & Lee, 2024). These findings suggest that institutional success depends not simply on expanding the number of institutes, but on improving quality, adaptability, and local embeddedness.

The broader policy logic of the King Sejong Institute system is especially clear in Korean Wave-based learner strategies. Korean popular culture often attracts first-time learners, but sustained language study requires institutional mechanisms that prevent dropout and convert cultural interest into educational commitment (Cho & Kim, 2023). For this reason, official strategy should connect language education with culturally relevant content, regionally adapted curricula, and long-term learner pathways. In this sense, the King Sejong Institute is not merely a language school; it is a strategic bridge between popular culture and academic study (Cho & Kim, 2023).

Overseas Korean Studies also depends on the quality of content and the international relevance of the field. Research on foreign university students majoring in Korean Studies shows that many students first become interested in Korea through Korean popular culture, yet their understanding of the Korean Peninsula remains uneven and often limited (Kang, 2024). This implies that institutional support must go beyond language instruction to include balanced content on history, politics, reunification, and contemporary society. Such content diversification strengthens academic legitimacy and helps Korean Studies avoid being reduced to a narrow cultural fascination (Kang, 2024). Similarly, studies of the field argue that Korean Studies should include underrepresented topics, comparative perspectives, and digitally accessible resources in order to remain intellectually robust and internationally competitive (Heo, 2024; Kwak, 2023).

In theoretical perspective, the most effective strategy for Overseas Korean Studies is a multilayered model of support. First, broad international funding through KF expands the field geographically and increases institutional visibility (Kwak, 2023). Second, KSPS and AKS provide developmental and consolidating support through Seed Program and Core University Program funding (Jeong, 2025). Third, the King Sejong Institute network supplies the language infrastructure that feeds the broader academic ecosystem (Hwang, 2024; Kim et al., 2024). Together, these institutions create a pipeline in which language learning, curriculum development, scholarly research, and international collaboration reinforce one another. The long-term strength of Overseas Korean Studies therefore depends on continuity, regional balance, localized adaptation, and coordinated public policy rather than fragmented short-term projects (Kang, 2024; Kwak, 2023).

In conclusion, institutional support is not an auxiliary feature of Overseas Korean Studies; it is its very foundation. The Korean state and affiliated institutions have built a strategic support structure that ranges from initial language exposure to advanced research collaboration. KF widens the global reach of Korean Studies, AKS and KSPS deepen its scholarly base, and the King Sejong Institute network expands its learner pipeline. When combined with targeted programs such as the Seed Program for Korean Studies and the Core University Program for Korean Studies, these institutions demonstrate how policy can transform cultural interest into a stable international academic field. The future of Overseas Korean Studies will depend on maintaining this coordinated architecture while ensuring that support remains locally responsive, academically rigorous, and financially sustainable.

Online Resources and Virtual Academic Networks for Overseas Korean Studies

The practical development of Overseas Korean Studies has increasingly become dependent on digital infrastructure, because online access now determines whether students can enter the field, whether researchers can sustain their work, and whether small overseas departments can remain academically viable. In many universities outside South Korea, Korean Studies is still taught by a small number of faculty members, with limited budgets and uneven access to Korean-language materials. In this context, digital platforms, virtual academic communities, and nationally supported online services function not as supplementary tools but as essential components of the academic infrastructure of the field. The Korea Foundation has expanded digital access to Korean Studies through initiatives such as KF Global e-School, which connects Korean universities with overseas institutions and provides online Korean Studies and Korean language courses (Korea Foundation, 2024). Likewise, the Academy of Korean Studies,

through the Korean Studies Promotion Service, has strengthened the field by supporting curriculum development, research capacity, and institutional continuity, especially through programs designed to support the formation and consolidation of Korean Studies institutions (Kang, 2024).

Operating as a national online education platform under Korea's lifelong education system, K-MOOC offers open access to university-level courses and also enables blended learning models for diverse groups of learners (National Institute for Lifelong Education, 2024). This advantage is particularly salient for overseas students. Accordingly, it mitigates shortages of local specialists and supports blended learning models that integrate online lectures with classroom discussion, source analysis, and written assignments. Research on K-MOOC indicates substantial uptake: between October 2015 and August 2017, 272 courses were implemented and 289,163 participants enrolled, with an average completion rate of 9.3%, which is closely consistent with global MOOC patterns (Lee & Chung, 2019). This suggests that K-MOOC is suitable for broad access, but it also shows that completion depends on instructional quality, course design, and learner support. For Overseas Korean Studies, K-MOOC is therefore most effective when used as a structured academic bridge: students first acquire general knowledge online and then deepen it through local seminars, reading groups, and supervised projects (Aksela et al., 2016). In addition, digital courses reduce dependence on individual instructors and provide continuity for smaller overseas programs where faculty resources may be unstable.

A second indispensable layer consists of research databases such as RISS and KCI. RISS is important for thesis retrieval, literature searching, and document discovery, while KCI provides bibliographic visibility and supports access to Korean academic publications. For overseas researchers, these systems are critical because access to Korean-language scholarship is often limited outside Korea. In practical terms, they enable undergraduate students to find articles for essays, graduate students to build stronger bibliographies, and faculty members to locate Korean research for comparative work. This matters because the quality of Overseas Korean Studies depends not only on enthusiasm for Korea, but also on access to current scholarship and reliable academic information systems. Digital knowledge environments have become a structural necessity in higher education, especially where physical library holdings are limited (Peters & Seruga, 2016). Through RISS and KCI, Korean Studies departments abroad can participate more fully in the same research conversations that shape scholarship in Korea.

Teacher-development platforms are equally significant. The quality of Korean language teaching strongly affects whether learners remain in the field long enough to become majors, researchers, or cultural mediators. Studies on the King Sejong Institute system emphasize localization, specialized teacher recruitment, diversified promotion, and institutional cooperation as key conditions for success (Hwang, 2024). Another study on Korean-wave-based learners argues that language education should not merely attract beginners through popular culture, but should also maintain learning continuity and convert interest into sustained study (Cho & Kim, 2023). In this context, online teacher-training platforms and professional communities are practically important because they allow instructors to exchange lesson plans, adapt materials to local contexts, and develop competencies in digital pedagogy. The need is even greater in virtual environments, where university teachers require skills related to instructional adaptation, online interaction management, and collaboration across different learning contexts (Guasch et al., 2010).

The King Sejong Institute network is best understood as an entry pathway into Overseas Korean Studies. Many learners begin with language classes and later move into more advanced academic study. This progression is not automatic; it depends on curriculum continuity, local institutional cooperation, and teacher support. Scholarship on the King Sejong Institute shows that its effectiveness is strengthened when institutions localize content, recruit professional teachers, and reinforce cooperation with local partners (Hwang, 2024). In practical terms, this means that an institute should not simply offer standard language classes, but should also connect learners to cultural seminars, online tutoring, academic Korean courses, and reading opportunities that lead toward university-level Korean Studies. Research on academic-purpose Korean curricula further confirms that teacher collaboration, including online and offline exchange, is necessary for developing materials that serve learners with different educational goals (Sun et al., 2025).

Table 3
Major Online Resources for Overseas Korean Studies

Resource	Main function	Contribution to sustainability in overseas settings
K-MOOC	Online university courses	Expands access to Korean Studies content and reduces dependence on local specialists
RISS	Research search and thesis access	Supports literature reviews, dissertations, and academic source collection
KCI	Journal indexing and academic visibility	Helps scholars identify Korean publications and follow scholarly debates
Online teacher-training platforms	Teacher development and shared pedagogy	Improves instructional quality and supports professional communities
King Sejong online platforms	Language learning and academic outreach	Creates a pathway from language learning to Korean Studies programs

Source: Author's compilation based on data and descriptions from Lee and Chung (2019), Hwang (2024), Sun et al. (2025), and Korea Foundation (2024).

Virtual academic networks extend these resources into a collaborative system. Overseas Korean Studies increasingly develops through webinars, joint seminars, co-taught classes, and online reading groups. These formats reduce the isolation of small departments and make it possible to cooperate with stronger Korean Studies centers without the costs of travel or long-term exchange. This networking model corresponds with broader trends in higher education, where digital platforms enable knowledge exchange beyond traditional institutional boundaries (Peters & Seruga, 2016). In practical terms, a university in Latin America, Europe, or Southeast Asia may co-host an online lecture with a Korean professor, invite diaspora scholars to a virtual panel, or share syllabi with neighboring institutions. Such networking lowers barriers to participation and raises the academic visibility of smaller programs.

The practical design of these networks should follow a structured developmental model. First, institutions should use K-MOOC modules as entry-level content for students who are interested in Korea but lack prior academic training (Lee & Chung, 2019). Second, they should integrate RISS and KCI into writing assignments and research methods courses so that students learn to work with Korean-language sources (Kwak, 2023). Third, departments should establish virtual teacher communities linked to King Sejong Institute-related training systems, enabling regular workshops on pedagogy, digital tools, and local adaptation (Hwang, 2024). Fourth, universities should seek support from Korean institutions to sustain online lectures, research cooperation, and academic events. This layered structure is more effective than isolated initiatives because it connects language learning, research development, and institutional sustainability into one pathway.

Table 4
Practical Strategies for Virtual Academic Networking

Strategy	Example	Expected result
Blended learning	K-MOOC + local seminars	Better comprehension and learner engagement
Digital research training	RISS and KCI in course assignments	Stronger academic writing and source analysis
Teacher networking	Online workshops and professional forums	More consistent teaching quality
Institutional linkage	Online seminars and collaborative projects	Broader cooperation and academic visibility
Curriculum sharing	Joint syllabi and reading-list exchange	Easier program development and adaptation

Source: Compiled by the author based on Lee and Chung (2019), Peters and Seruga (2016), Hwang (2024), Sun et al. (2025), and Korea Foundation (2024).

South Korea's experience of educational digitalization has also acquired practical relevance for Korean Studies in Kazakhstan, particularly where digital resources can compensate for limited local teaching capacity. An early example was the introduction of Korea Foundation-supported online Korean-language courses at KazNU in cooperation with Sookmyung Women's University, in which more than 50 students participated and Korean professors delivered video lectures as part of the university curriculum (Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, 2020). More recently, Korean Studies scholars in Kazakhstan have explored the use of K-MOOC courses as a digital resource for local learners, while academic cooperation between Kazakhstani and Korean institutions has increasingly incorporated online lectures, virtual exchange, and digitally mediated access to Korean-language materials (Oh, 2025). In the Kazakhstani context, the practical significance of this model lies not in reproducing South Korea's digital education system in its entirety, but in selectively integrating its components into blended learning. Such an approach can expand students' exposure to authentic Korean-language content, connect learners with Korean specialists, and reduce the geographical limitations associated with Kazakhstan's concentration of Korean Studies expertise in major cities.

From a broader policy perspective, online resources and virtual academic networks also contribute to diversifying the content offered in Overseas Korean Studies. Studies suggest that many students first encounter Korea via popular culture, yet the persistence of partial understanding of Korean history, politics, and issues related to the Korean Peninsula is documented (Kang, 2024). Accordingly, virtual resources must promote more than initial attraction; they should drive deeper academic engagement. Maintaining academic credibility for Korean Studies abroad – while preventing it from being narrowed to a limited cultural fascination – requires balanced coverage of history, politics, reunification studies, society, and comparative regional issues. Digital systems enable this by broadening access to current scholarship, recorded lectures, primary sources, and collaborative academic forums. Digitalization brings opportunities, but it simultaneously introduces challenges to the sustainable development of Overseas Korean Studies. Unequal technological infrastructure, limited multilingual digital content, variation in digital literacy, and the need for ongoing platform maintenance remain significant challenges. Future digital strategies should expand access while also safeguarding quality, inclusiveness, and long-term institutional sustainability. Online resources and virtual academic networks have become fundamental foundations for Overseas Korean Studies. While K-MOOC extends access, RISS and KCI strengthen research capacity, teacher-development platforms enhance instructional quality, and Korean institutions provide the organizational framework that integrates these components into a global academic ecosystem (Guasch et al., 2010; Cho & Kim, 2023). Integration is the most effective model. The future of Overseas Korean Studies is not shaped by standalone digital tools; rather, coordinated virtual infrastructures preserve institutional continuity, sustain pedagogical quality, and support the long-term circulation of knowledge over time.

The Kazakhstani experience also has implications beyond the national level because the country has increasingly developed as a platform for regional Korean Studies cooperation. The combination of established university-based programs, Korean Studies research centers, Korean diaspora organizations, and long-term cooperation with Korean institutions provides conditions for Kazakhstan to function as a regional node connecting Korean Studies initiatives across Central Asia. This role is particularly relevant because the development of Korean Studies in the region remains uneven and individual institutions often face limitations in staffing, research infrastructure, and access to Korean-language resources. Regional conferences, joint publications, shared digital courses, and interuniversity research networks can therefore extend the effects of Korean-supported programs beyond individual universities. Recent Central Asian Korean Studies publications supported through the Academy of Korean Studies' Core University Program illustrate this networked approach by bringing together researchers and institutions from Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries (Academy of Korean Studies, 2025; Jang, 2026).

Conclusion and practical recommendations

This article's review of scholarship indicates that digital educational content is no longer a peripheral supplement to Overseas Korean Studies; it now functions as one of the main conditions for the field's sustainability. Practically, Overseas Korean Studies abroad will depend on whether institutions can secure continuous access to high-quality online learning materials, digital research databases, and collaborative academic networks. Especially

relevant are overseas universities constrained by staffing, characterized by small student cohorts, and affected by uneven access to Korean-language sources. In such contexts, digital infrastructure helps transform Overseas Korean Studies from a fragile local offering into a durable transnational academic domain. The wider institutional ecosystem created by the Korea Foundation and the Academy of Korean Studies illustrates this logic clearly, as both organizations connect dispersed institutions into a more stable international structure of support.

A key conclusion is that digital content is most effective when it is organized as a pathway rather than a collection of separate tools. K-MOOC offers broad entry-level access to Korean-related lectures and can attract learners who have no prior academic background in the field. RISS and KCI then allow those learners to move from general interest to source-based academic study, while teacher-support systems and King Sejong Institute networks help sustain learner progression and classroom continuity. MOOCs and open resources expand participation, yet their educational value rests on interaction, guidance, and ongoing support. Research on digital learning repeatedly shows that access by itself does not ensure completion or deep learning; accordingly, course design, learner support, and pedagogical scaffolding are essential for meaningful outcomes. For Overseas Korean Studies, online platforms should be incorporated into structured academic programs rather than being operated as isolated content repositories.

Sustainability further calls for an appropriate balance between accessibility and academic depth. Even when students initially approach Korea via popular culture or language study, durable scholarly engagement requires access to broader themes, including Korean history, politics, social change, regional relations, and comparative analysis. Digital content that focuses only on attraction may generate short-term enthusiasm without durable academic commitment. Studies of overseas Korean Studies and King Sejong-linked learner pathways emphasize the need for localized content, continuity, and institutional cooperation so that interest can be converted into advanced study. In this regard, digital educational content can function as a bridge from initial cultural curiosity to sustained disciplinary engagement.

From a practical standpoint, several recommendations follow. First, overseas departments ought to adopt blended learning as the default model. K-MOOC modules can serve as introductory lectures, while local seminars, tutorials, and reading groups can deepen interpretation and discussion. This model is especially effective for small programs because it reduces dependence on a full local faculty team and allows institutions to maintain course offerings even when staffing is limited. Blended learning also improves retention because students are never left to study independently without feedback. Instead, online content becomes the foundation for guided classroom engagement.

Second, universities should integrate RISS and KCI into research training from the first stages of study. Students can learn to search Korean databases, locate peer-reviewed sources, assess journal quality, and develop Korean-language bibliographies. Not only is this a technical skill; it is essential for academic credibility. Research infrastructure is what allows Overseas Korean Studies to participate in a wider scholarly conversation within Korea, rather than remaining isolated from it. Departments that make database literacy a standard part of methodology courses will produce stronger essays, theses, and dissertations.

Third, teacher development needs to remain a permanent priority. The literature on online communities of practice indicates that collaborative teacher networks are important for reflection, sharing strategies, and sustaining pedagogical improvement over time. In the Korean Studies context, K-teacher-style training, online workshops, and shared lesson banks can help instructors adapt materials to local needs and improve the quality of virtual teaching. This is especially relevant for King Sejong Institute-linked environments, where teachers often work across very different institutional and cultural settings. Teacher support therefore needs to include digital pedagogy, intercultural communication, and curriculum adaptation, not only content knowledge.

Fourth, institutional support from the Korea Foundation and the Academy of Korean Studies should continue to target both emerging and established programs. Seed-level support is necessary for universities that are just beginning to build Korean Studies capacity, while Core University-style support is needed to strengthen mature centers that can serve as regional hubs. This developmental ladder is one of the most effective features of Korea's international support strategy because it combines expansion with consolidation. If future policy allocates greater attention to smaller or newer programs, the field will become more geographically balanced and less dependent on a few flagship institutions. Fifth, long-term learner pathways should

inform the design of digital content. A student may begin with a King Sejong language course, then progress to a K-MOOC lecture series, employ RISS and KCI for course papers, and subsequently participate in an online seminar hosted by a Korea Foundation- or AKS-supported university. This sequence creates continuity between language learning, academic literacy, and research specialization. The value of this pathway is that it reduces dropout and helps students perceive Overseas Korean Studies as a coherent intellectual trajectory rather than a series of disconnected experiences. In conclusion, the sustainable development of Overseas Korean Studies hinges on coordinated digital and institutional support. Online resources such as K-MOOC, RISS, and KCI broaden access; teacher networks and the King Sejong system maintain pedagogical continuity; and the Korea Foundation and Academy of Korean Studies provide the financial and organizational framework that makes the whole ecosystem possible. The field's key takeaway is that digital educational content must be treated as long-term strategic infrastructure, not as a temporary substitute for face-to-face education. When aligned content, pedagogy, research access, and institutional partnership are coordinated, Overseas Korean Studies can remain both academically rigorous and globally resilient.

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