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Research Trends of Korean Language Education Overseas in Korea

Introduction

This article aims to analyze the accomplishments and limitations of studies published on Korean language education overseas and to consider tasks for future research. Although many studies on Korean language education overseas have been published in various countries around the world, language skills allow only those from the English-speaking world to be accessed. Studies published in Korea, on the other hand, cover Korean language education that is carried out in various countries and also include research about policy. I will therefore focus on analyzing studies published in Korea in this article.

Korean language education overseas can largely be divided into two depending on the makeup of the learners: whether they are overseas Koreans or foreigners. In the early years, most of the education was provided to overseas Koreans, and the foreigners who learned Korean were limited to those learning the language for specific reasons such as diplomats or missionaries. However, as the international and economic status of Korea grew stronger, more and more foreigners began to learn the Korean language, which is a trend accelerated with spread of the Korean Wave. The objectives and characteristics of Korean language education inevitably differs depending on whether the learners are overseas Koreans or foreigners. Since the former has a stronger character of teaching a heritage language, I will be limiting my focus to Korean language education overseas directed specifically to foreigners.

Methodology

This article utilizes keyword network analysis and topic modeling analysis to examine research trends. Recent research analyses tend to use text mining, which allows a relatively objective processing of a large amount of data. The

program used here is NetMiner 4.4.

Collection of Data

I began by collecting journal articles and theses/dissertations related to Korean language education overseas by using the online Research Information Sharing Service (RISS). I first selected articles that included either “gugoe Han’gugeo” or “haeoe Han’gugeo”—both meaning “Overseas Korean Language”—but did not include the terms “Korean Language School” (*Han’geul hakkyo*), “Korean School” (*Han’guk hakkyo*) or “Overseas Koreans” (*dongpo* or *gyomin*). Journal articles were limited to those selected as candidates or accredited by the Korea Citation Index (KCI). Theses/dissertations were limited to master’s or doctoral degree work. No limitations were placed on the period of publication. Among the studies that were initially selected as a result, I filtered out those unrelated to Korean language education or overlapping studies by reviewing their titles, table of contents, and abstracts and thus removed studies that focused on the field of Korean studies in order to focus specifically on Korean language education. The final cohort of studies that were selected through this process consisted of 220 studies total: 97 theses/dissertations and 123 journal articles.

Preprocess

Keyword network analysis and topic modeling analysis extract and analyze keywords. Because not all extracted keywords are relevant, they need to be processed before undergoing analysis, which is the preprocess step. For this article, I set what are “defined words,” “thesaurus,” and “exception list” for the preprocess. “Defined words” ensure that two keywords that are not separate words are processed as a single term. For example, because “Sejong Institute” (*Sejong hakdang*) should not be processed separately as “Sejong” and “Institute,” the entire term “Sejong Institute” is set as one of the “defined words” so that it is processed as one keyword. “Thesaurus” makes sure that keywords with the same meaning are processed as the same keyword regardless of how they are spaced or expressed differently. For instance, “Korean language teacher” (*Han’gugeo gyowon*) is variably spaced depending on the study (“Han’gugeo gyowon” or “Han’gugeogyowon”). These are set in advance as synonyms and processed as the same term. Finally, “exception list” eliminates keywords that are

not needed when analyzing research trends. Terms such as “research” (*yeon'gu*), “object” (*daesang*), and “analysis” (*bunseok*) are very frequently used in academic articles even though they are not significantly useful for research trend analysis. In addition, umbrella terms that describe the entire theme of the articles such as “Korean language education overseas” are not significant for the analysis and were consequently set as “exception list” to exclude them in advance.

Data Analysis Method

This article uses keyword network analysis and topic modeling analysis to look at research trends of Korean language education overseas. Keyword network analysis analyzes the frequency and degree centrality of certain keywords. Degree centrality is an analytical method that looks at how highly connected a single node is with other nodes to find the central keyword.

Topic modeling extracts keywords and classifies potential topic categories that can best express textual groups (Lee 2018, 143). Among many topic modeling techniques, this article used the latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA) technique supported by NetMiner 4.4. To conduct topic modeling analysis, the hyperparameters (number of topics, α , β) need to be defined. To that end, an evaluation of topic models was carried out to assess consistency. The number of topics was set at a minimum of 5 and at a maximum of 10, with a gradient of 1. α was set at a minimum of 0.01 and a maximum of 0.1, with a gradient of 0.01. β was fixed at 0.01. The interaction was set at 1,000 times. Because evaluation of the topic models resulted in high consistency when the number of topics was 5 and α was set at 0.05, these were the figures used as the hyperparameters during the analysis.

Research Trends of Korean Language Education Overseas

Trends by Year

The figure below shows the number of theses or dissertations and of journal articles that were released per year.

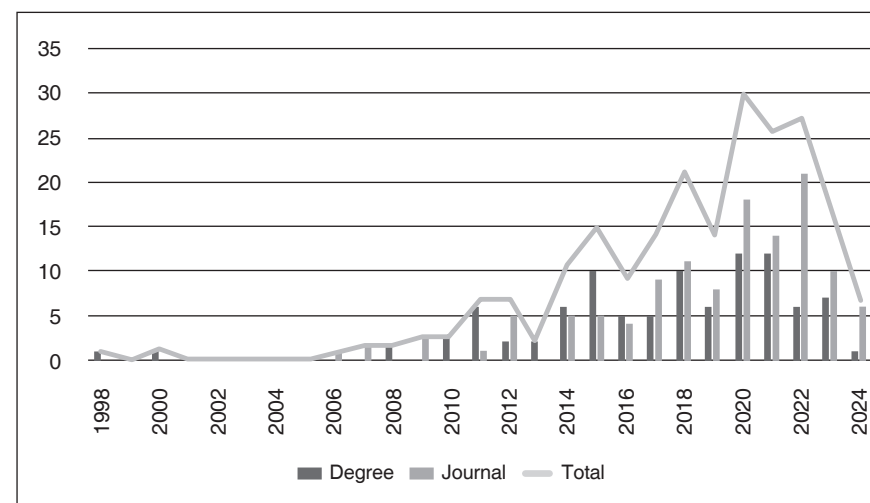


Figure 1. Trends by Year

According to RISS, the first study to use the keyword “Korean language education overseas” is a thesis/dissertation published in 1998. Interest in Korean language education overseas for foreigners developed somewhat belatedly since the main target of the education initially was overseas Korean residents, not foreigners. Over 10 studies on Korean language education overseas were published in 2014, and this number rapidly rose after 2018. This is related to the Korean Wave and the surge in Korean language learners and Korean language education institutions as a result. Research on curriculum, teaching/learning material development, and teaching skills likely increased in tandem.

Keyword Frequency and Network Analysis

Table 1 shows the top 10 keywords according to the results of keyword frequency and degree centrality analysis of studies on Korean language education overseas.

The keywords “learning” (*hakseup*), “development” (*gaebal*), and “university” (*daehak*), though ranked differently, all show a high frequency of usage as well as high degree centrality. It is easy to see how “learning” is important in researching Korean language education overseas given how education is the process of teaching and learning. “University” appears to be one of the core keywords as well in researching Korean language education overseas since many universities and colleges overseas created and offered Korean

Table 1. Keyword Frequency and Network

Rank	Keyword	Frequency	Keyword	Weight
1	learning (<i>hakseup</i>)	67	learning (<i>hakseup</i>)	0.368534
2	development (<i>gaebal</i>)	35	university (<i>daehak</i>)	0.290948
3	university (<i>daehak</i>)	34	development (<i>gaebal</i>)	0.215517
4	teaching/learning material (<i>gyojae</i>)	29	class (<i>sueop</i>)	0.189655
5	culture (<i>munhwa</i>)	25	culture (<i>munhwa</i>)	0.176724
6	Korean language teacher (<i>Han'gugeo gyowon</i>)	23	Korean language teacher (<i>Han'gugeo gyowon</i>)	0.159483
7	class (<i>sueop</i>)	19	teaching/learning material (<i>gyojae</i>)	0.153017
8	policy (<i>jeongchaek</i>)	17	motivation (<i>donggi</i>)	0.125
9	China (Jungguk)	17	curriculum (<i>gyoyuk gwajeong</i>)	0.114224
10	distribution (<i>bogeup</i>)	16	policy (<i>jeongchaek</i>)	0.114224

language majors and minors. “Development” is an important keyword likely due to studies on the development of teaching/learning material, curriculum, and training programs.

The other keywords among the top 10 according to both frequency and degree centrality are “class” (*sueop*), “culture” (*munhwa*), “Korean language teacher” (*Han'gugeo gyowon*), “teaching/learning material” (*gyojae*), and “policy” (*jeongchaek*). The high ranking of the keywords “class,” “Korean language teacher,” and “teaching/learning material” show how elements that are important in language education are also emphasized in the research on Korean language education overseas. Cultural content also forms an important part of Korean language education overseas, more so than Korean language education carried out in Korea, as evidenced by the keyword “culture” among the top 10. The keyword “policy” can be seen as a reflection of how Korean language education overseas is influenced by the distribution policies of related government departments. Finally, the inclusion of “China” among the top 10 frequently appearing keywords show how many studies are about Korean language education in China.

Topic Analysis of Overseas Korean Language Education Research

Table 2 shows the potential topics of the studies on Korean language education overseas as found by topic modeling analysis.

Table 2. Topic Modeling Findings/Results

Topic	Keyword 1 (influence)	Keyword 2 (influence)	Keyword 3 (influence)	Keyword 4 (influence)	Keyword 5 (influence)	Theme	Number of documents (percentage)
1	learning (<i>hakseup</i>) (0.112)	university (<i>daehak</i>) (0.055)	motivation (<i>donggi</i>) (0.027)	Chinese people (<i>Junggugin</i>) (0.023)	factor (<i>yoin</i>) (0.023)	Characteristics of Korean language learners overseas	36 (16.4)
2	policy (<i>jeongchaek</i>) (0.066)	distribution (<i>bogeup</i>) (0.064)	Sejong Institute (Sejong hakdang) (0.044)	management (<i>unyeong</i>) (0.042)	comparison (<i>bigyo</i>) (0.028)	Korean language education overseas policy	46 (20.1)
3	teaching/learning material (<i>gyojae</i>) (0.087)	development (<i>gaebal</i>) (0.085)	learning (<i>hakseup</i>) (0.078)	culture (<i>munhwa</i>) (0.057)	China (Jungguk) (0.033)	Development of Korean language teaching/learning material for use overseas	63 (28.6)
4	Korean language teacher (<i>Han'gugeo gyowon</i>) (0.075)	learning (<i>hakseup</i>) (0.055)	perception (<i>insik</i>) (0.039)	development (<i>gaebal</i>) (0.034)	program (0.033)	Training programs for Korean language teachers overseas	44 (20.0)
5	culture (<i>munhwa</i>) (0.057)	university (<i>daehak</i>) (0.054)	class (<i>sueop</i>) (0.041)	current state (<i>hyeonghwang</i>) (0.035)	major (<i>jeon'gong</i>) (0.030)	Current state of Korean language education in universities overseas	31 (14.1)

The five potential themes that were extracted can be categorized largely as three research themes. The first is research on the policies concerning Korean language education overseas and corresponds to Topic 2 in Table 2. The second is research on onsite Korean language education overseas and includes Topic 1, Topic 3, and Topic 5 in Table 2. The third is research of Korean language teachers and corresponds to Topic 4 in Table 2. The following sections look at each theme in detail.

Research on Korean language education overseas policies

The first theme to examine in the research on Korean language education overseas are the related policies, which take up around 20%. The government departments overseeing the work related to the distribution and education of the Korean language overseas are the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.¹ Korean language education overseas for foreigners can be divided as education for 1) students learning Korean as a foreign language at elementary, middle, and high school, 2) students majoring in Korean at universities, and 3) students learning Korean at agencies besides regular schools (Cho 2018, 223). Depending on the type of learner they are supporting, each South Korean government department accordingly handles different kinds of work.

Korean language education provided at elementary, middle, and high schools overseas is managed by the Ministry of Education. The ministry works to have regular Korean language courses incorporated as part of the local schools' curricula by signing international education agreements with the ministry of education of other countries. It also oversees the Test of Proficiency in Korean (TOPIK). According to the ministry, there are 2,154 schools ranging from elementary to middle and high school in 47 countries that have created a Korean language class as of December 2023.² The Ministry of Foreign Affairs supports the creation of the department of Korean studies or Korean language in universities overseas, sends university instructors and voluntary workers to each site, and trains professionals and experts. As of July 2024, there are a total of 1,405 universities located across 106 countries that have a Korean studies or Korean language course.³ The most representative example of Korean language

education provided at institutions other than regular schools is the Sejong Institute, which is overseen by the King Sejong Institute Foundation under the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism. In terms of Korean language education overseas, the ministry is in charge of developing educational material, training language teachers, running and designating Sejong Institutes, and providing Korean language and culture education.

The King Sejong Institute Foundation is the agency that directly provides education and actually carries out the policy to distribute the Korean language widely overseas. The foundation was established to oversee Korean language education overseas and the distribution of Korean culture. In addition to designating and operating Sejong Institutes outside of Korea, the Foundation also supports these institutes by sending language teachers, developing curricula and teaching/learning material, and developing assessments and evaluations. As of June 2024, there are 256 Sejong Institutes across 88 countries,⁴ which include areas where there are no or minimal local Korean language education institutions for the general public such as Central and Latin America and Africa, further adding to its important role in the distribution and education of the Korean language. As Table 2 shows, research on the Sejong Institute takes up a considerable part of the studies on the policies concerning overseas Korean language education. Examples of Topic 2 include "A Study on the Promotion Plan of Sejonghakhadang as a Foreign Policy of Korean Language Providing: Comparing to Management Policy of China's Confucius Institute" (Kang, Kim, and Chi 2012), "An Analysis of the Implementation and Outcome of the Overseas Korean Language Education Policy: Focusing on the Mongolian King Sejong Institute" (Tuya 2016), and "A Study on the Policy Efficiency of the King Sejong Institute Aiming to Invigorate the Overseas Dissemination of the Korean Language: Focusing on Analysis of Policy Executive Agency" (Sung 2019).

The research on Sejong Institute's policies regarding Korean language education overseas can be further divided into studies that compare the policies with another country's native language distribution policy and studies that analyze current policies and propose ways to develop them. During the earlier years following the establishment of the Foundation, the research mainly

1 Although the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family are related to Korean language education as well, I have not included them in this article since they mainly oversee policies concerning immigrants in Korea and children of multicultural families. In addition, the policies carried out by the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Foreign Affairs also include works related to overseas Koreans, though I have not included this in this article since overseas Koreans are not our subject of interest here.

2 The source is available at <https://www.moe.go.kr/boardCnts/listRenew.do?boardID=350&m=0309&cs=moe>.

3 The Korea Foundation Statistics Center (<https://www.kf.or.kr/koreanstudies/koreaStudiesMap.do>) provides information on universities that offer Korean studies courses, which include both courses on Korean studies and Korean language courses.

4 The source is available at <https://www.ksif.or.kr/ste/ksf/hkd/lochkd.do?menuNo=20101800>.

focused on conducting comparative analysis with other native language educational institutions of other countries such as China's Confucius Institute, Germany's Goethe-Institut, and France's Alliance française, whereas after the expansion of Sejong Institute, research is shifting towards examining the present state of Sejong Institutes overseas and proposing relevant policies.

Research on the characteristics and education of learners onsite

Research on overseas Korean language education onsite includes studies covering Topics 1, 3, and 5 and their corresponding themes in Table 2. Studies on Topic 1 examine the characteristics of onsite Korean language learners and consist of 16%. Studies on Topic 3 look at ways to carry out Korean language education onsite and take up 29%. Studies on Topic 5 research the current state of Korean language education onsite and are about 14% of the studies. Since the studies on these topics are based on local features instead of the general situation of Korean language education overseas, the majority of them are limited to a single country.

Studies looking at the characteristics of local learners are mostly about psychological or cognitive factors such as the motivation, anxiety, or learning strategy of the learner. Since these factors are important variables in learning the Korean language and are influenced by cultural background and educational environment, such studies can be useful for understanding how local learners acquire the Korean language and be effectively used during language education. "Relationship between Learning Motivation and Foreign Language Anxiety among Korean Majors in Taiwan" (Lee 2021) and "A Study on Effects of 'Hallyu' Contents as Korean Language Learning Motivation Factor" (Kim 2018) are examples of studies on Topic 1.

Studies on Topic 3 tend to be research about teaching material development or class case studies. Examples of these studies include "Developing a Self-Study Korean Textbook That Taps into the BTS Contents for Those Who Are Learning Korean as a Hobby" (Yi 2020), "The Development of Korean Textbooks for Thailand Secondary School Students" (Lee et al. 2018), and "A Study on Korean Literature and Korean Culture Teaching and Learning Methods: Focusing on the Case of Korean Language Education Abroad" (D. Kim 2024).

Case studies of class or lessons carried out onsite are about certain

pedagogical methods such as flipped learning and a particular literature class or translation class that was taught. Research on teaching/learning material development include studies on the development of educational material that was customized to be suitable for local learners and studies on developing material for self-study. Many studies on the former—development of locally tailored teaching/learning material—are about the development of textbooks for local elementary, middle, and high schools. Published studies include case studies or solutions regarding teaching/learning material development in countries that have recently chosen Korean as a foreign language to be taught in elementary, middle, and high schools of Thailand, Vietnam, or Mongolia. The latter—development of educational material for self-study—will likely see an increase in demand considering the advancement of various media and more and more opportunities to encounter the Korean language outside of regular educational settings.

Among the studies on teaching/learning material development or class case studies, the studies related to the Korean Wave particularly stand out. For instance, studies have been published on material development or lessons using K-pop, and studies looking at the motivation of the learner have also demonstrated the influence of the Korean Wave. The increase in learners who started to study the Korean language after developing an interest in contents of the Korean Wave and the popularity of Korean contents in music, film, and drama overseas have led to the publication of studies looking at teaching/learning material development or lessons that make use of K-contents. This is likely why the keyword "culture" among the keywords for Topic 3 in Table 2 shows considerable influence.

Additionally, although it did not show up as an influential keyword, studies examining the curriculum such as "A Study on the Development of Korean Language Curriculum for a General Education Electives at Overseas Universities Based on the Korean Language Standard Curriculum" (Lee, Ahn, and Lee 2022) can also be classified together with studies on Topic 3. In Korea, research related to government departments were more emphasized among the studies looking at the curriculum of Korean language education overseas.⁵ These include studies looking at the development of a curriculum by applying

⁵ Research on the curriculum of individual countries has been published with more focus on the analysis of the current state than on the curriculum development, as will be discussed later.

the Korean Language Standard Curriculum (Han'gugeo pyojun gwajeong), which was announced in 2020, to general Korean language courses taught at universities overseas, and research on the development of a culture education curriculum at the Sejong Institute.

Studies on Topic 5, research on the current state of Korean language education onsite, mainly consist of studies that look at cases of individual countries or the creation and management of Korean language majors and curricula at universities. These include “Korean Language and Culture Education at Universities in Hong Kong: Curricula with an Example” (Kim 2017) and “Improving the Current Status of the Korean Language and Literature Curriculum in Universities in Turkey: The Case of Istanbul University” (Son 2023).

Recently, more and more elementary, middle, and high schools overseas are choosing Korean as a foreign language subject, and studies examining the current state of such cases are being published. Research on the present state of local Korean language education onsite is significant in that it allows an objective view of the situation, based on which the direction of further development can be discussed. Field research onsite takes up the largest percentage of Korean language education overseas and ranges across a wide variety of themes.⁶ This research is particularly important since the curricula, pedagogical methods, and teaching/learning material need to differ depending on the local learner and educational environment.

Research on the characteristics and training of Korean language teachers overseas

Korean language teachers who work overseas can largely be divided into teachers sent from departments of the Korean government and teachers hired locally onsite. The latter can be further divided into teachers who are native Korean speakers and non-native Korean speakers. This classification can also be applied to the research on Korean language teachers overseas. The teachers sent from the government include teachers sent from the King Sejong Institute Foundation

to Sejong Institutes, teachers sent from the Korea Foundation to universities, and volunteer members sent from the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA). Studies have looked at the status of their dispatch and education of trainee teachers. Research on locally hired teachers has examined the training, re-education, and skills of locally hired teachers. Studies on Topic 4 include “A Study of Self-Awareness in Non-Native Korean Language Teachers: Focusing on the Core Competencies of Non-Native Korean Language Teachers” (S. Kim 2024), “A Study on the Development of Re-education Programs to Strengthen the Intercultural Teaching Competency of Korean Language Teachers: The Case of Korean Language Teachers at K-12 Schools and King Sejong Institute in the United States” (Lee, Kang, and Kim 2022), and “Needs Analysis for the Development of Re-education Programs for KOICA Korean Language Education Volunteer Members” (Kim, Sim, and Yoon 2022).

A lot of the research on the teachers of Korean language education overseas is on the training of the teachers. This includes education of trainee teachers, training programs to foster local teachers who are non-native Korean speakers, and the development and management of training programs for the re-education of Korean language teachers overseas. There are also studies on how foreigner-teachers perceive themselves and case studies on teaching methods such as team teaching by Korean and foreigner-teachers together. Since non-native Korean speaking foreigner-teachers may experience additional and different hardships compared to native Korean speaking teachers, there needs to be more diverse research on local non-native Korean speaking language teachers.

Conclusion

So far, this article has reviewed the trends of research on Korean language education overseas by using keyword network analysis and topic modeling analysis. After confirming the rapid rise in studies examining Korean language education overseas for foreigners, the analyses were conducted for each of the following themes: research on policies concerning Korean language education overseas, research on the onsite education, and Korean language teachers overseas. The implications based on the findings are summarized below.

First, a large percentage of the research on Korean language education overseas is on the Sejong Institute. This is likely because the Sejong Institute is

⁶ The keyword used during the primary search for studies was “Korean language education overseas” (*gyugolhaeoe Han'gugeo gyoyuk*) for this article. This suggests that there may be more studies on the educational methods carried out in each individual country.

the educational institution that provides Korean language and culture education to the widest range of learners among the general public. Another reason is because policies such as the selection of the Korean language at regular schools overseas or the establishment of a Korean studies or Korean language major at universities overseas require local cooperation and thus is difficult to research. The findings of the survey that Chae, Cho, and Choi (2022) conducted on Korean language teachers overseas show that improving administration was regarded as the most necessary among ways to vitalize Korean language education overseas: more specifically, expanding the support of Korean language education in coordination with international collaborative education policies of Korea. Such a demand would have risen in tandem with the increase of schools offering Korean language classes in local elementary, middle, and high schools. Since government policies need to be examined from the aspects of feasibility and utility, vague research should be avoided, and basic research from diverse perspectives that can be used as reference during policy decision-making should be conducted.

Second, the increase in Korean language learners overseas has led to the diversification of learner variables such as the learners' native language, motivation and purpose of learning Korean, language proficiency, and age. Although pedagogical methods and teaching/learning material should reflect these changes accordingly through broader research and development, in reality, they have not yet been able to keep up. The theme of teaching/learning material development and case studies of classes and lessons took up the largest part of research; the absolute number of these studies, however, is extremely lacking. The afore-mentioned survey shows that Korean language teachers overseas need locally customized teaching/learning material and supplementary material (Chae, Cho, and Choi 2022, 195), but such research as well as actual development is limited to a few countries. Diverse customized curricula and teaching/learning material that reflect not only each country's characteristics but also the differences in motivation and cognition of the learners depending on whether they are in elementary, middle, or high school should be developed. Considering the increase of countries that have selected Korean as a foreign language in their regular curriculum, locally customized Korean textbooks need to be developed for children and teenagers.

Third, contents for learners who cannot easily access educational institutions that teach the Korean language should be researched and developed.

The expansion of opportunity to learn without being restricted by time or space, thanks to the development of various media, should be put to good use. In this sense, the operation of the Online King Sejong Institute and the Metaverse King Sejong Institute by the King Sejong Institute Foundation and the research of learning material for self-study created for overseas learners are significant. The many online learning platforms run by individuals or private companies can also be helpful to overseas learners, although research should be conducted sufficiently to ensure that quality learning is taking place online or by self-study.

Fourth, research on the training and re-education of Korean language teachers overseas is still wanting at the present. Although re-education is currently being carried out through several government departments, education more specialized to the life cycle of the teachers or the teaching environment where they are teaching will become increasingly necessary. The representative examples of the training of Korean language teachers overseas are those carried out by the King Sejong Institute Foundation and the National Institute of Korean Language. The King Sejong Institute Foundation runs the Sejong Institutes, online training for classes, online training for translation and interpretation, and re-education training for both dispatched and locally recruited Korean language teachers. The Foundation also supports the programs to foster and produce local Korean language teachers. The National Institute of Korean Language carries out online training and training by visiting Korea for Korean language teachers overseas—mainly, teachers and doctoral-level researchers at local universities. Meanwhile, programs to foster and train Korean language teachers overseas are extremely lacking. There are hardly any cases in which Korean language education is offered as a major at universities overseas. More research and development of programs to raise local Korean language teachers, particularly non-native Korean language teachers, is needed. The research and implementation of re-education should also be further expanded.

Changes such as the increasingly higher international status of Korea, the Korean Wave, and the development of various media will further cause an increase in the demand for Korean language overseas. Policies well supported by research are necessary to lead both the quantitative expansion and qualitative growth of Korean language education overseas and can serve as the foundation for continuous development.

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