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Korean Language Education in the Netherlands

Overview

Until 2007, Korean as a Foreign Language (KFL) education in the Netherlands was limited to a small number of academically-oriented individuals studying Korean studies at Leiden University. In 2007, however, Korean schools—commonly known as Hangeul hakkyo—expanded their offerings beyond heritage children, allowing adults with personal ties to Korea or early Hallyu enthusiasts to study Korean for non-academic purposes. In 2012, the Faculty of Humanities at Leiden University introduced a BA International Studies at its campus in the Hague where Korean language was included as one of 17 mandatory foreign languages students could choose from. With growing interest in the Korean language and culture, the Academic Language Center at Leiden University began offering beginner-level Korean courses to both non-Korean studies majors and public in 2015.

In recent years, particularly after 2020, additional KFL options have emerged beyond Leiden University and Korean schools. A tertiary-level program in Rotterdam officially incorporated Korean language courses into its curriculum, and language centers at five more universities have begun offering beginner-level Korean courses. During the pandemic, a graduate of Korean studies at Leiden took the initiative to offer online Korean language courses at Volksuniversiteit Amsterdam, a non-profit adult learning center. This initiative has gradually led to the expansion of Korean language courses at Volksuniversiteit locations in other regions, often facilitated by Korean school teachers in their own residential communities.

As of the summer of 2024, Korean language instruction within the formal education system in the Netherlands is offered at two tertiary institutions. Outside this formal system, three Korean schools provide instruction not only to heritage children and adolescents but also to non-heritage adult learners. Additionally, Korean language courses are available at six university-affiliated language centers—Amsterdam, Groningen, Leiden, Radboud, Tilburg, and

Utrecht—and eight Volksuniversiteit locations.¹ These KFL courses primarily target adult learners, and there are currently no KFL programs for children or adolescents in the Netherlands.

This paper will examine the current status of Korean language education at Leiden University, Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences, and the Korean schools, with a primary focus on the Korean studies program at Leiden University. It aims to explore the present situations, distinctive needs, challenges, and prospects within each institution. Language centers and Volksuniversiteit locations are excluded from the core discussion due to their variable course offerings, which depend on teacher availability and fluctuating enrollment. Since these courses primarily function as private group lessons with individually determined materials and methods, they lack the structured approach required for comprehensive analysis. The paper concludes by proposing potential directions for advancing Korean language education in the Netherlands.

KFL at Leiden University: A Brief History

The history of KFL in the Netherlands is closely intertwined with the development of Korean studies at Leiden University. Detailed information on the development of Korean studies in the Netherlands can be found in Breuker and Nam (2024) and Walraven (2007). This section provides a brief historical overview to shed light on the characteristics and evolution of Korean language education at Leiden.

The first course on Korea at Leiden University was offered in 1947 by Dr. Frits Vos, a scholar in Japanese studies. Upon his appointment as a full professor in 1958, Dr. Vos took on the title of Professor of Japanese studies and Korean studies, thereby laying the groundwork for the formal development of Korean studies at Leiden. In 1961, the university introduced a graduate program in Korean studies for students with undergraduate backgrounds in Japanese or Chinese studies. In 1989, an independent undergraduate program in Korean studies was launched.

From 1989 through the late-2000s, the program remained small, with

only a few faculty members and a limited student body, consisting mainly of individuals with a strong academic interest in Korea and adoptees of Korean heritage. Until the early 2010s, the number of graduates remained quite low, partly due to the pass-fail system, which contributed to lower completion rates compared to the initial enrollment.

Traditionally, Korean studies at Leiden was grounded in philological methods, emphasizing the research of historical, ideological, philosophical, religious, and literary texts. Although the Korean studies program at Leiden University is a humanities-focused area studies program, distinct from language and literature programs, it has nevertheless devoted substantial time to Korean language acquisition within its curriculum. This emphasis arose from the necessity for advanced reading skills to engage with primary texts. Students were required to study not only modern Korean but also classical Korean and classical Chinese. Korean language instruction, delivered by Dutch-speaking professors, typically employed a grammar-translation method that prioritized reading and translation skills essential for academic research. Despite the appointment of a native Korean lecturer who introduced conversation and writing instruction into the curriculum, the grammar-translation approach remained predominant until the early 2010s.

The popularity of Korean pop culture has significantly influenced the landscape of Korean language education at Leiden University. The Netherlands restructured its university system in the 1980s, reducing the duration of study from six years to four years, and subsequently to three years in 2001. This reform lowered the barriers to university education, which had previously been regarded as an ivory tower focused solely on pure academic research. Most Dutch university programs do not impose specific quotas; instead, all students who meet the minimum academic requirements are granted admission. Consequently, the accessibility of university education increased. Coupled with the gradual emergence of the Hallyu in Europe during the late 2000s and early 2010s, this accessibility contributed to a steady rise in enrollment in Korean studies at Leiden. A discernible shift in student interests has emerged, characterized by a growing demand for contemporary Korean culture and communicative language skills, rather than a focus on traditional philological approaches and long-term academic pursuit.

As De Ceuster (2007) highlighted, this shift created a gap between faculty, who maintained an academic and reading-focused approach, and students,

¹ The source is available at <https://www.volksuniversiteit.nl/cursussen/taalcursus/koreaans-leren> (accessed October 11, 2024).

whose interests became diverse and practical. To bridge this gap and accelerate students’ progress towards higher Korean proficiency within the shortened academic program, a six-month intensive language immersion course at a university language center in Korea was incorporated into the curriculum in 2012.

In 2012, the faculty of humanities launched a new program, the BA International Studies (BAIS), on the Hague campus. This interdisciplinary global studies degree, conducted entirely in English, requires all students to select both a region and a language as their focus of study. Starting in their second semester, students engage in three integrated-skills language acquisition courses, with 6 contact hours per week for the first two courses and 4 hours for the third. In their final semester, after a semester abroad or internship, students enroll in Language and Culture in Practice, a 2-hour-per-week course designed to integrate language learning with research skills. The program quickly gained popularity, attracting students from diverse international backgrounds. Initially, only one Korean language class per course was offered, but as demand grew, this expanded to two, and eventually, at its peak, three classes at each level. Recently enrollment has reached a plateau, with often three classes offered for the first two levels and two for the more advanced courses, depending on the semester.

The increase in student enrollment in the Korean studies program on the Leiden campus in the early 2010s, alongside the establishment of the BAIS program, led to the hiring of two Korean language lecturers with professional teaching qualifications in 2014. Consequently, these native Korean lecturers took over all Korean language courses, and in 2015, the language courses of the Korean Studies program were restructured around communicative methodologies. While this shift improved student satisfaction and overall proficiency, some faculty expressed concerns about weakened integration between language courses and content courses, as well as the challenge of maintaining higher academic reading standards aligned with the Korean studies program’s emphasis on academic research.

Recent Developments, Challenges, and Prospects of KFL within the Korean Studies Program at Leiden

Since 2019, the curriculum has again been under revision, starting with the

first-year curriculum and now extending into the second and third years. The new curriculum, designed to address the unique needs of Korean studies in the Netherlands, is set for full implementation by the 2024–2025 academic year (Table 1).

Tabel 1. Korean Studies Korean Language Curriculum 2024–2025

Year	Semester	Course	Credit (EC)	Contact Hour	Duration (weeks)
First year	Fall	Korean 1	15	10 / week	13
	Spring	Korean 2	15	10 / week	13
Second year	Fall	Choose 1: - Korean 3 - Korean Language Study in Korea	15 15	9 / week 20 / week	13 10
		Korean Language in Use	5	2 / week	13
	Spring	Intermediate Korean Reading 1	5	4 / week	6
		Choose 1: - Intermediate Korean Reading 2: Societal Issues	5	4 / week	6
		- IKR2: Culture	5	4 / week	6
		- IKR2: History and Classics	5	4 / week	6
Third year	Fall	Choose 1: - Korean for Academic Purposes	5	2 / week	13
		- Korean through Literature	5	2 / week	13
		- Business Korean	5	2 / week	13
MA	Fall	Advanced Korean Reading	10	4 / week	13

Note: Duration does not include the midterm, final, and resit exam weeks.

The first three semesters of the new curriculum employ a communicative approach that balances the development of all language skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. At Leiden University, a standard course typically consists of two hours of instruction per week and is worth 5 credits, with students usually enrolling for a total of 30 credits per semester. The first-year courses Korean 1 and Korean 2 are intensive 15-credit courses, meeting five times a week for a total of 10 hours, and account for half of the semester’s total credits.

These courses correspond to Levels 1 and 2 of regular 200-hour Korean language programs at language centers within Korean universities and use textbooks published by one of these institutions. Korean 1 and Korean 2 each consist of approximately 130 hours of instruction, which is fewer hours

compared to equivalent programs in Korea that use the same textbooks. To compensate for the shorter class hours and the absence of a Korean language environment outside the classroom, blended learning techniques, including flipped learning, have been implemented since the 2019–2020 academic year.

Before coming to class, students are required to study target Korean grammar for each lesson through specially designed knowledge clips for Korean 1 and Korean 2. They then assess their understanding through mandatory online quizzes. They also use a vocabulary learning app to prepare essential words in advance. In classes, typically consisting of 12 to 18 students, activities such as pair work, small group games, and class mingling allow them to practice and use the grammar and vocabulary studied. A unit often concludes with a performance of a comprehensive communicative task, such as shopping, ordering food, making an appointment, or planning a joint trip, to name a few.

Assessment includes written evaluations in vocabulary, grammar, reading, and writing, as well as listening tests, a skit performance based on a communicative task, and an individual oral interview; students must pass all areas with a minimum score of 6 out of 10 to advance.

In the first semester of the second year, approximately 70% of students leave for Korea to participate in a regular 200-hour Level 3 or higher Korean course at a language center within a Korean university, where they receive intensive language training alongside multinational peers. Students who remain in Leiden take the Korean 3 course, which follows a similar syllabus and uses the same textbooks as that taken by their peers in Korea. To mitigate the lack of a Korean-speaking environment, the program and Korean studies student association arrange one-on-one language exchanges and a weekly Korean language table with Korean expatriates residing in the Netherlands, available to students in Korean 2 and above.

Starting in the second semester of the second year, classes will incorporate (semi-)authentic materials tailored to the needs of Korean studies students, moving away from textbooks published in Korea or elsewhere. The primary objective of this semester is to enhance students' advanced reading skills in Korean, which are essential for their graduation research.

In the Intermediate Korean Reading 1 course, offered during the first half of the semester, students engage with vocabulary and grammar commonly found in written language. This is achieved through exposure to texts such as newspaper articles and professional reports, fostering an understanding

of different written styles and linguistic conventions while improving their analytical reading skills.

The Intermediate Korean Reading 2 course, offered in the second half of the semester, comprises three themed modules: societal issues; broadly defined culture; and history and classics. Each module fully dedicates itself to one theme, providing key readings and exposure to relevant Korean terms that align with the students' interests and research paths. These themes match the faculty's expertise in the Korean studies program and guide students in selecting their graduation research topics. This structure is designed to achieve integration between language and research, serving as a bridge to the thesis writing class in the third year, facilitating students' access to Korean-language resources when writing their graduation theses related to these subjects.

In addition to the two reading courses, the Korean Language in Use course is offered during this semester. This course utilizes Korean media, such as films, dramas, documentaries, TV entertainment, and YouTube videos, enabling students to further develop their practical aural and oral skills in Korean. By integrating the enjoyable nature of learning through media, this class aims to complement the curriculum's reading emphasis while making the language acquisition process more motivating and engaging. It also provides students with valuable experience in effectively utilizing various media resources that are easily accessible online, laying the foundation for self-directed learning beyond their formal Korean language courses.

In their third year, students concentrate on minor courses (30 credits) offered by other programs while also preparing their graduation theses, marking the first semester of the third year the final semester in which Korean language courses are available. Students select one of the three 5-credit language courses based on their personal or career interests: Korean for Academic Purposes, Business Korean, and Korean through Literature.

Korean for Academic Purposes supports students in their thesis research by guiding them in locating primary resources in Korean and taking reading notes and annotations on these materials. Students also engage in academic reading, participate in in-class discussions, and complete assigned academic presentations.

Business Korean caters to students interested in pursuing careers in Korea-related organizations after graduation. This course is designed to provide students with specialized Korean language skills tailored for professional

environments, along with a solid understanding of Korean business culture. A few alumni working at a Korean company in the Netherlands are invited to share insights during this course.

Korean through Literature is designed for students who wish to explore the Korean language for personal enjoyment, rather than strictly academic or business purposes. This course enhances students' understanding of both the Korean language and culture through the exploration of various genres of Korean literature, including poetry, novels, and literary essays. Students share their interpretations and reflections through written assignments and class discussions.

The number of undergraduate freshmen, which was around 40 in 2014, gradually increased and peaked at approximately 80 in 2020. It has since stabilized at around 60 to 70 students. The number of students who fulfill the first-year requirements and advance to the second year is now between 45 and 55, with most of these students continuing to the third year. Enrollment in the MA Korean courses vary each year, ranging from 6 to 12 students, including both graduates from Leiden and international students, primarily from European countries. The growing student body and the diversification of language courses offered have led to an increase in the number of language lecturers. Currently, five full-time and part-time lecturers, all native speakers of Korean, along with two native-speaking intern teachers pursuing their MA degrees at a graduate school in Korea, are involved in teaching Korean language courses in Leiden and in BA International Studies.

Over the past decade, significant dialogue has taken place among existing and new faculty members, faculty and students, as well as between the program and the university's administrative bodies to develop an administratively feasible curriculum that meets the demands of students and societal needs, while preserving its identity as an academic program. Following a challenging period of transformation, a curriculum has taken shape that seems to work for most; however, challenges remain.

Maintaining the stability of the Korean language curriculum relies on sustaining the current number of students. If enrollment were to decrease, it could become difficult to uphold the recently introduced second- and third-year language course options, which were designed to reflect student demands as well as the program's needs. Such a reduction might also lead to cuts in language lecturer positions and increase the workloads of those who remain. Enrollment

in area studies programs often fluctuates based on external factors, such as a country's international prominence or image. The presence or absence of highly popular Hallyu content, along with media coverage that reinforces Korea's positive image, appears to impact student numbers. These variables, however, remain largely beyond the control of internal quality improvement within the program. Compounding these challenges, the recent installation of a far-right government in the Netherlands, has resulted in substantial cuts to education budgets. This has prompted universities to consider significant restructuring for programs with lower student intake. Thus, sustaining the adequate number of students is ever more crucial for the program to retain its identity and independence. In response, both faculty and students are actively involved in promotional efforts such as Campus Open Days, Student-for-a-Day, and Trial Study Days, aiming to raise awareness and interest in the program.

To enhance the quality of language education, the addition of a native Dutch-speaking language lecturer is desired. Currently, all language courses are taught by native Korean speakers who lack sufficient knowledge of Dutch, necessitating the use of English for translation or explanation. While native Korean lecturers significantly contribute to education by providing high-quality language input and feedback and promoting a communicative approach, a native Dutch-speaking lecturer can complement the capabilities of native speakers in ways that enhance student learning. As demonstrated by the cases of Chinese and Japanese studies programs, the ability to convey subtle meanings and engage in complex translations without relying on a third language offers advantages for both students and instructors, particularly in intermediate and advanced courses. Currently, of the twelve faculty members in the Korean studies program, only two are native Dutch speakers, and their involvement in Korean language instruction is not feasible. Although hiring a dedicated native Dutch-speaking language lecturer would be ideal, finding qualified candidates presents a challenge. Given that the Korean studies program does not focus on language and literature, few graduates emerge with a strong linguistic emphasis. While there are a small number of graduates with recent or pending MA degrees in translation or Korean linguistics from graduate programs in Korea, it is uncertain whether they would pursue teaching Korean as a career due to the unattractive working conditions and the compensations for part-time language lecturers. Furthermore, considering the anticipated restructuring and ongoing hiring freeze at the university, the prospects for hiring a Dutch-speaking

language lecturer remain unpromising at least for the time being.

Securing suitable intermediate and advanced Korean language textbooks that fulfill the curriculum's aim while reflecting the local context of the Netherlands is also challenging. Textbooks published in Korea often fail to meet the unique and specific needs of the students in our program. For example, while many textbooks have been published in Korea for academic and for business purposes, they do not align with the needs and objectives of learners when considering the multilingual context of the Netherlands. It would be ideal for the lecturers themselves to develop the customized course materials that adopt the specific local needs; however, considering the high teaching load of language lecturers and the lack of guaranteed research time in their contracts, this presents a significant challenge. In this context, the existence of a variety of easily accessible open-source resources, rather than relying solely on published textbooks, would be more beneficial, allowing instructors to tailor content more effectively to their students' needs.

In summary, while the Korean studies program at Leiden has navigated a period of transformation and adaptation, the challenges related to budgetary issues, curriculum sustainability, faculty recruitment, and resource availability persist. These factors not only impact the program's immediate educational goals but also shape the broader context of Korean language education in the Netherlands. Understanding these dynamics is crucial as we explore other institutions, such as Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences, that contribute to the diverse landscape of Korean language learning.

KFL at Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences

A University of Applied Sciences (Hogeschool in Dutch) is a tertiary educational institution that focuses on offering professional or vocational degrees. These institutions emphasize practical and hands-on training, preparing students for specific careers such as business.

Korean language courses are offered in the four-year International Business program at Rotterdam Hogeschool. Students in this program must choose a foreign language to study. In addition to commonly taught foreign languages such as French, German, Spanish, and Russian, this program uniquely allows students to select an Asian language as their focus.

In 2012, Korean language courses were included in the program as electives due to Korea's growing cultural and economic influence in the Netherlands. For ten years, two beginning-level Korean language courses were available as electives, each meeting once a week for two hours and lasting for eight weeks. Consistent student demand and the efforts of the lecturer ultimately led to a significant change in 2022, when Korean, alongside Japanese and Mandarin, was officially established as one of the focus languages within the program.

In the 2022–2023 academic year, fifty students joined the Korean language track, increasing to fifty-five in 2023–2024. In the first year, all students in the program must study a foreign language of their choice; however, from the second year onward, a foreign language is required only for those specializing in Commerce. In the 2023–2024 academic year, thirty-five students continued with Korean language courses in their second year.

The Korean track curriculum is currently under development. As an official focus language in the program, Korean courses in the first two years are held twice a week for two hours each. Each academic year consists of four eight-week blocks. Currently, the textbooks used for the first two years are *New Sogang Korean* 1A, 1B, and 2A. In the third year, students specializing in Commerce must study abroad in Korea, while other students can choose between studying abroad, doing an internship, or pursuing a minor. As of August 2024, the first group of students has been sent to a university in Korea. The final-year Korean courses have not yet been concretely shaped and are set to be offered for the first time in the 2025–2026 academic year.

While the program has made significant strides, it also faces challenges and opportunities for further development. As the Korean language track soon expands to cover all four years, the demand for instruction will surpass the capacity of the single lecturer currently responsible for all courses. Hiring an additional lecturer is essential, but finding a qualified Korean instructor in the Netherlands is challenging. Given the current student numbers, a part-time hire is more likely, though attracting talent from abroad, especially from Korea, is difficult under part-time conditions. Additionally, rising far-right political forces have led to increased scrutiny of English-taught programs and stricter employment regulations for foreign professionals, adding uncertainty to future staffing.

Student enrollment in the Korean track is critical to both staffing

expansion and curriculum stability. However, maintaining student motivation beyond the initial stages remains a challenge, as noted by the current lecturer. Although students often begin with strong enthusiasm, largely driven by their interest in Korean culture, their motivation gradually wanes as they come to realize that their language proficiency is not advancing as rapidly as expected. This decline in motivation can be attributed not only to the limited number of contact hours but also to the fact that many students underestimate the level of commitment required to master Korean, which presents distinctive linguistic challenges and demands substantial effort outside the classroom. The large class sizes in the first-year courses, often exceeding 25 students, make it difficult to implement communicative and interactive teaching methods, causing some students to lose interest.

Despite these challenges, it is encouraging that approximately 70% of students continue studying Korean beyond their first year. However, several issues remain. First, the program must strengthen partnerships with Korean universities to offer immersive language experiences that meet the needs of Hogeschool students. Furthermore, the new fourth-year curriculum should be designed to help students effectively apply their Korean skills in professional business contexts. By the third year, most students are expected to achieve low-to mid-intermediate proficiency, which, though commendable, may not be sufficient for business environments. The curriculum must address the gap between students' current abilities and the proficiency required in real-world business situations.

Another challenge is the growing proficiency gap among students, which is expected to widen after their study abroad experiences in Korea. Unlike the first two years, where progress is relatively uniform, study abroad will result in significant individual differences in language exposure and proficiency. This gap will be a key challenge in the fourth year, requiring thoughtful curriculum adjustments to accommodate students at different levels while ensuring continued progress. The lecturer has expressed concerns about developing this curriculum, given the unpredictability of students' post-abroad proficiency.

As the program evolves, unforeseen challenges will undoubtedly arise, but they will also offer opportunities for growth. The coming years will be critical in shaping the future of the Korean track, and its trajectory is one to watch with anticipation.

Two-Track Korean Education at Korean Schools

For nearly two decades, Korean schools were the primary, and often the only, option for non-degree learners of Korean, catering to those studying the language as a hobby or for personal enjoyment. Initially founded to serve heritage learners—children of immigrants, expatriates, and those of mixed Korean-Dutch parentage—these schools gradually opened their doors to a broader audience. As Korean learning opportunities remained limited, they began to attract Korean adoptees and eventually adult learners with a general interest in the Korean language and culture. While other learning options have since emerged, especially after the pandemic, these schools continue to play a key role in non-degree Korean language education.

Currently, three Korean schools operate in cities with significant Korean communities: Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Eindhoven. Amsterdam Korean school, the largest and oldest, began serving heritage children in 1993 and introduced a KFL program in 2007. Similarly, Rotterdam Korean school, which opened in 1996, started offering KFL courses since 2007. Eindhoven Korean school, which is smaller in scale, was established in 2019 in response to the growing Korean community in the region, and its student numbers have been increasing each year. Theses Korean schools typically hold classes on Saturday mornings, renting classrooms from local Dutch schools, and operate on a two-semester schedule, with classes starting in February and September each year. Classes are taught by volunteer teachers, most of whom are parents or Korean international students attending Dutch universities. The volunteers receive a modest stipend of approximately 60 euros per day. The details at each school as of Spring 2024 are as follows (Table2).

Table 2. Korean Schools in the Netherlands, Spring 2024

City	Track	Students	Instructors	Tuition (euro)	Instruction
Amsterdam	Heritage	187	22	200	4 hrs / week
	KFL	approx. 150	15	250	
Rotterdam	Heritage	approx. 100	15	230	4 hrs / week
	KFL	approx. 80	5	230	
Eindhoven	Heritage	77	9	210	3 hrs / week
	KFL	18	3	260(online 150)	

Despite minor differences, all three schools operate under a similar two-track system: a heritage track and a KFL track. The heritage track follows the Korean education model, with preschool, elementary, middle, and high school levels, though specific grade offerings vary each year. With the recent surge in the number of immigrants and expats with young children, preschool classes have increased, while the elementary to high school levels usually have one class per grade. Depending on student numbers, some grades may be merged, or certain classes may not be offered. High school classes are often grouped together without grade distinctions.

At the elementary and higher levels, most schools use official Korean textbooks for subjects like Korean language (“Gugeo”) and math. Although children from multicultural families join preschool classes together with those from fully Korean families, they often struggle in higher grades, leading to dropouts at the lower elementary levels. Some schools offer one or two separate Korean language classes for these children, though there are no advanced-level options afterward.

The KFL track at Rotterdam and Eindhoven uses Seoul National University’s *Active Korean* series, covering one book per year from Levels 1 to 4. Amsterdam follows the same series but completes it over three years. Higher-level classes are only available in Amsterdam and Eindhoven where they use the *Sejong Korean Conversation* 3 and 4. The KFL classes attract not only Dutch adults but also many other foreigners. Students come from a wide range of age groups, and their motivations for learning Korean vary, including interest in K-pop, history and culture, travel, family and friends, or work-related reasons.

The administrators of all the three schools express concerns over financial constraints and high rental fees. Since they rely primarily on government subsidies and keep tuition fees low, maintaining budgetary stability is an ongoing concern. As a strategic response, some schools have expanded their KFL programs to increase revenue. However, this shift risks diverting focus from their primary mission of heritage language education. Korean parents from multicultural families also express concerns that their children, who may need Korean language support the most, are being overlooked.

Administrators also face challenges in recruiting long-term, skilled teachers, a persistent issue across all institutions. Schools prefer committed teachers who can stay for extended periods, but the volunteer nature of the role makes this challenging. Since most teachers are volunteers, placing the burden

of extensive lesson preparation on them is also unreasonable. Furthermore, many of these volunteers lack formal teaching experience, making it difficult to ensure consistent lesson quality. Without a standardized curriculum beyond the use of textbooks, teachers are often left to design lessons on their own, which can lead to inconsistencies in instruction. Although the schools jointly offer annual teacher training and some teachers benefit from online degree programs in TKFL through the support of the Overseas Korean Foundation, securing enough skilled and long-term teachers remains an ongoing struggle.

Given the nature of Korean schools, it would be ideal to provide robust extracurricular cultural activities that engage both heritage learners and foreign students. However, due to financial limitations and the heavy reliance on the dedication of administrators, these programs are often limited. Activities such as cooking, calligraphy, and sports events, which are key to fostering a connection to Korean culture are usually offered once or twice per year. While these activities greatly benefit the students, organizing them regularly remains a challenge without strong financial and institutional support. Greater involvement from government agencies, Korean community, and local businesses and corporations would help sustain and expand these valuable programs.

Outlook

Moving forward, diversifying the learner base is crucial. As interest in Korean language grows, with learners motivated by diverse reasons—such as K-pop, travel, personal ties, and professional needs—offering a variety of Korean language courses tailored to these motivations is essential. The introduction of Korean language programs at vocational institutions like Rotterdam Hogeschool is an encouraging development. However, expanding Korean language courses beyond major programs to include electives or minors would better meet the growing demand. While practical challenges, such as administrative hurdles and teacher shortages, have thus far hindered this expansion, it remains a necessary step for broadening Korean language education.

Another important area of expansion is Korean language education for adolescents. Despite a rising interest among younger learners, sparked largely by K-pop, there are currently no formal programs targeting this age group in Dutch-speaking regions. Although some Korean schools and Volksuniversiteit

locations accept learners aged 16 and above, these opportunities are limited. Developing structured Korean courses for teenagers, either within or outside the formal education system, would be beneficial. In the interim, creating accessible, well-structured online resources that cater to adolescents' self-study needs could help bridge the gap.

To support this expanding learner base, it is equally important to train Dutch-speaking Korean language teachers alongside native Korean-speaking instructors. Developing a cohort of Dutch-speaking teachers would help broaden the scope of Korean language education both within formal institutions and in community-based settings. Although there are currently no formal training programs for Korean language teachers in the Netherlands, creating such programs would be crucial to ensure a steady supply of qualified educators, making it a critical area for future development.

In addition, improving the availability of locally adapted teaching materials is essential. Most institutions currently rely on textbooks published in Korea, which often do not fully align with the needs of learners in the Netherlands. Locally tailored resources are still limited, but open-source teaching materials that can be easily adapted by teachers to fit local contexts would be an effective solution in the short term. This would enable teachers to meet the specific needs of Dutch-speaking learners more effectively.

Finally, enhancing Korea's visibility in the Netherlands and creating more Korea-related opportunities would further support the growth of Korean language education. Events such as the annual Korean speech contest, TOPIK exams, and cultural activities, organized in cooperation with Leiden University and the Korean Embassy, have made significant contributions. However, expanding these efforts to include more diverse cultural events, scholarships, internships, and job opportunities would stimulate greater engagement. While the Korean Cultural Center in Belgium serves the Benelux region, its activities do not always extend to the Netherlands. Given the increasing interest in Korea and the presence of institutions like Leiden University, which is a hub for Korean studies in Europe, there is potential for more active collaboration between government agencies, educational institutions, and Korean corporations to promote Korean language and culture in the Netherlands.

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