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CURRENT TRENDS AND PERSPECTIVES IN TURKIC LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN SOUTH KOREA: FOCUSING ON THE KAZAKH LANGUAGE

This paper investigates the burgeoning field of Turkic language education in South Korea, highlighting its historical context, current landscape, and future prospects. As globalization and South Korea's engagement with resource-rich Central Asia intensify, the significance of Turkic languages in fostering cultural understanding and promoting multiculturalism within Korea has become evident. This article explores the current landscape of Central Asian and Turkic language education in South Korea, focusing specifically on Kazakh language education. By analyzing existing programs, challenges faced by educators and learners, and potential areas for growth, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of this developing field and its significance for Korea's expanding soft power and cross-cultural diplomacy efforts. Despite the growing interest in Turkic language education, several obstacles hinder its expansion, including limited resources and the perceived difficulty of Turkic languages. To address these challenges, collaborations with Turkic-speaking countries are proposed, along with establishing a Central Asian cultural center in South Korea as a strategic move to promote Turkic language education, enhance cultural exchange, and strengthen Korea's relationships with Central Asian nations. Such initiatives would foster reciprocity in cultural exchange, promote soft power for Kazakhstan, support Turkic language learning, and enhance Korea's relations with Central Asian nations. While challenges exist, the prospects for Turkic language education in South Korea are promising.

Key words: Turkic languages, South Korea, Kazakh language, Central Asia, multiculturalism, Kazakhstan, soft power diplomacy, culture centers, cross-cultural exchange, globalization.

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Оңтүстік Кореяда түркі тілінде білім берудің қазіргі тенденциялары мен перспективалары: қазақ тіліне бағдарлау

Бұл мақала Оңтүстік Кореядағы түркі тілдерін оқыту қалай дамып жатқаны, оның тарихи контексті, ағымдағы мансабы мен перспективаларын зерттеуге арналған. Оңтүстік Кореяның жаһандануы мен табиғи ресурстарға бай Орталық Азияның өзара байланысы артқан сайын түркі тілдерінің мәдени өзара түсінікті нығайтудағы және Кореяда мультикультурализмді ілгерілетудегі маңызы айқын болып жатыр. Бұл мақалада Оңтүстік Кореядағы Орталық Азия және түркітілдес тілдердегі білім берудің қазіргі жағдайы қарастырылады, бұдан бөлек, қазақ тіліндегі білімге ерекше көңіл бөлінеді. Қолданыстағы бағдарламаларды, оқытушылар мен студенттер кездесетін қиындықтарды, дамуға әлеуетті бағыттарды талдайтын бұл зерттеу Кореяның жұмсақ күш пен мәдениетаралық дипломатиядағы күш-жігерін кеңейту үшін осы дамып келе жатқан саланы және оның маңыздылығын тереңірек түсінуге ықпал етуге арналған. Түркі тілдерінде білім алуға деген әуестік артуына қарамастан, оның кеңеюіне бірқатар кедергілер, соның ішінде шектеулі ресурстар мен түркі тілдерінің күрделілігі кедергі болып жатады. Бұл проблемаларды шешу үшін түркітілдес елдермен ынтымақтастық, сондай-ақ түркітілдес білім беруді ілгерілету, мәдени алмасуды кеңейту және Кореяның Орталық Азия елдерімен қарым-қатынасын нығайту жөніндегі стратегиялық қадам ретінде Оңтүстік Кореяда Орталық Азия мәдени орталығын құру ұсынылады. Мұндай бастамалар өзара мәдени алмасуға, Қазақстанның “жұмсақ күшін” дамытуға, түркі тілдерін үйренуді қолдауға және Кореяның Орталық Азия елдерімен қарым-қатынасын нығайтуға ықпал етпек. Қазіргі проблемаларға қарамастан, Оңтүстік Кореяда түркі тілдерінде білім беру болашағы зор.

Түйін сөздер: түркі тілдері, Оңтүстік Корея, қазақ тілі, Орталық Азия, мультикультурализм, Қазақстан, жұмсақ күш дипломатиясы, мәдени орталықтар, мәдениетаралық алмасу, жаһандану.

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Современные тенденции и перспективы тюркского языкового образования в Южной Корее: на примере казахского языка

В данной статье исследуется растущая область тюркоязычного образования в Южной Корее, подчеркивая ее исторический контекст, нынешнюю ситуацию и перспективы на будущее. По мере усиления глобализации и усиления взаимодействия Южной Кореи с богатыми ресурсами Центральной Азией, значение тюркских языков в укреплении культурного взаимопонимания и продвижении мультикультурализма внутри Кореи стало очевидным. В этой статье исследуется текущая ситуация в сфере образования центральноазиатских и тюркских языков в Южной Корее, уделяя особое внимание образованию на казахском языке. Анализируя существующие программы, проблемы, с которыми сталкиваются преподаватели и учащиеся, а также потенциальные области для роста, это исследование призвано способствовать более глубокому пониманию этой развивающейся области и ее значения для расширения усилий Кореи по «мягкой силе» и межкультурной дипломатии. Несмотря на растущий интерес к образованию на тюркских языках, его расширению препятствует ряд препятствий, в том числе ограниченность ресурсов и предполагаемая сложность тюркских языков. Для решения этих проблем предлагается сотрудничество с тюркоязычными странами, а также создание Центральноазиатского культурного центра в Южной Корее в качестве стратегического шага по продвижению тюркоязычного образования, расширению культурного обмена и укреплению отношений Кореи со странами Центральной Азии. Такие инициативы будут способствовать взаимному культурному обмену, продвижению «мягкой силы» Казахстана, поддержке изучения тюркских языков и укреплению отношений Кореи со странами Центральной Азии. Несмотря на существование проблем, перспективы тюркоязычного образования в Южной Корее многообещающие.

Ключевые слова: тюркские языки, Южная Корея, казахский язык, Центральная Азия, мультикультурализм, Казахстан, дипломатия мягкой силы, культурные центры, межкультурный обмен, глобализация.

Introduction

South Korea's "Hallyu," or Korean Wave, has taken the world by storm, with K-pop, dramas, and films sparking international interest in Korean culture. This cultural exchange extends beyond entertainment, with a growing number of people worldwide showing interest in learning the Korean language. Not only that, but Korean Wave has successfully globalized within the Central Asian context, primarily Kazakhstan, with its phenomenon of Q-pop (Zholamanova & Oh, 2023; Zholamanova & Oh, 2024). However, in this landscape of opportunity lies a potential path less traveled: Turkic languages.

However, the focus on Turkic languages might seem unexpected. Unlike Korean, Turkic languages seemingly belong to a different language family altogether. However, a recent study (Robbeets, Bouckaert, Conte, et al, 2021) sheds fascinating light on their connection. The study revealed that the Transeurasian (Altaic iteration) language family, including Japanese, Korean, and Turkish languages, originated from millet farmers in northeastern China 9,000 years ago. These findings support the Altaic

family theory, suggesting a more profound historical link between Korean and Turkic languages than previously thought. This newfound understanding, coupled with the strategic importance of Central Asia and the growing emphasis on cross-cultural communication, positions Turkic language education as a strategic asset for South Korea's future.

The introduction of Turkic languages to Korea can be traced back to the Korean War in the early 1950s, a pivotal moment when Turkish troops fought alongside South Korean forces as part of the United Nations Command (Oh, 2021). The presence of Turkish soldiers, known for their bravery and solidarity, left a profound impression on the Korean people. This initial encounter sparked a burgeoning interest in Turkish culture and language, leading to the establishment of Turkish Studies departments in South Korean universities. These academic initiatives aimed to deepen the understanding of Turkey and Korea's cultural and linguistic heritage, laying the foundation for more structured academic exchanges.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked a significant geopolitical shift, opening up the Central Asian and Caucasus regions to the

global community. This transformation provided South Korea with new avenues to engage with Turkic-speaking countries beyond Turkey. The independence of Central Asian states such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Azerbaijan brought to light the rich cultural and historical ties these nations share with Korea, stemming from their common Altaic roots (Oh, 2021; Lee&Kim, 2016). These newly accessible regions became focal points for South Korean academic and diplomatic efforts, significantly broadening the scope of Turkic Studies.

A critical aspect of the historical and cultural affinity between Korea and Central Asia is the presence of an ethnic Korean diaspora in the region. During the Soviet era, many Koreans were forcibly relocated to Central Asia, creating a significant Korean community in countries like Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. This diaspora has played a vital role in fostering South Korea's interest in developing relations with Central Asian countries. The Korean diaspora's shared experiences and cultural ties have provided a unique bridge between South Korea and Central Asia, contributing to mutual understanding and collaboration (Oh&Zholamanova, 2021).

Prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Turkey and the Central Asian region were not prominent areas of interest for Korea, despite their shared historical connections and common heritage. However, the geopolitical and economic shifts since 1991 have catalyzed a growing interest in these regions. South Korea recognized the potential for cultural diplomacy and economic collaboration with the Turkic-speaking world, prompting a renewed focus on Turkic language education. This shift was driven by both strategic interests in Central Asia's natural resources and emerging markets and the cultural renaissance these newly independent states were experiencing.

As a result, Turkic Studies in Korea expanded beyond the initial focus on Turkey to include a broader range of Turkic languages and cultures. Academic programs began incorporating the study of languages such as Uzbek, Kazakh, and Azerbaijani, reflecting a more comprehensive approach to understanding the Turkic world (Oh, 2021). These efforts have not only strengthened academic and cultural ties but also enhanced South Korea's soft power, positioning it as a bridge between East Asia and the Turkic-speaking regions. This expansion of Turkic Studies underscores South Korea's commitment to leveraging historical affinities to promote mutual understanding and cooperation in the 21st century, fostering deeper cultural connections and

facilitating diplomatic and economic collaborations with the broader Turkic world.

As South Korea's involvement with Central Asia grows due to globalization and the region's rich natural resources and strategic importance, the significance of these languages in fostering cultural understanding has been underscored. This understanding promotes multiculturalism within Korea and opens up opportunities for economic and political collaborations as part of the Silk Road Economic Belt initiative.

This article explores current trends and perspectives in Central Asian and Turkic language education, specifically focusing on Kazakh language education. It highlights their significance for South Korea's expanding soft power and its potential to foster more profound cross-cultural diplomacy. By analyzing existing programs, challenges faced by educators and learners, and potential areas for growth, this research aims to contribute to a more robust understanding of this developing field and its significance for Korea's evolving role in the global landscape.

Materials and Methods

This study examines the current landscape of Kazakh language education in Korea within the framework of Turkic language in general. To achieve this, we will employ a multi-pronged methodological approach. First, we will analyze empirical data from the websites of Korean higher education institutions and reports from the Korean Ministry of Education and Statistics (KOSTAT) and the Korean Statistical Information Service (KOSIS). This will provide insights into the academic infrastructure and cultural activities related to Kazakh studies. Second, we will examine online bookstores such as Kyobo, Yes24, and Aladdin to identify publications and scholarly output. Third, relevant academic journals like the Central Asian Studies, Journal of Eurasian Studies, and the Journal of Central Eurasian Studies will be analyzed to understand research trends. Finally, a review of existing academic literature will be conducted to assess the current state of Kazakh language education and research in Korea. This study aims to present a comprehensive picture of Kazakh language studies in Korea by triangulating data from these various sources.

Literature review

The study of the languages of Central Asia, such as Kazakh, in Korea has seen progress and obstacles,

which mirror more significant trends in the academic field. Eom points out the early stage of Central Asian studies in Korea since its founding in 2005 and criticizes the lack of interdisciplinary research, inadequate financial support, and limited emphasis on internal regional relations (Eom, 2012). Eom's stress on an interdisciplinary approach and the necessity for a broader geographical conception emphasizes the fragmented nature of the field. However, his recommendations for identity-focused studies and redefining the geographical scope of Central Asia are primarily aspirational, indicating significant gaps in current research methods and institutional support. Jeong provides a statistical overview of Central Asian studies, noting the qualitative and quantitative growth of the "Central Asian Studies" journal (Jeong, 2015). Despite this progress, Jeong's analysis demonstrates a predominance of Korean scholars and a lack of international collaboration, indicating a narrow academic perspective. The large number of publications does not necessarily result in depth or interdisciplinary integration, suggesting that the field's development may be more surface-level than substantial.

Li discusses explicitly the study of Central Asian languages, identifying a significant imbalance in the research focus on Mongolic versus Turkic languages (Li, 2015). Li's findings highlight the limited number of specialized researchers and the underrepresentation of Turkic languages like Kazakh, suggesting a need for targeted efforts to address this gap. While beneficial, the comparison with the Korean language may also restrict the scope of linguistic studies by imposing a narrow comparative framework. Kim offers a historical viewpoint, noting persistent issues such as neglecting previous research, inadequate translation of historical materials, and differing academic terminologies (Kim, 2015). Kim's criticism of the lack of researchers and social indifference underscores a systemic issue within Korean academia. Central Asian studies, including Kazakh language education, suffer from insufficient institutional and societal support. Relying on historical achievements without significant contemporary progress indicates a state of stagnation. Oh examines the academic institutions and scholars involved in Turkish and Turkic studies in Korea, noting increasing economic and academic exchanges between Korea and Turkic states (Oh, 2021). His study highlights the role of educational and research centers in bridging cultural and social gaps but criticizes the narrow focus of current research on politics and economics. He

argues for diversification into educational and geographical studies and emphasizes the importance of international collaboration. The increasing number of Korean students studying in Turkic countries and Turkic students in Korean universities is a positive trend. Nevertheless, Korean scholars are required to take a more proactive approach to engaging in the international academic scene.

Despite significant advancements in Central Asian and Turkic studies in Korea, there are still critical challenges. These include the need for interdisciplinary approaches, sufficient financial support, a broader geographical scope, and international collaboration. Addressing these issues is crucial for advancing the field and nurturing a deeper understanding of Central Asia's intricate cultural and linguistic landscape.

Result and Discussion

The study reveals a nascent but growing interest in the Kazakh language within the framework of Turkic language education in South Korea. Despite the field's youth, there have been significant efforts to develop Kazakh language education, evidenced by 18 scholarly articles published since 2003, 15 MA and PhD theses, and four books, including two dictionaries. However, these numbers, though promising, also highlight several critical issues and challenges that need to be addressed to foster deeper and more meaningful engagement with the Kazakh language and, by extension, Central Asian studies.

Turkic language education in South Korea primarily occurs at the university level, with institutions like Seoul National University, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, and Busan University of Foreign Studies offering a range of programs catering to different proficiency levels (Oh, 2021). These programs serve as foundational platforms for fostering an understanding of Turkic languages among Korean learners.

According to the statistical data from the Ministry of Education of Korea statistics on Korean students in foreign higher education institutions, despite Turkey retaining its status as the most desirable destination for Korean students in the Turkic world, Kazakhstan has shown a rising trend, albeit with fluctuating numbers (Ministry of Education, 2022). Uzbekistan's appeal is also rising, indicating shifting interests among Korean students seeking educational opportunities in Turkic-speaking countries.

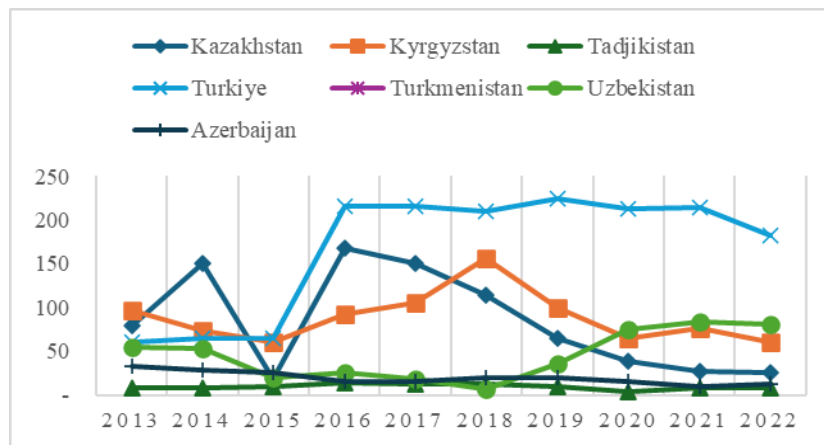


Figure 1 – Korean students in Turkic countries' higher education institutions (Ministry of Education, 2022)

Kazakhstan initially emerged as an enticing destination for Korean students, witnessing a notable enrollment increase from 79 students in 2013 to 151 in 2014 (Ministry of Education, 2022). This spike in interest indicated a promising trend, suggesting a growing affinity towards Kazakh language studies and cultural exploration among South Korean students. However, the subsequent fluctuation and decline in enrollment figures, particularly the sharp drop to 18 students in 2015, followed by a gradual decrease until 2019, raise legitimate concerns regarding the sustainability and stability of this trend (Ministry of Education, 2022). To address the recent decrease, Kazakhstan needs to implement more significant and instrumental steps and incentives, such as scholarships, research support, and benefits for students and researchers, to attract more Korean students and faculty. It is also important to consider the impact on student development, institutional reputation, and the advancement of knowledge and innovation. Nonetheless, current trends underscore the evolving landscape of international academic exchanges and the growing significance of cultural and academic ties between South Korea and the Turkic world.

On the other hand, Kazakhstan exemplifies the growing interest in Korean language learning within Central Asia. With the increasing presence of Korean companies in Kazakhstan since the early 1990s, the popularity of the Korean language has surged. Kazakh universities, including Al-Farabi Kazakh National University and Kazakh Ablai Khan University of International Relations and World Languages, have responded by offering Korean language programs (Oh&Zholamanova, 2021).

The Center for Oriental Studies, established post-independence, has also spearheaded educational initiatives in collaboration with Korean institutions, further facilitating cultural exchange. Exchange programs between Korean and Kazakh universities have flourished, with notable increases in inbound exchange students from Kazakhstan in recent years. However, efforts to attract outbound Korean students to Kazakh universities, particularly those outside major cities, remain modest and could benefit from more proactive marketing strategies (Oh&Zholamanova, 2021).

Furthermore, data on Turkic World international students enrolled in Korean universities in 2023 provides insights into the educational exchanges between South Korea and Turkic-speaking countries (Ministry of Education, 2023).

Among the enrolled students, Uzbekistan has the highest number of students across all categories, including language training, undergraduate, masters, doctoral, and other programs, totaling 10,409 students (Ministry of Education, 2023). This reflects the growing interest among Uzbekistani students in pursuing higher education opportunities in South Korea. Similarly, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tadjikistan also have notable representation in Korean universities, albeit with comparatively smaller numbers. However, the data indicates a notable presence of Kazakhstani students, with 1,255 students enrolled across various programs in Korean universities in 2023 (Ministry of Education, 2023). This demonstrates a significant interest among Kazakhstani students in pursuing academic opportunities in South Korea, further enriching the educational and cultural exchange

between the two countries. These educational exchanges not only contribute to the academic enrichment of both Korean and Turkic students

but also facilitate cross-cultural understanding and strengthen bilateral relations between South Korea and the Turkic world.

Table 1 – Turkic World Students Studying in Korea 2023 (Ministry of Education, 2023).

	Language Training	Undergraduate	Graduate		Others	Total
			Masters	Doctoral		
Azerbaijan	24	66	46	8	7	151
Uzbekistan	842	7,655	1,248	375	289	10,409
Kazakhstan	276	669	165	50	95	1,255
Kyrgyzstan	163	335	102	15	54	669
Tajikistan	63	83	49	6	7	208
Turkmenistan	16	34	15	1	2	68
Turkiye	180	160	88	59	98	585

To gain further insights into the dynamics of cultural exchange and migration patterns between South Korea and Turkic-speaking countries, it is imperative to consider the influx of international migrants from these regions into Korea. The data on international migrants from Central Asia and Turkic countries reveals noteworthy trends.

Uzbekistan has emerged as a significant contributor to the migrant population in South Korea, with consistently high numbers over the years. The figures show a steady increase from 12,333 migrants in 2013 to 22,208 in 2022, reflecting a sustained flow of individuals from

Uzbekistan seeking opportunities or settling in South Korea (KOSIS, 2024). Kazakhstan, although experiencing fluctuations in migrant numbers, demonstrates substantial growth from 1,130 in 2013 to 15,635 in 2022 (KOSIS, 2024). This significant increase suggests a growing presence of Kazakh migrants in South Korea, potentially influencing cultural exchange and fostering deeper ties between the two nations. Meanwhile, other Turkic countries like Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan also contribute to the migrant population in South Korea, albeit with smaller numbers compared to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

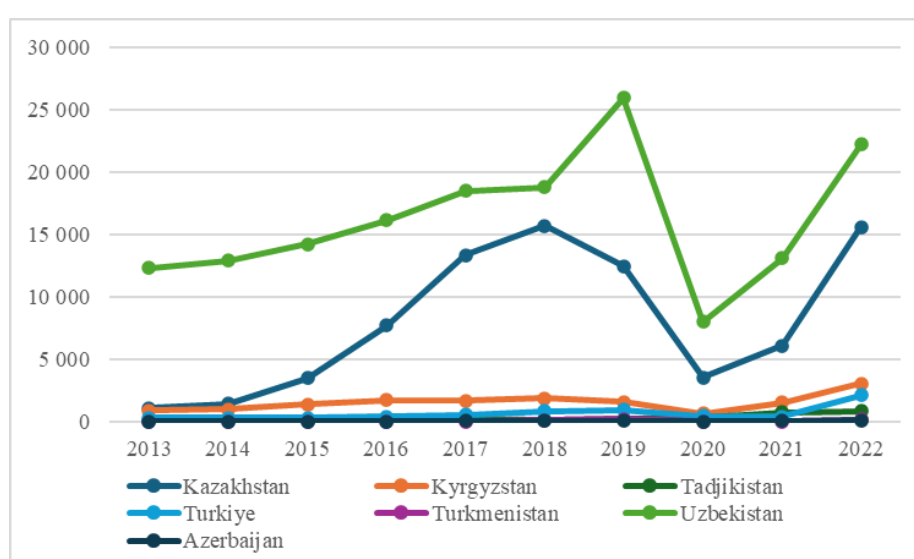


Figure 2 – International migrants in Korea from Turkic countries (KOSIS, 2024).

The influx of migrants from Turkic countries into South Korea not only enriches the cultural diversity within the country but also serves as a catalyst for fostering bilateral relations and promoting cross-cultural understanding. These migration trends complement the efforts in Turkic language education and highlight the interconnectedness between migration patterns, cultural exchange, and educational initiatives in shaping South Korea's engagement with the Turkic world.

On the other hand, it is important to note that a significant number of Central Asian students enrolled in Korean universities are majoring in Korean language and studies. Moreover, this strong interest in studying in Korea is a direct result of the dedicated efforts and strategy of the Ministry of Education of South Korea, the Korea Foundation, and other organizations. These efforts encompass a wide range of programs and scholarship opportunities, notably the Global Korea Scholarship, all aimed at consistently promoting and supporting Korean language education in Korea.

Given Kazakhstan's influential position in the region, it is recommended that similar initiatives be implemented to promote and advocate for the advancement of not only Kazakh language education, but also for studies in Central Asian and Turkic countries in general. This is particularly crucial within the context of Turkic language education, where Kazakhstan can take a leading role in nurturing stronger cultural and educational bonds. By emulating the effective strategies employed by the Korean Ministry of Education, Kazakhstan can effectively enhance the status of Kazakh and Turkic language studies, thus making them more desirable and appealing to Korean students and scholars.

Conclusion

Despite the growing interest, several obstacles hinder the expansion of Turkic language education in South Korea. Key challenges include limited resources, such as a shortage of qualified instructors proficient in Turkic languages and a dearth of specialized teaching materials tailored for Korean learners. Moreover, the perceived difficulty of Turkic languages, characterized by agglutinative morphology and unfamiliar writing systems like Cyrillic or Arabic script, presents a significant deterrent for prospective learners accustomed to more widely spoken languages like English or Japanese.

Collaborations with Turkic-speaking countries could prove beneficial in overcoming these

challenges. Faculty exchange programs could facilitate the exchange of expertise, allowing Korean instructors to enhance their fluency and teaching methodologies. Standardized curriculum frameworks would ensure consistency and quality across educational institutions, thereby enhancing the accessibility and effectiveness of Turkic language education in South Korea.

Creating a Central Asian cultural center in Korea presents numerous strategic advantages. Given the recent developments in the activities of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) and the extensive initiatives undertaken by TURKSOY, it has become increasingly apparent that there is a compelling necessity to establish a dedicated cultural center. This center would serve as a unified platform not only for public diplomacy for all the Turkic states, facilitating more efficient coordination of events and activities, but also as a Turkic language education center that shares common cultural and linguistic heritage. Furthermore, it would significantly enhance the prospects of generating interest in the Kazakh language within the broader framework of Turkic languages among the Korean populace. Firstly, it would contribute to reciprocity in cultural exchange by balancing the efforts of Korean cultural centers in Kazakhstan and Central Asia in general, fostering a more equitable exchange of cultures and public diplomacy. Secondly, with its strategic location and economic potential, Kazakhstan could leverage the center to showcase its rich cultural heritage and establish itself as a pivotal player in the East Asian region, thereby promoting soft power. Thirdly, the center could play a vital role in supporting Turkic language learning and Central Asian studies in Korea, complementing the efforts of Korean universities. Finally, establishing a cultural center would strengthen Korea's relations with Central Asian nations, fostering deeper ties and facilitating collaboration across various domains.

This study presents a policy-relevant article on the promotion of Kazakh language education within the broader context of Turkic languages. It offers comprehensive policy recommendations for Turkic states, with a specific focus on Kazakhstan, urging them to take proactive measures in promoting and preserving Turkic languages. The paper provides a detailed analysis of the current situation of the Kazakh language in the context of Turkic language education in South Korea and proposes strategies for Kazakhstan to take a leadership role in advancing the cause of Turkic languages within the region and globally.

In conclusion, while challenges exist, the

prospects for Turkic language education in South Korea are promising. By addressing these challenges and exploring opportunities for collaboration and cultural exchange, South Korea can further enrich its linguistic diversity and strengthen its ties with the Turkic world, contributing to mutual understanding, cultural enrichment, and diplomatic cooperation in the region and beyond.

However, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of this research. Firstly, the study primarily focuses on the landscape of Kazakh language education within the framework of Turkic language education in South Korea and may not encompass all relevant factors influencing the field's development. Secondly, the proposed solutions, such as promoting academic scholarships, research support, exchange programs, and establishing a

cultural center, require further feasibility studies and stakeholder consultations to assess their practicality and effectiveness. Lastly, the research may be subject to biases inherent in data collection and analysis, which could affect the accuracy and reliability of the findings. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities facing Turkic language education in South Korea. It lays the groundwork for future research and policy interventions in this area.

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