

‘Roots of K-culture and fabric of our identity is Korean language’

The London Korean School in England, which opened in 1972, is celebrating its 52nd anniversary this year. Currently, there are 115 Hangeul schools in 26 countries across Europe (as of December 2020). Of these, 23 schools are in the United Kingdom. In particular, the London Korean School is the oldest and most established Hangeul school in Europe.

After graduating from Ewha Womans University in 1966 with a degree in education, I pursued a master’s degree at the University of London, starting in 1972, for three years on a national scholarship. While collecting data to compare the math skills of British and Korean children aged 6-13 for my dissertation, I ended up starting a Korean school for the children of expatriate Korean employees. I also had dreams and hopes for the children of first-generation immigrants. One could say my dreams and hopes for the children of first-generation immigrants to not forget their Korean culture and language led to the passion to build a Korean language school.

In September 1972, at the Notting Hill Gate Anglican Mission Center, which was then used as the Korean Community Center, the then Korean Association President Kim Sung-eung, professor Chung Jong-hwa, Korean Consul General in the U.K. Kwon In-hyuk and the U.K. correspondent of the Dong-A Ilbo Kim Sung-yeol started the Korea in U.K. Children’s School, the predecessor of the London Korean School.

The school started with nine students and gradually grew to 330 students today. At the time, there were three teachers that included Koreans studying abroad. All of them were unpaid volunteers. The goal of the school was “to help the children understand the differences between the U.K. and Korea and to help them adapt to local schools.”

In 1991, I started another Korean language school in Oxford, which was opened by then Ambassador Lee Hong-koo (former prime minister). Again, everything was run by unpaid volunteers. After 10 years as a research professor at Oxford University, I was admitted as a permanent fellow (congregation), and after my retirement, I became a member of the Lifetime Honorary Professors (convocation). I am grateful to have been able to lay down one of the bricks in the great house of education.



Dr. Miriam Chung,
emeritus professor, University of Oxford (founder of London Korean School)

If I had one wish for Korean School teachers, it would be to teach students to compare and analyze the differences between their country and Korea. It would be interesting to start with very easy and everyday topics and gradually upgrade to more difficult and challenging concepts. This will help us to think about our precious values in a positive way. I would like them to develop the intellectual ability to analyze and apply things based on the subjects they have learned, rather than the knowledge itself.

Finally, at the 2024 Paris Olympics, South Korea ranked eighth in the world in the medal standings, surpassing European powerhouses Germany and Italy. We are a sports powerhouse, as well as a top 10 global economy.

Today’s proud nation owes much to the Korean Wave. In particular, at the root of K-culture, K-food and the Korean identity lies the Korean language. The Korean language is the beginning and end of the Korean Wave. Today, Hangeul schools in the United Kingdom are not only Korean language institutions that instill the Korean identity in the next generation of overseas Koreans living in the region, they also play a significant role as a foreign language education institution, where people from other cultures and locals come to learn Korean.

The Overseas Koreans Agency is celebrating its first anniversary. As the first Korean language school in Europe with a history of more than 50 years, we look forward to the interest and support of the OKA to ensure that the London Korean School will break away from freeloading and find its own home as befits Korea’s national character. 