

# Assessing the environment and tasks for teaching Korean language and culture to next generation of compatriots in Kazakhstan



Kazakhstan is currently home to approximately 120,000 Koryo people. Almaty, home to more than 40,000 Koryo compatriots, is not only the largest Koryo community in Kazakhstan, but the city's landmarks, including the Palace of the Republic, Kazakhstan Hotel and the Children's Palace, as well as the Medeu Dam, which protects the city from landslides in the Tian Shan mountains, were designed and built by Koryo architects.

In Kyzylorda, Kazakhstan, there are the Hong Beom-do Memorial Park and Hong Beom-do Street, and across the country, there are 32 streets named after Koryo people.

According to Forbes magazine's 2024 ranking of Kazakhstan's wealthiest people, Koryo person Kim Vyacheslav, Kaspi Bank chairman, was ranked first, and Kim Vladimir, president of Kazakhmys Holding, ranked fourth. One could even safely say that Kazakhstan is a country of Koryo people.

Kazakh is the main language of Kazakhstan, but the number of trilingual young people is growing. Kazakh is considered the language of the ancestors, and Russian is used in everyday life, but the number of people learning English and Korean is increasing. Korean, along with K-pop and K-dramas, has become a craze among the local population in their 20s and 30s.

In Kazakhstan, where Koryo people have a high profile and the Korean language craze is gaining momentum, Korean language education is thriving as another accessible language for citizens. At the same time, it is helping to maintain and foster a sense of Korean identity among the next generation of Koryo compatriots.

There are schools in Kazakhstan where Korean is taught as a regular subject in middle and high school, and there are also regular schools where it is taught as a non-regular subject. The Nazarbayev Intellectual School is one of the former and offers two hours of classes per week.

Korean language education is also offered at the Almaty Korean Education Institute, which opened in 1991. In 2024, there were 3,200 students enrolled in the institute. There are also 25 Hangeul




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schools across the country. The Kunayev Hangeul School, which is considered to be the best run of them all, provides after-school Korean language education for students in elementary, middle and high school. Korean language schools for the elderly of the Koryo diaspora also teach health courses, acupuncture lectures and Korean history, alongside the Korean language.

Private Korean language schools are also thriving, with students who want to improve their Korean proficiency test scores in a short period of time flocking to them. There are more than 100 private Korean language schools, including some that are run by Korean language graduates themselves.

Finally, there is Korean language education at local universities and colleges. The first was in the late 1980s, at the beginning of the Soviet Union's reform and opening policy, when a Korean language department was established at Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University by Park Il and Jung Sang-jin, who were strong advocates for the revival of the native language. I was the first Korean professor to be sent to the university by the South Korean government, and I taught students and ran the department together with professors from North Korea. Today, all the North Korean professors have left the university, and the name of the department has been changed from the Joseon Language Department to the Korean Language Department. At the time, the department was given a permit to open after the successful appeal by Park and Jung to the Kazakh government, who said it was necessary to train Korean teachers to revitalize the native language.

Since then, Korean language departments have been established at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University and Kyzylorda University, which is the successor of the Primorsky Krai University of Education. There are departments not just in Taldykorgan, where many Koryo people live, but also at Nazarbayev University and Eurasian National University in the capital Astana. Some of them are designated as Sejong Institutes and receive some support from the Korean government. 

\* The contributor's claims or opinions may differ from the position of the Overseas Koreans Agency.