İSTANBUL ÜNİVERSİTESİ YAYINEVİ

Şarkiyat Mecmuası
Journal of Oriental Studies

RESEARCH ARTICLE / ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ

Şarkiyat Mecmuası 2026 48: 368-391

https://doi.org/10.26650/jos.1815637

Submitted | Başvuru 01.11.2025
Revision Received | Revizyon Talebi 17.03.2026
Last Revision Received | Son Revizyon 30.03.2026
Accepted | Kabul 05.04.2026

Açık Erişim | Open Access

Beyond Pop Culture: Korean Language Education as a Soft Power Instrument in Türkiye

Popüler Kültürün Ötesinde: Bir Yumuşak Güç Aracı Olarak Türkiye'de Korece Eğitimi

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Abstract

This study investigates how the Korean language functions as a soft power tool within the unique cultural and geopolitical context of Turkey. Grounded in Joseph Nye's soft power theory, the research analyzes the Korean government's policies for promoting its national language specifically in the Turkish context, leveraging the global rise of hallyu and the surge in interest in Korean culture. While prior scholarship generally addressed Korean language education in Turkey from historical and pedagogical perspectives, this investigation is the first to examine the topic through the lens of language policy and soft power strategy. Consequently, the study reveals that Korean language education in Türkiye transcends instructional activity and serves as a vital component of South Korea's cultural diplomacy strategy. Using qualitative document analysis, the research evaluates the activities and objectives of various ministries and affiliated agencies of the Korean government. This involved official reports, strategic plans, and statistical data regarding their Korean language education efforts in Turkey. The findings indicate that while initial interest in the Korean language in Turkey was sparked by the *hallyu* effect, this interest has gained a more sustainable and long-term quality due to comprehensive policies integrated with institutional-level education and assessment systems. By incorporating the Turkish case into the literature on language policy and soft power, this study addresses a significant gap in the existing scholarship.

Öz

Bu çalışma, Kore dilinin Türkiye'nin özgün kültürel ve jeopolitik bağlamında bir yumuşak güç aracı olarak nasıl işlev gördüğünü incelemektedir. Joseph Nye'ın yumuşak güç kuramına dayanan araştırma, hallyu'nun küresel yükselişi ve Kore kültürüne artan ilgi bağlamında Kore'nin ulusal dilini Türkiye bağlamında tanıtma politikalarını analiz etmektedir. Önceki çalışmalar Türkiye'deki Korece eğitimini genellikle tarihsel ve pedagojik yönleriyle ele alırken, bu araştırma konuyu ilk kez dil politikaları ve yumuşak güç perspektifinden incelemektedir. Böylece çalışma, Korece eğitiminin Türkiye'de yalnızca bir öğretim faaliyeti olmanın ötesine geçerek, Kore'nin kültürel diplomasi stratejisinin bir parçası olarak nasıl işlev gördüğünü ortaya koymaktadır. Doküman analizi yöntemiyle Kore hükümetine bağlı çeşitli bakanlıkların ve kurumların yayımladığı resmî raporlar, stratejik planlar ve istatistiksel veriler incelenerek bu kurumların Türkiye'deki Korece eğitimiyle ilgili faaliyetleri ve hedefleri değerlendirilmiştir. Türkiye'de Koreceye olan ilginin başlangıçta *hallyu* etkisiyle ortaya çıktığı, ancak kurumsal düzeyde eğitim ve ölçme değerlendirme sistemleriyle entegre bütüncül politikalar sayesinde daha sürdürülebilir ve uzun vadeli bir nitelik kazandığı sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. Bu yönüyle çalışma, Türkiye örneğini dil politikası ve yumuşak güç literatürüne dâhil ederek önemli bir boşluğu doldurmaktadır

Atıf | Citation: Gökçe, Özlem. "Beyond Pop Culture: Korean Language Education as a Soft Power Instrument in Türkiye". **Şarkiyat Mecmuası - Journal of Oriental Studies 2026 48:368-391**, https://doi.org/10.26650/jos.1815637

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2026. Gökçe, Ö.

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Anahtar Kelimeler Yumuşak Güç, Kore'nin Yumuşak Gücü, Türkiye'de Korece Eğitimi, Dil Politikaları, *hallyu*

Keywords soft power, Korea's soft power, Korean language education in Türkiye, language policy, *hallyu*

Introduction

In an era marked by increasing global interdependence, nations seek to shape their international presence not only through economic strength or military capability but through the power of attraction. Cultural appeal, shared values, and educational exchange have become essential means of fostering mutual understanding and enhancing national image. Within this changing landscape, language and culture stand out as vital instruments that bridge societies, convey identity, and cultivate lasting influence across borders.

This growing emphasis on attraction and cultural appeal finds its theoretical expression in Joseph Nye's concept of soft power. Nye[1] conceptualizes soft power as a country's ability to achieve desired outcomes through attraction rather than coercion or payment. Within this framework, states shape global preferences by making their culture and values appealing to others, thereby converting attraction into influence.

Among the instruments that generate such attraction, language occupies a uniquely strategic role. As Akalın[2] notes, linguistic and cultural initiatives effectively introduce a nation's heritage and identity to foreign audiences. Language is not merely a means of communication but a vehicle of ideology, identity, and symbolic capital that conveys national values and fosters cross-cultural understanding. Thus, promoting a national language becomes a vital dimension of a country's soft power strategy.

Recent studies emphasize how national languages serve as instruments of soft power and cultural diplomacy through state-sponsored institutes and educational programs that extend a nation's cultural reach.[3] These studies demonstrate that language functions not only as a marker of identity but also as a channel of attraction that supports nation branding and what Nye[4] terms public diplomacy— communication with foreign publics to build attraction and goodwill. For non-global languages such as Korean, sustained institutional efforts are essential to cultivate visibility and legitimacy on the global stage.

Korea exemplifies this approach. Beyond the international popularity of its cultural exports—K-dramas, K-pop, and cinema—the Korean language has become a deliberate tool of attraction. Through state-led institutions, the government integrates language education into its broader cultural strategy, disseminating values and enhancing its national image. This growing linkage between popular culture and language learning illustrates how soft power operates through both entertainment and education.

This dynamic is particularly visible in Türkiye, where Korean language learning has expanded rapidly over the past two decades. Türkiye, though geographically distant from Korea, shares long-standing diplomatic ties and historical goodwill. At the same time, its distinct cultural framework compared to other European nations makes it a valuable case for exploring how linguistic attraction functions across culturally

1 Joseph S. Nye, "Soft Power," *Foreign Policy*, no. 80 (1990): 153–171

2 Ahmet Akalın, "Language as a Tool of Soft Power for States", In *Alisher Navoi and the 21st Century,* (Tashkent: Alisher Navoi Uzbek Language and Literature University, 2021), 270.

3 Jingyi Zhou, "The Role of British Council in UK Culture Diplomacy", *Open Journal of Political Science 12* (2022), accessed 28 September, 2025; Şamil Öçal, "Culture and Language as a Soft Power Tool in Iranian Foreign Policy", *Journal of Regional Studies* 2 (2018). Accessed 3 August, 2025; Ebru Eren, "Education policies as a tool of soft power: Alliance Française and Yunus Emre Institute", *Current Research in Social Sciences 6* (2020): 12-13, accessed 3 August, 2025; Jeffrey Gil, "The promotion of Chinese language learning and China's soft power", *Asian Social Science* 4 (2008), accessed 16 October, 2025.

4 Joseph S. Nye, "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 616* (2008): 95, accessed 10 October, 2023.

diverse regions.

Although many studies have examined Korea's soft power through its popular culture, few have explored the strategic role of the Korean language—especially beyond East Asia. Yet, language constitutes one of the most enduring and identity-bearing resources of soft power, serving not only as a medium of communication but also as a channel through which national values and cultural identity are transmitted. In Türkiye, research has mostly addressed pedagogical or linguistic aspects, leaving its policy and diplomatic significance largely overlooked. This study fills that gap by analyzing how Korea institutionalizes Korean language education in Türkiye as part of its broader soft power strategy, offering new insights into how language functions as a sustained instrument of attraction and influence.

This research contributes both contextual and theoretical value to the study of soft power. By examining the development, institutionalization, and strategic role of Korean language education in Türkiye, it provides the first comprehensive analysis of how language functions as a vehicle of attraction within Korea's broader cultural diplomacy. Through this analysis, the study highlights how Korean language promotion extends the reach of Korea's soft power beyond its traditional Asian sphere, offering new insights into the intersection of language policy and international influence.

Research questions

1. How have the Korean government and its policies positioned and institutionalized the Korean language as an instrument of soft power in Türkiye?

2. How does the interplay between Korean popular culture and language learning shape Korea's soft power in Türkiye?

1. Theoretical framework: soft power

The concept of soft power, first introduced by Nye, represents a form of power distinct from coercive or command-based strategies. It refers to a country's ability to shape the preferences of others not through force or monetary inducement, but through attraction. As Nye[5] defines, this "second aspect of power" refers to getting others to want what a country wants— a co-optive form of power that contrasts with command power— and encompasses cultural, ideological, and institutional elements that make a nation's practices more legitimate and appealing to foreign audiences.

Soft power is thus fundamentally different from general influence, which may also rely on coercion or inducement. Nye[6] describes it as "attractive power," emphasizing that its resources are the assets that produce attraction—chiefly culture, political values, and foreign policies—and involve the ability to set agendas and shape preferences so that others perceive certain outcomes as natural or desirable. In today's interconnected global environment, coercive strategies have become increasingly costly and counterproductive. As Gallarotti[7] observes, punishing or threatening others often results in self-punishment in a deeply interdependent world, making attraction and cooperation more sustainable forms of international influence. Consequently, strategies have increasingly shifted toward cooperation and attraction as means of achieving influence. From this perspective, soft power represents a more viable and enduring form of international engagement.

Nye[8] further explains that soft power derives from the values embodied in a country's culture, the examples it sets through domestic and foreign policy, and the conduct of its international relations. One of the principal instruments through which soft power operates is public diplomacy—communication with for-

5 Nye, "Soft Power", 166-167.

6 Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, (New York: Public Affairs Books, 2004), 6-7.

7 Giulio Gallarotti, "Soft power: what it is, why it's important, and the conditions for its effective use". *Journal of Political Power* 4 (2011), 33.

8 Nye, *Soft Power Means to Success*, 8.

eign publics through cultural exchange, broadcasting, education, and international cooperation[9]. The goal of public diplomacy is to transform foreign audiences' attitudes toward a country's culture, values, and policies from ignorance or indifference to appreciation and support. Yet, as Nye[10] cautions, public diplomacy can only generate soft power when the underlying culture and policies are themselves appealing.

At this point, the concept of cultural diplomacy becomes particularly relevant. As one of the key dimensions of public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy encompasses efforts to make a nation's cultural resources, values, and achievements visible on the international stage or to facilitate cultural transmission abroad. According to Cull[11] "cultural diplomacy is an actor's attempt to manage the international environment through making its cultural resources and achievements known overseas and/or facilitating cultural transmission abroad." This perspective highlights that cultural activities should not be viewed merely as promotional tools but as strategic means of fostering mutual understanding and sustained international engagement.

Institutions play a critical role in this process. As Nye[12] notes, governmental and semi-governmental institutions can enhance a country's legitimacy and attractiveness by institutionalizing its cultural values. Examples include the Alliance Française (France), British Council (UK), Cervantes Institute (Spain), Confucius Institute (China), Japan Foundation and Yunus Emre Institute (Türkiye). Such institutions demonstrate how language and culture become enduring channels of attraction by promoting national cultures and public diplomacy.

Within this cultural domain, language has been widely recognised as a strategic resource of soft power, as it enables closer engagement with a country's culture, mentality, and values[13]. In this framework, the Korean language can be viewed as both a medium and a product of soft power—an instrument that embodies national culture, conveys values, and sustains attraction through education and cultural diplomacy. Accordingly, Korea's state-supported language promotion policies illustrate how soft power operates through education, institutional networks, and global cultural engagement.

Since its introduction by Joseph Nye in the early 1990s, the concept of soft power has been widely debated, refined, and expanded across disciplines ranging from international relations to cultural studies. Scholars have questioned its measurability, applicability, and the balance between attraction and persuasion, leading to a diverse range of interpretations. However, the present study does not seek to revisit or extend these theoretical debates. Rather, soft power serves here as a conceptual foundation to examine how language functions as an instrument of attraction within Korea's broader strategies of cultural outreach and international engagement.

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative document analysis within an interpretive paradigm to examine how Korean language education functions as an instrument of soft power in Türkiye. According to Bowen[14] (2009, p. 27), document analysis is *"a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents... to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge."* Documents, whether printed or electronic, are treated not as neutral repositories of information but as interpretive materials through which social and institutional meanings are constructed.

This methodological orientation was chosen because it enables an in-depth exploration of institutional

9 Nye, "Public Diplomacy", 95.

10 Nye, *Soft Power Means to Success*, 95.

11 Nicholas J. Cull, "Public Diplomacy: Taxonomies and Histories," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 616* (2008): 33, accessed 1 November, 2025.

12 Nye, *Soft Power Means to Success*, 10.

13 Natalia Yudina and Oksana Seliverstova, "External language policy and planning as part of soft power policy", In *IV International Scientific and Practical Conference 'Anthropogenic Transformation of Geospace: Nature, Economy, Society' (ATG 2019)*, Advances in Engineering Research 191 (Atlantis Press, 2020), 313.

14 Glenn A. Bowen, "Document Analysis As A Qualitative Research Method", *Qualitative Research Journal 9* (2009): 32, accessed 3 August, 2025.

perspectives and policy approaches, rather than measuring individual outcomes or perceptions. In line with Bowen's[15] view that researchers should *"rely on the description and interpretation of data rather than having the raw data as a basis for analysis,"* this study approaches the documents interpretively to derive meaning within their contextual and institutional settings. The documents were read multiple times to identify key information on Korean language education and its role in soft power. I approached them as socially and politically embedded texts, interpreting their content in relation to Korea's cultural diplomacy and the ways language promotion conveys national values and influence. This interpretive process sought to connect the meanings derived from the documents to a broader understanding of language as a soft power instrument.

The analyzed materials include academic studies, theses, institutional reports, and official web sources, which together provide insight into the policy orientations and institutional mechanisms shaping Korean language promotion in Türkiye. Documents were purposively selected based on their relevance to the research questions and theoretical framework. This approach enables a contextual and critical understanding of how Korean language education is positioned as a soft power resource associated with national image-building, cultural dissemination, and educational cooperation.

3. *Hallyu* as a soft power resource of Korea

As this study focuses on the intersection of language and soft power, understanding the rise of *hallyu* is essential for contextualizing how Korea's cultural appeal has fostered global interest in learning the Korean language. This section examines the emergence of *hallyu* as Korea's leading soft power asset, tracing its evolution from local cultural production to a deliberate means of international influence.

The term *hallyu* emerged in the 1990s, meaning "Korean wave." It was first used abroad when Korean dramas gained popularity in other Asian countries. As pop music and cinema later attracted global audiences, *hallyu* was categorized into distinct phases reflecting its development.

Hallyu 1.0 (1990s–early 2000s) began with the regional popularity of Korean television dramas across Asia. Building on this foundation, *hallyu* 2.0 in the mid-2000s marked the global rise of K-pop and the diversification of cultural exports. During the 2010s, *hallyu* 3.0 expanded beyond entertainment to include lifestyle and digital culture, as *K-culture* became associated with a modern and aspirational image of Korea. Since the late 2010s, *hallyu* 4.0 has reached worldwide prominence through online platforms and transnational fan communities. Collectively, these phases strengthened Korea's cultural presence and laid the groundwork for the global spread of the Korean language.[16].

Hallyu today is no longer a transient cultural trend but a strategic resource integrated into Korea's foreign policy and national branding. It serves as a deliberate soft power instrument designed to shape global perceptions and promote cultural exports such as films, K-pop, and online media. As Jin[17] observes, the worldwide rise of Korean popular culture demonstrates *hallyu*'s impact as a public diplomacy tool. Supported by government initiatives since the late 1990s, Korea's cultural industries have evolved into one of the country's most influential global assets. As Nye[18] points out, Korea possesses the economic and cultural resources to produce significant soft power, enabling it to pursue a foreign policy that enhances its role in global governance.

This growing influence is also reflected in international evaluations of Korea's soft power performance. While methodologies differ, recent indices collectively highlight the country's rising global standing. In Brand Finance's 2025 Global Soft Power Index, South Korea ranks 12th, whereas it holds first place in the IMF's

15 Bowen, "Document Analysis", 30.

16 Si Yeun Moon, "Future of Hallyu: Hallyu 5.0", *Journal of Product Research* 41 (2023): 71, accessed 25 October, 2025.

17 Dal Yong Jin, "The Rise Of Digital Platforms As A Soft Power Apparatus In The New Korean Wave Era", *Communication and the Public* 9 (2024), 164.

18 Joseph S. Nye, "South Korea's Growing Soft Power," *Project Syndicate*, November 10, 2009, https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/south-korea-s-growing-soft-power-2009-11.

newly developed Global Soft Power Index (GSPI) with a score of 1.68[19]. In this sense, Korea's current position in these global indices substantiates that *hallyu* is not a transient trend but a sustained and measurable source of national soft power.

3.1. The role of government in fostering *hallyu*

Building upon the state-led cultural initiatives that initially supported the rise of *hallyu*, the Korean government progressively institutionalized its role in sustaining the Korean Wave as a long-term soft power strategy. These efforts systematized cultural exports, fostered creative industries, and transformed *hallyu* from a spontaneous trend into a coordinated national project.

For decades under authoritarian rule, artistic production remained constrained as military regimes limited freedom of expression. Following democratization in 1987, however, civilian governments adopted a more supportive stance toward culture. During the administration of Kim Young-sam (1993–1998), Korea liberalized its economy, joined major international organizations, and began integrating cultural policy into national development[20]. Recognizing the growing importance of soft power, the Korean government later launched an ambitious nation-branding program in 2009 to enhance Korea's global image and reinitiate *hallyu* as a key cultural strategy. According to Oh and Chae[21], a National Branding Council was established under the presidency to promote the nation's image in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (MCST), which proposed detailed policies for the global dissemination of *hallyu*. This transformation marked the beginning of a more systematic and state-led approach to cultural governance, setting the stage for the institutionalization of Korea's creative industries.

This transformation also led to the diversification of institutions engaged in cultural diplomacy. Among these, the Korea Creative Content Agency (KOCCA) and the Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange (KOFICE), Korean Culture and Information Service (KOCIS) founded in the 2000s, coordinated policies to promote Korea's content industries and supported production, distribution, and international collaboration across fields such as broadcasting, music, gaming, and digital media[22]. Together, these institutional efforts created a coherent policy framework that ensures the global expansion and sustainability of *hallyu* as a central pillar of Korea's soft power[23].

4. The role of language in soft power strategies

As Korea's institutional efforts consolidated the global reach of hallyu, they also underscored Nye's notion that culture—when made attractive to others—constitutes a vital source of soft power. A country's soft power derives primarily from three sources: its culture (when it is attractive to others), its political values such as democracy and human rights (when it lives up to them), and its policies (when they are perceived as legitimate)[24]. Within this framework, language constitutes a central cultural resource. Beyond its communicative function, language operates as a symbol of national identity and a vehicle of cultural appeal, making it a strategic asset in the exercise of soft power. As Pratama[25] notes, language plays a crucial role in promoting and branding the attractiveness of a nation through cultural diplomacy. Accordingly, states have increasingly sought to internationalize their languages as a means of enhancing visibility, fostering cultural affinity, and

19 Serhan Cevik and Tales Padilha, "Measuring Soft Power: A New Global Index. *IMF Working Papers* 2024, no. 212.

20 Emre Demir and Kerem Kılıçdaroğlu, "Comparative research on soft power: Cases of Turkey and South Korea", *Turkic–Altaic Economic Belt* 40 (2022).

21 Chong-jin Oh and Young-gil Chae, "Constructing Culturally Proximate Spaces through Social Network Services: The Case of Hallyu (Korean Wave) in Turkey". *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi* 10, (2013): 93.

22 Mutlu Binark, *Kültürel Diplomasi ve Kore Dalgası "Hallyu"*, (Ankara: Siyasal Kitabevi, 2019), 93.

23 "About KOCCA", accessed September 8, 2025, https://www.kocca.kr/en/main.do. "About KOFICE", accessed September 8, 2025, http://eng.kofice.or.kr/about/about_2.asp

24 Joseph S. Nye, "Soft power: the origins and political progress of a concept", *The Journal of International Communication 28* (2022): 5, August 14, 2025. progress of a concept", *The Journal of International Communication 28* (2022): 5, accessed 5 August 2025

25 Rifka Pratama, "English language in the context of cultural diplomacy", *Culturalistics: Journal of Cultural, Literary, and Linguistic Studies 7* (2023): 80, accessed 5 August 2025.

strengthening their global influence.

Building on this perspective, the practical implementation of language-based soft power can be observed through various strategic educational initiatives. Strategic language education programs, such as scholarships, exchange initiatives, and language institutes, function as instruments of attraction that extend beyond linguistic learning. By providing sustained exposure to the language, culture, and values of the promoting country, these initiatives cultivate long-term familiarity and emotional affinity, thereby strengthening the foundation of its soft power influence.

In line with these strategies, historical examples demonstrate how the promotion of language has effectively functioned as a tool of soft power in numerous countries. Since the eighteenth century—and particularly in the post–Second World War period—the promotion of the French language and culture abroad functioned as an effective instrument to enhance France's national reputation by projecting its ideologies and sociocultural values[26]. Alliance Française, founded in Paris in 1883, is a prestigious institution that has been providing courses in 133 countries since its inception[27]. Through the systematic global dissemination of the French language, France has successfully reinforced its cultural prestige and strengthened its international visibility, making linguistic outreach a lasting pillar of its soft power.

Similarly, the British Council, founded in 1934 has played a pivotal role in spreading English globally through structured language programs and teacher-training initiatives. The Council's founding aim was "to create in a country overseas a basis of friendly knowledge and understanding of the people of this country, of their philosophy and way of life, which will lead to a sympathetic appreciation of British foreign policy, whatever for the moment that policy may be and from whatever political conviction it may spring" [28]. In other words, the British Council has sought not only to promote the English language, culture, and values, but also to cultivate favorable relations with other countries. As Pratama[29] notes, the position of English within interstate cultural diplomacy has become decisive. Its role in international communication signifies not merely a linguistic phenomenon but also an instrument of global politics, where language use can shape and reinforce political influence. In this sense, as exemplified by the British Council's long-standing activities, English has long served as a key soft power asset for English-speaking nations, particularly the United Kingdom and the United States.

Following the examples of France and the United Kingdom, Germany also institutionalized its language and culture promotion through the establishment of the Goethe-Institut. Founded in 1951, the Goethe-Institut promotes knowledge of the German language, cultivates international cultural cooperation, and provides information about cultural, social, and political life in Germany. As of 2025, it operates 150 institutes in 99 countries[30]. Through this extensive global network, the Goethe-Institut has positioned German language education as both an instrument of intercultural dialogue and a vehicle for enhancing Germany's intellectual and cultural presence abroad, thereby reinforcing its soft power in the international arena.

Similarly, founded in 1991, Instituto Cervantes actively supports the teaching of Spanish, and according to 2025 data, operates in almost 90 cities across more than 40 countries on five continents[31]. Through its worldwide centers, the Instituto Cervantes has enhanced the global visibility of the Spanish language and strengthened Spain's cultural influence by linking linguistic outreach with cultural and educational diplomacy.

The Japan Foundation, established in 1972 under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, serves as Japan's principal institution for promoting cultural diplomacy. Its initiatives span arts and cultural exchange, Japanese

26 Eren, Ebru, "Education Policies", 128

27 "About us". Accessed August 14, 2025, https://www.alliance-francaise.ca/en/who/about-us

28 "Our history", accessed August 14, 2025, https://www.britishcouncil.org/about-us/history

29 Pratama, Rifka, "English language", 80.

30 "Who We Are", accessed August 14, 2025, https://www.goethe.de/en/uun/org.html.

31 "About Us", accessed August 14, 2025, https://cervantes.org/us/los-angeles/en/about-us.

language education abroad, and the advancement of Japanese studies and international dialogue. The Foundation organizes Japanese language programs overseas, provides online courses, and develops teaching materials to support learners. As of 2025, it operates centers in 28 cities across different countries worldwide[32]. These efforts align with Japan's broader soft power planning, in which "policies such as Japanese language teacher development, the establishment of the Japanese language education evaluation system, language learning assistance, and the creation of Japanese online teaching resources" are employed to reinforce Japan's international presence[33]. In doing so, Japan illustrates how the systematic planning of language education can operate as an intentional and sustainable form of soft power.

China entered the arena of language-based soft power later than its European counterparts, founding the Confucius Institute in 2004 with similar objectives. The Institute's mission is to teach Chinese worldwide, promote Chinese culture, and foster mutual understanding and friendship between different societies. It also seeks to advance educational and cultural cooperation, thereby supporting reciprocal learning and dialogue[34]. Through this global network, China has institutionalized its language promotion policy as a key instrument of cultural diplomacy, linking linguistic dissemination with broader efforts to project a positive national image and expand its international influence.

In addition to these global examples, Türkiye has also actively incorporated language promotion into its soft power strategy through state-supported institutional initiatives. Türkiye established the Yunus Emre Institute in 2007[35] with the aim of teaching Turkish as a foreign language to international audiences and promoting Turkish culture worldwide. Through this institution, efforts have been made to ensure that Turkish is taught and disseminated globally in accordance with professional and pedagogical standards.

Taken together, these cases demonstrate how states use language education not only to spread their language and culture but also to shape positive perceptions of their global image. As Nye[36] notes, soft power works "through attraction rather than coercion," and language programs embody this principle by creating favorable associations with the promoting country. Strategic initiatives such as scholarships, exchanges, and language institutes provide sustained exposure to a nation's language, culture, and values, fostering long-term familiarity and emotional affinity that strengthen its soft power influence.

In this broader context, Korea's approach can be understood as part of a wider global pattern of language-based soft power strategies. The Korean government has similarly institutionalized the promotion of its language and culture through state-supported initiatives. In particular, the King Sejong Institutes (KSI) and Korean Cultural Centers (KCC) function as key instruments through which Korea disseminates its language, engages with foreign publics, and strengthens its cultural presence abroad. These institutions play a central role in aligning language education with broader cultural and diplomatic objectives, thereby positioning Korean as an effective tool of soft power.

4.1. The state's use of Korean as a tool of soft power

The Korean language has become a key element of the country's soft power, serving both as a cultural symbol and a tool for global engagement. Although Korea joined cultural diplomacy later than China and Japan, it quickly advanced by creating institutions for language promotion. As Korean culture spreads worldwide, demand for learning the language has risen sharply, making it a vital channel for international audiences to connect with Korea's culture and society.

To meet the rising global demand, the Korean government has supported Korean language education

32 "JF Language Course", accessed September 4, 2025, https://www.jpf.go.jp/e/project/japanese/education/jf/index.html.

33 Jingshu Gu, Shiping Deng, "Rearticulating the Promotion of Japanese Language And Culture From The Perspective of "Soft Power", Frontiers in Psychology 15 (2024). Accessed September 4, 2025.

34 "Basic Conditions of an Institution Applying to Host a Confucius Institute", accessed August 14, 2025, https://ci.cn/en/gywm/sl

35 "Yunus Emre Institute", Accessed March 27, 2026, https://www.yee.org.tr/en/node/59

36 Nye, "Public Diplomacy", 94.

abroad through several ministries. The MCST oversees KSIs and KCCs, the Ministry of Education (MOE) manages Korean language schools and institutes, and the MOFA works with privately run schools[37]. Other ministries—including Employment and Labor, Trade, Industry and Energy, Gender Equality and Family, Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Justice, and the Interior and Safety—are also involved[38]. The multiplicity of ministries involved suggests that Korea's language policy operates as an inter-ministerial framework, integrating education, labor, and culture into a cohesive form of public diplomacy.

Among these, the MCST, the MOE and the MOFA are particularly significant, as most foreign learners are reached through the programs administered by these ministries. Table 1 presents the key ministries, the affiliated institutions, and major initiatives supporting the global promotion of the Korean language.

Table 1: Key Ministries and Institutions Involved in Korean Language Promotion

Ministry	Affiliated Institutions	Core Responsibilities	Representative Programs and Initiatives
Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism	KSIF, KCCs, National Institute of Korean Language (NIKL)	· Global promotion of Korean language and culture · Curriculum and assessment development · Teacher training and certification (native and local) · Cultural branding through language diplomacy · Korean Language Standard Curriculum · Textbook development for foreign learners	· Operation of KSIs worldwide · Nuri KSI online platform · Sejong Korean Language Assessment (SKA) · Korean language courses at KCCs · K-Teacher Program for non-native instructors · Teacher dispatch to KSIs
Ministry of Education	National Institute for International Education (NIIED)	· International language education policy · Standardized proficiency testing · Scholarship and academic linkage · Global expansion of Korean language learning	· Test of Proficiency in Korean (TOPIK) · Global Korea Scholarship (GKS) · Teacher dispatch to local schools · Target of one million TOPIK applicants by 2027
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Korea Foundation (KF)	· Promotion of Korean studies and Korean language abroad	· Fellowship for Korean Language Training · Support for Employment of Contract Faculty Member

(Source: Compiled by the author.)

The KSIF is a public institution under the MCST responsible for managing overseas Korean language education and promoting Korean culture through KSIs worldwide. The KSI is the national brand for Korean

37 Ki-ung Yang, Seung-geum Yoo, "The Status of the Korean Language as an International Language", *Hallyu Now: Global Hallyu Issue Magazine 34* (2020): 11, accessed 13 August, 2025.

38 Yeon-Ju Kim, Myoung-Soon Kim, "Subjects Review and Comparison of Korea or Korean Studies in Internal and External Universities", *Korean Educatıon 133* (2022): 386, accessed 14 August 2025.

language and culture education[39]. The first KSI was founded in Mongolia in 2007. It is one of the key institutions responsible for Korean language education abroad. As of 2025, there are 252 KSIs worldwide. In 2007, KSIs served about 740 students annually, compared to more than 210,000 in 2024. The number of KSIs is expected to increase further, with a goal of designating and operating over 350 institutes worldwide by 2030[40]. This represents an increase of nearly two hundredfold, reflecting rapid global demand. The steady numerical expansion of KSIs suggests that this demand is not merely spontaneous but actively fostered through state-led coordination, funding, and branding efforts. This pattern demonstrates how Korea has successfully institutionalized its language policy, transforming cultural curiosity into structured educational demand.

Beyond its institutional expansion, the KSI organizes Korean language education through multiple channels. In addition to offering in-person courses across various countries, it also provides freely accessible online materials, programs, and level tests for international learners. The Nuri KSI portal, for instance, offers a wide range of resources on Korean language and culture for both learners and teachers. Learners can access textbooks, dictionaries, and supplementary materials, while teachers are provided with teaching resources such as textbooks, audio files, and free professional development programs. Furthermore, the Nuri KSI portal maintains learner engagement through interactive elements such as online events, quizzes, and learning apps[41]. Taken together, these initiatives highlight the government's strong commitment to promoting the Korean language on a global scale. By expanding access to high-quality educational resources, the KSI not only facilitates language acquisition but also fosters cultural affinity and strengthens Korea's soft power abroad. This growing digitalization further enhances accessibility and extends Korea's cultural presence globally, transforming pedagogical innovation into soft power practice. This reflects Nye's[42] conception of attraction-based influence—an approach emphasizing influence through cultural appeal rather than coercion. In this sense, digital platforms such as the Nuri KSI portal embody attraction-based soft power, as they invite global learners to voluntarily engage with Korean language and culture through accessible, appealing, and interactive content.

In addition to quantitative growth, qualitative indicators also demonstrate the effectiveness of this institutional expansion. According to the KSIF[43], the 2024 KSI Learner Satisfaction Survey—conducted in 88 countries with 17,622 participants—recorded an all-time high satisfaction score of 92.5, marking the fifth consecutive year of increase. This outcome reflects the Foundation's success in enhancing educational materials and customizing instruction, thereby reinforcing the institutional credibility of Korean language education as a sustainable form of soft power.

Alongside the KSI focusing primarily on structured language education, another institution advancing Korean language promotion abroad is the KCC. Operating under the MCST, the KCC functions as a strategic actor in enhancing Korea's national image and facilitating cultural exchanges between countries[44]. Although its primary mission is cultural promotion, it also contributes to language education by offering Korean classes. According to the 2008 activity evaluation report of the Korean Cultural Centers, the primary reason local participants visited these centers was to receive Korean language education, accounting for the highest proportion at 51.26%[45]. This finding indicates that the KCCs serve not only as centers of cultural dissemination but also as primary venues for Korean language learning abroad. As of 2025, 35 Korean Cultural Centers

39 Donald Lien, Peilan Tang, Erika Zuloaga, "Effects of Hallyu and the King Sejong Institute on International Trade and Services in Korea", *The International Trade Journal*, 36 (2022): 10, accessed 26 October, 2025.

40 "Eleven New King Sejong Institutes designated in 2025", accessed August 14, 2025. https://www.mcst.go.kr/english/policy/pressView.jsp?pSeq=530

41 "About the Nuri KSI", accessed September 16, 2025. https://nuri.iksi.or.kr/front/page/siteguide/introduction/main.do

42 Nye, *Soft Power Means to Success*, 5.

43 "KSIF reports record-high 2024 KSI learner satisfaction score", accessed October 18, 2025, https://www.ksif.or.kr/cop/bbs/selectBoardArticle.do?nttId=9220000006988&bbsId=BBSMSTR_000000000141&pageIndex=1

44 Yang, Yoo, "The Status of the Korean Language," 12.

45 Berrin Demircan, "South Korea's Cultural Diplomacy Activities In Türkiye: The Example of the Korean Cultural Center", (Master's thesis, Sinop University, 2024), 31.

operate worldwide across four major regions: eight in Asia-Pacific, five in the Americas, eleven in Europe, and five in the Middle East/Africa[46]. These initiatives collectively strengthen both language learning and cultural engagement, thereby enhancing Korea's soft power beyond the realm of traditional state diplomacy. The KCC model exemplifies how cultural institutions can embed linguistic experience within everyday cultural consumption, reinforcing affective dimensions of soft power.

NIKL, operating under MCST, has developed the Korean Language Standard Curriculum that provides a comprehensive framework encompassing learning objectives, content, teaching methods, and assessment guidelines, which can be adapted to different educational contexts[47]. This demonstrates that the Korean government not only promotes its language through institutional expansion but also seeks to standardize and systematize its teaching across diverse contexts, thereby reinforcing the strategic role of language education within its broader soft power agenda.

In addition to curriculum development, NIKL also produces and distributes a wide range of open-access teaching materials designed for foreign learners of Korean such as textbooks, instructional guides, and digital learning content tailored to different learner groups and educational contexts[48]. The availability of such standardized yet adaptable materials indicates that Korea's language policy extends beyond institutional expansion to the systematic production and global circulation of pedagogical content. This further reinforces the role of language education not only as a medium of cultural transmission but also as a structured and state-managed component of soft power.

Beyond institutional initiatives, the MOE has made standardized assessment a crucial pillar of Korea's language strategy, most notably through the TOPIK. The exam is administered not only to foreigners but also to overseas Koreans whose first language is not Korean. The results of the exam are used for purposes such as admission to Korean universities, employment applications, scholarship opportunities, and enrollment in overseas universities[49].

According to data from the NIKL, while the number of applicants for the beginner level of the TOPIK in 2019 was 101,617, the number of applicants for intermediate and advanced levels reached as many as 274,254[50]. Furthermore, the number of test takers has increased over the years in parallel with the growing population of Korean learners worldwide. For instance, the number of test takers increased from just over 2,000 in 1997[51] to more than three hundred thousand applicants by 2022[52]. This distribution indicates that a large group of learners seek to use Korean not only for basic daily communication but also for academic, professional, or long-term purposes. Therefore, as a globally administered exam, TOPIK should be understood not merely as a technical test measuring individual proficiency but also as an important instrument of Korea's language policy and cultural diplomacy. As an officially standardized mechanism, TOPIK legitimizes Korea's linguistic authority internationally, transforming language assessment into a channel of state influence.

In addition to the TOPIK, the KSIF has developed the SKA to evaluate learners' proficiency in line with Se-

46 "The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism promotes Korean culture through 35 cultural centers around the world", accessed August 14, 2025, https://www.kocis.go.kr/

47 Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and National Institute of Korean Language, **한국어 표준 교육과정** [Korean Standard Curriculum] (Seoul: Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2020), 1.

48 "Introduction to Educational Materials Developed by the National Institute of the Korean Language," accessed March 29, 2026, https://kcenter.korean.go.kr/kcenter/teaching/intro.do

49 "Test of Proficiency in Korean(TOPIK)", accessed October 16, 2025, http://www.niied.go.kr/user/nd95750.do

50 Jae-Yoon No, "A study on the assessment system analysis of the Korean Proficiency Test (TOPIK) and the Italian Proficiency Test (CILS)", (Master's thesis. Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, 2022), 1.

51 "Yearly statistics on TOPIK applicants, test takers, and passers". Accessed 27 October, 2025. https://www.moe.go.kr/boardCnts/viewRenew.do?boardID=350&boardSeq=75623&lev=0&searchType=null&statusYN=C&page=-4&s=moe&m=0309&opType=N

52 Muhammet Emre Korkmaz, "Development of Teaching Materials for Turkish Learners of Korean as a Foreign Language", (Ph.D. Dissertation. Ankara University, 2023), 107.

jong Institute curricula. Beyond its internal function, it has been recognized for visa issuance at the Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Uzbekistan, admission at Yonsei University's Global Leaders College, and scholarship selection at the Korea National University of Arts and the POSCO TJ Park Foundation[53]. The fact that the SKA is employed even for visa issuance and scholarship applications underscores the government's aim to transform the exam into a functional policy tool by forging institutional linkages abroad. Taken together, this functionalization of the SKA suggests that Korea is pursuing a strategy similar to the internationalization of TOPIK, thereby building a multi-layered assessment system tailored to different target groups. The parallel development of the SKA and TOPIK indicates Korea's effort to diversify linguistic governance, aligning assessment tools with broader diplomatic and educational objectives.

NIIED, the agency affiliated with MOE, responsible for the internationalization of Korean education, administers the GKS, which enables foreign students to pursue degree programs in Korea. Although not directly responsible for language education, the program requires recipients to complete one year of intensive Korean training. This requirement not only facilitates the spread of Korean among international students—many of whom later engage in academia, diplomacy, or business—but also sustains global interest in learning Korean. Consequently, the GKS, designed as a public diplomacy initiative, functions as a strategic instrument of Korea's soft power[54]. Through the GKS, Korea effectively cultivates a global network of culturally literate elites whose professional trajectories perpetuate Korean visibility and influence across various sectors.

An essential component of Korean language education is teacher training and placement abroad. The NIIED dispatches Korean language teachers abroad to teach at local schools where Korean is offered as a second foreign language[55], while the KSIF sends teachers to KSIs[56]. More recently, however, initiatives have sought to involve non-native speakers in the Korean language teaching. In 2023, the NIKL launched the K-Teacher Program, open to foreigners working in educational institutions or studying Korean Language and Literature, Korean Language Education, or Korean Studies. The program comprises 130 sessions and awards certification upon completion[57].

By creating space for local teachers alongside native speakers, this policy shift supports long-term sustainability, especially given the limited supply of native-speaking instructors. With *hallyu* expanding, demand for Korean is projected to rise, and relying solely on native speakers will be insufficient. Training more foreign teachers thus represents a strategic step for the future. The program's free provision also signals the state's determination to foster local teachers; compared with fee-based alternatives such as TESOL and CELTA, its accessibility is particularly notable. By shifting the focus from native-speaker dependency to local empowerment, this initiative signifies a paradigmatic move toward the indigenization of Korean language education abroad.

The KF, affiliated with the MOFA, plays a complementary role in enhancing Korea's soft power, particularly within the academic sphere. While the Foundation does not directly offer Korean language education abroad, it occasionally supports overseas universities that provide Korean language or Korean Studies programs by assigning or assisting with the placement of qualified faculty members. It also invites foreign scholars and graduate students to Korea through fellowships to participate in intensive Korean language courses, thereby fostering linguistic competence and cross-cultural understanding. Through these initiatives, the KF contributes to the global dissemination of the Korean language and transforms language and research programs into effective channels of sustained soft power influence.

Beyond these initiatives, Korea's broader public diplomacy strategy further illustrates how language

53 "Sejong Korean Language Assessment", accessed September 19, 2025, https://ska.ksif.or.kr/ontest-ska/front/guide/test/info.do

54 Kadir Jun Ayhan, Moamen Gouda, Hyelim Lee, "Exploring Global Korea Scholarship as a Public Diplomacy Tool", *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 57 (2021): 873, accessed 20 October, 2025.

55 "Dispatching Korean Language Teachers To Local Schools", accessed October 16, 2025, http://www.niied.go.kr/user/nd83484.do

56 "Dispatch of Korean Language Teachers", accessed October 16, 2025, https://www.ksif.or.kr/com/cmm/EgovContentView.do?lang=eng&menuNo=31101230&utm_source=chatgpt.com

57 "K-teacher Program", accessed September 16, 2025, https://kcenter.korean.go.kr/kcenter/kteacher/info.do?gubun=3

education is positioned within its soft power framework. According to the First Master Plan for Korean Public Diplomacy (2017–2021), one of the government's core goals is "to proliferate current knowledge and understanding of Korea by rectifying factual errors in foreign textbooks and promoting Korean studies and Korean-language courses overseas"[58]. This indicates that the Korean government regards Korean-language education not only as a soft power instrument but also as a corrective measure to address factual inaccuracies about Korea abroad, thereby shaping a more accurate and favorable national image. Taken together, these initiatives reveal a comprehensive model of linguistic diplomacy, showing that Korea's language policy now operates as a coordinated instrument of global influence rather than a secondary cultural project.

5. The case of Türkiye: Korean language education as an instrument of soft power

This section examines the historical development, institutional foundations, and current state of Korean language education in Türkiye, while situating this process within the broader framework of Korea's foreign language policies and its soft power–driven strategies for the global dissemination of Korean.

Higher education institutions

Korean language education in Türkiye began in 1989 with the establishment of the four-year Department of Korean Language and Literature at Ankara University. Later, similar departments were launched at Erciyes University in 2003 and Istanbul University in 2016[59]. In addition to these three active institutions, there are also other universities that have not yet begun admitting students. Beyond undergraduate programs, Korean is also offered as an elective course at several universities, including Hacettepe, Bilkent, Boğaziçi, Yeditepe, Atılım, Karadeniz Technical, and Bahçeşehir Universities[60]. As of 2025, Ankara Science University has also joined this list. Collectively, this landscape indicates that Korean has achieved an institutional presence in Türkiye, both at the undergraduate level and as an elective subject.

However, Korean language education in Türkiye first extended beyond undergraduate programs in 2009, when Korean classes were launched within Ankara University's TÖMER (Turkish and Foreign Languages Research and Application Center). The fact that these courses began before the establishment of the KCC and the KSI highlights both Ankara University's pioneering role and the indirect influence of Korea's cultural appeal on the field of education. Initially offered to a small group of learners, these courses later reached a broader audience through cooperation with the KSI. After the collaboration faced certain administrative challenges, the partnership came to an end, and since then TÖMER has continued to offer Korean courses solely at its Ankara branch, while also providing access to learners in other cities through online classes when necessary. This development indicates that Korean language education in Türkiye has achieved a sustainable structure and generated lasting local interest even without direct collaboration with Korean institutions. In this respect, the TÖMER case demonstrates that soft power can be activated not only through official government channels but also through the initiatives of local institutions, in parallel with the growing diplomatic and economic relations between the two countries.

Korean government-run education institutions and exams

The local institutional foundations of Korean language education in Türkiye soon integrated with initiatives supported by the Korean government. Since the 2010s, in line with Korea's global language policies, the KSI has become one of the key components of Korean language education in the country. The first KSI in Türkiye was established at Ankara University in 2010, followed by two branches in Istanbul and one each in İzmir, Bursa, and Trabzon[61]. However, as of 2026, only one branch in Istanbul remains active, operating in collaboration with Istanbul University. Scholars in the field frequently point out that administrative challenges

58 Kwang-jin Choi, "The Republic of Korea's Public Diplomacy Strategy: History and Current Status". Perspectives Paper 1. 2019, no. 1.

59 Muhammet Emre Korkmaz, Özlem Gökçe, Eunmi Yu, "Translation Practices and Suggestions For The Korean-Turkish Learner's Dictionary", *The Korean Society of Bilingualism 95*, (2023): 251-252.

60 Korkmaz, Gökçe, Yu, "Translation Practices", 253.

61 Youngeun Son, "Improving the Current Status of the Korean Language and Literature Curriculum in Universities in Turkey: The Case of Istanbul University", *Korean Studies Quarterly 46* (2023): 329, accessed 27 October, 2025.

in assigning Korean instructors have contributed to this decline. This underscores the importance of employing local teachers for the long-term sustainability of Korean language education in Türkiye. KSI, serves as the primary institutional mechanism through which Korea extends its language policy from the center to the periphery. The establishment of a KSI in Türkiye can thus be interpreted as evidence that Korea's global language policy has expanded beyond Asia and become institutionalized within the context of Türkiye's growing interest in Korean language and culture.

Parallel to the expansion of KSIs, another major institutional step in Korea's cultural diplomacy was the establishment of the KCC. Founded in Ankara in 2011 under the Korean government, the KCC offers Korean language courses taught by native instructors and organizes cultural, artistic, and sports events[62]. As a key element of Korea's global network for language education and cultural promotion, it enhances the visibility of Korea's soft power. By combining language and culture, the KCC presents Korea's image in a multidimensional way and increases accessibility through online programs. Its presence in Türkiye allows direct interaction between the local public and Korean language and culture, helping sustain a positive perception of Korea.

Studies on perceptions of the KCC in Türkiye show that factors such as music, dramas and films, spatial design, free refreshments, and accessible educational activities have boosted interest in Korean culture[63]. The free Korean language courses offered by the KCC integrate language learning with cultural experience, leading learners to view the language not only as a communication tool but also as a means of cultural participation. In this sense, the KCC functions as an active extension of Korea's cultural diplomacy in Türkiye. This integrated model transforms Korea's soft power from cultural attraction into a sustainable form of interaction through language, making Korean language education in Türkiye more accessible and deeply intertwined with cultural experience.

Apart from these institutional developments, assessment systems also play a crucial role in the institutionalization of Korean language education. In Türkiye the TOPIK is one of the most institutionalized components of the Korean government's language-based soft power strategy. Held regularly twice a year in Türkiye since 2008[64], the exam provides learners with an opportunity both to certify their language proficiency and to access educational or employment opportunities in Korea. In addition, the SKA, developed by the KSIF, began to be administered in Türkiye in 2022[65], complementing TOPIK by assessing speaking skills. The regular implementation of these exams in Türkiye shows that Korea's language policy has been incorporated into the country's educational system. As a result, learning Korean has evolved from being a personal interest into a formally recognized and measurable academic qualification. Moreover, through these exams, Turkish students can apply for educational and employment opportunities in Korea, which reflects how Korea's education-oriented soft power has created a concrete sphere of attraction in the Turkish context. These assessment systems also serve as a motivational tool, maintaining students' interest in the Korean language and Korea itself with clear, long-term goals, thereby supporting the continuity of soft power influence. However, it should be noted that these exams cannot be administered nationwide due to the limited number of test centers, which restricts access to a relatively small group of learners.

Another support of the Korean government regarding policies for promoting Korean language education in Türkiye is the dispatch of Korean language teachers. Under this program, administered by the KCC, public announcements were made in 2020 and 2022 inviting schools to apply for support in offering Korean

62 "About the Cultural Center", accessed September 25, 2025, https://tr.korean-culture.org/tr/6/contents/331

63 Demircan, "South Korea In Turkey", 45.

64 Muhammet Emre Korkmaz, "The Past and Present of Teaching Korean As A Foreign Language", *Journal of Oriental Studies 3* (2023): 106, accessed 29 September, 2025.

65 Byeong-in Im, "The Sejong Korean Language Assessment Administered for the First Time in Türkiye," *KOFICE*, October 1, 2022, https://kofice.or.kr/c30correspondent/c30_correspondent_02_view.asp?seq=22057

language courses[66]. Although similar support programs are implemented in other countries[67], the extension of this initiative to Türkiye's national education system demonstrates Korea's strong commitment to its language policy in the country. However, the program's lack of continuity has limited the wider spread of Korean language courses and their full integration into the local education system. Establishing such programs on a regular and long-term basis could enhance not only the quality and stability of Korean language education in Türkiye but also the sustainability of Korea's education-based soft power.

Collaboration between local actors and the Korean government

Beyond formal education policies, the growing involvement of local actors provides another perspective on how Korea's linguistic influence has taken root in Türkiye. One of the most significant steps in integrating Korean into Türkiye's education system was taken in 2017, when the Ministry of National Education officially recognized Korean as a second foreign language in secondary schools[68]. This decision was significant as it marked the first inclusion of Korean in Türkiye's official secondary education curriculum. Although the decision itself was not directly initiated by the Korean government, it was largely shaped by Türkiye's foreign language policy and nonetheless demonstrates how Korea's cultural and linguistic influence has extended.

In parallel with the decision of including Korean into the high schools' language education program, curriculum development process was carried out by academics from Ankara university[69]. The teaching materials were developed with the support of the NIKL between 2021 and 2022 by experts from Ankara university and various universities in Korea. A graduate of a Korean Language and Literature program was appointed to teach these classes. Korean lessons began in 2018 and in 2022 across two high schools[70]. As of 2025-2026 academic year, Korean language instruction is provided through two different models in high schools. While it is taught as an elective course at Alparslan Anatolian High School, Bayrampaşa Aliya İzzetbegoviç İmam Hatip High School[71] launched a year-long preparatory Korean language program in the 2025-2026 academic year[72]. Although these initiatives are relatively new for Turkish high schools, the fact that Korean courses remain limited to only a few schools nationwide indicates that early-stage Korean education has not yet reached a level of widespread implementation. This shows that, despite institutional progress, the full integration of Korean into Türkiye's formal education system is still at an early stage.

The notable increase in Korean language teaching materials developed by Turkish specialists additionally serves as a fundamental indicator that Korea's cultural influence has evolved beyond an external attraction factor in Turkey, transforming into an internalized and sustainable educational domain. The local production of specific resources, such as grammar books, vocabulary flashcards, and TOPIK preparation guides makes Korean language education more localized and sustainable. This domestic production activity signifies that Korea's "soft power" is not merely being passively transferred but is actively being reproduced and adopted at the local level.

While some materials are independently prepared by local specialists and academics, others have been

66 "Support for elementary, middle, and high schools in Türkiye that wish to open Korean language courses", accessed 27 October, 2025, https://tr.korean-culture.org/tr/362/board/215/read/117764

67 As previously discussed in the section "*The State's Use of Korean as a Tool of Soft Power*," NIIED and the King Sejong Institute Foundation have implemented teacher dispatch programs to support Korean language education abroad.

68 Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of National Education, *Korean Language Curriculum for Secondary Education* [*Ortaöğretim Kurumları Korece Dersi Öğretim Programı*] (Ankara: Board of Education and Discipline, 2017), https://ookgm.meb.gov.tr/meb_iys_dosyalar/2021_03/17170933_2017-152_OrtaoYretim_KurumlarY_Korece_Dersi_OYretim_ProgramY.pdf

69 Pınar Altundağ, Korean Language Education in Türkiye, in *Foreign Language Teaching in Türkiye- An Overwiev from the Early Republic to Present*, ed. Tuba Demirkol and Umut Başar, (Ankara: Nobel Publishing, 2025), 270.

70 Korkmaz, "Development Teaching Materials", 108.

71 Imam Hatip High Schools are vocational secondary schools designed to train religious personnel, such as imams and preachers, by combining a general curriculum with Islamic studies under the supervision of the Ministry of National Education.

72 "İlkerin Okulu Aliya'da Korece Hazırlık Sınıfı," Bayrampaşa Aliya İzzetbegoviç Anadolu İmam Hatip High School, July 9, 2025, https://bayrampasaaihl.meb.k12.tr/icerikler/ilklerinokulualiyadakorecehazirliksinifi_16469712.html

developed with institutional support from Korea. Specifically, works prepared with the backing of institutions like the Academy of Korean Studies (AKS) clearly demonstrate Korea's resolute and structural commitment to Korean language education in Turkey, concurrently highlighting the efficacy of cooperation. A significant outcome of this institutional collaboration is the Erciyes Eurasian Center for Korean Studies, established within Erciyes University with AKS support. The Center actively supports academic activities in the field of Korean Studies and Korean language/culture research[73]. Although the Center does not directly provide Korean language instruction, it contributes to the academic study of the Korean language and culture with numerous publishings and teaching materials. Its establishment with the support of the Korean government demonstrates the State's openness to collaboration with local institutions and universities, a strategy that can be regarded as an integral component of Korea's broader efforts to advance Korean language education abroad.

In addition, the online "Korean Basic Korean Dictionary Development Project for Turkish Middle and High School Students," jointly prepared by Turkish and Korean researchers, represents a strategic effort to strengthen the digital dimension of Korean language education in Türkiye. Within the scope of the project, a Turkish translation of the Basic Korean Dictionary developed by the NIKL was prepared and made available online; however, it is currently not accessible due to limitations in institutional support. This situation indicates that improving institutional support could expand access to such digital resources. The active participation of Turkish researchers also highlights the growing local capacity for material development.

Overall, Korean language education in Türkiye has evolved as a multifaceted reflection of Korea's soft power strategy. Through universities, KCC, KSIs[74], material development and teacher training projects, this structure has enabled Korea's language-based cultural diplomacy to gain institutional visibility in Türkiye. At the same time, the active involvement of Turkish institutions and scholars has allowed Korean language education to move beyond being a foreign-led initiative and transform into a localized and sustainable system. This situation demonstrates that Korea's soft power now operates not as a one-way cultural transmission but as a reciprocal and collaborative model grounded in mutual interaction and joint production.

5.1. Motivational dynamics behind learning Korean in Türkiye

This section explores the underlying motivations of individuals learning Korean in Türkiye, examining why and how the language has become attractive. Understanding the psychological factors that drive Turkish learners to study Korean provides deeper insight into how the language functions as an element of soft power.

The growing global demand for Korean cultural content has fueled interest in the Korean language. Today, Korean dramas serve as a gateway to Korea for audiences around the world. Since the 1990s, government-backed investments in the cultural industry and the international promotion of cultural production have laid the groundwork for a noticeable rise in demand for learning Korean from the 2000s onward. Son[75] notes that most undergraduate programs and elective courses teaching Korean worldwide were established only after Korea reached a certain level of economic development and after *hallyu* emerged as a global source of attraction.

A study conducted among Korean culture enthusiasts in Türkiye examined how their engagement with Korean culture contributed to their personal experience. The most frequently mentioned response was the desire to learn the Korean language[76]. This illustrates how Korea, through its cultural production, has gen-

73 "Director's Message", accessed 28 October, 2025, https://www.erckseurasia.com/mudurun-mesaji

74 In addition to these institutions, Korean language classes have also been offered by certain municipal governments and local private courses in various cities across Türkiye. However, as the primary focus of this study is on the official institutions established by the South Korean government, such local initiatives have been excluded from its scope.

75 Son, "Improving Current Status", 326–327.

76 Elif Taşdemir, "Fandom: Admiration of South Korea and South Korea Series As A Carrier of Culture", (Ph.D. Dissertation, Akdeniz University, 2018), 77-78.

erated global curiosity and a desire to learn its language, thereby expanding its soft power from culture to language. Although Korean language education in Türkiye began before the rise of *hallyu*, the phenomenon has significantly broadened the language's appeal among Turkish audiences. Türközü[77] likewise observes that since the spread of *hallyu* in Türkiye, the profile of Turkish students learning Korean has changed; many young people have begun learning the language independently through Korean dramas and K-pop outside formal university programs. This suggests that Korea's cultural production and promotional strategies have effectively enhanced the attractiveness and functionality of its national language even within the Turkish context.

Türkiye and Korea exhibit remarkable similarities in terms of historical values and social norms. Elements such as interpersonal relationships, respect for elders, forms of address within the family, and domestic life reveal notable parallels in both cultures. Studies indicate that this cultural affinity has played a significant role in the success of *hallyu* in Türkiye. As noted by Oh and Chae[78], the skillful blend of Western and Asian values within *hallyu* has enabled Turkish audiences to recognize familiar elements in Korean cultural content and thereby develop a sense of cultural identification with their own Asian roots. Recent studies highlight similar aspects: among the reasons for Turkish interest in Korean culture are psychological factors such as television productions reflecting a conservative social structure and a perceived cultural closeness[79]. By witnessing Korean lifestyles through dramas and identifying cultural commonalities between the two societies, Turkish audiences have significantly contributed to the formation of a strong fan base for *hallyu* in Türkiye. This demonstrates that the appeal of Korea's cultural products arises not only from aesthetic appreciation but also from shared values—deepening soft power at the level of emotional and cultural identification.

A similar pattern is observed among younger learners. The interest of high school students in Korean primarily stems from the Korean Wave, which encompasses popular culture elements such as dramas, films, and pop music[80]. Another group in which *hallyu* enthusiasm is particularly evident—students of imam hatip high schools—also demonstrates strong interest in learning Korean. Although their curriculum includes Arabic and English, these students are reported to approach Korean with greater enthusiasm and effort than the other languages[81]. This indicates that Korean culture resonates across diverse educational and sociocultural contexts, including different types of secondary education, reflecting the broad appeal of the Korean Wave among young learners. Rather than being limited to particular groups, interest in Korean emerges among students with varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds, highlighting the inclusive and wide-reaching nature of Korea's soft power.

In an environment where the allure of Korean culture incentivizes language learning, it is strategically vital that Korea sustains this interest. At this point, Korea's ability to sustain and support such interest carries strategic significance. Demircan[82] notes that, in addition to personal and social influences, factors such as free and accessible educational opportunities, library facilities, and the physical design of the Korean Cultural Center also play a role in stimulating interest in Korean culture. From this perspective, the crucial role of institutions like the KCC in maintaining this interest becomes evident. The fact that many educational programs offered at the Center, including Korean language courses, are free and easily accessible to everyone constitutes a major advantage. Moreover, by providing resource areas such as a library, the Center

77 Sırrı Göksel Türközü, "Korean Language Education in Turkey and Changes in the Type of Korean Learners", *Journal of Korean Culture 26* (2014), 70-71.

78 Oh, Chae, "Constructing Culturally Proximate", 84–85.

79 Büşra Tamer, Behlül Tokur, "Perception of Religion and Life Among Adolescents: Hallyu Sample", *Journal of Analytic Divinity 8* (2024): 210, accessed 28 October, 2025.

80 Dursun Eşsiz, "Student Needs Analysis for Developing a Korean Textbook as a Second Foreign Language in Secondary Education". *International Journal of Language Literature and Culture Researches 6* (2023): 148, accessed 28 October 2025.

81 Sümeyye Asa, " A Field Study on the Impact of South Korean Popular Culture (Hallyu) on Imam Hatip High School Students", (Ph.D. Dissertation, Bursa Uludağ University, 2019), 199.

82 Demircan, "South Korea In Turkey", 45.

supplies material and literature support for both Korean language learners and researchers—particularly in Türkiye, where Korean Studies does not yet have a deeply established academic tradition. Therefore, the establishment of such a center by the Korean government in Türkiye transforms cultural interest and language learning into mutually reinforcing processes, representing a strategic practice that sustainably strengthens the nation's soft power.

A different perspective on the motivation for learning Korean is also possible. Demircan[83] highlights its diverse impact, with participants indicating that acquisition is not merely a linguistic process but offers advantages in social networking, personal development, and career advancement. While the *hallyu* effect often drives initial interest, it gains individual sustainability when institutions like KCC convert this enthusiasm into tangible opportunities. The ensuing benefits from cultural contact inevitably foster a long-term commitment to the language. Consequently, soft power instruments such as KCC and KSI deepen Korea's soft power by indirectly supporting individuals' personal and professional development.

6. Conclusion

The first research question explored how the Korean government and its policies have positioned and institutionalized the Korean language as an instrument of soft power in Türkiye. Findings indicate that Korean language education has developed along two main axes. The first stems from Türkiye's own initiatives in higher education, later expanded through Ankara University TÖMER to meet rising domestic demand. The second derives from Korea's direct institutional presence through the KSI and KCC, which integrate language teaching into a broader framework of state-supported cultural diplomacy. Together, these two dimensions have transformed Korea's language policy in Türkiye from a pedagogical effort into a structured component of its soft power strategy.

The study revealed that as in other parts of the world, multiple ministries—including the MCST, MOE, and MOFA—collectively provide the institutional foundation for these efforts in Türkiye, particularly through the KSI and KCC. Through complementary systems such as TOPIK and SKA the Korean government deliberately aligns educational objectives with learners' long-term goals of studying or working in Korea. This coordination between individual aspiration and national policy converts Korea's cultural appeal into a sustainable and strategic form of attraction. Through such institutionalization, Korean language education has evolved into a stable infrastructure of soft power, reflecting the coherence of Korea's global language promotion strategies.

MOFA's initiatives to support universities offering Korean language and Korean Studies programs abroad further consolidate this framework through funding, instructor dispatch, and academic exchange programs. Although these departments were originally established through the initiative of the Turkish government rather than the Korean government, Korea's continued support for them has been incorporated as part of its broader language strategy. These actions reveal that language promotion extends beyond teaching—it also involves reinforcing academic representation and research capacity.

These integrated policies have enhanced the visibility and prestige of Korean in Türkiye, supporting both growth and instructional quality. By embedding principles of sustainability and professionalism, Korea has positioned Korean language education as a core pillar of its soft power strategy.

The second research question examined how the interplay between Korean popular culture and language learning shapes Korea's soft power in Türkiye. Studies on Turkish learners consistently identify *hallyu* as the primary driver of interest in the Korean language. The expanding number of learners in universities and institutions such as the KCC, KSI, and TÖMER reflects the cultural influence generated by Korean media. Within this context, KCCs and KSIs function as the most visible agents of Korea's cultural diplomacy, offering integrated programs that connect language and culture. Thus, popular culture and language learning reinforce each other, creating a self-sustaining dynamic of attraction. This synergy strengthens Korea's national

83 Demircan, "South Korea In Turkey", 45.

image in Türkiye.

From a soft power perspective, this represents a tangible example of Nye's concept of attraction—his principle that "others want what you want"—illustrating how the desirability of a nation's culture and values shapes its influence abroad. Korea's cultural diplomacy has cultivated an international image that stimulates engagement with its culture and language. This theoretical perspective also finds a clear reflection in the case of Türkiye, where the growing appeal of Korean culture and the increasing demand for Korean language learning exemplify this dynamic of attraction. The Korean language has thus evolved beyond a communicative tool into a strategic instrument that embodies the nation's identity and values.

In sum, the trajectory of Korean language education in Türkiye illustrates how Korea's global soft power strategy adapts to local contexts. It reveals that the effectiveness of soft power lies in combining institutional policy with cultural influence, allowing language to serve as a lasting medium of attraction.

6.1. Implications and recommendations

The Turkish case shows that the global promotion of Korean language education functions through a dual structure integrating Korea's institutional initiatives with local academic efforts. While this framework has enabled steady progress, several structural and contextual challenges remain.

Korea's inter-ministerial approach has been instrumental in expanding Korean language education worldwide. Yet, as Melissen[84] cautions, excessive bureaucratic division may hinder coordination. Sustaining Korea's soft power therefore requires coherent collaboration among ministries. The same applies to Türkiye, where Korean's inclusion as a second foreign language in secondary schools marks major progress but also exposes gaps in teacher training and material development. These issues call for closer cooperation between the educational authorities of the two countries.

Another challenge concerns the scarcity of dictionary resources for Turkish learners. While basic Korean–Turkish dictionaries exist, intermediate and advanced materials remain limited. Continued technical and financial support for the *Basic Korean Dictionary* project and translation of its higher-level volumes would greatly enhance accessibility and quality. Moreover, given the growing interest in Korean among younger age groups, it is essential to develop age-appropriate dictionary resources tailored to their linguistic and cognitive levels.

Moreover, limiting the TOPIK exam to a few major cities restricts equal access across Türkiye. This challenge could be addressed by implementing existing online testing systems in collaboration with local institutions, allowing Korea's language promotion efforts to attain a more inclusive nationwide structure consistent with its broader soft power strategy.

Another structural issue arises from the heavy reliance on native Korean-speaking instructors in Korean language education. While native speakers play an important role, limiting teaching positions primarily to them has led to administrative and procedural challenges, particularly in terms of recruitment, placement, and continuity. For a more sustainable and effective system, it is essential to incorporate locally trained teachers—especially graduates of Korean Language and Literature programs—into the teaching workforce. Such an approach would not only alleviate existing structural constraints but also strengthen the long-term institutionalization of Korean language education in Türkiye.

Ultimately, the sustainable success of Korean language education in Türkiye depends on stronger institutional collaboration, the localization of teaching resources and teacher training, and improved nationwide accessibility. These measures will help transform its current expansion into a durable dimension of Korea's soft power.

84 Jan Melissen, "Beyond the New Public Diplomacy," *Clingendael Paper* 3 (Clingendael Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 2011), 15, www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/20111014_cdsp_paper_jmelissen.pdf.

Peer Review	Externally peer-reviewed.
Conflict of Interest	The author has no conflict of interest to declare.
Grant Support	The author declared that this study has received no financial support.

Hakem Değerlendirmesi	Dış bağımsız.
Çıkar Çatışması	Yazar çıkar çatışması bildirmemiştir.
Finansal Destek	Yazar bu çalışma için finansal destek almadığını beyan etmiştir.

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