

**CULTIVATING EFFECTIVE  
EDUCATORS: EXPERIENTIAL  
LEARNING IN KOREAN LANGUAGE  
TEACHER EDUCATION<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract:** The global rise in Korean language education, driven by the growing influence of the Korean Wave (Hallyu), has sparked a need for innovative teaching methods to effectively address the needs of an increasingly diverse community of learners. This study examines the effectiveness of experiential learning programs in Korean language teacher education, focusing on their role in developing pedagogical competencies, shaping professional identities, and preparing educators for multicultural classrooms. By integrating hands-on, immersive activities such as classroom simulations, practicum placements, and community engagement projects, experiential learning enables future educators to bridge theory and practice, fostering deeper language proficiency and cultural understanding. Grounded in Situated Learning Theory and Possible Selves Theory, the research demonstrates how real-world teaching experiences not only enhance instructional skills but also broaden career aspirations and cross-cultural competencies among teacher candidates. The study further examines institutional responses to the growing demand for Korean language instruction, including curriculum innovations at leading universities and the expansion of international language programs. As Korean language education undergoes a paradigm shift driven by global cultural

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engagement and domestic demographic changes, this study contributes to the evolving discourse on effective teaching methodologies, underscoring the importance of adaptability, cross-cultural competency, and experiential learning in shaping the future of Korean language educators.

**Keywords:** Experiential Learning, Situated Learning Theory, Possible Selves Theory, Professional Identity Formation, Career Exploration, Language Teaching Practicum

### **예비 교사 양성을 위한 경험 중심 학습의 효과: 한국어 교원 교육에서의 정체성 형성과 진로 탐색**

**초록:** 한류의 세계적 확산에 따라 한국어 교육에 대한 수요가 급증하면서, 다양한 학습자 공동체의 요구에 효과적으로 대응할 수 있는 혁신적인 교수법 개발의 필요성이 대두되고 있다. 본 연구는 한국어 교원 양성과과정에서 경험 중심 학습 (Experiential Learning)의 효과를 고찰하며, 이러한 접근이 예비 교원의 교수 역량 향상, 전문 정체성 형성, 다문화 교실에 대한 준비도 제고에 어떠한 영향을 미치는지 분석한다. 교실 시뮬레이션, 교육 실습, 지역사회 참여 프로젝트 등 몰입형 실천 활동을 통합한 본 연구의 프로그램은 예비 교사들이 경험을 통해 이론과 실재를 연결하고 언어 능력과 문화적 이해 능력을 동시에 심화하는 데 기여한다. 본 연구는 상황 학습 이론 (Situated Learning Theory) 과 가능 자아 이론 (Possible Selves Theory) 에 기반하여, 실질적 실질적 교육 경험이 예비 교원의 교육적 기술은 물론 진로 동기와 문화 간 역량을 어떻게 고양하는지를 조명한다. 또한, 한국어 교육 수요의 급증에 대응하는 대학 커리큘럼 혁신 및 국제 교육 프로그램 확대 등 제도적 차원의 변화도 함께 분석하였다. 본 연구는 한국어 교원 양성의 패러다임 전환 속에서, 적응력, 문화 간 소통 역량, 실천 기반 교수법의 중요성을 강조하며, 앞으로의 한국어 교육자 양성에 있어 경험 중심 학습이 갖는 이론적·실천적 함의를 제시한다.

**키워드:** 경험 중심 학습, 상황 학습 이론, 가능 자아 이론, 전문 정체성 형성, 진로 탐색, 한국어 교육 실습

## **1. Introduction: Global Korean Wave (Hallyu) and the rising importance of Korean language education**

Over the past decade, the Korean Wave (Hallyu) has profoundly transformed global cultural consumption patterns, with K-pop groups

like BTS, television series such as *Squid Game*, and films like the Oscar-winning *Parasite* spearheading this cultural phenomenon. The rapid rise in the popularity of Korean cultural exports has driven a dramatic increase in demand for Korean language education, creating both significant pedagogical challenges and opportunities (Kim Suk-Young 김석영, 2023; Courtney McLaren and Jin Dal-Yong 진달용 2020; Nan Mei Mingxue 2023; Yoo Theodore Jun 2020). This phenomenon has triggered a paradigm shift in language instruction, compelling educators and institutions to innovate their teaching methodologies and curricula. The growing surge in Korean language acquisition necessitates a thoughtful reevaluation of traditional teaching methods, prompting the development of innovative instructional strategies tailored to the evolving and diverse needs of a rapidly expanding global student population (Wang and Kelly 2023). Educators must now develop strategies that cater to learners from diverse cultural backgrounds, varying proficiency levels, and varied motivations for studying Korean, thereby ensuring effective and inclusive language instruction in this dynamic educational landscape. At the same time, this global interest offers unique opportunities for advancing the field, encouraging research into effective teaching practices, and promoting the integration of cultural elements into language instruction. This trend not only challenges existing educational frameworks but also stimulates progress in teaching methodologies, curriculum design, and cross-cultural communication strategies.

South Korea's rapidly changing demographic landscape has led to a more diverse population, creating an urgent need for certified instructors equipped to address the complex demands of a heterogeneous student body.<sup>4</sup> In response, leading institutions such as Seoul National University, Korea University, and Yonsei University which are collectively known as the SKY universities, have introduced experiential learning programs into their curricula. These programs integrate theoretical knowledge with practical experience to address the critical shortage of certified educators capable of meeting the diverse needs of a heterogeneous student population. This study explores the impact of these initiatives on undergraduate students, focusing on how they shape students' understanding of Korean language education and

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<sup>4</sup> Recent data indicate that the global Hallyu fan base reached 225 million enthusiasts across 119 countries by the end of 2023, underscoring the urgent need for qualified language instructors.

influence their professional aspirations. The ultimate aim is to identify effective strategies for preparing future educators to excel in increasingly diverse and dynamic educational environments.

## **2. The Changing Landscape of Korean Language Education**

The field of Korean language education now stands at a critical juncture, necessitating innovative approaches to address emerging challenges. Future research must develop pedagogical methods tailored to diverse learner backgrounds, integrate advanced technology into language instruction, and enhance educators' cross-cultural communication skills. By embracing these challenges, the field can evolve to meet the demands of Hallyu's global spread and the changing demographics of language learners (Jin Dal-yong 진달용 2023; Kim Hyun Mee 김현미 and Lah Tae Jun 나태준 2023). As the Korean Wave continues to influence global popular culture, its impact on language education promises to reshape Korean language pedagogy and approaches to fostering cultural understanding in an increasingly interconnected world (Pyun, Miran 편미란, Fang, Lu, and Pi, Yunjin 피유진 2024). This evolving landscape presents opportunities for creativity, adaptability, and a renewed commitment to bridging linguistic and cultural divides in language education.

This study employs a theoretical framework that integrates Situated Learning Theory and Possible Selves Theory (Markus and Nurius 1986) to examine the efficacy of experiential learning programs to develop teaching skills and shape professional identities among future Korean language instructors. Through this framework, the study investigates how experiential learning programs can prepare students for the complex demands of Korea's diverse educational landscape while fostering both practical skills and professional identity development.

South Korea's evolving demographics and the global popularity of Hallyu have created unprecedented demand for Korean language education, prompting institutions and policymakers to respond with targeted initiatives and expanded infrastructure. The demographic landscape has undergone significant changes, marked by

a sharp increase in children from multicultural families, rising from 46,954 in 2012 to 193,042 in 2024 (Ahn, Hyun Seon 안현선, Lee, Jeesoo 이지수, Jin, Yuanying 2023). This demographic shift has amplified the demand for educators proficient in teaching Korean as both a first and second language. These transformations underscore the increasing importance of Korean language education domestically, reflecting the broader global interest in learning the Korean language. The convergence of these factors has created an urgent need for educators who can effectively address the complexities of teaching Korean in an increasingly multicultural context, both within Korea and internationally. The Ministry of Education's ambitious goal of attracting 300,000 international students by 2027 further underscores the pressing need to resolve the current teacher shortage.<sup>5</sup> Despite introducing a certification system for Korean language educators in 2005, only 83,749 teachers had been certified as of February 2024, revealing a persistent gap between supply and demand.

To meet the growing global demand for Korean language education, the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism has announced an ambitious plan to expand the number of King Sejong Institute centers worldwide to 350 by 2027.<sup>6</sup> This initiative aims to strengthen the global infrastructure for Korean language learning by increasing the number of international instructors to 350 and training 500 local educators during the same period. Additionally, the ministry plans to develop educational materials incorporating popular Korean cultural content, such as K-pop and dramas, to engage learners and enhance overseas education programs.

The National Institute for International Education has revamped the Test of Proficiency in Korean (TOPIK) to address the growing demand for proficiency assessments (Han, Sun-Hwa 한선화 2019). It introduced a Computer-Based Testing (CBT) and Internet-Based Testing (IBT) Speaking Test, officially launching the speaking section in 2023. This addition marks a significant evolution in TOPIK, which now includes speaking alongside its traditional sections of

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<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Education, Republic of Korea. (2023, August 31). "Targeting 300K International Students by 2027."

<sup>6</sup> The Korea Times. "Korea Designates 18 More King Sejong Institute Centers." <https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/foreignaffairs/20240624/korea-designates-18-more-king-sejong-institute-centers> (accessed June 24, 2024).

reading, listening, and writing. These innovations aim to evaluate the diverse needs of learners better worldwide and reflect the institute's commitment to adapting the test to global trends in language education.

This trend reflects broader cultural and educational engagement with Korea. The global Korean language education landscape has significantly changed, driven by cultural interest. For instance, the Korea Foundation noted a dramatic rise in Korean Wave fan club membership, from 9 million in 2012 to 224 million by 2023. This cultural enthusiasm has led to an expansion of educational infrastructure. By 2023, the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, in collaboration with the King Sejong Institute Foundation, expanded the King Sejong Institutes to 248 locations across 85 countries, serving over 216,000 learners. The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology also administered the Test of Proficiency in Korean (TOPIK) to a record 417,800 test-takers from 88 countries in 2023, marking a significant milestone in Korean language proficiency assessment. Recent data show a notable increase in interest in the Korean language within American higher education, marked by significant growth in student enrollment in Korean language programs. The Modern Language Association (MLA) tracks language enrollments and reported a substantial 78% increase in Korean language course enrollment from 2009 to 2016, reaching about 15,000 students. The MLA's latest report highlights Korean as one of only three languages, alongside American Sign Language and Biblical Hebrew, that have consistently shown enrollment growth (Modern Language Association 2023).

This dramatic expansion in demand for Korean language education has created both challenges and opportunities for preparing qualified educators. Leading Korean universities have responded by developing innovative experiential learning programs that integrate theoretical knowledge with practical teaching experience. This study examines one such initiative, a collaborative pilot program at Yonsei University, to understand how experiential learning shapes future educators' professional identities and career aspirations. Drawing on Situated Learning Theory and Possible Selves Theory (Markus and Nurius 1986), this research investigates how authentic teaching experiences within diverse educational contexts can prepare undergraduate students for the complex demands of contemporary Korean language education. The findings aim to inform curriculum

development and policy decisions as institutions worldwide work to meet the growing global demand for qualified Korean language instructors.

### **3. Theoretical Foundations: Situated Learning and Possible Selves**

To understand the effectiveness of experiential learning in teacher education, this study draws on Situated Learning Theory and Possible Selves Theory, which together illuminate how authentic experiences shape professional identity and motivation among future educators. Career exploration programs in Korean language education have traditionally been designed as “helper” or “mentoring” initiatives. These programs are grounded in the Situated Learning Theory principles, as they immerse students in real-world contexts where they engage with Korean language learners and actively contribute to a collaborative learning environment (Lave and Wenger 1991).

Situated Learning Theory posits that learning is most effective within authentic contexts and communities of practice, highlighting the crucial role of contextual immersion in developing professional skills and knowledge (Kim, Jung-Hee 김정희, Lim, Jong-Mi 임종미, and Kim, Eun-Man 김은만 2022). In Korean language education, this paradigm suggests that aspiring educators benefit significantly from engaging in real-world teaching scenarios, facilitating their transition from passive knowledge recipients to active contributors within the professional community. Through these immersive experiences, learners engage in “legitimate peripheral participation,” advancing from the periphery to the core of the community of practice as they accumulate expertise in supporting language learners (Lave and Wenger 1991: 29). This process enhances language proficiency and fosters cultural understanding, adaptability, and the formation of a professional identity.

Complementing this approach, Possible Selves Theory asserts that individuals are motivated by their perceptions of “potential future selves”. As such, experiential learning programs offer students the opportunity to envision themselves as future educators, making the

career path both tangible and personally meaningful (Markus and Nurius, 1986: 954). By synthesizing these theoretical perspectives, this study explores how experiential learning programs in Korean language education can prepare students for the complex demands of a diverse educational landscape. It examines how these programs can develop practical skills, promote cultural understanding, and cultivate professional identities among aspiring educators. By analyzing the connection between theoretical knowledge and practical application, this study aims to demonstrate how experiential learning aligns students with the evolving needs of Korea's multicultural society (Lee et al. 2025).

Recent studies have demonstrated that practical, career-oriented courses effectively enhance students' career planning and motivation (Oh Juil 오주일 and Jeong, Daeyul 정대울 2019; So, YeonHee 소연희 2022; Song Hanna 송한나 2013). Recent research highlights the effectiveness of such programs in fostering meaningful learning experiences. For instance, Seo Kyung-hye and Park Sun-ok (2019) found that Korean language mentoring programs help international students adjust to university life and provide mentors with valuable experiential learning opportunities in Korean language education. Similarly, Choi Anna and Lee Myung-gwi (2023) observed that mentors build positive relationships with learners and gain confidence through interactions, underscoring the transformative impact of situated learning experiences. These findings demonstrate how such programs benefit both mentors and mentees, enriching the professional development of future educators while supporting learners' integration and growth.

Building on this foundation, our study examines how experiential programs impact students' perceptions of Korean language education, cultivate professional identities, and inspire future career aspirations. In addition to addressing the growing demand for proficiency assessments, we aim to contribute to the expanding body of literature on Korean language pedagogy by examining the efficacy of experiential learning for future teachers. Our findings provide critical insights that can inform policy decisions and curriculum development in Korean language education programs, helping to meet the needs of both global learners and Korea's increasingly diverse student population.

The expansion of Korean Language Education programs across

various institutions highlights this approach's creative nature and growing relevance. For example, Yonsei University's Korean Language Institute (KLI) and Sogang University's Korean Language Education Center exemplify innovative curriculum development and teaching methodologies. These programs emphasize practical speaking skills and cultural immersion, with Yonsei focusing on diverse cultural activities and experiential learning to facilitate students' adaptation to Korean society. Sogang, meanwhile, has developed a curriculum that prioritizes speaking ability and incorporates authentic, real-life scenarios into the classroom.

Enhancing professional identity in Korean language education requires more than informal interactions and extracurricular activities, often the focus of traditional programs. These approaches, while valuable, can limit mentors' opportunities to acquire specialized knowledge or systematically refine their teaching methodologies. This study advocates a shift toward structured programs offering participants immersive Korean language education experiences. Such programs would enable educators to explore innovative teaching methods and cultivate professional competencies, fostering a deeper connection to their roles as language instructors and advancing their professional growth.

To implement this vision, we designed an undergraduate course titled "Survival Korean," the first collaborative pilot program involving the Department of Korean Language and Literature, the Office of International Affairs, the University of California Education Abroad Program (UCEAP), and the Institute of Higher Education Innovation (IHEI). IHEI's mandate to address social innovation and tackle societal challenges shaped part of the initiative. We offered the program as a 3-credit course, running from March to June 2024, for 15 weeks. In the course syllabus, we highlighted that traditional Korean language instruction remains rooted in a conventional second language (L2) teaching model, where instructors maintain complete control over the curriculum (Henry and Liu 2023). This rigid structure often fails to address the needs of diverse learner groups, leading to increased anxiety for some students and providing few opportunities for interactive and engaging learning.

The "Survival Korean" course was specifically designed for exchange students enrolled at Yonsei University during the spring semester who had little to no prior knowledge of the Korean language.

Unlike traditional language courses, this program emphasizes real-life challenges and cultural adaptation, empowering learners to navigate their new environment more effectively. The course also introduced a novel “project-based learning” (PBL) approach, which IHEI promoted, replacing conventional teaching methods (Wang and Kelly 2023). Korean language majors participating in the program were paired with international students as part of a collaborative learning experience. We intentionally chose the term “buddy” instead of “helper” or “mentor” to highlight the reciprocal nature of these relationships, emphasizing mutual growth and cultural exchange. This approach also provided participants with practical experience designing learning materials, planning class activities, and directly supporting learners. Through these hands-on opportunities, participants gained a clearer understanding of the teaching profession and were able to explore potential career paths in Korean language education.

This innovative framework fostered a supportive learning environment for Korean language learners and their peers, referred to as “buddies”. Grounded in the principles of Possible Selves Theory, the program encouraged participants to envision themselves as future educators through meaningful engagement with the field of Korean language education (Kubanyiova 2009; Sato 2020). It addressed shortcomings in traditional teaching methodologies and empowered participants to develop practical skills and cultural competencies vital for personal and professional growth.

By examining these experiential programs, we aim to identify the best practices and areas for improvement, highlighting effective strategies for cultivating linguistically proficient and culturally competent Korean language educators. We recognize the challenges in addressing structural curricular changes and decision-making processes involving university language institutes, broader educational politics, and traditional teaching methodologies. While implementing structural reforms requires time and deliberation, these debates are particularly relevant given the changing cultural landscape of contemporary students. Today's learners, having grown up in a society characterized by exposure to diverse cultures and languages, navigate multicultural environments with greater confidence and adaptability. As educators, we must equip students with the skills necessary for success in both academic and professional spheres by adopting a multifaceted approach to Korean language education. This study seeks to contribute to

advancing new pedagogical practices, supporting the field's ongoing growth and evolution in response to increasing global interest and significant demographic shifts in South Korea. By addressing these challenges, we aim to enhance the quality and effectiveness of Korean language education in an increasingly globalized context.

Additionally, the program responds to the evolving landscape of Korean language education. The global market for Korean language learning is projected to reach \$67 billion by 2034, with 2,154 schools across 47 countries already offering Korean language classes. This growing demand highlights the urgent need for qualified educators. By providing structured, experiential learning opportunities, universities can play a pivotal role in preparing the next generation of Korean language instructors to meet both global demand and domestic needs in this rapidly expanding field.

#### **4. Experiential Program Design and Implementation**

Building on these theoretical foundations, the “Survival Korean Program” at Yonsei University was designed to immerse undergraduates in real-world teaching scenarios, utilizing a “buddy system” and collaborative learning to foster hands-on skill development. Experiential career exploration programs play a vital role in bridging the gap between academic study and career pursuit, helping students envision themselves as future Korean language educators. While Korean Language and Literature programs in South Korea provide a strong foundation in language and culture, they often lack practical experiences necessary for fostering interest in teaching careers. This disconnect highlights the limitations of theoretical knowledge alone in motivating students to pursue careers in Korean language education. Undergraduate career exploration programs address this issue by allowing students to apply their academic knowledge in real-world settings. Such experiences are instrumental in helping students make informed career decisions (So, Yeon-Hee 소연희 2022). By connecting abstract concepts with practical application, these programs empower students to see themselves more clearly as educators, inspiring them to consider teaching a viable and rewarding career path.

Studies on experiential programs in foreign language education confirm their positive impact on strengthening the link between academic knowledge and career choices. Lee, Kilryoung 이길영 (2018) found that indirect experiences played a significant role in the career exploration of students in English education. Lee highlighted activities such as tutoring friends or observing teachers as key factors in students' career decisions. Similarly, Lee, Song 이송 (2023) reported that a course entitled “French Language and Culture Experience” in a French studies department helped students connect their academic studies to practical career paths. This course situates students' theoretical learning in a real-world teaching context, enabling them to envision potential career opportunities more concretely.

Experiential learning programs have proven highly effective in helping students explore career paths and build professional identities (Layton et. al. 2020). Researchers across various fields have shown that hands-on experiences are crucial in shaping students' career trajectories. For example, So, Yeon-Hee 소연희 (2022) found that experiential learning activities encouraged career preparation behaviors among engineering and education majors, while Jang, Nayoung 장나영 et al. (2024) reported that field experiences positively influenced the career decisions of pre-service teachers. Similarly, Kim, Yeon Hee 김연희 et al. (2024) demonstrated that modern dance students improved their career readiness and satisfaction through immersive experiences, and Kim, Ji Young 김지영 et al. (2012) observed that physical education majors participating in special education programs developed more positive perceptions of disabilities and adapted better to special education environments. These findings collectively highlight how experiential programs provide a platform for skill development, personal growth, and forming a professional identity, enabling students to refine their career aspirations through direct engagement with their chosen fields.

Providing hands-on teaching experiences is essential for fostering interest and confidence in Korean language education among undergraduate students. Immersing students in authentic classroom settings, such as collaborating with exchange students, allows them to build confidence, explore career options, and develop practical teaching skills. These experiences enable students to interact with learners, apply teaching methods, and receive constructive feedback from experienced educators, helping them envision a more straightforward and more

desirable future as educators. By addressing self-doubt through practical application, students can cultivate a more substantial interest in pursuing Korean language education as a career.

Building on these theoretical foundations, the “Survival Korean” program at Yonsei University was designed to immerse undergraduates in real-world teaching scenarios, utilizing a buddy system and collaborative learning to foster hands-on skill development. This study aims to empirically investigate how experiential Korean language education programs provide meaningful career exploration opportunities for undergraduate Korean Language and Literature majors. These programs play a crucial role in preparing the next generation of educators by sparking greater interest in teaching Korean as a potential career path. The findings will contribute to developing effective strategies to nurture future Korean language teachers, meeting both the growing global demand and domestic needs in an increasingly interconnected linguistic landscape.

It examines how undergraduate students in the Korean Language and Literature Department at Yonsei University perceive and engage with Korean language education through this experiential course. Using a qualitative approach, we selected eleven undergraduate students (seven female and four male) from the Department of Korean Language and Literature at Yonsei University, who were enrolled in the “Survival Korean” course, to participate in our focus group to analyze the impact of these experiences on their professional aspirations and decision-making. The group consisted of nine third-year students, one first-year student, and one fourth-year student. These students participated as “buddies” in a Korean language education program designed for exchange students, actively engaging in hands-on learning through various tasks. They developed learning materials, planned and facilitated class activities, and supported learners throughout the program.

During the academic semester, we collected data through surveys and in-depth interviews to evaluate the program’s impact. Pre- and post-surveys were administered via Google Forms, incorporating demographic and open-ended questions. The study involved 11 undergraduate Korean buddies who assisted 54 Korean language learners, exchange students from the University of California Education Abroad Program (UCEAP). For 15 weeks, participants engaged in bi-weekly online discussions on a password-protected bulletin board

called LearnUs. Using a message board format, they responded to weekly exercises, interacted with their buddies, and discussed course-related content in detailed, multi-paragraph posts. These interactions resembled focus group dynamics but allowed for deeper reflection due to the extended response time. All qualitative data were examined thematically to identify patterns and insights.

We began by evaluating the baseline knowledge of the Korean students regarding Korean language education to establish their starting point. Next, we analyzed their learning outcomes from the experiential program, emphasizing their engagement in a community of practice and the hands-on learning opportunities it offered. Lastly, we explored changes in their interest in Korean language education and career aspirations. We employed a detailed and multifaceted approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of the program's impact on students' experiences, learning outcomes, and career aspirations in Korean language education. As part of this process, we conducted follow-up interviews in four small groups, each lasting approximately 40 minutes, to delve deeper into survey responses and gather more nuanced perspectives on participants' experiences. These interviews provided valuable insights that clarified and expanded upon the data collected. Using Naver Clova Note for automatic transcription, we recorded the interviews and ensured their accuracy through a meticulous review and correction process conducted by five researchers. This integrated analysis provided a rich and holistic understanding of the program's impact on students' professional development and their evolving interests in pursuing careers in Korean language education.

We designed an experiential Korean language education program to immerse undergraduate students in Korean Language and Literature through practical, hands-on classes for exchange students. This immersion facilitated Situated Learning by providing participants with authentic experiences in the field. We structured the program based on Keller's ARCS model (Attention, Relevance, Confidence, Satisfaction) (1987) to maintain motivation for both learners and buddy participants (Cai et. al. 2022). By implementing the ARCS model, we aimed to maximize the potential for positive identity formation, aligning with the Possible Selves Theory.

We created a buddy system to encourage undergraduate buddies to explore their potential roles as Korean language educators. The program was supported by a supervising professor and four

graduate Korean language teachers. This structure allowed us to create a comprehensive learning environment that fostered practical skills, cultural exchange, and professional development for all participants. We divided learners into four groups, each supported by two or three buddies. Korean language teachers conducted primary instruction and managed the overall program, providing guidance and support to the buddy participants. Buddies collaborated closely with learners, assisting in creating educational materials, teaching Hangeul, grammar, and vocabulary, planning and facilitating classroom activities, supporting communication practice, and engaging in cultural exchange. This hands-on involvement gave buddies direct insight into the challenges Korean language teachers face, such as effectively conveying authentic Korean expressions and addressing learners' difficulties. The first four weeks focused on learning Hangeul, followed by nine weeks (excluding exam periods) dedicated to thematic lessons based on real-life topics. We chose these topics based on the practical needs of learners living in Korea.

We structured each thematic unit into two distinct stages: preparation and activity. During the preparation stage, learners selected vocabulary and expressions they wished to focus on, which “buddies” then used to create customized Korean language materials. These materials incorporated authentic, practical expressions alongside the learners’ specific requests and questions, ensuring the content was relevant and engaging. This personalized approach allowed students to learn and apply their knowledge effectively.

The activity stage consisted of three speaking-focused sessions designed to enhance communication skills. First, learners practiced dialogue using buddy-developed materials, emphasizing pronunciation and expression. Next, they participated in classroom role-playing activities that simulated real-life scenarios to improve their conversational abilities. Finally, learners visited real locations, such as restaurants or cafes, where they applied their Korean language skills in authentic situations. By involving buddy participants in curriculum design and teaching, the program offered them valuable hands-on teaching experience while inspiring them to envision themselves as future Korean language educators.

We designed this study to investigate the impact of experiential learning in Korean language education on undergraduate students’ career interests and professional development. Focusing on students

from the Department of Korean Language and Literature at Yonsei University, our research explores how participation in a hands-on Korean language education program shapes their perceptions of the field and influences their career choices. Adopting a qualitative research approach, we employ in-depth interviews and thematic analysis to better understand students’ lived experiences and evolving perspectives regarding their career trajectories and professional identities. This qualitative methodology allows us to capture the complexity and richness of students’ reflections, motivations, and aspirations as they engage with experiential learning opportunities. This research aims to provide meaningful insights into the role of Korean language education in undergraduate students’ professional development and to inform them about the design of more effective educational programs. By doing so, we seek to contribute to the ongoing efforts to meet the growing global demand for highly qualified Korean language educators.

## 5. Findings: Transformative Impact on Future Educators

Analysis of participant feedback and survey data reveals that experiential learning significantly enhances pedagogical skills, deepens cultural competence, and inspires undergraduates to pursue careers in Korean language education. A survey on perceptions of Korean language education provided valuable insights into participants’ prior knowledge, experiences, and interest in the field, establishing a baseline for evaluating the program’s impact.

Table 1. Understanding and Interest in the Field of Korean Language Education, Unit: Number of Participants

	<b>Question</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
1	I was aware of Korean language education.	1 (9.1%)	1 (9.1%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (63.6%)	2 (18.2%)

2	I was interested in Korean language education.	1 (9.1%)	1 (9.1%)	3 (27.3%)	5 (45.5%)	1 (9.1%)
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Source: Authors' survey data (pre-survey, 2024).

Before engaging in the experiential program, 9 out of 11 students (81.8%) were aware of Korean language education, while 2 (18.2%) indicated no prior awareness. Additionally, five students reported having some relevant experience in the field. Two had participated in private tutoring for elementary school students from multicultural backgrounds or engaged in language exchange programs at a Korean language institute. The other three described activities are less directly related to Korean language education, such as tutoring native Korean-speaking adolescents or volunteering as subway interpreters and city tour guides. While these experiences offered exposure to language and cultural exchange, they fell outside the traditional scope of Korean language education. This diversity in prior experiences enriched the program by bringing varied perspectives and setting the stage for a dynamic and engaging learning environment.

Before joining the program, we assessed participants' initial interest in Korean language education. Of the group, six participants (54.6%) expressed interest in the field, three (27.3%) reported feeling neutral, and two (18.2%) indicated no prior interest. To gain deeper insight into their motivations, we collected open-ended responses, revealing various reasons for their interest. Some participants aspired to major in Korean Language Education. In contrast, others enjoyed teaching Korean to foreigners or found language teaching personally rewarding, driven by a desire to share knowledge about Korea. Several participants expressed a passion for the Korean language and a curiosity about teaching it as a second language. One participant was inspired by a course they had taken on Korean Language Education as a foreign language. These responses highlighted the diverse motivations that shaped participants' engagement with the program.

Table 2. Fields of Courses Taken in the Department of Korean Language and Literature, Unit: Number of Participants (Multiple responses allowed)

	<b>Field of Area</b>	<b>Answer</b>
1	Modern Literature	7(48.8%)
2	Classical Literature	5(31.2%)
3	Korean Linguistics	2(12.5%)
4	Korean Language Education	2(12.5%)

Source: Authors' survey data (pre-survey, 2024).

Despite varying levels of awareness and interest, we found that this interest had not yet translated into substantial academic engagement. To explore this further, we examined the coursework of participants in the Korean Language and Literature department. Most students had taken courses in modern literature (7 students, 48.8%) and classical literature (5 students, 31.2%). Only two students (12.5%) had enrolled in Korean linguistics or language education courses, revealing a disconnect between expressed interest and formal academic pursuit.

Table 3. Understanding of Korean Language Teaching Certification and Instructional Methods, Unit: Number of Participants

	<b>Question</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
1	I was aware of the profession of Korean language teachers.	3 (27.3%)	4 (36.4%)	2 (18.2%)	2 (18.2%)	0 (0.0%)
2	I was aware of the qualification requirements for Korean language teachers.	5 (45.5%)	2 (18.2%)	3 (27.3%)	1 (9.1%)	0 (0.0%)
3	I was aware of Korean language teaching and learning methods.	4 (36.4%)	3 (27.3%)	2 (18.2%)	2 (18.2%)	0 (0.0%)

Source: Authors' survey data (pre-survey, 2024).

We also assessed participants' knowledge of the Korean language teaching profession and their qualifications before the program. Three participants (27.3%) were unaware of the profession, while four (36.4%) reported limited knowledge. Regarding teaching

qualifications, five participants (45.5%) had no prior understanding, and two (18.2%) had limited awareness. These findings highlight the gap between initial interest and formal engagement in Korean language education, setting the stage for our program to bridge this divide and provide practical, hands-on experience in the field.

We asked participants about their knowledge of Korean language teaching methods and strategies, and the responses revealed significant gaps in their understanding. Four participants (36.4%) reported having no prior knowledge, while three (27.3%) indicated only a limited understanding. Notably, none of the participants demonstrated a firm grasp of these areas. Open-ended responses provided further context, with one participant stating, "This program was my first real exposure to Korean language education, so I did not know much before." Another shared, "I had no prior knowledge other than knowing that foreigners study Korean at language institutes or academies." Others mentioned limited awareness of the field, such as the need to pass specific exams or complete graduate-level coursework to become a certified teacher and the lack of teaching certification options in their undergraduate programs.

These responses revealed that while some participants believed they were generally aware of Korean language education, their understanding was often superficial or incomplete. For instance, some misconstrue unrelated activities, such as volunteering as subway interpreters, as relevant teaching experience. Additionally, participants showed low enrollment in related coursework and limited knowledge about the qualifications required to teach Korean. To explore these patterns further, our research team conducted follow-up interviews, uncovering several structural factors that hindered deeper engagement with Korean language education.

The interviews highlighted a scarcity of specialized courses in Korean language education at the undergraduate level, leaving students with few opportunities to advance their studies. Many participants also expressed a lack of awareness about potential career pathways in the field, highlighting a need for improved information dissemination. Furthermore, a common misconception among interviewees was the belief that advanced degrees were mandatory for obtaining teaching certification. This misunderstanding may discourage some students from pursuing careers in Korean language education altogether.

These findings shed light on the complex challenges facing

Korean language education and underscore the importance of addressing these barriers. They emphasize the need for more comprehensive and accessible information about career pathways and more straightforward guidance on pursuing teaching certification. By addressing these issues at the undergraduate level, institutions can better support students interested in Korean language education and foster greater participation and growth in this critical field.

Before participants joined the program, we assessed their understanding and interest in Korean language education. As we explored the reasons behind low engagement in this field, a nuanced story unfolded from our participants' experiences. One student's journey highlighted the limited departmental opportunities, as they noted, "I knew that Korean language education differed from Korean language and literature, but there were not many opportunities to explore it in my department. It was not until I took a Korean Language Education course as a foreign language that I learned more about it." This scarcity of options seemed to influence course selection priorities, with another participant observing, "Most students choose courses based on credits and workload, rather than genuine interest in Korean language education."

The narrative revealed a troubling trend when we found low interest in practical experiences. This discovery underscored the challenges in promoting meaningful engagement with Korean language education, emphasizing the importance of developing strategies to stimulate interest in hands-on learning and career development. A participant shared their frustration, stating, "The language institute often advertises mentoring or tutoring opportunities, but hardly anyone applies, so I do not think many people are interested." This lack of enthusiasm also extended to career development courses. One student described a valuable seminar featuring guest speakers from the field but lamented its rarity and low enrollment due to its limited credit value, saying, "I am taking a career development seminar where guest speakers in Korean language education share their experiences, but opportunities like this are rare, and since the course only offers one credit, most students do not enroll." Through these personal accounts, we began to see the multifaceted challenges facing Korean language education, from institutional limitations to student priorities, all of which contribute to a cycle of low engagement that seems difficult to break. These responses reveal systemic barriers to engagement with

Korean language education, including limited course offerings, misaligned student priorities, and a lack of awareness about practical opportunities for learning. Our findings highlight the need for more robust, credit-worthy courses and experiences that can effectively introduce students to the field of Korean language education.

Our findings reveal that low engagement in Korean language education stems from structural barriers restricting students' ability to connect with the field and envision viable career paths. Key obstacles include limited access to relevant coursework and a lack of engaging extracurricular opportunities. Without authentic, hands-on learning experiences, students struggle to immerse themselves in the Korean language education community and see their potential roles. Furthermore, inadequate awareness of career options leaves many students without clear aspirations or direction. To address these challenges, it is essential to develop targeted, practical programs that provide meaningful exposure to Korean language education. Such initiatives would ignite genuine interest and active participation, enabling students to experience the field firsthand and imagine themselves as future educators. By bridging the gap between academic learning and real-world application, these immersive opportunities can help students form a more concrete and inspiring vision for their future in Korean language education (Lave and Wenger 1991: 35).

The following discussion highlights how the experiential program in Korean language education enriched participants' insights into the complexities of teaching and learning Korean. We assessed perceived learning outcomes using six questions, each rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree."

Table 4. Changes in Understanding of Korean Language Teaching and Learning, Unit: Number of Participants

	<b>Question</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
1	I learned how to teach Hangeul.	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (36.4%)	7 (63.6%)
2	I learned how to plan and create Korean language teaching materials.	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (27.3%)	8 (72.7%)

3	I learned how to explain Korean grammar and vocabulary.	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (54.5%)	5 (45.5%)
4	I learned how to design and conduct classroom activities for Korean language instruction.	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (18.2%)	9 (81.8%)
5	I learned how to understand and communicate with people from different cultures.	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	11 (100%)
6	I was able to identify the Korean language content that learners actually need.	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (27.3%)	8 (72.7%)

Source: Authors' survey data (post-survey, 2024).

Our findings revealed overwhelmingly positive results. All participants reported beneficial learning outcomes, with most selecting “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” for each statement. Notably, all eleven participants (100%) “Strongly Agreed” that the program significantly enhanced their intercultural understanding and communication, indicating a substantial boost in intercultural competence. As participants shared their open-ended responses, they provided rich insights into their learning experiences, actively highlighting three key areas where they experienced significant growth. They actively developed skills in creating effective educational materials, which empowered them to design engaging lessons. Additionally, participants gained a deeper understanding of learners' difficulties, allowing them to tailor their teaching strategies more effectively. Furthermore, they actively identified practical Korean expressions for daily use, enhancing their ability to connect theoretical knowledge with real-world applications. These reflections made it clear that participants were not just passive recipients of information but actively engaged in their learning process, transforming their experiences into valuable skills and knowledge (Lave and Wenger 1991: 31).

These results demonstrate the program's success in providing a

comprehensive, hands-on learning experience that bridges theoretical knowledge with practical application. By immersing students in real-world teaching scenarios, we fostered a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in Korean language education and cultivated essential skills for future educators (Zakrajsek and Schuster 2018).

Developing effective educational materials proved to be a transformative experience for participants, fostering growth, reflection, and a deeper understanding of their teaching practices. Our participants actively shared their experiences creating educational materials, weaving a narrative of development and insight. One participant took ownership of their teaching approach, stating, "I incorporated the instructor's intentions into my materials, moving beyond a set curriculum." As another educator reflected, this proactive stance resonated with others: "Designing teaching aids prompted deep reflection on content presentation and effective delivery." The process of creation sparked introspection for many. One participant noted, "Creating my teaching aids led to meaningful reflection on what and how to teach." Another educator observed that this hands-on approach enabled greater customization: "Making materials myself allowed for closer tailoring to students' needs." Through these experiences, participants gained a deeper understanding of the impact of their choices. One educator had a revelation about the broader implications of their work, sharing, "I realized how content prioritization and material design affect student engagement." These personal accounts painted a vivid picture of educators actively engaging with their craft, constantly refining their approach to better serve their students.

These experiences actively transformed participants from passive learners into dynamic contributors within the Korean language teaching community. As students created their materials, they embarked on a journey of discovery and growth. They gained a keen awareness of how instructional design directly influences learning outcomes, observing firsthand the impact of their choices on student engagement and comprehension. This process deepened their understanding of the teaching process, moving beyond theory to practical application (Oyserman and Terry 2006). They learned to craft practical and engaging materials, recognizing the importance of capturing and maintaining student interest. Moreover, through this hands-on approach, they began to identify and address the specific challenges Korean language learners face, tailoring their materials to overcome

common hurdles. This active engagement in material creation fostered a sense of ownership and professional identity, as participants saw themselves evolving from students into educators, ready to make meaningful contributions to the field of Korean language instruction (Marcus and Nurius 1986; Zakrajsek and Schuster 2018). This hands-on approach fostered a sense of belonging in the teaching community and provided valuable insights into the complexities of Korean language education. Participants' reflections demonstrate the program's success in bridging theoretical knowledge with practical application, preparing them for future roles as effective Korean language educators (Day, et al. 2006).

Through their experiences, participants developed a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by Korean language learners, revealing a complex interplay of cultural, linguistic, and pedagogical factors. As they engaged in material creation, one participant noted, "Designing materials revealed which concepts needed emphasis and where learners might struggle." This hands-on approach allowed educators to anticipate and address potential difficulties proactively. Direct interaction with students proved equally enlightening. One buddy shared, "Witnessing students' struggles firsthand prompted me to consider more effective teaching methods." This real-time feedback loop encouraged continuous improvement and innovation in teaching strategies. The diversity of learners presented both challenges and opportunities. An enthusiastic participant remarked, "I enjoyed addressing the challenges faced by exchange students by tailoring materials to meet their needs."

This adaptive approach also extended to recognizing linguistic differences, as another observer noted, "I observed how learners from different language backgrounds struggled with various aspects of Korean, such as pronunciation or grammar." Personalization emerged as a key theme in these narratives. Another buddy found that "Tailoring explanations to individual students' difficulties proved a valuable part of the experience." This individualized attention not only addressed immediate challenges but also deepened the educators' understanding of the learning process. Cultural nuances added another layer of complexity to language instruction. An intrigued participant shared, "I found it intriguing to see how students from different cultures faced unique challenges in learning Korean." This cultural awareness enhanced the educators' ability to create inclusive and effective learning

environments. Through these varied experiences, our participants transformed their understanding of language learning challenges, equipping themselves with practical insights to serve their diverse student populations better (Gonzalez-Bravo 2019).

These reflections demonstrate how participants developed empathy and a deeper understanding of the diverse challenges Korean language learners face. By immersing participants in an authentic learning environment, we provided them with opportunities to engage directly with learners, allowing them to develop practical teaching skills in a meaningful context. As they worked to help learners overcome challenges, participants began to see themselves as capable and effective future educators. This hands-on experience fostered the development of positive self-perceptions, reinforcing their potential to succeed as Korean language teachers. Through this hands-on approach, we enhanced participants' teaching skills and fostered a genuine connection to Korean language education. This immersive experience proved instrumental in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, preparing our students for future roles in Korean language education (Mackay 2019).

Participants emphasized the importance of teaching practical Korean expressions, illustrating how real-world applications can enhance and empower students' learning experience. One student enthusiastically remarked, "We taught expressions learners could immediately use in their daily lives," emphasizing the direct relevance of their lessons. Another participant contrasted this approach with their high school English learning experience, noting that the focus on real-world Korean expressions felt uniquely practical and engaging. The effectiveness of this method became clear as participants observed their students' growing confidence. One educator proudly shared, "We helped learners become more confident in using Korean for basic tasks, such as ordering food or asking for directions." This focus on practical skills resonated deeply with both teachers and students. Another participant reflected on the importance of context, stating, "Teaching context-specific expressions made our lessons more meaningful." One participant observed that the lessons' real-world applicability extended beyond the classroom: "Learners appreciated learning practical tips and phrases directly from Korean speakers and practicing them outside the classroom." This seamless connection between classroom learning and real-life application was particularly impactful.

Participants found great satisfaction in helping learners acquire immediately applicable Korean expressions. This experience highlighted the importance of focusing on real-world communication rather than relying solely on academic language. Our approach made learning more effective for students and reinforced participants' emerging identities as practical, supportive educators - a key component of Possible Selves Theory (Hamman et al., 2010; Markus & Nurius, 1986). Through this process, our participants transformed from mere instructors into facilitators of authentic, meaningful language acquisition, actively shaping their students' ability to navigate Korean-speaking environments with confidence and ease.

The Korean language education experiential program significantly enhanced participants' understanding of Korean language teaching and learning by immersing them in an authentic and interactive environment. This hands-on approach transformed students from passive observers into active practitioners, allowing them to engage deeply with the teaching process. As participants helped learners overcome challenges, they envisioned themselves as capable future educators. This experience fostered emotional fulfillment, as they witnessed the positive impact of their efforts on learners' progress and confidence, reinforcing their aspirations to pursue careers in Korean language education. By bridging theory with practice, the program enhanced teaching skills and sparked a passion for Korean language education among participants, laying a solid foundation for their future careers in this field.

## **6. Discussion and Implications**

The results highlight not only the personal transformation of participants but also the broader implications for curriculum design and institutional policy in Korean language teacher education. Participation in the Korean language education experiential program transformed participants' career aspirations, igniting a strong interest in pursuing Korean language education as a professional path and fostering enthusiasm for hands-on teaching experiences. By analyzing survey data alongside qualitative responses, we assessed changes in participants' interest, future plans, and program evaluations.

Table 5. Changes in Career Intentions Toward Korean Language Education, Unit: Number of Participants

	<b>Question</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
1	This course sparked my interest in pursuing a career in Korean language education.	0 (0.0%)	1 (9.1%)	2 (18.2%)	4 (36.4%)	4 (36.4%)
2	I would like to continue teaching Korean to foreigners in the future.	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (45.5%)	6 (54.5%)
3	I would recommend this course to other undergraduate students in the Department of Korean Language and Literature.	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (9.1%)	10 (90.9%)
4	I believe more programs like this one should be offered to provide experiential learning opportunities in Korean language education.	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	11 (100%)

Source: Authors' survey data (post-survey, 2024).

The findings revealed significant growth in their aspirations. Many participants expressed increased enthusiasm for a career in Korean language education, with eight out of eleven (72.8%) indicating that the program heightened their interest by selecting “Agree” or “Strongly Agree.” This renewed passion translated into unanimous support for continuing to teach Korean in the future, with five participants (45.5%) choosing “Agree” and six (54.5%) selecting “Strongly Agree.”

Beyond individual career goals, participants strongly endorsed the program itself. Ten participants (90.9%) stated they would “strongly recommend” the program to their peers, while one participant (9.1%)

chose “Agree.” Their feedback also emphasized the need for more opportunities like this experiential program. Every participant (100%) “Strongly Agreed” that similar programs should be offered to support aspiring educators further. These results underscore the program’s transformative impact in shaping participants’ professional aspirations and fostering collective enthusiasm for expanding access to immersive learning experiences in Korean language education.

These individuals actively embraced their roles as future educators and advocates for meaningful language learning opportunities through their participation. The experiential program significantly heightened their interest in Korean language education and motivated them to consider it as a viable career path. This aligns with the principles of envisioning future roles, which suggest that imagining oneself in a desired professional position enhances motivation and commitment. By immersing participants in hands-on teaching experiences, the program allowed them to step into the role of a Korean language educator, helping them form a clearer and more attainable vision of their potential future selves within the field. This process fostered enthusiasm and confidence, laying a strong foundation for their pursuit of careers in Korean language education.

In their open-ended responses, participants shared how the program profoundly transformed their perspectives on the importance and value of Korean language education. One participant reflected on the rewarding nature of the experience, saying, “I found the experience rewarding. It made me realize how valuable it is to give foreigners a positive experience of the Korean language and culture.” Another participant described how the program shifted their understanding of the global significance of Korean language education: “Before this program, I had not fully grasped the extent to which foreigners want to learn Korean. Now, I see the growing global interest in the Korean language and culture.” They continued, “I understand the importance of Korean language education, and it made me reflect on how it needs to evolve to meet the diverse needs of learners.”

These reflections revealed a profound transformation in participants’ understanding of Korean language education. Initially holding a limited and abstract view, they developed a nuanced appreciation of their societal and cultural significance. This shift highlights the value of learning through authentic, real-world experiences. By engaging in practical teaching scenarios, participants

gained a deeper understanding of the field's impact, experiencing firsthand the growing global demand for Korean language skills and recognizing the importance of adaptive, learner-centered approaches. This hands-on experience enhanced their teaching abilities and ignited a passion for the field, underscoring the program's success in cultivating future educators.

Participants also expressed a heightened interest in discovering effective and practical teaching methods to make Korean language education more accessible and engaging. Their reflections illustrated this shift in focus. One participant shared, "I became interested in figuring out how to make Korean language education more enjoyable and less intimidating for foreign learners." Another noted, "The program made me think about how to teach Korean effectively so that students can use it in real-life situations." Others emphasized their curiosity about teaching practical skills, stating, "I am now more curious about how to teach practical Korean conversation skills and explain grammar and pronunciation in a way that's easy to understand."

The cultural dimension of teaching also resonated deeply with participants. One reflected, "Teaching Korean allowed me to experience cultural exchange, which was rewarding. It made me think about designing fun, relaxed lessons introducing Korean culture." These insights demonstrated an evolving commitment to making Korean language education practical and meaningful. Participants highlighted their growing passion for teaching and their recognition of education as a bridge between cultures - an essential realization for future educators in an increasingly interconnected world (Vargas et al. 2024).

The program inspired participants to adopt creative and learner-centered teaching strategies, empowering them to transition from passive observers to confident, active educators. One "buddy" observed, "The program made me think about how to teach Korean effectively so that students can apply it in real-life situations," demonstrating the importance of authentic, contextual learning experiences. As participants designed lessons and addressed learners' needs, they developed a sense of belonging within the professional community of Korean language educators. Another participant reflected on this growth, saying, "I am now more curious about how to teach practical Korean conversation skills and explain grammar and pronunciation in a way that is easy to understand."

The program's success in cultivating future educators became evident as participants strongly desired to continue exploring Korean language education as a potential career path. One buddy concurred, "I am now more motivated to learn about Korean language teaching certification and other requirements for becoming a teacher." Another remarked, "This program sparked my curiosity about the broader world of Korean language education and how I can contribute to it." These reflections highlight how experiential programs effectively inspire students to consider Korean language education a viable career option. According to the "Possible Selves Theory," experiencing the teaching role firsthand allows individuals to envision themselves more vividly in that future, making the career path feel both achievable and meaningful (Hamman, 2010). The program helped participants construct a clearer sense of their potential professional identities by connecting theory to practice. The transformative impact of this experiential learning approach underscores its importance in Korean language education curricula. As the field continues to evolve, innovative methods such as large language models, virtual reality solutions, and metaverse platforms are being explored to enhance language learning experiences. These advancements and hands-on teaching experiences empower students to envision and actively pursue careers in this vital and growing field.

Our study actively examined how undergraduate students in the Department of Korean Language and Literature at Yonsei University perceive and engage with Korean language education. We explored the impact of an experiential Korean language education program on participants' understanding of the field and their career intentions. Our findings revealed that the program positively influenced participants, deepening their knowledge, enhancing their cultural competence, and strengthening their career exploration behaviors. Grounding our approach in "Situated Learning Theory," we transformed participants from passive learners into active practitioners. Through hands-on experiences, students expanded their knowledge beyond the superficial by designing learning materials, planning and managing classroom activities, and supporting Korean language learners. This process allowed participants to assume legitimate peripheral roles, fostering a deeper understanding of effective teaching strategies and the complexities of Korean language education.

The program also actively developed participants' intercultural

competence. Students engaged in meaningful interactions with Korean language learners from diverse cultural backgrounds, promoting intercultural communication skills. We placed them in authentic, culturally diverse contexts, enhancing their ability to adapt teaching methods to meet the specific needs of learners. This experience contributed to increased global awareness, enhanced cultural sensitivity, and the development of skills as culturally responsive educators. By providing these immersive experiences, we enabled participants to gain practical insights into Korean language education and develop crucial skills for future careers in this field.

The hands-on nature of the program allowed students to actively engage with the material, moving beyond theoretical knowledge to practical application. Participants learned about teaching strategies and implemented them in real-world scenarios, receiving immediate feedback and opportunities for reflection. This approach effectively bridges the gap between academic study and professional practice. Students experienced firsthand the challenges and rewards of teaching Korean to diverse learners, allowing them to envision themselves more clearly in future roles as language educators. The program's success in enhancing understanding and developing intercultural competence underscores the value of experiential learning in preparing students for careers in Korean language education.

The program revealed a significant shift in participants' career intentions, transforming initial, superficial interests in Korean language education into more focused, deeper aspirations. However, they actively began envisioning themselves as future educators through the program. The experiential nature of our approach enabled participants to construct more explicit, vivid images of their "future teacher selves," fostering a sense of purpose and motivation to pursue this career path. Participants expressed enthusiasm about continuing to teach Korean and actively sought information about becoming certified Korean language teachers. The program elicited profound feelings of accomplishment and emotional satisfaction among participants as they witnessed their learners' progress. This emotional reward reinforced their evolving possible selves, aligning their envisioned futures with the gratification of supporting learners. Additionally, participants reported significant personal growth, including increased confidence, improved problem-solving skills, and a deeper understanding of the teaching profession. These developments actively contributed to the formation

of their overall professional identity.

Furthermore, our study makes valuable contributions to scholarly research and educational practice. Our research makes significant academic contributions by providing concrete evidence that supports the effectiveness of hands-on learning programs in sparking students' interest and involvement in Korean language education. We have drawn on social theory to deepen our understanding of how real-world experiences shape students' career goals. This is particularly important because, while Korean culture is becoming increasingly popular worldwide and the demand for Korean language teachers is growing, there has been a lack of research on motivating students to pursue this career path. Our study fills this gap by showing how practical, experiential learning can help students develop a strong professional identity and career ambition in Korean language education. Demonstrating the power of learning through hands-on experiences opens new avenues for preparing the next generation of Korean language educators (Hamman et. al. 2010).

Our findings have clear practical implications for universities. We strongly recommend that they incorporate hands-on learning programs into their Korean language education curricula. These programs should provide students with structured opportunities to gain real-world teaching experience, particularly in diverse cultural settings. This approach helps bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world application, allowing students to see how their academic knowledge translates into practical skills. Participating in these experiential programs gives students a clearer vision of themselves as future Korean language educators. This forward-looking perspective nurtures a new generation of motivated and skilled teachers in the field. The impact of our study goes beyond just the students who participated. We hope to inspire other educational institutions to adopt similar hands-on learning approaches. This could create a domino effect, encouraging more students to consider Korean language education as a viable career path. With the worldwide demand for Korean language skills on the rise, our research offers a clear path forward. It shows how to effectively prepare the next generation of educators who will be crucial in meeting this growing global need for Korean language instruction.

Our study provides valuable insights, but we acknowledge several limitations that influence our findings. We implemented an experiential program different from traditional Korean language classes

at language institutes or academic institutions. As a result, our participants' experiences may not fully reflect the realities of standard Korean language teaching environments. Future research should explore how similar programs can effectively integrate into more traditional educational settings. We assessed the program's impact over a single academic semester. While we observed positive changes in participants' perceptions and career intentions, we cannot determine whether these shifts will lead to long-term career commitments. To address this limitation, we recommend conducting longitudinal studies to examine the sustained impact of experiential programs on students' career trajectories. Tracking participants' career choices and professional development over several years post-graduation would provide valuable insights. Additionally, comparing the long-term outcomes of students who participate in experiential programs with those who do not would offer a more comprehensive understanding of the program's effectiveness.

By addressing these limitations, we can better understand how experiential learning programs influence students' career paths in Korean language education. This knowledge will enable universities to design more effective curricula and better prepare students for careers in this rapidly growing field. To expand on the findings of this study, future research should investigate the lasting impact of experiential Korean language education programs on students' career decisions, focusing on whether their envisioned "possible selves" persist over time and translate into actual career commitments. Studying a broader range of students, including those from diverse academic disciplines, would help determine the generalizability of these findings across various educational backgrounds. Analyzing how differences in program structures affect participants' learning outcomes, professional identity development, and career intentions would provide deeper insights into effective preparation methods for the next generation of Korean language educators.

## **7. Conclusion**

By anchoring practical teaching experiences in established educational theory, experiential learning is a dynamic force in preparing skilled,

flexible, and culturally responsive Korean language educators. Experiential learning has emerged as a powerful tool in preparing future educators and language learners, bridging the gap between theory and practice in ways that traditional classroom instruction often cannot achieve. This innovative approach transforms students from passive recipients of knowledge into active contributors, allowing them to develop crucial skills and a strong professional identity through hands-on experiences.

The transformative impact of experiential learning in this study is best understood through its theoretical grounding in two complementary perspectives: “Situated Learning Theory” (Lave and Wenger 1991) and “Possible Selves Theory” (Markus and Nurius 1986). Situated Learning Theory posits that learning is most effective within authentic contexts and communities of practice, emphasizing the importance of contextual immersion for developing professional skills and knowledge. In Korean language teacher education, aspiring educators benefit greatly from engaging in real-world teaching scenarios, facilitating their progression from passive knowledge recipients to active contributors within the professional community.

Through experiential learning, participants engage in what Lave and Wenger describe as “legitimate peripheral participation,” moving from the periphery to the core of the teaching community as they accumulate expertise and confidence (Lave and Wenger 1991). This process enhances language proficiency and fosters cultural understanding, adaptability, and the formation of a professional identity. By participating in authentic teaching experiences, future educators gain firsthand insight into the complexities of classroom dynamics, learner diversity, and the practical challenges of language instruction - elements often absent from traditional, theory-based teacher education programs.

Possible Selves Theory adds a motivational lens, asserting that individuals are driven by their visions of potential future selves. Immersive teaching experiences allow students to concretize their career aspirations, making the path to becoming a Korean language teacher both tangible and personally meaningful. This alignment between self-concept and professional possibility is critical for fostering long-term commitment and engagement in the field. By synthesizing these theoretical perspectives, this study demonstrates how experiential learning programs in Korean language education prepare students for

the complex demands of a multicultural and rapidly evolving educational landscape. The framework enables a nuanced analysis of how practical teaching experiences develop pedagogical skills, promote cultural understanding, and cultivate robust professional identities among aspiring educators. Ultimately, bridging theoretical knowledge with real-world application is essential for aligning teacher preparation with the evolving needs of Korea's increasingly diverse society and the global demand for qualified Korean language instructors.

For aspiring teachers, the journey often begins with excitement mixed with trepidation. Many students initially feel overwhelmed by the prospect of standing in front of a classroom. However, a remarkable transformation occurs as they engage in real teaching scenarios. As one student shared, "Initially, the responsibility of teaching overwhelmed me, but as my engagement increased, I began to identify as a genuine educator." This metamorphosis from nervous novice to confident professional underscores the profound impact of experiential learning on career aspirations and self-perception.

Mentorship is another critical pillar, providing guidance and perspective that textbooks alone cannot offer. One participant reflected, "My mentor helped me understand that teaching is not just about delivering content; it is about creating connections." This highlights the emotional and relational aspects of education that experiential learning brings to the forefront, enriching students' understanding of their future profession.

Experiential learning also demonstrates a powerful impact on language acquisition. Students are thrust into immersive activities, working alongside Korean buddies and engaging in real-world conversations. While initially daunting, these experiences become catalysts for growth, boosting confidence and communication skills in ways that traditional classroom exercises cannot match.

The uniqueness of experiential learning lies in its ability to cater to diverse learning styles and needs, proving particularly transformative for students who often struggle with traditional teaching methods. This approach keeps them consistently engaged and actively participating, as one exchange student with ADHD noted, "I felt consistently engaged, which for me is hard to do." Beyond engagement, experiential learning enhances language skills, fosters cultural competence, and builds adaptability - essential qualities for navigating an interconnected world. Through real-world interactions, students develop a deeper

understanding of different cultures and perspectives, as highlighted by a participant who realized the importance of being “flexible and empathetic” when teaching students from diverse backgrounds.

As students advance through their experiential learning journey, they develop a more profound commitment to their studies and a greater willingness to view mistakes as valuable learning opportunities. Applying their skills in real-world contexts fosters a sense of accomplishment and motivation. One student shared, “I honestly used the expressions I learned frequently, and sometimes I would hear native Koreans use the phrases, which made me feel happy to know I understood what they said.” These experiences create a positive feedback loop, inspiring students to stay engaged and continue learning with enthusiasm.

Ultimately, this study reveals the transformative potential of experiential learning in both teacher preparation and language acquisition, as illuminated by its theoretical foundations. These programs equip students with the skills, confidence, and cultural awareness needed for future professional success by immersing them in authentic, challenging situations. One student aptly concluded, “This experience transformed me – not just as a teacher, but as a person.” This powerful testament highlights the holistic impact of experiential learning, suggesting that its integration into educational curricula could revolutionize how we prepare the next generation of educators and global citizens.

## **Declaration Statement**

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