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DIGITAL-ERA UKRAINIAN LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN KOREA: INSTITUTIONAL FOUNDATIONS, EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

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This article examines how Ukrainian language education in the Republic of Korea has been institutionally formed and developed amid the dual transformations of digitalization and the reconfiguration of the international order. Ukrainian was designated a Critical Foreign Language under the *Act on the Promotion of Education in Critical Foreign Languages* (officially translated as *Less Commonly Taught Foreign Languages*) in 2016, and its importance has further increased since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Ukrainian language education in Korea operates through a highly concentrated, single-institution model centered on the Department of Ukrainian Studies at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies. Contrary to the common perception that such a structure limits educational outreach, this study argues that it has functioned as an institutional strength by ensuring curricular coherence, standardization of teaching materials, and sustained training of specialists. The publication of standardized textbooks at the A1–A2 levels in 2025 and the forthcoming B1–B2 volumes in 2026 demonstrate Korea's transition from introductory instruction toward systematic training of independent language users. The article further analyzes key challenges facing Ukrainian language education in the digital era, including the limited availability of authentic online materials, insufficient multimodal resources, ethical and pedagogical constraints on the use of AI-based tools, and perceived cultural distance among learners. Rather than rapid technological adoption, Korean Ukrainian language education has pursued a gradual digital transition based on web-based textual and audio materials, reflecting the realities of Critical Foreign Languages with limited learner populations. This study proposes future directions emphasizing the development of a national digital language education platform, institutionalization of blended learning, cautious and limited use of AI, and stronger linkages between education, research, and societal needs related to Ukraine's postwar reconstruction. In doing so, the article contributes empirical insights and policy implications to discussions on strategic language education and digital language pedagogy.

Key words: Ukrainian language education, **digital education**, **critical foreign languages**, **strategic languages**, multimodal learning, artificial intelligence, language policy.

DOI:

I. Introduction

Since the mid-2010s, the international community has experienced a series of complex and interrelated transformations, including the intensification of geopolitical tensions, the reconfiguration of global supply chains, and growing uncertainty in global security environments. Within this context, foreign language education is no longer understood merely as a means of enhancing individual communicative competence, but is increasingly recognized as a strategic asset directly linked to a nation's diplomatic, security, and economic capacities. In particular, languages with relatively small learner populations but strong ties to specific regions are being repositioned beyond the category of "rare languages" and are instead conceptualized as Critical Foreign Languages, essential to the implementation of national strategies.

A representative institutional response to this shift in perception is the *Act on the*

Promotion of Education in Less Commonly Taught Foreign Languages, enacted by the Korean government in 2016. Although the official English title of the Act employs the term *Less Commonly Taught Foreign Languages*, the policy framework it establishes effectively conceptualizes these languages as Critical Foreign Languages to be cultivated from the perspective of mid- to long-term national capacity building rather than short-term educational demand. The Act presents a comprehensive policy structure encompassing textbook development, teacher training, learner support, international exchange, and the expansion of research infrastructure. Ukrainian was designated under this Act as one of Korea's Critical Foreign Languages. At the time of its designation, Ukrainian was perceived as a language with relatively limited learning demand; however, subsequent changes in the international political environment have led to a steady expansion of its strategic importance.

In particular, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 elevated Ukraine to a central actor in the European security order and international politics, while postwar recovery and reconstruction emerged as major tasks for the international community. Within this context, Ukrainian has come to be positioned not merely as a regional language, but as a Critical Foreign Language applicable across a wide range of domains, including diplomacy, security, postwar reconstruction cooperation, humanitarian assistance, and activities within international organizations. This shift has also prompted a reassessment within Korean society of the objectives and orientation of Ukrainian language education.

At the same time, higher education as a whole is undergoing another structural transformation in the form of digitalization. The expansion of online learning environments, the widespread adoption of multimodal learning materials, and the emergence of artificial intelligence-based language learning tools are fundamentally reshaping teaching and learning practices as well as assessment systems in foreign language education. However, these changes cannot be applied uniformly across all language education contexts. In the case of Critical Foreign Languages, which are often characterized by small learner populations and educational infrastructures concentrated in a limited number of institutions, digital transformation functions as a complex challenge that entails both new opportunities and structural constraints.

Ukrainian language education in Korea is situated at the intersection of these two dynamics: the changing status of Ukrainian as a Critical Foreign Language within national strategy and the transformation of educational environments driven by digitalization. At present, the Department of Ukrainian Studies at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies is the only institution in Korea that offers Ukrainian language education as a full-fledged undergraduate major, indicating that Ukrainian language education in Korea operates through a highly concentrated, single-institution model. While this structure has often been criticized for limiting the breadth of educational provision, it has simultaneously functioned as an institutional strength by ensuring curricular coherence, enabling the standardization of teaching materials, and supporting the sustained training of specialized human resources.

Despite these distinctive characteristics, relatively little research has offered a comprehensive analysis of Ukrainian language education in Korea within the context of the digital era. Existing studies have tended to focus either on Critical Foreign Language policy in general or on the structural constraints faced by individual languages, while integrative examinations that address digital transformation, textbook development, learning environments, and educational outcomes within a unified analytical framework remain scarce. In response to this gap, the present article adopts Ukrainian language education

in Korea as a case study through which to derive analytical frameworks and implications applicable to Critical Foreign Language education more broadly.

The objectives of this study are threefold. First, it analyzes the policy and institutional foundations through which Ukrainian language education in Korea has been established and developed as a form of Critical Foreign Language education. Second, it examines the major challenges confronting Ukrainian language education in the digital era, with particular attention to authentic learning materials, multimodal learning content, the use of artificial intelligence, and issues of cultural distance. Third, it proposes future directions and policy-oriented and pedagogical recommendations aimed at ensuring the sustainability of Ukrainian language education as a strategically grounded model of Critical Foreign Language education.

To achieve these objectives, this study employs a qualitative research methodology that combines policy document analysis with educational case analysis. The discussion focuses on the curriculum, textbook development, digital learning environment, and academic and social outcomes of the Department of Ukrainian Studies at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies. Through this approach, the article seeks to provide empirical grounding for discussions of Korea's Critical Foreign Language policies and digital language education, while contributing to the exploration of future directions for Ukrainian language education in the digital era.

II. Korea's Critical Foreign Language Education Policy and the Institutional Position of Ukrainian

2.1. Formation and Transformation of Critical Foreign Language Education Policy

Critical Foreign Language Education is characterized by features that distinguish it from conventional foreign language education policy. Whereas general foreign language education has traditionally focused on improving communicative competence for large numbers of learners, Critical Foreign Language Education aims to accumulate language capacities essential to the implementation of national strategic objectives over the long term, regardless of the size of the learner population. Brecht and Rivers (2000) conceptualize such languages as “national language assets,” emphasizing that education in strategic languages should be treated not as a response to short-term demand but as an object of institutionalized and sustained investment [3 : 3–6].

In Korea, this shift in perception began to take concrete shape during the 2010s. In particular, the *Act on the Promotion of Critical Foreign Language Education*, enacted in 2016, redefined minority languages that had not been sufficiently addressed within conventional foreign language policy as strategic resources at the national level and established an institutional foundation for their systematic development. This Act went beyond the mere designation of language categories, presenting a comprehensive policy framework encompassing textbook development, teacher training, learner support, international exchange, and the expansion of research infrastructure.

However, previous studies indicate that while Critical Foreign Language Education policy has been partially successful in establishing an institutional framework, it has also revealed limitations in adequately reflecting language-specific characteristics and educational realities. Lee (2024) points out that Korea's Critical Foreign Language policy

applies uniform standards across a wide range of languages, thereby failing to sufficiently capture differences in educational environments and stages of development among individual languages [14 : 112–118]. **These limitations are particularly pronounced in languages with small learner populations and educational infrastructures concentrated within a limited number of institutions.**

These critiques suggest that Critical Foreign Language Education should not be operated through a single, uniform policy framework, but rather requires differentiated approaches that take into account language-specific conditions and stages of development.

2.2. The Convergence of the Strategic Language Concept and Digital Transformation

One notable trend in recent discussions surrounding Critical Foreign Language Education is the convergence of the strategic language concept with the discourse on digital transformation. Advances in digital technology have expanded access to language education while simultaneously enabling the accumulation of learning materials, the standardization of instructional methods, and the increased efficiency of teaching and learning processes. Ferguson (2012) argues that digital learning environments can facilitate qualitative transformation in language education by enabling the accumulation of learner data, the provision of personalized feedback, and the design of individualized learning pathways [5 : 7–10]. These characteristics offer new possibilities even for small-scale language education contexts with limited learner populations.

Nevertheless, digital transformation does not automatically generate positive outcomes for Critical Foreign Language Education. When technological adoption precedes the development of sufficient learning materials and pedagogical design, it may instead lead to superficial learning and a decline in educational quality. Mayer (2020) emphasizes that for multimodal learning to function effectively, it must be grounded not in the simple combination of technologies, but in instructional design informed by cognitive load theory [15 : 85–92]. This perspective makes clear that in Critical Foreign Language Education, digital adoption is not a matter of speed, but of sequencing and conditions.

These discussions suggest that digital transformation can produce meaningful educational effects only when it is aligned with the objectives of strategic language education.

2.3. The Changing Policy Status of Ukrainian

At the time of its initial designation as a critical foreign language, Ukrainian was generally perceived as a language with relatively limited learning demand. However, following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Ukraine has emerged as a central actor in the European security order and international politics, leading to a fundamental shift in the policy status of the Ukrainian language. Kuzio (2022) analyzes how, in the post-war context, Ukrainian has come to function not merely as an ethnic or national language, but as a core element of national identity and international political discourse [13 : 41–44].

Within the context of Korea's Critical Foreign Language Education policy, this transformation calls for a redefinition of the objectives of Ukrainian language education. Ukrainian should no longer be approached merely as an effort to sustain a 'rare language,' but rather as a strategic language applicable to a wide range of fields, including diplomacy, security, post-war reconstruction cooperation, humanitarian assistance, and international organizations. This shift demands new standards that go beyond conservative, preserva-

tion-oriented approaches in textbook development, curriculum design, and the overall architecture of digital learning environments.

2.4. The Policy Implications of a Single-Institution-Centered Model

Ukrainian language education in Korea is characterized by a concentrated, single-institution-centered structure. In general, such a structure has often been criticized for its limitations in terms of expanding the educational base. However, from the perspective of Critical Foreign Language Education, a single-institution model may instead be understood as a strategic choice aimed at ensuring educational quality and long-term sustainability. Becher and Trowler (2001) argue that the stable maintenance of academic communities requires a certain degree of institutional concentration and the accumulation of specialized expertise [2 : 57–60].

Ukrainian language education can be understood within this framework. A department-centered structure has enabled the standardization of textbook development, continuity in curriculum design, and the long-term cultivation of specialized human resources, thereby providing institutional stability in responding to structural changes such as digital transformation. In this sense, Ukrainian language education in Korea can be evaluated as a case that relatively faithfully implements the model of strategic language capacity accumulation envisioned by Critical Foreign Language Education policy.

This chapter has examined the formation and transformation of Korea's Critical Foreign Language Education policy and analyzed the institutional position of Ukrainian within the broader discourse on strategic languages and digital transformation. Through this analysis, Ukrainian language education is shown to constitute not merely an example of small-scale language education, but a significant case illustrating how national strategic language education can be institutionalized in the digital era.

Building on this policy and theoretical context, the following chapter will analyze the concrete operational structure and educational outcomes of Ukrainian language education in Korea, focusing on the Department of Ukrainian Studies at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies.

III. The Current State of Ukrainian Language Education in Korea: A Case Study of the Department of Ukrainian Studies at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies

3.1. A Single-Institution-Centered Educational Structure and Its Formation

Ukrainian language education in Korea has developed primarily around the Department of Ukrainian Studies at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (HUFS). Since its establishment in 2009, the department has functioned as the **only institution in Korea – and in much of East Asia – offering Ukrainian language and Ukrainian studies as a full-fledged undergraduate major**. This institutional singularity has often been perceived as a structural limitation in terms of educational outreach and scale. However, when examined within the framework of **Critical Foreign Language Education**, such a single-institution-centered model can instead be understood as a strategic configuration that enables curricular continuity, accumulated expertise, and institutional stability.

Research on higher education communities suggests that **a certain degree of institutional concentration is often necessary for sustaining small and specialized academic fields**. Becher and Trowler (2001) argue that disciplinary communities require stable orga-

nizational bases in order to maintain shared norms, pedagogical coherence, and long-term professional reproduction [2 : 57–60]. This insight is particularly relevant to Critical Foreign Language Education, where learner populations are structurally limited and where educational quality can otherwise become overly dependent on individual instructors.

In its early stages, Ukrainian language education in Korea faced substantial constraints, including the lack of standardized teaching materials, a limited pool of trained instructors, and minimal access to locally adapted learning resources. Despite these conditions, the HUFS Department of Ukrainian Studies adopted an **integrated educational model** that placed language instruction at the core of the curriculum while progressively incorporating area studies components such as history, politics, economics, and culture. This approach aligns with the policy rationale of Critical Foreign Language Education, which emphasizes the cultivation of strategic human resources capable of operating at the intersection of language competence and regional expertise [3 : 3–6].

Importantly, from its inception the program did not separate “language training” from “area expertise,” but rather designed them as mutually reinforcing elements. This integrated philosophy has continued to shape subsequent developments in curriculum design, textbook production, and the gradual construction of digital learning environments.

3.2. Curriculum Structure and the Development of Standardized Textbooks

The curriculum of the Department of Ukrainian Studies at HUFS is organized around a **stepwise language education framework from A1 to B2**, in accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The CEFR emphasizes progressive communicative competence, learner autonomy, and functional language use across proficiency levels, making it a widely accepted benchmark for curriculum design in higher education language programs [4].

One of the most significant recent achievements in Korean Ukrainian language education has been the **systematic development and publication of standardized Ukrainian language textbooks**. In 2025, textbooks for the beginner levels (A1 and A2) were published, followed by the scheduled publication of intermediate and upper-intermediate textbooks (B1 and B2) in January 2026. This development marks a critical transition: Ukrainian language education in Korea has moved beyond an introductory, ad hoc phase and entered a stage oriented toward the training of **independent language users**.

In the context of Critical Foreign Language Education, the importance of standardized teaching materials cannot be overstated. Prior research has noted that small-scale language programs are often vulnerable to excessive reliance on individual instructors’ personal expertise and teaching styles, which can undermine curricular consistency and long-term sustainability [3]. **The establishment of a standardized textbook system** mitigates this structural risk by ensuring pedagogical continuity, reproducibility, and quality control across cohorts.

Moreover, textbook standardization serves not only the stabilization of offline instruction but also functions as a **necessary precondition for digital expansion**. Without a stable and shared curricular core, attempts at developing digital content or online platforms risk fragmentation and uneven quality. In this sense, the standardized Ukrainian textbooks provide an institutional infrastructure upon which future digital and multimodal learning environments can be systematically constructed.

3.3. Digital Learning Environments and Teaching-Learning Practices

At present, Ukrainian language education in Korea has not fully adopted artificial intelligence –based teaching and learning systems. Instead, instruction relies on **web-accessible learning materials linked to the newly published standardized textbooks**, combining textual input with recorded audio resources. This approach reflects a strategy of **gradual digital transition**, prioritizing learner accessibility and instructional stability over the rapid adoption of high-cost or experimental technologies.

Such a strategy is consistent with existing research on technology integration in language education. Bax (2011) conceptualizes effective educational technology adoption as a process of “normalisation,” in which digital tools become pedagogically meaningful only when they are fully embedded within established instructional practices [1]. From this perspective, the cautious and incremental use of digital resources in Korean Ukrainian language education represents not technological conservatism but **pedagogical prudence**.

This gradual approach is particularly appropriate in the context of Critical Foreign Language Education. When learner populations are small, premature implementation of large-scale AI systems or platform-based instruction can complicate quality assurance and assessment reliability. Studies on blended and incremental digital learning models suggest that **carefully phased integration of digital tools is more effective for sustaining learner engagement and instructional coherence in small-scale language programs** [6].

Accordingly, the current web-based text-and-audio model should be understood not as an endpoint, but as a **transitional phase** preparing the ground for future multimodal content expansion and selectively framed AI-assisted learning support.

3.4. Academic, Extracurricular Activities, and Educational Outcomes

Beyond the formal curriculum, the Department of Ukrainian Studies at HUFs has actively expanded its educational impact through academic and extracurricular initiatives. The publication of the *Korean Journal of Ukrainian Studies* has contributed to establishing a domestic scholarly platform for Ukrainian studies, while academic conferences, exhibitions, and policy-oriented forums have facilitated engagement between academia and broader society. Although the journal is currently undergoing institutional reorganization due to website restructuring, this pause reflects a process of digital realignment rather than a contraction of academic activity.

Educational outcomes are also observable in graduate career trajectories. According to employment statistics from recent years, graduates of the Ukrainian Studies program have maintained **relatively stable employment rates**, with some cohorts exceeding an average employment rate of 80 percent. Alumni have entered government agencies, public institutions, large corporations, research organizations, and fields related to translation and international cooperation. These outcomes indicate that Ukrainian language education in Korea is meaningfully connected to societal demand [8].

Importantly, employment outcomes should not be interpreted as direct measures of linguistic proficiency alone. Rather, they reflect the **alignment between language education, regional expertise, and strategic labor market needs**, which constitutes a core objective of Critical Foreign Language Education [2]. In this respect, the Ukrainian Studies program challenges the common assumption that small or critical language majors are inherently disadvantaged in terms of employability.

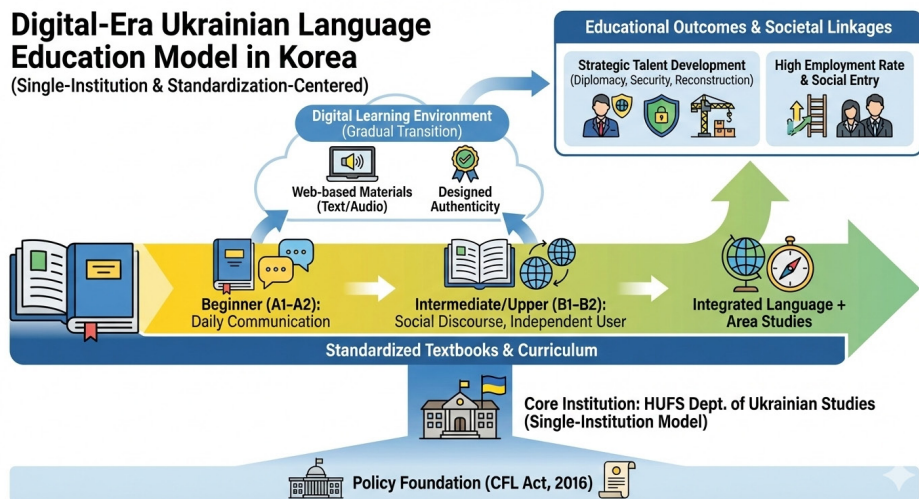


Figure 1. Digital-Era Ukrainian Language Education Model in Korea

3.5. Summary

This chapter has examined the structure, curriculum, instructional practices, and outcomes of Ukrainian language education in Korea through a case study of the Department of Ukrainian Studies at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies. Despite operating within a single-institution-centered framework, the program has demonstrated a relatively stable developmental trajectory characterized by curricular continuity, standardized textbook production, and cautious yet purposeful digital transition.

These findings provide an essential empirical foundation for the subsequent analysis. Only by accurately recognizing both the achievements and the structural constraints of the current system can the challenges of digital transformation, multimodal learning expansion, and AI integration be addressed in a realistic and theoretically grounded manner. Accordingly, the next chapter turns to a more focused discussion of these challenges and the conditions under which meaningful pedagogical transformation may occur in the digital era.

IV. Challenges and Possibilities for Transformation in Ukrainian Language Education in the Digital Era: Authenticity, Textbook Standardization, and the Conditions for Digital Expansion

4.1. Digital Transformation and the Question of “Authenticity” in Foreign Language Education

The expansion of digital environments has dramatically increased access to learning materials in foreign language education, while simultaneously raising new questions regarding the notion of *authenticity*. Traditionally, authenticity in foreign language education has been closely associated with the use of materials produced and used by native speakers in real-life contexts. In digital learning environments, however, this criterion alone is no longer sufficient to account for the quality of learning.

Gilmore (2007) conceptualizes authenticity in foreign language education not as a

single attribute, but as a multilayered concept encompassing: (1) the relationship among real speakers, listeners, and messages; (2) the authenticity that learners perceive in and attribute to texts; and (3) task design and patterns of classroom interaction [7 : 97–99]. From this perspective, the authenticity of textbooks or learning materials should not be judged by whether they are directly taken from the real world, but rather by whether they are pedagogically designed to enable learners to transition into actual communicative practices.

This discussion is particularly significant in the context of Critical Foreign Language Education. For languages with limited learner populations and scarce opportunities for natural exposure, the unmediated introduction of authentic materials may instead increase cognitive burden and reduce learner motivation. Consequently, Critical Foreign Language Education in the digital era faces a fundamental challenge: not how many “real” materials are provided, but how *learnable authenticity* can be effectively designed and implemented.

4.2. Ukrainian Language Standard Textbooks (A1–B2) in Korea and “Designed Authenticity”

Within this theoretical framework, the Ukrainian language standard textbooks (A1–B2) developed in Korea can be examined as a case of *designed authenticity*. These textbooks represent a tangible outcome of Critical Foreign Language Education policies implemented since 2016 and form a coherent instructional system spanning from beginner (A1–A2) to upper-intermediate and advanced levels (B1–B2) [9, 10, 11, 12].

The thematic organization of the textbooks follows a gradual progression from everyday communicative contexts to more socially and discursively complex topics. At the A1–A2 levels, linguistic functions are introduced through familiar domains such as greetings, family, food, and daily activities. At the B1–B2 levels, the focus shifts toward more abstract and socially embedded themes, including interpersonal relationships, social change, technology, identity, and community. This progression encourages learners to perceive language not merely as a grammatical system, but as a means of constructing social meaning. In this respect, the textbooks partially correspond to Gilmore’s (2007) first criterion of authenticity, namely the representation of relationships among speakers, listeners, and messages [7].

This pedagogical orientation becomes more evident in the dialogue texts and task designs included in the textbooks. At the A1–A2 levels, dialogues are structured around greetings, appointments, choices, and routine activities, followed by tasks that require learners to describe or write about their own experiences using similar linguistic frameworks. This design encourages learners themselves – rather than textbook characters – to assume the roles of real speakers and listeners, thereby re-centering communicative purpose and context around the learner [9, 10].

At the B1–B2 levels, this approach is further expanded. After engaging with reading and listening materials on social issues, personal value judgments, or digital environments, learners are asked to articulate their own opinions or construct arguments in response to given situations [11, 12]. **In this process, learners function not as passive recipients reproducing textual content, but as active discourse agents who reconstruct meaning.** Such task design prioritizes learners’ perception of language as usable communicative resources over the inherent “realism” of the text itself, aligning with Gilmore’s (2007) notion of *learner authenticity* [7 : 99].

In sum, the Ukrainian language standard textbooks developed in Korea prioritize pedagogically mediated situations and tasks that facilitate learners’ transition into real-world communication, rather than the direct adoption of unprocessed authentic materials.

This approach can be evaluated as an educationally grounded choice that reflects the specific conditions of Critical Foreign Language Education.

4.3. Limitations of Standard Textbooks and Structural Constraints on Digital Expansion

Despite these strengths, it is difficult to conclude that the Ukrainian language standard textbooks fully satisfy all the requirements of language education in the digital era. First, the textbooks remain largely centered on text- and audio-based learning structures, with limited integration of video materials, visual information, or interactive content. This limitation does not necessarily indicate deficiencies in textbook quality, but rather reflects the structural reality that digital learning environments have not yet been fully developed.

Second, while authenticity is effectively implemented at the level of thematic organization and task design, it has not been sufficiently integrated with forms of interaction characteristic of digital environments – such as learner collaboration, asynchronous speaking activities, or automated feedback systems. Mayer (2002) emphasizes that the effectiveness of multimedia learning depends not on the mere combination of media, but on instructional design and interaction structures that take cognitive load into account [15 : 105–107]. From this perspective, the current standard textbooks provide a foundational structure for multimodal expansion, but such expansion does not automatically translate into enhanced learning outcomes.

Third, the potential role of artificial intelligence (AI) in Ukrainian language education has yet to be situated within a clearly defined pedagogical framework. This situation should not be interpreted as a delay in technological adoption, but rather as the result of a deliberate decision to postpone premature implementation in the absence of clearly established principles of use and assessment criteria. Nevertheless, in the long term, the integration of AI into learning-support functions – such as pronunciation feedback, vocabulary expansion, and draft-level writing feedback – remains an issue to be addressed.

4.4. Summary: Transitional Characteristics and Conditions for Transformation

Taken together, the Ukrainian language standard textbooks (A1–B2) developed in Korea can be regarded as a case of *designed authenticity* that partially aligns with the conceptual framework proposed by Gilmore (2007) [7]. At the same time, these textbooks exhibit transitional characteristics with respect to the multimodality, interactivity, and technological integration demanded by digital-era language education.

Accordingly, the current challenge does not lie in rejecting or fundamentally restructuring the existing textbooks. Rather, the core task is to determine how a stable and systematically developed textbook framework can be organically integrated with digital platforms, blended learning models, and limited, pedagogically justified uses of artificial intelligence. This issue extends beyond the scope of individual textbook development and is directly linked to national-level strategies for Critical Foreign Language Education.

This line of inquiry leads naturally to the discussion in the following chapter. Chapter V will therefore examine, in greater detail, the institutional and pedagogical choices required for Ukrainian language education in Korea to secure sustainability as a form of strategic language education in the digital era.

V. Future Directions and Strategic Recommendations: Conditions for the Sustainable Development of Ukrainian Language Education in Korea in the Digital Era

This chapter synthesizes the institutional achievements of Ukrainian language education in Korea, the pedagogical characteristics of the standardized textbooks (A1–B2), and the limitations revealed in the context of digital transformation, as discussed in Chapters III and IV, in order to propose strategic directions for future development. The recommendations presented here extend beyond the operational improvement of specific textbooks or a single educational institution and instead focus on the institutional and pedagogical conditions required for Ukrainian language education, as a form of *Critical Foreign Language Education*, to become established as a national-level strategic language program.

5.1. Building a National-Level Digital Education Platform Based on Standardized Textbooks

Korean Ukrainian language education has already secured an important institutional foundation for expansion into a digital education platform through the establishment of a continuous standardized textbook system spanning levels A1 to B2. The key task moving forward lies not in developing additional textbooks, but in *remediating* the existing standardized textbooks to suit digital learning environments.

A national-level digital education platform should go beyond the simple provision of digitized textbook files and incorporate the following core functions. First, it should offer clearly structured learning pathways aligned with CEFR levels, along with diagnostic tools to assess learner progress. Second, it should systematically accumulate audio, video, and cultural materials linked to the core sentences and communicative functions presented in the standardized textbooks. Third, it should integrate task design and feedback mechanisms that support self-directed learning. Fourth, it should establish a collaborative environment that enables resource sharing and joint instructional design among instructors.

Such a platform would help compensate for an educational structure that has relied excessively on the individual capacities and efforts of instructors, thereby transforming Ukrainian language education into a public and sustainable educational resource. Research on digital language education has consistently emphasized that learning outcomes depend less on the quantity of content or technological sophistication than on the design of learning pathways and feedback structures [5 : 7–10].

5.2. Institutionalizing Blended Learning and Redesigning Instructional Structures

Digital transformation should not be pursued as a replacement for face-to-face instruction, but rather through the institutionalization of blended learning models that organically combine in-person classes with online learning. In *Critical Foreign Language Education*, where learner populations are relatively small, blended learning approaches that preserve the quality of face-to-face interaction while complementing it with online components are pedagogically more effective than fully online instruction.

Within a blended learning model, in-person classes can prioritize interaction-centered activities such as speaking, discussion, and collaboration, while online environments can be used to reinforce listening, reading, vocabulary, and grammar learning through repetition and review. This structure not only enhances learner engagement, but also provides instructors with a foundation for analyzing learning histories and delivering personalized feedback. Prior

research indicates that such blended learning approaches are particularly effective in improving learner persistence and satisfaction in small-scale language education contexts [6 : 96–98].

5.3. Establishing Principles for the Gradual and Limited Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) should be approached not as a question of whether to adopt technology, but as a matter of how to establish principles of use that align with educational objectives and assessment systems. The fact that Ukrainian language education in Korea has not yet fully adopted AI should be interpreted not as technological backwardness, but as a cautious choice that prioritizes pedagogical and ethical considerations.

Future AI use may be examined gradually under the following principles. First, AI should be limited to learning-support functions such as vocabulary expansion, pronunciation comparison, and draft-level feedback. Second, its use should be restricted in areas directly linked to achievement assessment. Third, the scope and conditions of AI use should be clearly disclosed to learners. Fourth, ethical education regarding AI use should be provided to both instructors and learners.

Recent studies have pointed out that while generative AI can be useful in supporting learning processes, its integration into assessment contexts carries the risk of distorting learners' actual language performance [17 : 2–4]. This risk arises because the process through which generative AI improves output is separated from the learner's cognitive and linguistic performance. The core purpose of language assessment lies in evaluating learners' ability to independently construct meaning and select lexical, grammatical, and discourse strategies under constrained conditions. However, generative AI can automatically perform higher-order language operations – such as restructuring sentence patterns, substituting vocabulary, and enhancing discourse cohesion – thereby improving output quality regardless of the learner's actual language competence.

In such cases, assessment results are more likely to reflect learners' ability to use AI or design prompts than their independent language proficiency. This distortion is particularly problematic in Critical Foreign Language Education, where learner populations are small and precise evaluation of individual achievement is essential. Moreover, it is practically difficult to fully control AI use or standardize conditions across assessment contexts. Accordingly, generative AI in Critical Foreign Language Education should be clearly positioned not as a substitute for language competence, but as a tool that supports learning processes prior to assessment.

5.4. Expanding Strategic Language Education through Education–Research–Society Linkages

Ukrainian language education should not remain confined to the classroom, but rather expand as a form of strategic language education through integration with research activities and social applications. Ukraine is expected to generate long-term language demand across multiple domains, including postwar reconstruction, international cooperation, diplomacy and security, and cultural exchange. This context enhances the social legitimacy of Ukrainian language education.

To this end, several measures should be pursued in parallel: strengthening articulated undergraduate–graduate curricula; expanding project-based learning linked to translation, research, and international cooperation; and establishing collaborative models with public institutions, research organizations, and private enterprises. Strategic language edu-

cation achieves sustainability when it is connected to tangible social demand, and such linkages also enhance educational effectiveness by providing learners with concrete motivation for language study [3 : 3–6].

In summary, Korean Ukrainian language education currently stands at a transitional stage. Building on the significant achievement of establishing standardized textbooks (A1–B2), it has the potential to evolve into strategic language education through the expansion of digital platforms, the institutionalization of blended learning, the limited and principled use of AI, and stronger linkages among education, research, and society.

The central challenge at present does not lie in the radical introduction of new directions. Rather, it lies in maintaining the stability of the existing textbook system and educational framework while gradually expanding them within digital environments and policy support structures. Such an approach can enable Ukrainian language education in Korea to move beyond short-term achievements and develop into a sustainable model of strategic language education in the digital era.

This perspective leads directly to the concluding chapter, which synthesizes the academic and policy implications of the present study.

VI. Conclusion

This study set out to examine the institutional achievements accumulated by Ukrainian language education in Korea amid the structural transformation brought about by digitalization, as well as the limitations and challenges it currently faces. By comprehensively reviewing the education policies implemented since Ukrainian was designated a *Critical Foreign Language* in 2016, the educational system developed around the Department of Ukrainian Studies at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, and the recently developed and published standardized textbooks (A1–B2), this study explored possible directions for the transformation of Ukrainian language education in Korea in the digital era.

The analysis suggests that, despite the structural constraint of being centered on a single institution, Ukrainian language education in Korea has achieved a notable level of institutional consolidation through the establishment of a standardized textbook system and the stabilization of its curriculum. In particular, the development of a continuous series of standardized textbooks from A1 to B2 represents a meaningful case that overcomes the fragmentation and ad hoc nature often identified in Critical Foreign Language Education. These textbooks provide a core foundation for future digital expansion and pedagogical innovation. This study further demonstrated how the textbooks intersect with the concept of *authenticity* as discussed in foreign language education theory, arguing that authenticity designed in accordance with the Korean educational context can effectively promote learner engagement and interaction.

At the same time, the study clarified that these achievements do not fully satisfy all the conditions required for language education in the digital era. Current Ukrainian language education remains largely centered on text- and audio-based learning structures, while the integration of multimodal learning materials, digital interaction environments, and AI-based learning support tools remains at a transitional stage. These limitations should be understood not as deficiencies of individual textbooks or educational actors, but as structural challenges commonly encountered by Critical Foreign Language Education programs with limited learner populations as they adapt to digital transformation.

Based on this analysis, the study proposed four strategic directions: the construction of

a national-level digital education platform, the institutionalization of blended learning models, the gradual and limited use of artificial intelligence, and the expansion of strategic language education through linkages among education, research, and society. The significance of these recommendations lies in their emphasis on maintaining the stability of existing standardized textbooks and curricula while gradually expanding them within digital environments and policy support frameworks, rather than pursuing radical or abrupt systemic changes.

The academic contribution of this study lies in its refusal to reduce Critical Foreign Language Education in the digital era to a mere issue of technological adoption. Instead, it presents language education as a comprehensive analytical domain where instructional design, policy frameworks, and social contexts intersect. From a policy perspective, the study also contributes to repositioning Ukrainian language education not as a temporary or interest-driven initiative, but as a form of strategic language education that requires sustained development from a medium- to long-term perspective.

This study nonetheless has limitations, as it focuses on a single national context and a single educational case. Future research should expand the discussion through comparative analyses of other Critical Foreign Language Education programs, empirical investigations into learner perceptions and learning experiences, and systematic analyses of actual learning outcomes in digital learning environments. Despite these limitations, this study is expected to offer meaningful implications for both research and policy by systematically outlining the conditions and directions under which Ukrainian language education in Korea can develop in the digital era.

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ЦИФРОВА ОСВІТА УКРАЇНСЬКОЮ МОВОЮ В РЕСПУБЛІЦІ КОРЕЯ: ІНСТИТУЦІЙНІ ОСНОВИ, ОСВІТНІ ВИКЛИКИ ТА ПЕРСПЕКТИВИ РОЗВИТКУ

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У статті розглядається процес інституційного формування та розвитку освіти з української мови в Республіці Корея в умовах подвійної трансформації – цифровізації та переосмислення міжнародного порядку. Українську мову було визначено як критично важливу іноземну мову відповідно до Закону про сприяння освіті з критично важливих іноземних мов (офіційно перекладеного як *Less Commonly Taught Foreign Languages*) у 2016 році, а її значущість ще більше зросла після повномасштабного вторгнення Росії в Україну у 2022 році. Освіта українською мовою в Кореї функціонує в межах висококонцентрованої, одноінституційної моделі, зосередженої на факультеті українознавства Корейського університету іноземних мов Хангук. Усупереч поширеному уявленню про те, що така структура обмежує освітнє охоплення, у статті доводиться, що вона фактично стала інституційною перевагою, забезпечивши узгодженість навчальних програм, стандартизацію навчальних матеріалів і безперервну підготовку фахівців. Видання стандартизованих підручників рівнів A1–A2 у 2025 році та запланований вихід наступних томів рівнів B1–B2 у 2026 році засвідчують перехід корейської системи освіти українською мовою від початкового етапу навчання до систематичної підготовки незалежних користувачів мови. У статті також проаналізовано ключові виклики, з якими стикається освіта українською мовою в цифрову епоху, зокрема обмежена доступність автентичних онлайн-матеріалів, нестача мультимодальних ресурсів, етичні й педагогічні обмеження використання інструментів на основі штучного інтелекту, а також культурна дистанція серед здобувачів освіти. Замість швидкого впровадження технологій корейська система освіти українською мовою обрала поступовий цифровий перехід, що ґрунтується на веборієнтованих текстових та аудіоматеріалах і відображає реалії викладання критично важливих іноземних мов з обмеженою кількістю студентів. У статті пропонуються перспективні напрями розвитку, зокрема створення національної цифрової платформи мовної освіти, інституціоналізація змішаного навчання, обережне й обмежене використання штучного інтелекту, а також посилення зв'язків між освітою, науковими дослідженнями та суспільними потребами, пов'язаними з післявоєнною відбудовою України. Таким чином, дослідження робить емпіричний і політико-освітній внесок у дискусію щодо стратегічної мовної освіти та цифрової лінгводидактики.

Ключові слова: освіта українською мовою, цифрова освіта, критично важливі іноземні мови, стратегічні мови, мультимодальне навчання, штучний інтелект, мовна політика.

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