

German as a Foreign Language in South Korea

A framework for teacher education and international cooperation between school and university based educational programs

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Abstract: Dieser Beitrag untersucht die aktuellen Herausforderungen des Deutsch-als-Fremdsprache-Unterrichts (DaF) in Südkorea. Dabei handelt es sich um einen Kontext, in dem die Relevanz des Fachs an Schulen abnimmt, während der Bedarf an qualifizierten Lehrkräften insgesamt fortbesteht. Es wird das FLinkUS-Seoul-Projekt betrachtet, eine Zusammenarbeit zwischen der Deutschen Schule Seoul International, der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena und der Seoul National University, die darauf abzielt, theoretische und praktische Komponenten in der Lehrendenausbildung durch innovative, hybride Lehrmethoden zu verbinden. Basierend auf empirischen Daten analysiert dieser Beitrag, wie das Projekt zentrale Herausforderungen bewältigt und die professionelle Entwicklung von (angehenden) Lehrkräften in einem multiprofessionellen Team stärkt. Abschließend werden mögliche zukünftige Entwicklungen des FLinkUS-Projekts skizziert, die auch den Bereich Koreanisch als Fremdsprache betreffen.

Schlagwörter: Professionalisierung, Lerngemeinschaft, Schulentwicklung, Südkorea

Abstract: This paper explores the current challenges facing German as a Foreign Language (GFL) education in South Korea, where the subject's relevance in schools is declining while the overall demand for proficient instructors persists. It examines the FLinkUS Seoul project, a collaboration between the Deutsche Schule Seoul International (Seoul German School), Friedrich Schiller University Jena, and Seoul National University, which aims to bridge theoretical and practical components in teacher training through innovative, hybrid teaching methods. Based on empirical data, this paper analyzes how the project addresses key challenges and strengthens the professional development of (future) language teachers in multiprofessional teams. Finally, potential future developments of the FLinkUS project are outlined, which also pertain to the field of Korean as a Foreign Language.

Keywords: Teacher Education, Learning Communities, School Development, South Korea



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1 Introduction

In South Korea the field of German as a Foreign Language (GFL) education is undergoing significant transformations (cf. Auswärtiges Amt 2020). Typically, German is introduced as a secondary foreign language after English, commonly starting as an elective course during high school. While the relevance of German as a school subject is on the decline, there is a continued demand for proficient German language educators, particularly within tertiary educational contexts. To meet this demand, prospective German language instructors undergo specialized training at universities.

Nevertheless, the contemporary landscape of GFL education in Korea is confronted with two primary challenges, as will be discussed in this article (cf. Jin 2018; Shin 2021). Overall, we advocate for the growing need to innovate German language instruction, ensure its quality, and align it with foreign language didactics and broader educational developments, both within and beyond the South Korean context (cf. Wicke 2013). These considerations are in line with internationally discussed trends in foreign language teacher education (cf. Johnson 2015: 516).

Similarly, Legutke & Schart (cf. 2016: 11–13) argue that—with respect to publications on GFL teacher education and foreign language teacher education more broadly—there is a need for further research on the content, methodology, and processes within these programs, despite the increased research efforts in recent years. In this article, we demonstrate that these findings also apply to the Korean context. Additionally, we aim to address the existing research gaps in the field of professionalization and the professional self-concept of German as a Foreign Language in Korea. Drawing on a partnership project in which university institutions worked together with a school institution, we will show possible perspectives for the further development of our subject. More specifically, addressing these challenges, collaborative efforts have emerged between the Seoul German School (Deutsche Schule Seoul International, DSSI), Friedrich Schiller University Jena (FSU), and Seoul National University (SNU). Within this cooperative framework—also referred to as FLinkUS Seoul (cf. Baumbach 2023)—innovative seminars have been offered since 2022, which form the basis of the research presented in this paper.

Drawing on interviews with participating students and reflections from course instructors, this paper empirically addresses the following research question: How do GFL students perceive this project in terms of bridging theoretical and practical perspectives, and what competencies, questions, and challenges do they identify?

2 German as a Foreign Language in South Korea

German Studies and German as a Foreign Language have held a significant place in South Korea's education system since the 1940s. Over the past few decades, however, this field has undergone substantial transformations, driven by major demographic, political, and economic shifts within the country. The following section explores the evolution and current status of the German language in

Korea, with a particular emphasis on the professionalization and training of teachers specializing in German as a Foreign Language.

2.1 Facts and Figures

In South Korea, German was introduced as a foreign language in secondary schools alongside English and Chinese after the liberation from Japan in 1945 (cf. Lee 1998: 75). Over time, English was expanded to elementary schools and elevated to a compulsory subject, while other foreign languages were relegated to middle schools as electives, with the actual number of teaching hours significantly reduced (cf. Shin 2013: 133–139). Among other foreign language courses, German remained the most popular choice in high schools until the mid-1970s. However, the number of students learning German has since declined, largely due to the increasing demand for languages with greater practical applications in politics and economics, particularly Japanese and Chinese. Currently, only 87 of South Korea's 1,761 high schools, or 4.9 %, offer German classes (cf. Korean Educational Development Institute. Ministry of Education Republic of Korea 2023). In line with this trend, the number of German teachers at the secondary school level has also continued to decline. The number of German teachers decreased from 1,119 in 1990 to 139 in 2010, and as of 2023, there were only 21 German teachers left in the Korean public school system (cf. Chang 2023). However, Kim, J. (2023) argues that these figures do not reflect the actual demand for German language education in South Korea. At the secondary school level, students are not able to choose their own subjects; instead, schools select offerings based on available teaching staff. As a result, the limited number of German teachers has restricted the availability of German as an elective. Research by Hur et al. (2020: 661) indicates that, under the high school credit system, there is a shortage of at least 175 German teachers to meet student demand, even if each teacher allocates an average of 15.1 teaching hours per week and classes have an average size of 24.5 students. At the university level, the number of German majors has been declining. Nevertheless, there appears to be a rise in non-majors voluntarily taking German as an elective. Additionally, private language institutions in South Korea continue to offer German courses. A recent report in a daily newspaper highlights a renewed interest in overseas employment, particularly among young adults, leading to an increased focus on learning foreign languages such as Japanese and German, in addition to English (cf. Jang 2024). These trends suggest that although English is the dominant foreign language in South Korea, learners in an increasingly pluralistic society are seeking to study a diverse range of languages based on their personal interests and needs. Consequently, German remains a relevant and in-demand foreign language, creating a continuous need for qualified German teachers.

2.2 Teacher Education

Secondary school teachers in Korea typically complete a bachelor's program at the education department of a university which has been approved for teacher training and licensing by the Ministry of Education. There are currently four public universities and one private university in Korea

offering bachelor's programs in GFL. During their studies, students are expected to gain proficiency in the German language, develop an understanding of German literature and culture, and complete the pre-service teacher training. The Ministry of Education has detailed the minimum standards for the required program content and the competencies students must acquire in order to obtain a teacher's license, and most colleges and universities structure their curricula accordingly. However, we argue that the curriculum outlined in these regulations is largely insufficient in preparing students for the complexities of professional teaching for two main reasons. Firstly, the curriculum is predominantly content-oriented. Secondly, in terms of teacher training, only two subjects—'Materials Research and Teaching Methods' and 'Teaching Theories'—are designated as compulsory. From our perspective, structural changes are required in both educational policies and university curricula in South Korea. Significant curricular reform in German teacher education to enhance the focus on teacher preparation has been suggested as early as the late 1990s (cf. Chong 1999). However, as of 2024, no significant changes have been implemented.

Individual departments may offer additional courses related to teacher education, such as teaching methods, educational assessment, and curriculum. However, in the case of German language education, this is not the case due to the lack of professors specializing in GFL. This shortage stems from the fact that GFL has not been recognized as a distinct academic field in Korea for a long time, as pointed out by Shin (2014: 82). Addressing this issue requires establishing GFL as an independent field of study and fostering future scholars in the discipline (cf. Feike et al. 2023: 7). In addition, German education departments need to clarify their institutional identity as teacher training institutions and secure enough faculty members in the field of GFL. Moreover, teacher education at Korean Universities tends to be overly theoretical and disconnected from the realities of the teaching field. Han & Jung (2024: 728) note that this is partly because subject-specific-content and didactics has developed to be more academic rather than practice-oriented. As a result, novice teachers often enter the profession without adequate pre-service training. Although internships are a compulsory component of teacher education programs, they typically last only four weeks, making it challenging for prospective teachers to integrate and apply the theories and methods learned in their teacher education courses at university (cf. Feike et al. 2023: 4–5).

Numerous efforts have been made to address the disconnect between teacher education and the field, as well as to enhance teacher professionalism. Each teacher education institution has organized team-teaching classes in collaboration with field teachers and offered special lectures by field practitioners as non-credit courses. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education recently promoted the reorganization of the teacher education system from a four-year bachelor's program to a six-year program aimed at strengthening teacher professionalism. Additionally, a plan has been established to extend the practicum period from the current four weeks to one semester by 2028.

To date, efforts to reform teacher education in Korea have focused mainly on reorganizing the teacher education system or restructuring the curriculum. While these institutional reforms are essential, as Han & Jung (2024) rightly point out, their success depends on how courses in the

teacher training program are designed. In this paper, we present the FLinkUS Seoul seminar as an initiative that puts one such design into practice.

3 FLinkUS Seoul

3.1 Theoretical Foundations

The theoretical and conceptual foundations of the FLinkUS project are explained in detail in Baumbach (2023). We will therefore only highlight a few theoretical reference points that are particularly relevant for the present study.

FLinkUS corresponds to so-called research-practice partnerships (RPPs), with a particular focus on the school education sector (cf. Coburn & Penuel 2016; Farrell et al. 2021). Coburn & Penuel (cf. 2016: 52) report on the growing interest of various political and academic stakeholders in promoting and researching research-practice partnerships. At the same time, they highlight the underrepresentation of the field of education and educational research in this context and advocate for strengthening research initiatives in this field. Similarly, Farrell et al. (2021: 36) emphasize the diverse forms of RPP implementation. As we will demonstrate in the empirical section, cooperation within a professional community plays a central role in FLinkUS. The theoretical foundations for this type of cooperation are “Professional Learning Communities” (PLC, e.g., Rolff 2015) and “Communities of Practice” (e.g., Brouwer et al. 2012). Both approaches share the view that professional development should be conceptualized as an individual’s integration into professional communities that are composed of individuals with varying degrees of expertise. In a socio-cultural perspective, it is in these collaborative processes that knowledge is negotiated cooperatively and new, individual—but socially mediated—competencies are developed (cf., e.g., Johnson 2009). These dynamics and developmental processes are understood to be primarily driven by participation in corresponding communities in which subject-specific issues are addressed in relation to specific fields of action in practice.

It should be emphasized that the concept of ‘PLC’ as a whole is firmly rooted in the school context, particularly in relation to school development processes (cf. Will & Blume 2022: 97–98). However, the conceptual and terminological expansion of this idea to ‘multiprofessional learning communities’ (MPLC), which goes back to Baumbach (2023), is noteworthy here. In MPLCs, such as FLinkUS Seoul, individuals collaborate within the field of foreign language education (as researchers, school teachers, and university students), bringing together diverse professional experiences and perspectives. In this context, MPLCs offer significant potential for addressing the shared field of action research and development in foreign language teaching from different perspectives. In the specific case of FLinkUS Seoul, the participating students come from different universities and have varied professional backgrounds and learning practices. Overall, the guiding principle behind this collaboration is that not only the university students but also the other actors benefit from collaborative teaching research. In other words, the teacher trainers themselves must have the

opportunity to develop as professionals and learn through interactions with various actors, such as language learners and future teachers (cf. MacPhail et al. 2018).

The cooperation between different institutions and actors in FLinKUS is as multifaceted as are its objectives. On the part of DSSI, objectives include providing professional support for the development of learning materials and co-teaching approaches in CLIL (for a discussion of the CLIL concept, see, e.g., Schart 2024), but also enhancing high school students' motivation to learn German. This aim aligns with university students' objectives, as it creates opportunities for exchange and learning that extend beyond those typically offered in foreign language teaching. These aspects will be further elaborated and illustrated with concrete examples; in particular they include using the diverse potentials of 'learning in the wild' (cf. Kleppin 2024: 13–15) and the multilingual resources of both high school and university students (cf. Laurentzen et al. 2024).

With regard to the perspective of Korean universities, the aforementioned issues should be addressed. With FLinKUS Seoul, we aim to support the professionalization of prospective GFL teachers by providing a training concept that offers a broad range of practical experiences. According to Will et al. (2022: 17), these encompass both "simulative-performative" and "practical-performative" encounters with the professional field of language education. By developing teaching materials that they create but do not use themselves in class, students also implement their own teaching ideas with FLinKUS.

3.2 Project Partners

The partnership between Seoul German School, Seoul National University and Friedrich Schiller University Jena began in 2021. A similar cooperation with the German School in Sevilla was established around the same time. Both collaborations were integrated into the teacher education programs for German as a Foreign and Second Language (DaFZ) at Friedrich Schiller University Jena starting in the winter semester of 2021/2022. Building on the experiences gained from these partnerships, the FLinKUS Seoul project was developed and commenced in April 2022 (cf. Baumbach 2023; Baumbach et al. 2025). The collaboration within FLinKUS Seoul was further strengthened by a German Studies Institutional Partnership ("Germanistische Institutspartnerschaft")¹ which connects Friedrich Schiller University Jena with Seoul National University, among other institutions, and has fostered deeper collaboration in research and teaching (for example cf. Czyzak et al. 2024). The overarching goal of this GIP is to strengthen GFL teacher education in the various East Asian contexts through networking and innovative forms of teaching and curriculum development.

¹ The program 'Germanistische Institutspartnerschaften (GIP)' was initiated in 1993 by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and is an important instrument for the promotion of German and German Studies. The aim is to internationalize universities in Germany and worldwide by strengthening German teacher training and German Studies outside the officially German-speaking countries through joint research and exchange programs (also see Voerkel et al. 2023).

3.2.1 Introduction of the Seoul German School

Seoul German School (DSSI), founded in 1976, is part of the PASCH network which supports over 2000 schools offering German outside Germany. Various school types are represented in the network, with schools differing, for example, in whether they follow a German curriculum or a national curriculum of the respective host country. Further differences lie in the desired language level at graduation and the resulting forms of teaching in which German is offered or used (i.e. as a foreign language lesson or CLIL in other subjects).²

DSSI is one of the 135 so-called German schools abroad ('Deutsche Auslandsschulen'—DAS) within the PASCH network. It receives funding from the German government and at the same time operates as a Korean private school. The teaching staff is predominantly German-speaking, and most lessons are taught in German. DSSI is relatively small, with just under 200 students in grades 1 through 12. Some classes have fewer than ten students (Deutsche Schule Seoul International 2014).³ The student body is diverse, with students coming from a variety of cultural backgrounds and speaking different languages at home. The school also enrolls several international students whose parents have opted for the German educational system for their children. This diversity influences the scope and the responsibilities of the school. As an international German school, DSSI has a particular focus on language and educational support and follows a CLIL-approach in its curriculum. This approach requires teachers to adopt appropriate teaching methods to address the specific challenges of their environment, particularly methods of language-sensitive teaching of subject knowledge. Therefore, continuous training and development in CLIL practices as part of the collaboration discussed in this article is a significant benefit to the teaching staff at DSSI.

3.2.2 University Partners

Seoul National University and Friedrich Schiller University Jena participate in FLinkUS Seoul as university partners. Seoul National University is one of the few universities in Korea offering a teacher education program for German teachers. Each year, on average, fifteen students are admitted to the BA program, five students are admitted to the master's program, and two to the doctoral program. The Department of German Language Education at SNU has worked closely with the Department of German as a Foreign and Second Language and Intercultural Studies at Friedrich Schiller University Jena in the field of German as a Foreign Language since 2021.

² Further information on PASCH and the different school types can be found, for example, in Baumbach & Feike (2024: 3–5).

³ By Korean law, DSSI, like any international school in Korea, is only accessible to Korean students who have lived abroad for more than three years. Additionally, a maximum of one-third of the students may be Korean. The only other restrictions are the students' German language abilities and the total size of the school, which typically accommodates approximately 15–20 students per class.

3.3 Focus Areas of Cooperation

During the FLinKUS pilot phase, language learning biographies⁴ of the high school students were collected and analyzed. They served as the basis for developing teaching materials and activities throughout the subsequent semesters. During the summer semester of 2022, teaching materials for eighth-grade biology students on the subject of the sense of smell were produced. After teaching materials had been developed in the seminar, the Korean university students conducted a participatory lesson observation on-site at the school which was observed by the German university students via Zoom. Following the lessons, the effectiveness of the materials used was assessed through an online questionnaire. During the winter semester 2022/2023, materials were developed for improving the high school students' presentation skills in biology lessons. In the summer and winter semesters of 2023/2024, measures were developed to promote writing skills for statements in ethics. Finally, in the summer semester 2024, short debates on the use of AI technologies in language learning were organized as part of the DSSI Media Awareness Week. All topics and activities were developed at the request of, and in close consultation with, the teaching staff.

4 Empirical Study

4.1 Methodological Approach

The empirical research presented here follows a qualitative research paradigm (cf. Kuckartz & Rädiker 2022: 19–20). The assumption that there is cooperation between research partners is crucial to this approach (cf. Wyatt 2015; also see Barkhuizen 2019). Accordingly, the university students themselves are actively involved in the preparation, implementation, and evaluation not only of the school lessons, but also of the research throughout the semester. Consequently, it can also be considered a central part of FLinKUS that the participating university students learn scientific working techniques and develop a 'scientific habitus' (cf. Mertens et al. 2020; Kullmann 2011). In order to allow a collective reflection on this academic and professional development process, we offer a reflective discussion with the students at the end of each semester. Overall, our data corpus includes interview data from the semesters aforementioned.⁵ An interview guideline⁶ was employed as a methodological approach for conducting the semi-structured interviews (cf. Reichertz 2016: 184–187; Rosenthal 2018: 123–127). The main topics were: motivation to participate in the seminar, attitudes towards research, subjectively perceived characteristics of the seminar, perspectives on its research orientation, significance of the seminar for personal studies and professional

⁴ The language learning biographies of the students analyzed in the FLinKUS seminar were collected using a template developed by Michael Schart in collaboration with the seminar participants. Since these data are not the primary focus of the study, only one example from the DSSI students is included in Appendix I.

⁵ The authors confirm that all necessary consents were obtained, and that applicable data protection guidelines were fully adhered to throughout the work process. We accept full personal responsibility for compliance with these provisions.

⁶ The interview guideline was developed as part of Stefan Baumbach's dissertation project. It was modified for the research context described here.

development as a teacher, challenges encountered, and suggestions for improvement. Research data has been collected regularly since the first implementation of FLinkUS Seoul in 2022. For this article, we have chosen to focus on the perspectives of four students from the summer semester of 2022. The participants included both BA students and students enrolled in advanced study programs. Our analysis concentrates on three interviews (two individual interviews and one group interview) conducted during that semester, with a total duration of 2 hours and 27 minutes.

After narrowing down the data corpus, the selected interviews were first transcribed in Korean and subsequently translated into English. The qualitative content analysis was conducted according to the methodological principles of content-structuring analysis (cf. Mayring 2015; Selvi 2019). Deductively developed categories, reflecting the pre-existing research interests outlined in this study, served as a foundation for repeated inductive coding cycles (see Kuckartz & Rädiker 2022). This deductive-inductive approach was employed to develop categories using MAXQDA. In a subsequent coding round, these categories were further refined—they were differentiated in some cases and summarized or revised in others. Ultimately, a category system with six main categories and 37 subcategories was developed. The main categories identified in our research are: ‘Motivation for Participation,’ ‘Perspective on Teacher Training,’ ‘Teaching Practice in German as a Foreign Language,’ ‘Challenges,’ ‘Research Activities of Students,’ and ‘Innovative Seminar Concepts.’

4.2 Results

In this chapter, we will analyze interviews with participating university students in order to explore how the FLinkUS seminar supported their professional development, the challenges they encountered, and their suggestions for improvement. All of the interviewed students evaluated the FLinkUS seminars positively, highlighting two main benefits: (1) the development of teaching competencies through a deeper understanding of specific learning contexts and (2) an expanded perspective on language classes, especially in terms of CLIL.

4.2.1 Developing Teaching Competencies through a Deeper Understanding of Specific Learning Contexts

The students emphasized that teaching competencies should be developed through both experience and theoretical knowledge, as Mira (1) expressed. Sumi (2) highlighted that the FLinkUS seminar helped her to develop her professional growth by experiencing schools and classrooms, creating teaching materials for practical use, and by observing the teaching process to assess whether the materials functioned in the classroom as intended.

1. (...) 특히 교사의 측면에서 제가 느낀 게 이론적으로 배워야 할 내용은 당연히 배우고 있어야 되고 교사는 더 나아가서 굉장히 실질적인 경험치가 많이 쌓여야 될 것 같더라는 생각이 들었어요. 근데 매번 그런 경험치를 내가 수업을 하면서 쌓는 거는 불가능하니까 다양한 형태의 수업을 보고 또 다양한 학생들로 구성된 수업을 보고 배울 수

있는 점들. (...) Especially in terms of teachers, I think theoretical things should be learned, but I think teachers should also have a lot of practical experience, but it is impossible for me to have such an experience by teaching myself. So I think I should experience different kinds of teaching and build up skills that come from experience in that way.) (531 Mira)

2. 직접 가서 본 게 도움이 많이 된 것 같아요. 물론 수업을 짜보고 하는 것도 그렇지만 내가 짠 수업이 어떻게 적용되고 실제로는 내가 생각했던 대로 흘러가는지 안 흘러가는지를 확인하는 게 가장 도움이 되지 않았을까 싶어요. (I think it was very helpful to see it in person. Of course, also to plan and conduct a lesson, but the most helpful thing was to see how the lesson I had planned worked and whether it actually went as I had imagined or not.) (107 Sumi)

In the process of developing teaching materials, students were able to collect ideas for their own teaching through collaboration with other seminar participants. According to Sumi's statement (3),⁷ ideas for teaching were mainly gathered through a brainstorming process, and it seems that Sumi constantly tested the applicability of the activities that were developed collaboratively in the seminar. Overall, Sumi seemed to be able to apply what she learned in the seminar to her own teaching context and broaden her experiential knowledge.

During the development of the lesson materials, students positively reported that the materials were tailored based on their understanding of the learners (4). In this regard, participants stated that analyzing high school students' language learning biographies, visiting schools to familiarize themselves with the environment, and observing the interactions between teachers and high school students as well as peer-interactions through classroom observations helped them better understand the context in which GFL classes take place (6). This process appears to have allowed participating university students to become familiar with the atmosphere of the German school (6), with the high school students' level of German language proficiency (5), the difficulties they face with German (8), and their linguistic and cultural background (7).

This understanding of high school students in the German classroom also appears to have helped participants better understand the focus of the FLinKUS seminar on how CLIL can support high school students abroad in their development of academic language skills in German (8). The participants added that, as future teachers, they want to reflect on the language they use in their teaching and how they could communicate more effectively (9), recognizing the crucial role of the teacher's language in the classroom. Given that the teacher's language plays a key role in classroom teaching and learning and can facilitate language acquisition (cf. Walsh 2011; Siebold 2023), it can be assumed that the students who participated in the FLinKUS seminar have had the opportunity to reflect on the essential skills teachers need to develop (9).

The FLinKUS seminar also deepened the participating students' understanding of the specific linguistic and cultural backgrounds of high school students at DSSI. Moreover, they utilized not only

⁷ For reasons of space, the remaining transcription excerpts are included in Appendix II.
KONTEXTE (2025), 3: 1

their German language skills but also Korean to teach in a language-sensitive manner (7). In this way, Hannah views the FLinKUS seminar as an important opportunity to learn how to tailor lessons to individual students (10). As a result of this experience, she stated that analyzing student data would be one of the first things she would do upon becoming a teacher (15).

4.2.2 Broadening the Understanding of Foreign Language Classes

The FLinKUS seminar also seems to have broadened the participating students' views of language teaching. Specifically, CLIL-based teaching appears to be particularly innovative for the Korean students. For instance, Sumi reported that the CLIL-based lesson design allowed her to experience an activity-oriented lesson that was interesting and engaging for her learners (12). Sora mentioned that the seminar helped her overcome her previous stereotypes of foreign language teaching, which she had perceived as mainly grammar-focused and based on memorization (13, 14). She also expressed a desire to try innovative lessons in the future (15). Similarly, Hannah (16) reflected on her experience with CLIL-based teaching and reconsidered the potential of integrating foreign language learning with content-based instruction. She seemed to distance herself from her previously held, subjective experiences of how languages are learned and to reconceptualize language learning as a tool for 'real' communication and content-learning. Additionally, as illustrated by Hannah's statement (9), she broadened her understanding of language teaching by exploring concepts such as everyday language use on the one hand, and academic language and communication on the other (cf. Haneda 2024; Zwiers 2008).

4.2.3 Motivation for Studying German Language Teaching

Overall, the FLinKUS seminar positively influenced students' attitudes towards their major, German language teaching. Additionally, it appears that the seminar deepened their understanding of current research in the field. For instance, Hannah, a BA student, expressed pride in having conducted in-depth research on a specific aspect of German language teaching, considering this experience as highly relevant to her major (17). Similarly, Hannah stated that the seminar helped her gain a better understanding of the purpose of her major, and she indicated a preference for field-based classes over theory-based classes in her future studies (18).

4.2.4 Challenges

As discussed above, the university students were generally positive about the field-based FLinKUS seminars, but they highlighted several challenges and areas for improvement. First, concerning language skills, they reported difficulties with communicating in German, which is a foreign language for most of the (Korean) students in the seminar (19 and 20). Specifically, BA students at the B1 level seemed to limit their participation, particularly at the beginning of the seminar. For example, Mira (20) initially regarded her German language skills as insufficient and therefore focused on understanding the instructor and her German-speaking peers. Sumi (19), who had lived in

Germany for a while during her childhood and studied at a German university for a year, also spoke of language difficulties in the seminar. This suggests that the students' language challenges—although this is not explicitly evident in the interviews—may be related to the specific academic language skills necessary for university-level courses on teaching German as a Foreign Language. Consequently, the development of professional language skills in German as a Foreign Language is a crucial area for further professional development, which should be addressed and strengthened in teacher education programs. Regarding the online class schedule, the time difference between Germany and Korea posed a limitation on when the German and Korean teams could participate together in the seminar using the online meeting tool (19).

One aspect most students highlighted for improvement was the flexibility in how the FLinkUS seminars were organized. Students pointed out the absence of a predefined syllabus for the seminar meetings (19). However, as noted in Baumbach (2023: 182), the FLinkUS seminars do not follow a fixed syllabus because the seminar's objectives are determined by the needs of the partner school, the specific developmental goals, and the diverse backgrounds, language skills, and academic socialization of the participants. This approach is unfamiliar to (most) students at Korean universities and seems to have caused considerable confusion, particularly at the beginning of the semester. Nevertheless, over time, students appear to have realized that it is “a class that we create as we go along,” as Hannah's remark (18) suggests.

Finally, regarding the students' comments about the lack of theoretical input (e.g., Sora (21)), it should be noted that the FLinkUS seminar's practice-orientated approach was probably unfamiliar to most Korean students. As a consequence, we aim to further develop the FLinkUS seminar by systematically integrating research and practical experiences with theoretical concepts, fostering a stronger connection between these dimensions in the future.

5 Conclusion and Future Prospects

This article addressed the underexplored area of professionalizing teachers of German as a Foreign Language in South Korea. Our research findings highlight the need for a stronger integration of theoretical and practice-oriented components in university-based study programs for foreign language teacher education, particularly in developing (reflective) teaching competencies. The empirical study involving Korean university students led to the following key findings. First, we were able to describe and analyze their development as pre-service teachers. A notable example is their engagement with the CLIL concept, which they developed and applied throughout the project. Second, a shift in the Korean university students' perception of the importance of interactive and action-oriented teaching methods was evident. From their perspective, these didactic principles marked a significant enhancement over the typical approaches used in foreign language pedagogy in Korea, prompting them to reassess their pre-existing assumptions about foreign language instruction.

Regarding future perspectives, our findings emphasize the need to adapt teacher training programs to address key aspects such as motivation and professional biographies. Revisiting these topics within a broader framework is crucial to ensure a more comprehensive and context-sensitive approach to teacher development. In addition, we argue that reflective, cooperative and research-oriented approaches to teacher education programs are crucial for enabling students to effectively integrate empirical knowledge from field experiences with their theoretical knowledge base (cf. Legutke & Schart 2016: 32).

Finally, we would like to outline potential perspectives for the further development of FLinKUS Seoul. Starting in the winter semester of 2024/2025, FLinKUS Seoul will expand through a new school partnership with a privately funded Korean school. This expansion will open new opportunities for collaboration in CLIL, including work in multi-professional teams and exploration of professionalization processes in both the German and Korean school contexts. Furthermore, we consider it valuable to extend the concept to the subject of Korean as a Foreign Language in the future. This is a relatively new academic field (cf. Kim, Y. & Kim, M. 2022) which is facing developmental challenges similar to those encountered in German as a Foreign and Second Language (cf. Altmayer et al. 2021: 4–10). We believe that a collaboration with GFL could prove fruitful for both academic fields. With the growing number of students with migrant backgrounds in South Korea, it is becoming increasingly necessary to take measures to promote the development of their academic language skills. The FLinKUS concept could be a promising approach to addressing this demand, as well.

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