

DEVELOPING STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE THROUGH A DIFFERENTIATED APPROACH IN TEACHING KOREAN

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Abstract: This article provides a methodological analysis of the development of students' communicative competence through a differentiated approach in teaching Korean as a foreign language. The study considers the fact that students differ in their level of knowledge, speed of language learning, grammatical preparation, vocabulary, pronunciation skills, speech activity, psychological readiness, and ability to work independently as the main problem. The article discusses ways of applying a differentiated approach in Korean language classes, developing a separate system of tasks for strong, average, and low-performing students, actively involving each of them in the communication process, taking into account individual needs in language learning, and gradually forming communicative competence. In particular, the article examines the possibilities of using leveled exercises, basic expressions, situational dialogues, role plays, small-group work, pair work, creative tasks, TOPIK preparation exercises, and elements of independent learning in developing vocabulary, grammar, listening comprehension, reading, writing, and speaking skills. The results of the study show that a differentiated approach increases students' interest in Korean language classes, reduces speech anxiety, determines each student's individual development trajectory, and serves the effective formation of communicative competence.

Keywords: Korean language, differentiated approach, communicative competence, teaching Korean, leveled tasks, learner-centered education, speech activity, linguodidactics, TOPIK, communication competence.

Introduction

The main goal of modern foreign language education is not merely to teach students grammatical rules or make them memorize vocabulary, but to teach them to use language tools correctly, freely, and appropriately in real communicative situations. Today, knowing a foreign language is not limited to translating texts or completing grammar tests. A student must be able to ask questions in the language being learned, explain their thoughts, choose an appropriate form of address for the interlocutor, maintain logical coherence in written and oral speech, and follow cultural-pragmatic norms.

This issue is even more important in teaching Korean. Korean is a difficult language for Uzbek students because of its grammatical structure, word order, sentence-final forms, category of respect, the system of 존댓말 and 반말, various connective endings, and cultural-pragmatic features. For example, a simple sentence meaning "Have you eaten?" can be expressed in Korean in different forms, such as 밥 먹었어?, 밥 먹었어요?, and 식사하셨어요?, depending on the age, status, and degree of closeness of the interlocutor. Therefore, communicative competence in Korean requires not only grammatical correctness, but also the ability to choose a speech form appropriate to the situation.

In practical lessons, students are not the same in terms of their level of knowledge and speech abilities. Some students quickly memorize new words, understand grammar well, and actively participate in speaking activities. Some students have difficulty pronouncing Korean sounds, do not have sufficient vocabulary, or hesitate to speak because they are afraid of making mistakes.

Some students may be strong in written speech but weak in oral communication. Others may show good results in listening comprehension but have difficulty expressing their thoughts independently in Korean.

If the same task is given to students of different levels, the effectiveness of education decreases. For strong students, the task may become too easy, while weaker students may not be able to complete it and may remain outside the lesson process. Therefore, it is necessary to use a differentiated approach in Korean language classes. A differentiated approach serves to organize the educational process by taking into account each student's real ability, need, and pace of development.

The purpose of this article is to analyze ways of developing students' communicative competence through a differentiated approach in teaching Korean, to present a system of leveled tasks, and to justify the methodological advantages of this approach.

Communicative Competence and Its Importance in Korean Language Education

Communicative competence is the ability of a language learner to use language units correctly, appropriately, and effectively in a particular speech situation. This competence consists of several components. First, grammatical competence means the ability to construct words and sentences according to the rules of the language. Second, sociolinguistic competence means the ability to choose a speech form appropriate to the interlocutor's age, status, degree of closeness, and the situation. Third, discourse competence means the ability to express ideas coherently, logically, and in a connected manner. Fourth, strategic competence means the ability to use various speech strategies to overcome difficulties that arise during communication.

Communicative competence is especially important in Korean because respect, distance, social status, and speech situation have great significance in Korean communication. A student may construct a grammatically correct sentence, but if they choose the wrong speech level, it is considered a pragmatic error. For example, addressing a teacher as 선생님, 어디 가? is understandable from a grammatical point of view, but it is inappropriate from the point of view of speech etiquette. The correct form should be 선생님, 어디 가세요? or 선생님, 어디에 가십니까?

Therefore, grammar exercises alone are not enough to develop communicative competence in Korean language classes. Students must acquire skills such as speaking, listening, asking questions, answering, expressing opinions, apologizing, expressing gratitude, and distinguishing between formal and informal speech in situations close to real communication. A differentiated approach makes it possible to organize communicative activities suitable for each student's level in this process.

The Essence of the Differentiated Approach

A differentiated approach means organizing the educational process in accordance with students' individual characteristics, level of knowledge, interests, needs, and speed of learning. In this approach, the same result is not required from all students. Instead, the aim is to move each student to the next stage based on their existing abilities.

In Korean language classes, a differentiated approach is implemented in several directions. First, tasks are differentiated according to their level of difficulty. For example, weaker students construct sentences based on ready-made patterns, average-level students create short dialogues, and strong students prepare independent situational conversations or presentations. Second, the amount of material is differentiated. A shorter text may be given to a weaker student, while a more complex text may be given to a strong student. Third, the level of support is differentiated. Some students work with basic words and expressions, while strong students work independently. Fourth, the form of the result is differentiated. One student gives a written answer, another explains orally, and another completes the task in the form of a dialogue or project.

A differentiated approach does not mean strictly dividing students into strong and weak groups. On the contrary, it creates conditions for each student to develop according to their own abilities. For example, a student who is weak in oral speech may be strong in written tasks. Or a student who shows good results in a grammar test may have difficulty in a real dialogue. Therefore, a differentiated approach must be flexible.

Identifying Students' Levels and Diagnostics

In order to organize a differentiated approach effectively, it is first necessary to identify students' real level of knowledge. Diagnostic assessment may be conducted at the beginning of a lesson or before starting a new topic. In this process, the teacher checks students' vocabulary, grammatical knowledge, pronunciation, listening comprehension, written speech, and oral speech.

For example, the following tasks may be given for diagnostics in a Korean language group: constructing simple sentences with given words; reading a short text and stating the main idea; answering the teacher's question in Korean; making three sentences with a certain grammatical form; listening to a short dialogue and answering questions; writing a self-introduction text.

Based on the diagnostic results, the teacher may conditionally divide students into three groups. The first group consists of weaker students who need basic words, simple grammatical patterns, and more support. The second group consists of average-level students who understand basic grammar but make mistakes in independent speech. The third group consists of strong students who speak more freely, can construct complex sentences, and can complete creative tasks.

However, this grouping is not permanent. Students may show different results depending on each topic or skill. For example, a student may be strong in TOPIK reading tasks but weak in speaking. Therefore, the teacher should observe students' condition in every lesson and adapt tasks accordingly.

A Differentiated Approach in Teaching Vocabulary

Vocabulary is an important foundation for developing communicative competence in Korean. If a student does not know enough words, they cannot express their thoughts freely even if they understand grammar. In teaching vocabulary, a differentiated approach requires differentiating the number of words, their complexity, and the task of using them according to students' levels.

For example, if the topic 음식, meaning "food," is being studied, basic words are given to weaker students: 밥, 물, 고기, 김치, 먹다, 마시다, 맛있다. They make simple sentences with these words: 저는 김치를 먹습니다. 물을 마십니다. 비빔밥이 맛있습니다.

Average-level students work with word combinations such as 음식을 주문하다, 식당에 가다, 매운 음식을 좋아하다, and 점심을 먹다. They create short dialogues based on these units.

Strong students express their own opinions on the topic. For example, they are given the task 한국 음식과 우즈베키스탄 음식을 비교해 보세요. They may express comparative ideas with sentences such as 김치는 맵고 건강에 좋습니다. 우즈베키스탄의 팔로프는 기름지고 든든한 음식입니다.

In this method, although the topic is common for all students, the level of the task is different. As a result, weaker students also participate in the lesson, while strong students demonstrate their abilities more widely.

A Differentiated Approach in Teaching Grammar

A differentiated approach is very important in teaching Korean grammar. This is because the meaning, context of use, and stylistic features of a grammatical form in Korean may create difficulties for students. For example, the forms -아/어서, -기 때문에, and -(으)니까 express the meaning of cause, but their usage is not the same. Also, forms such as -고 있다, -아/어 있다, -아/어 보다, and -(으)려고 하다 should be taught through leveled exercises.

For example, if the lesson topic is the grammatical form -(으)려고 하다, weaker students complete ready-made sentences:

저는 한국어를 배우려고 합니다.

I want to learn Korean.

저는 친구를 만나려고 합니다.

I want to meet my friend.

Average-level students make sentences independently:

한국에 가려고 비자를 준비하고 있습니다.

I am preparing a visa in order to go to Korea.

TOPIK 시험을 보려고 열심히 공부하고 있습니다.

I am studying hard in order to take the TOPIK exam.

Strong students create a dialogue or a short text based on this grammar. For example, on the topic “Talk about your future plans in Korean,” they may write the following text:

저는 앞으로 한국에 유학을 가려고 합니다. 그래서 매일 한국어를 공부하고 있습니다. 특히 말하기와 쓰기 실력을 높이려고 노력하고 있습니다.

I am planning to study in Korea in the future. Therefore, I study Korean every day. In particular, I am trying to improve my speaking and writing skills.

Such tasks teach grammar not only through rules, but also by connecting it with real communicative purposes.

A Differentiated Approach in Developing Speaking Skills

Speaking skills are often one of the most difficult skills for students to develop in Korean. Students may be afraid of making mistakes, feel shy about pronunciation, or be unable to find enough words. A differentiated approach helps reduce psychological barriers in speaking.

For example, on the topic 카페에서 주문하기, meaning “ordering at a café,” three levels of tasks may be given. Weaker students read and memorize a ready-made dialogue:

A: 무엇을 드릴까요?

What would you like?

B: 아메리카노 한 잔 주세요.

One Americano, please.

A: 따뜻한 걸로 드릴까요?

Would you like it hot?

B: 네, 주세요.

Yes, please.

Average-level students change this dialogue by adding the name of a drink, the price, and additional requests. Strong students create an independent situation: the order was given incorrectly, the customer is making a complaint, or the student is recommending something to a friend. For example:

주문한 음료가 아닌 것 같아요. 다시 확인해 주시겠어요?

I think this is not the drink I ordered. Could you please check it again?

This method prepares students for real-life communication. Each student speaks according to their own level, but all of them participate in communicative activity.

A Differentiated Approach in Developing Written Speech

Written speech is a complex skill in learning Korean. A student must know how to construct sentences, choose grammatical endings, use connective units, express ideas coherently, and complete a text. A differentiated approach is also effective in written speech.

For example, on the topic 나의 하루, meaning “My Day,” weaker students make sentences based on key expressions: 아침에 일어나다, 학교에 가다, 공부하다, 집에 오다, 자다. They write five simple sentences.

Average-level students turn these sentences into a text with the help of connectors such as 그리고, 그래서, and 그 후에. Strong students write a broader text by adding time, reason, and explanation:

저는 아침 7 시에 일어납니다. 아침을 먹은 후에 학교에 갑니다. 학교에서 한국어를 공부하고 친구들과 이야기를 합니다. 수업이 끝난 후에는 도서관에서 숙제를 합니다. 바쁘지만 보람 있는 하루입니다.

I wake up at 7 in the morning. After having breakfast, I go to university. At university, I study Korean and talk with my friends. After classes finish, I do my homework in the library. It is a busy but meaningful day.

This approach develops written speech gradually. Weaker students learn to construct sentences, average-level students learn to connect sentences, and strong students learn to create coherent texts.

A Differentiated Approach in Listening Comprehension

Listening comprehension in Korean may be difficult for students. This is because Korean speech often includes speech speed, phonetic reductions, intonation, honorific forms, and context-dependent meanings. A differentiated approach helps adapt the material and tasks to students' levels in listening lessons.

For example, the same audio text is played for all students, but the tasks are differentiated. Weaker students identify the key words in the text and answer questions such as 누가?, 어디에?, and 무엇을? Average-level students answer questions about the content of the dialogue. Strong students draw conclusions based on the listened text or express their own opinions.

For example, if the audio text is about ordering at a café, weaker students identify the name of the drink, average-level students determine the price and quantity of the order, and strong students analyze polite expressions in the dialogue. They explain the function of forms such as 주세요, 드릴까요, and 감사합니다.

In this way, one material can be used effectively with students of different levels.

A Differentiated Approach in Reading Skills

Differentiated tasks are also important in developing reading skills. In order to understand a Korean text, a student must understand word meanings, grammatical endings, sentence structure, and context. Especially in the TOPIK reading section, students are required to find the main idea of a text, draw conclusions, and identify semantic relations.

Tasks of different levels may be given for the same text. For example, a text about 한국의 명절, meaning “Korean holidays,” is given. Weaker students find holiday names and key words in the text: 설날, 추석, 가족, 음식, 선물. Average-level students answer questions based on the text: What do Koreans do on Chuseok? What food is eaten on Seollal? Strong students compare Korean and Uzbek holidays: they explain the similarities and differences between Chuseok and Navro'z.

This method turns the reading process not into a passive translation activity, but into an analytical and communicative activity.

A Differentiated Approach in TOPIK Preparation

A differentiated approach is of special importance in preparing for the TOPIK exam. This is because even if students study in the same group, their TOPIK levels may be different. Some students may be at the TOPIK I level, while others may be ready to complete TOPIK II tasks.

In TOPIK preparation, it is appropriate for weaker students to work with basic vocabulary, simple grammatical forms, and short texts. Average-level students practice more reading and listening tasks and write short answers. Strong students work with writing tasks 53 and 54, graph analysis, argumentative essays, and complex texts.

For example, on the topic 인터넷 사용, weaker students memorize a list of words: 인터넷, 사용하다, 편리하다, 문제, 시간. Average-level students write five or six sentences about the advantages and disadvantages of the Internet. Strong students write an essay in the style of TOPIK task 54, consisting of an introduction, arguments, and a conclusion.

Such an approach prepares each student for the exam according to their own level and helps improve results gradually.

A Differentiated Approach in Pair and Group Work

A differentiated approach can also be applied in pair and group work. Pairs should not always be formed only from students of the same level. Sometimes, if a strong student works with a weaker student, both benefit. The strong student strengthens their knowledge by explaining, while the weaker student understands a difficult topic more easily with the help of a peer.

For example, when creating a dialogue, the weaker student chooses basic expressions, the average-level student constructs the sentences, and the strong student expands the dialogue and helps with pronunciation. In group work, each student has their own task: one works with vocabulary, one checks grammar, one writes the text, and one presents it orally.

Such cooperation develops communicative competence because students use Korean not only with the teacher, but also in communication with one another.

Assessment in the Differentiated Approach

Assessment in the differentiated approach should also be flexible. It is not enough to assess only the final result. The student's initial level, pace of development, activity in class, work on mistakes, and independent effort should also be taken into account.

For example, if a strong student writes a complex essay, logical arguments, connective units, and stylistic accuracy are required from them. If a weaker student writes a simple text, the use of basic sentence structure, correct endings, and topic-related vocabulary is required from them. This is not injustice in assessment, but a learner-centered approach.

Assessment criteria may include the level of task completion, grammatical correctness, use of vocabulary, activity in communication, pronunciation, coherence of ideas, independent editing, and growth compared to previous results.

The Role of the Teacher

In the differentiated approach, the teacher performs not only the role of a knowledge provider, but also the role of diagnostician, guide, observer, organizer, and motivator. The teacher identifies each student's needs, selects a task suitable for them, provides help when necessary, and directs them toward independent work.

In such a lesson, the teacher does not ask all students the same question. The teacher also differentiates the questions. For example, the teacher may ask a weaker student, "What is the meaning of this word?" The teacher may ask an average-level student, "Make a sentence with this word." The teacher may give a strong student the task, "Use this word in another context and create a short dialogue."

It is also important for the teacher to create a positive psychological environment in the lesson. Weaker students should not be afraid of making mistakes, and strong students should not become bored. For this reason, even each student's small success should be encouraged.

Advantages of the Differentiated Approach

The differentiated approach has several advantages in Korean language classes. First, it increases each student's activity in the lesson. If the task is appropriate to the student's level, the

student tries to complete it. Second, speech anxiety decreases. Weaker students are not forced to speak in complex forms immediately; instead, they enter communication through basic expressions. Third, the opportunity for development expands for strong students. They are not limited to simple exercises, but complete creative and analytical tasks.

Fourth, the differentiated approach forms communicative competence gradually. The student first learns words and patterns, then constructs sentences, participates in dialogues, creates texts, and finally expresses independent opinions. Fifth, this approach corresponds to the principle of learner-centered education. In other words, the center of the lesson is not only the topic, but also the student's real needs and development.

Conclusion

In teaching Korean, the differentiated approach serves as an effective methodological basis for developing students' communicative competence. In Korean language classes, students differ in their level of knowledge, vocabulary, grammatical preparation, speech activity, pronunciation skills, and speed of learning. Therefore, giving the same task to all students does not always produce an effective result. The differentiated approach helps organize educational activities suitable for each student by taking into account their individual abilities.

The analysis shows that the use of leveled tasks in vocabulary, grammar, speaking, writing, reading, listening comprehension, and TOPIK preparation increases students' interest in the lesson, strengthens their activity in communication, and develops their ability to use Korean in real situations. Weaker students acquire basic skills through basic expressions and simple exercises, average-level students construct independent sentences and short texts, and strong students move to a higher level through creative, analytical, and communicative tasks.

In conclusion, the differentiated approach creates a learner-centered, flexible, and effective methodological system in teaching Korean. This approach serves to develop not only students' grammatical knowledge, but also their communicative, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competences. Therefore, the systematic application of the differentiated approach in Korean language classes is one of the important tasks of modern linguodidactics.

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