

# Teaching Strategies for Korean Language Classes with Highly Mixed Ability Students

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Keyword: mixed ability class, teaching strategy.

Abstract: Recruitment system and selection of the first batch of 2015 Korean Education Study Program's students were only through *Saringan Masuk (SM UPI)*; therefore, every student has different teaching ability, age, motivation, and characteristic. In brief in each class, there are medium achiever students, high achiever students, and low achiever students. Based on the background, the research questions of the present study are how the students' variety and background in the first batch of 2015 Korean Education Study Program are and also how the lecturers' strategies to deal with the students' highly mixed abilities are. The aim of the present study is to investigate the varied condition of the first batch of 2015 Korean students' ability and to learn appropriate teaching strategies to serve the students with mixed ability. The present study use a qualitative approach with case study method in the Korean Education Study Program. The findings of the present study suggest that the use of various teaching strategies is an appropriate effort taken by the lecturers in dealing with the mixed ability students in order to achieve competitive teaching outcome which is in line with the intended teaching target. The findings also suggest that appropriate efforts to improve the students' ability and to cope with the issues occurred in class with mixed ability are by giving extra class to the low achiever students and by providing fun extracurricular activities outside the formal class hours, for example, the extracurricular of Korean song choir.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Human communicates through sounds which are known with the term 'words'. Words are part of language. In *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI)*; The Official Dictionary of Indonesian, language is defined as an arbitrary sounds symbol system, which is used by members of a society to cooperate, interact, and identification themselves (*KBBI* offline 1.5, 2009). Meanwhile Stevenson (2015) in Oxford Dictionary of English language is defined as "the system of communication in speech and writing that is used by people of a particular country." According to the aforementioned definitions of language, we can infer that it is language that is used by humans as a tool to express ideas, thoughts, feelings, as a tool to improve themselves and to get information.

Language understanding is an important skill to be mastered by humans. There are about 7000 languages in the world used by humans as a tool of communication. The more someone understands

various languages, the easier s/he improves her/himself in facing international competition.

In facing *Masyarakat Ekonomi Asean (MEA)*; Asean Economic Community (AEC), Indonesia should be able to create internationally competitive human resources. One of their competences is able to master various languages in the world. *UPI (Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia)*; Indonesia University of Education, as a university which has a vision to be the leading and outstanding university has 5 foreign language education departments i.e. English Department, German Department, French Department, Japanese Department, and Arabic Department. To respond the development of science, technology, arts, demand of society and global changing, *UPI* has added a new foreign language education department that is Korean Education Program.

The rapid and well development of Korea in the world including in Indonesia, has driven *UPI* to facilitate Indonesians who want to learn Korean and the culture of Korea by establishing the Korean

Education Program. *UPI* becomes the only university which opens Korean program in the realm of education and it is expected to be able to produce competence Korean teachers.

Korean Education Study Program is the youngest program in *FPBS UPI*. The first lecturing activity of semester 1 (odd semester) was started on September 1, 2016 with 53 students divided into two classes. At first, the recruitment system and selection of new students were through *Saringan Masuk (SM UPI)*; the entrance test of *UPI*, in 2015. The recruitment system and the new students selection in 2016 will follow the procedure regulated by the *Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi (Dikti)*; Directorate General of Higher Education, and *UPI* through some ways online as follows: 1) *SNMPTN*, 2) *SBMPTN*, 3) *SM UPI*, 4) Dual Mode, and 5) International channel. The Student's educational background in his/her first language. Students arrive in an Korean Education Study Program with varied educational background. Some student have had little or no education about Korean Language.

Observing the result of monitoring and evaluation during the odd semester lecturing and the study result of the odd semester (September 1, 2015 – early January 2016) from the result of recruitment system and the new students selection through *SM UPI*, some phenomena are found: every student has different teaching ability, age, motivation, and character, there are some students who are really able to follow the lecturing, there are students who have ever learnt Korean before and there are students who have just known Korean for the very first time. In brief in every class, there are medium achiever students, high achiever students, and low achiever students.

Due to the phenomenon, we conducted a study entitled "Teaching Strategies for Language Classes with Highly Mixed Ability Students" (A Case Study of the First Batch of 2015 Korean Education Study Program Students *FPBS UPI*) in Bandung.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Vygotsky (1986) language, especially meaning, is at the center of the dynamics of consciousness that composed in humans (in Cammarata, 2016), therefore learning a new language not merely understands the meaning to communicate, but, learning a new language means having the ability to gain new possibilities of perception. As expressed by Byram and Esarte-Sarries (1991) that:

"Language is not simply a reflector of an objective cultural reality. It is an integral part of

that reality through which other parts are shaped and interpreted. It is both a symbol of the whole and a part of the whole which shapes and is in turn shaped by sociocultural actions, beliefs and values. In engaging in language, speakers are enacting sociocultural phenomena; in acquiring language, children acquire culture."

Studying a new language for students is closely related to the process of teaching the new language by teachers / lecturers. Teaching according to Hasibuan and Moedjiono (2012) is the creation of an enabling environment for the learning process. This environmental system consists of components that affect each other, the instructional objectives to be achieved, the material taught, teachers and students who must ensure the role and exist in certain social relationships, types of activities undertaken, as well as teaching- available.

Learning a language other than mother tongue means that we seek to understand others, as expressed by Reagan, Timothy and Osborn (2002) that:

"In studying languages other than our own, we are seeking to understand (and, indeed, in at least a weak sense, to become) the Other – we are, in short, attempting to enter into realities that have, to some degree, been constructed by others and which many of the fundamental assumptions about the nature of knowledge and society may be different from our own. We are, in fact creating new selves in an important sense."

With regard to language learning, Kumaradevelu (2006) explains that there are classroom procedures that teachers need to apply, modifying the material and facilitating student interaction activities. Modifying this material relates to how the teacher presents the material so that it can be accepted well by the students, while facilitating student interaction activities related to the activities of teachers in assigning tasks to students so that interaction runs smoothly between students in the classroom. The success of these activities will be greatly influenced by what strategies that teachers use in the learning process.

Every student has his/her own learning style, linguistic knowledge background, and individual pace in teaching and improving. Therefore, most foreign language classes involve students with mixed abilities (Richard, 1998).

Mixed abilities or 'heterogeneous' class is a term used to describe a class which consists of students with various proficiency levels. All classes consist of students who are different in so many ways. They have different strength and weaknesses in

approaching teaching. They also respond various leaning methods and classroom situation differently (Ur, 1991).

Ma (2016) explains the factors determining students' ability in teaching language as follows: age of maturity; Intelligence and multiple intelligences; Teaching style; Language aptitude; Language levels; Mother tongue; Learner autonomy; Motivation or attitude towards the subject; Cultural background.

Classroom condition with mixed ability requires appropriate teaching strategy. Some strategies that can be used in mixed ability classroom are as follows: Supportive teaching environment; Classroom management; Teaching to learn; Variety; Grouping; Pace; Interest; Collaboration; Individualization; Personalisation; Blooms taxonomy; Open-endedness; Open-endedness; Compulsory plus optional tasks; Adapting materials; Adapting materials (Bremner, 2008).

Teaching activity in mixed ability class is certainly not easy, there are many difficulties and obstacles faced both by the lecturers and the students. Therefore, Tomlinson (2005) also suggests teaching strategies to mixed ability class which can solve the difficulties, they are: Have a strong rationale for differentiating instruction based on students' readiness, interest, and teaching profile; Begin differentiating at a pace that is comfortable for you; Time differentiated activities to support student success; Use an "anchor activity" to free you up to focus your attention on your students; Create and deliver instruction carefully; Assign students into groups or seating areas smoothly; Have a "home base" for students; Be sure students have a plan for getting help when you're busy with another; Minimize noise; Make a plan for students to turn in work; Teach students to rearrange the furniture; Minimize "stay" movement; Promote on-task behaviour; Have a plan for "quick finishers"; Make a plan for "calling a halt"; Give your students as much responsibility for their teaching as possible; Engage your students in talking about classroom procedures and group processes.

Several studies on mixed ability classes have been conducted including: Challenges Facing EFL teachers in Mixed Ability Classes and Strategies Used to Overcome Them by Al-Shammakhi and Al-Humaidi (2015) with the results of their research showing that there are various levels of difficulty experienced by the teacher and the use of varied strategies, further research results show that there are similar difficulties experienced by both male and female teachers in varied teaching skills and there is no significant difference in the use of learning

strategies between the two. In another study conducted by Morris (2008) with the title of "A Qualitative Investigation of Interdisciplinary Mixed Ability Cooperative Classes in Inner Ring Suburban High School", stated that to face problems in the classroom with varying abilities required special training for teachers to be able to use various strategies and to do the various learning activities.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted for 8 months from March to November 2016 in Korean Education Study Program, *Fakultas Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia*; Faculty of Language and Literature Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia. Subjects of the study are: (1) fifty three first batch Korean Education Study Program's students with varied educational background and competence at whom some of them come from Senior High/Vocational schools of various region in Indonesia, (2) five expatriate teachers from Korea who have more than five years' experience in teaching Korean and now are staffs of Korean expatriate teachers in Korean Education Program, Faculty of Language and Literature Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, (3) three full time teachers of Korean Education Study Program *FPBS UPI*. The instruments of the data collection comprise the teaching result of the Korean Education Study Program's students in the first semester of 2015/2016, students' questionnaire and interview, and Korean expatriate teachers' questionnaire and interview.

## 4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Profile Description of Korean Education Students' Ability

The focus of the present study is students with mixed ability in language classes. The term mixed ability refers to all students with mixed abilities (Cambridge Dictionary). Classes with mixed ability level describe classes which consist of learners with different level of language ability. The different level of language ability can be seen from their first and second semesters' GPA as shown in table 1.

Table 1: Table of GPA in semester 1 and 2.

Category	Highest Score	Lowest Score	Average
GPA in Semester 1	3,82	1,27	3,27
GPA in Semester 2	3,93	2,00	3,21

Source: Batch 2015 Students' Achievement Document.

According to table 1, there is a relatively great gap between the highest and the lowest GPAs in a semester. In the first semester, the highest GPA is 3.84. It suggests that the student's ability is very high. Meanwhile, the lowest GPA is 1.27. It suggests that the student's ability is very low. Similarly in the second semester, there is a significant difference between the highest and the lowest GPA scores. It suggests that the Korean Education classes consist of students with various ability which are also known as 'mixed ability classes'.

Moreover, students' mixed ability can be influenced by many factors. The factors determining students' ability in learning language are influenced by several aspects as follows: age or maturity, intelligence and multiple intelligences, teaching style, language aptitude, language levels, mother tongue, learner autonomy, motivation or attitude towards the subject, and cultural background (Ma, 2016).

In this Korean Education classes, in average, students are in the transitional stage of late teenager to young adult between 18-21 years old. According to the result of the survey conducted, 64% students have Indonesian as their mother tongue. In addition, 65% students also master other language i.e. English before they know Korean. According to the questionnaire given to 51 students, 40% students choose Korean Education program because they do like the language and its culture. Besides the interest to the language learnt, other thing influencing someone's teaching ability is his/her motivation in teaching. In this Korean Education Program, 51% students are motivated to learn Korean because they want to be a Korean teacher one day. It can be a beneficial information for the lecturers to determine the teaching technique to be used. Motivation and interest differences will certainly cause a certain problem for the lecturers in providing materials and teaching activities that can fulfill all students' motivation and interest (Ma, 2016).

## 4.2 Description of Teaching Strategies of Korean Education Students

Table 2: Teaching strategies (classroom management, teaching material, teaching process, and motivation and interest).

Category	Mean
Classroom management	3,01
Teaching material	2,79
Teaching process	2,84
Motivation and Interest	2,88
Respond to teaching	4,49

Source: Data Processing Result 2016.

Table 2 shows the strategies often used by the lecturers to teach the class with mixed ability students. In the table, it is observed that the lecturers tend to use all strategies simultaneously even though the strategies are not always be used. All teaching strategy categories have the same average score that are: 3.01, 2.79, 2.84, 2.88, it suggests that the lecturers rarely use the strategies in the classroom. Degeng (1997) in his book "*Strategi Pembelajaran: Mengorganisasi Isi dengan Model Elaborasi*" states that teaching method refers to the way taken in a certain condition to achieve the teaching goals intended; meanwhile, teaching strategy refers to the process of choosing, implementing, and developing the teaching strategies to obtain a procedural step that can be used to achieve the intended goals.

According to the theory, we understand that lecturers have an important role in determining the steps of teaching strategies that are about to be conducted in every teaching activity to achieve the intended goals. Based on the result that has been previously explained, additional lecturers training in how to implement appropriate teaching strategies in class with mixed ability students is needed so that lecturers can fulfill the students' need optimally.

## 4.3 Description of Students' Respond

According table 3, students strongly agree to the strategies the lecturers used to cope with the difficulty and to improve the language ability in class with highly mixed ability students such as by giving extra class to the low achiever students, by providing interesting materials, etc. Higher students' respond is derived in the extracurricular activity that the lecturers often give outside formal class hours. Students feel that the strategy suits them and that they

feel helped by the activity. It is in line with the statement given by the lecturers and the students

during the interview session conducted by the researchers.

Table 3: Student's respond.

		Extra Class of Korean Literature	Extracurricular of Korean Song Choir	Extra Time for the Low Achiever Students	Interesting Teaching Material	Teaching Material Helping to Improve the Language Competence
N	Valid	51	51	51	51	51
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
	Mean	4,3725	4,3725	4,6471	4,5882	4,5098
	Mode	4,00	4,00	5,00	5,00	5,00

Source: Data Processing Result 2016.

As stated by Šimanová (2010), and Bremner (2008) that classroom conditions with varying abilities require appropriate instructional strategies. Some of the strategies that can be used in classes with such diverse capability conditions are as follows: Supportive learning environment; Classroom management; Learning to learn; Variety; Grouping; Pace; Interest; Collaboration; Individualization; Personalisation; Blooms taxonomy; Open-endedness; Compulsory plus optional tasks; Adapting materials; Homework.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

Mixed ability in each Korean Education Program student especially batch 2015 could be influenced by many factors. Based on the findings, factors mostly influencing the difference in the students' achievement are maturity, mother tongue, interest and motivation. Mixed ability class certainly requires appropriate teaching strategies in order to achieve a competitive teaching result which is in line with the intended teaching targets. Findings of the present study suggest that the combination use of teaching strategies is an appropriate step taken by the lecturers in mixed ability class; furthermore, lecturers have done many efforts to improve the students' achievement, for example, by providing extra class for low achiever students and by conducting fun extracurricular activities outside the formal class hour like the extracurricular of Korean song choir.

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