

Review of “Understanding Korean Language Education”

Title	한국어 교육의 이해 (개정판) Understanding Korean Language Education (revised edition)
Author	Jung-sup Kim
ISBN	978-89-5726-543-7
Year of Publication	2008
No. of Pages	497 pp.
Place of Publication	Seoul, Korea
Publisher	Hankuk Munwa Press

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“Understanding Korean Language Education” is a reader-friendly and useful introductory book for those who are about to study Korean language education (KLE). It is written by Jung-sup Kim, an authoritative expert in this field. This book compiles various theses on meaningful topics he contemplated and considered with view to actual teaching practice. Although KLE has recently shown remarkable growth both in quantity and quality, good introductory books on the subject are lacking for people who intend to major in KLE. This book covers a wide range of topics, including basic theory and practice, current issues and the future outlook of KLE.

This book is composed of three parts, including the present state of, issues in and the future of KLE. This 14-chapter book includes sub-chapters related to these three themes. Chapters 1 to 3 deal with the present state of KLE, including general problems in Korean language teaching in Korea as well as in China, Russia, Central Asia and North Korea. Chapter 1 discusses the basic foundation of KLE, quality of Korean language teachers, and textbooks for potential KLE major students or teachers-to-be. Chapters 4 through 11 comprehensively discuss practical and timely subjects in KLE. Chapter 4 suggests directions for developing Korean language textbooks.

Chapter 5 discusses ways to improve Korean language teaching methods. It is based on observations and recordings carried out in Korean language classes at the Kwandong International High School. Measures to improve and develop Korean instructors through class observations are discussed. Chapter 6 presents various cases of errors committed by Korean language learners in practical writing situations in Korea. The study of errors (classified according to regions) will provide very practical information for teachers. Chapter 7 describes basic theories and teaching methods in reading instruction. Chapter 8 provides instructional methods for teaching onomatopoeias and mimic words. Chapter 9 provides instructional methods for Sino-Korean words. Chapter 10 discusses instruction on Korean culture. The chapter also discusses difficulties and challenges learners face in learning. It suggests concrete instructional methods for teaching culture in KLE. Chapter 11 analyzes current issues in writing Korean proficiency tests as well as areas for improvement. Lastly, chapters 12 to 14 deal with the identity and status of KLE, Korean language instructors, and new instructional methods in KLE. These chapters provide meaningful topics to consider in KLE, directions for developing KLE more academically, and issues Korean language instructors face.

This book addresses diverse issues in KLE based on in-depth research. As the name “Understanding Korean Language Education” suggests, this book offers an overview of various issues in KLE and discusses each issue in a practical way. The discussion of Korean language textbooks and instructional methods are based on field experience, and it is emphasized that interaction and communication between instructors and learners will lead to the improvement of learners’ language proficiency. It also presents 8 subject matters to be considered for developing Korean language textbooks. For reading classes, it proposes three steps: a before-reading phase, a reading phase and an after-reading phase. They can easily be adapted and applied in actual class settings.

This revised edition maintains the basic format of the first edition published in 2004 and includes various studies and findings after 2004. The update on the current state of KLE in the world is rather impressive. Latest information on KLE throughout the world and the results of various analyses of textbooks are included along with concise, visual charts on these subjects. Non-Korean Korean language learners were surveyed, and from the surveys various teaching methods of teaching onomatopoeia, mimic words and Chinese characters were developed and proposed. The methods are not just based on instructors’ intuition but are based on learner’s recognition of difficult materials while studying. The discussion of errors in the use of connecting endings in Chapter 6 is based on learners’ writing assignments which were systemically analyzed. Systematic instructional methods for preventing common learners’ errors are effectively presented.

A list of references related to each chapter’s topic is included at the end of every chapter. All related studies can be found at a glance. An appendix at the end of this book provides references of study for KLE and useful information on institutes for KLE in Korea.

The conclusion includes Kim’s comments on the future of KLE: developing original methods in KLE based on the specific character of the Korean language and culture, moving away from western-style teaching methods, developing standardized Korean language textbooks, training experts on Korean education, and retraining teachers.

As a practical and a must-read introductory book for KLE, it provides the readers with a glimpse of what it is like to be in the teaching field with meaningful discussions and directions for further studies. However, in its discussion of teaching methodology, it focused mainly on reading instruction. If the teaching of other skills such as speaking, listening and writing could also be covered in the methodology discussion, the book would be even more complete and valuable to KLE major students and practitioners.