

USING DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTIONS IN MULTI-LEVEL CLASSROOMS

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Differentiated instruction refers to the practice of tailoring educational lessons to address the diverse needs of individual students. Recognizing that each learner possesses unique characteristics, educators must implement strategies to modify learning environments, content, outcomes, and processes to effectively engage all students. This method provides students with flexibility and autonomy in their learning experiences, enabling educators to personalize instruction according to students' specific needs. Central to this approach is the establishment of well-defined learning objectives and the development of pathways for each student to achieve those objectives. (Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, 2023).

Based on the definition of differentiated instruction by Beth Sheppard ‘it is a way of teaching in which instructors observe differences between students and plan instruction to meet all of their different needs’, the differentiation is proactive: teachers can help students become aware of different learning styles and guide them to explore their preferred styles in various learning situations (Shepperd, 2020). In an English language classroom, differentiated instruction means adjusting content, processes, and outcomes to accommodate each student’s background, language ability, interests, and learning pace.

C. Tomlinson asserts that educators implement differentiated instruction to acknowledge and respond to the diverse realities of their students. Students exhibit a range of characteristics: they may be dynamic and extroverted, reserved and inquisitive, confident or uncertain. Their interests span a wide array of topics, with some deeply engaged in specific subjects. Within the classroom, students may be academically advanced, average performers, or those facing challenges due to cognitive, emotional, economic, or sociological factors. These students possess varied learning styles and progress at differing rates, yet they converge in academically diverse classrooms (Tomlinson, 2017). So, how can teachers meet the needs of all these multi-level students in the same class? Based on the views above (Tomlinson, 2017; Sheppard, 2020), we can talk about varying the differentiation approaches to content, process, and product.

1. Content Differentiation is when we approach content differently for each student, it means that all students do the same type of activity on the same topic, but

the content presented to some students may be more challenging than others. Adapting materials based on students' language proficiency, background knowledge, or interests. For example, if teaching English vocabulary, teachers might provide simpler or visual definitions for beginners and more advanced terminology for higher-level students.

2. Process Differentiation involves creating different tasks for different students. Everyone is working on the same topic, but some students may work on activities that require more independence or abstraction than others. Offering varied activities or instructional strategies to help students process and understand the material. For instance, some students may benefit from visual aids or interactive games, while others might prefer reading or listening exercises.

3. Product Differentiation means that students can demonstrate their skills in different ways. For example, after a lesson on English grammar, some students might complete a traditional quiz, while others might write a short story, create a presentation, or even act out a scenario using the target grammar.

Examples of differentiated learning in the classroom include offering students a range of assignment choices, employing diverse assessment methods and individualized learning approaches, and tailoring instructional strategies to meet the needs of all learners. Additionally, this approach involves acknowledging students' backgrounds with cultural competence and providing varied learning resources. (What Is Differentiated Instruction and Why Does It Matter in the Classroom?, 2023).

There are a number of activities related to differentiated instructions. Here are some techniques for using differentiated instruction in English classes tailored to master's degree students majoring in electrical engineering with a B2 level of English proficiency. These tasks emphasize tailoring content to their field, accommodating various learning styles, and leveraging their technical expertise.

1. Teaching Technical Vocabulary and Concept Mapping

Task: Provide students with a list of electrical engineering terms and phrases in English (e.g., circuit, voltage, semiconductor). Divide students into pairs based on proficiency within the B2 level (stronger students with weaker ones) and ask them to create a concept map showing the relationships between these terms.

Differentiated instruction: Give more advanced students additional, complex terms or related phrases (like “integrated circuit” or “thermistor”) and ask them to include example sentences. For students needing more support, a teacher can provide a partially completed concept map or offer visual aids to help structure the map.

2. Technical Report Writing with Peer Review

Task: Ask students to write a short technical report on a relevant topic (e.g., “Recent Advances in Renewable Energy Technology”) using appropriate industry

terminology and structure. Have them pair up for a peer review, focusing on language use, terminology, and clarity.

Differentiated instruction: Encourage advanced students to add an extra section, such as a critical analysis of a current trend, while others can focus on a descriptive overview. Provide a checklist or a model answer for students needing more guidance, while more proficient students can also suggest improvements in grammar or expression.

3. Role-Playing Professional Scenarios

Task: Organize role-playing exercises where students simulate professional interactions, such as giving a technical presentation, explaining a concept to a non-specialist, or participating in a problem-solving activity.

Differentiated instruction: Pair students based on their comfort level with technical English. Less confident students could role-play as technical assistants, asking questions or paraphrasing information, while more proficient students take on the role of the lead engineer presenting detailed findings. Assign feedback partners so each student receives constructive input.

4. Listening and Summarizing Engineering Podcasts

Task: Provide students with an engineering-focused podcast or lecture in English. After listening, ask them to summarize the content in writing, focusing on main ideas, vocabulary, and technical accuracy.

Differentiated instruction: Give less proficient students the option of structured questions to guide their summary, whereas more advanced students write a full summary with critical reflections. Additionally, allow some students to present their summary orally to practice spoken English, while others can focus on written work if they need extra support.

In conclusion, differentiated instruction can enhance the accessibility, engagement, and rigor of English classes, facilitating each student's progress at an individualized pace and in alignment with their unique learning profile. This method fosters a more inclusive and stimulating learning environment, enabling students to develop their English skills more effectively and with greater confidence.

References

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