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TIERED INSTRUCTIONS AS A STRATEGY OF DIFFERENTIATED APPROACH IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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The article focuses on issue of differentiation in the classroom. Differentiation is a powerful education tool for teachers who understand diverse student academic needs, interests, readiness level and respond them positively. The implementation of differentiation strategy is aimed at maintenance of students' potentials and educational achievements. The present paper outlines the benefits of differentiation in the classroom, methods for differentiating instructions and assessment. One of the differentiating strategies is tiered assignments. It is based on main stages: pre-assessment, flexible grouping formation, tiered instructions and final assessment. Each tier carries the same workload and learning objective but the nature of the task varies. Tiered instructions are tasks at varied levels of complexity and with various degrees of scaffolding. Six ways to tier a lesson are described in the article: by challenge level, by complexity, by resources, by outcome, by process, by product. This strategy helps teachers to achieve learning objectives and encourage studying for all students without exception. The tiered strategy proves that students are more successful when they are taught based on their own readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles.

Key words: differentiating approach, tiered assignments, pre-assessment, learning objective, academic needs, readiness level.

Introduction. If we look inside any classroom today we will not find students with identical educational background, abilities, needs, interests, learning style and language proficiency level. All these factors vary significantly within a single group or a class. However, regardless the differences, students should master the same learning concepts, skills and successfully achieve professional grade level. Supporting all students to achieve success is a great challenge for teachers and it requires critical and creative thinking.

At the same time we realize that teachers are typically tied to content standards, curriculum limitations and associated assessments of those standards. But teaching this way without accounting for student's diversity, we narrow and reduce the degrees of freedom, critical reflection and self-direction that learners have to explore from diverse perspectives.

Objectives of the present paper are to examine the framework and advantages of differentiated strategies and to introduce one of the strategies – tiered approach implementation for English language classrooms.

Literature review. The education professor from University of Virginia and an expert in differentiation Carol A. Tomlinson describes differentiated instruction as, "a systematic approach to planning curriculum and instruction for academically diverse learners. It is a way of thinking about the classroom with the dual goals of honoring each student's learning needs and maximizing each student's capacity [6, p. 6]." But she also states that only differentiation approach implementation does not mean automatically student performance enhancement. The researcher outlines that the most successful way is to combine the mentioned technique with an elaborate flexible curriculum, well-grounded instructional strategies and learning activities aimed at students interests and success. The education practitioner M. Good claims that teachers plan "several activity options, not one for each student. Instead of generating isolated tasks, on any given day the teacher may work with the whole class, small groups, individual students, or a combination of all three" [1, p. 14].

The Professor Julia L. Roberts and Tracy F. Inman, from Western Kentucky University, underline the importance of students understanding of themselves and their abilities before tiered activities introduction. A differentiated classroom "respects diversity...maintains high expectations and ... generates openness." [5, p. 14]. As students recognize their strength and weakness, they understand the benefit of differentiation and become more open-minded. The Director Center for Gifted Studies Cheryl Adams asserts that, "It is an organized, yet flexible way of proactively adjusting teaching and learning to meet students where they are and help all students achieve successful growth as learners" [3,p. 59].

The program director for the PA High School Coaching Initiative Susan Keck and the director of the Discovery Educator Network Scott Kinney allege that once teachers are aware of their students needs and implement strategies to satisfy those needs into their instruction, differentiation guarantees “equity in the learning process” [2, p. 15].

The definition of “differentiation”. In the context of education, the term “*differentiation*” is defined as a teacher's reacting responsively to a learner's needs [7]. A teacher, that implements differentiated techniques, understands student's needs and responds them positively. The goal of a differentiated classroom is to ensure student's growth and individual success. Lessons can be variously differentiated by learning objectives, tasks, methods of teaching, students grouping, individualized access to specialists, learning style etc.

To facilitate the success of students in a responsive classroom requires the understanding of key differentiation principles. Among these principles are the following:

- a flexible mode of teaching (learning goals, materials, tools, ways of grouping and assessment can be used in a variety of ways);
- students differences are the basis for instructional planning (students differences are assessed, appreciated, and studied before the beginning of the course);
- flexibly grouped classrooms (it provides opportunity for carefully targeted teaching and learning, access to all learning materials, fair assessment in a wide range of contexts).

The theoretical sources define the following differentiated strategies as grouping option, compacting curriculum, questioning and complexity of tasks and tiered lessons and assignments [4]. To understand the meaning of tiered strategy we have to assume that this way of teaching is based on students' needs assessment. This strategy is aimed at providing a better instructional adjustment between students and their needs. According to C. Tomlinson, using tiered assignments allows for the following:

- adjusts assessment and instruction,
- enables students to begin learning where they are,
- permits students to work with appropriately challenging tasks,
- allows for reinforcement or extension of concepts and principles based on student readiness,
- ensures modification of working conditions based on learning style,
- avoids work that is anxiety-producing (too hard) or boredom-producing (too easy),
- promotes success and is therefore motivating [6].

Before the beginning of learning, the teacher has to complete a pre assessment to determine students' skills, language proficiency level, learning style and experience. If we expect continuous progress from students, they need to be challenged appropriately according to their ability to master intellectual, emotional, and social tasks at progressively more difficult levels. S. Rakow suggests the following pre-assessment characteristics: written, individual, focused on key information, concepts and skills, relatively short, assessed only for instructional planning and grouping (not graded). He also states that pre-assessment sets should be returned to students only at the end of the unit when they can assess their own progress [4].

The implementation of tiered strategy does not mean an average group division into low-middle-high levels or those who can learn and who can not. Tiered lessons and assignments are targeted to enable all students to learn the same skills and content but in different ways.

The benefit of a tiered approach is fair and sufficient support of gifted students as well as struggling ones. Moreover, tiered strategy increases opportunity for students to cooperate and communicate with peers of different learning levels. It helps to facilitate personal growth, self-monitoring and self-awareness, provides possibilities to master critical thinking and reflection. It is significant for a teacher to ensure that students are ready to perceive the learning material, to solve their learning objectives, to be highly motivated and to have formed inner values [8]. But the most important fact is that everyone is involved and has the same opportunity to gain success.

A tiered lesson may have one or more learning objectives and levels of complexity. The main characteristics of a tired lesson are: clear and flexible objective, driven concept, whole and

small group instructions, the grade level proficiency, opportunity for extended learning, optimal learning speed for all students, comfortable learning options for all students.

When planning and developing a tiered lesson tiered assignments practitioners suggest to follow some useful steps:

1. Identify the concept, skills and understanding you want students to acquire;
2. Identify the grade levels;
3. Determine which part of the lesson will be tiered: process (way of teaching), content (what to teach)or product (outcome of the lesson);
4. Determine which needs are addressed with the tiered activity;
5. Determine the modifications and quantity of tiers depending on the number of levels;
6. Decide how all tiers will be managed;
7. Promote teacher support at every tier;
8. Develop the appropriate assessment for each tiered assignments [3].

Having determined the specific learning target and grade level a teacher should develop tiered assignments. According to the specific learning topic an instructor can determine the best approach to structure the task: challenge level, complexity, outcome, process, product, resources. When implementing challenge level tiered tasks students complete different assignments all together. One group may need content reinforcement by selecting the necessary information from the text while other group may extend their understanding by writing true or false sentences.

If an instructor decides to tier by complexity it is better to give the same assignment but to vary the complexity level. For example, we can direct students to create a poster on a specific issue but one group will write only about one perspective of the problem while another group should consider some points. Mostly the same strategy is for differentiated outcome. All students use the same materials but have different outcome according to the given tiered task.

We suggest some variants of complexity level tiering. An instructor can give clearly defined or open-ended parameters of the issue, basic or extend information, single or multiplied resource application. We may demand from students simple answers or complex, varied response to the task. When a teacher is focused on the achievement of similar outcome but among differentiated students, it is beneficial to apply tiered instruction strategy so students will use different methods to gain similar results. For example, a learning objective is to master some grammar rules. One group of students is able only to choose and insert given variants, others are able to complete the task without key phrases or words. But the outcome is similar: all students master the same rule application.

We can differentiate tasks depending on students learning styles or learning experience. One group may be kinesthetic and act out a presentation. Another group could be visual and create the presentation. Considering this approach and groups comprehension level an instructor should pay attention to a resources choice. One flexible group can work with an authentic scientific journal while another may use a traditional textbook. While tiering, teachers have to keep in mind the importance of group flexibility. Tier groups are formed according to the learning objective or students abilities to complete the assignments. Therefore, students can be in one group for one particular lesson but should be regrouped if a different tiered strategy is implemented.

Another important point which we have to remember is that assignments should be equally interesting and active, fair in terms of time and outcomes. The target of the tiered strategy is to provide groups with different advanced work, not simply more or less.

The assessment in tiering lessons should be fair for all groups and with equal criteria depending on teachers' expectations and students' needs. While assessing we should keep in mind that the objectives of a differentiated lesson are maximum growth and individual success. The assessment can be formative or summative or both. Every student should be assessed individually in order to promote their personal growth but not peer competition. The main differentiated assessment characteristics are:

- validity: how well the assessment tool measures students results;
- reliability: evaluation of tests results stability;

- efficiency: ratio of benefit from the assignment results to teachers' time and resources expenditures [2].

The basic tiering lessons assessment frame is the same as for usual lessons, assessment should be continuous throughout all learning cycle: pre-assessment, formative and summative assessment. The pre-assessment information is not graded as it is focused on determination of the level and quality of previous knowledge and skills. Pre-assessment is aimed at finding out what concepts and skills student understands, what issue needs further mastering or enhancing and the most important point is how to set up flexible groups.

The simplest way to carry out pre-assessment is to rate students understanding of the terms and concepts by asking them to choose the suitable statements about the given information:

1. I have never heard about this information or term;
2. I know something about this concept, but I don't know how to apply it;
3. I understand the meaning of the term and can apply it.

As an another example from my personal experience we can share the following pre-assessment tool "Grade yourself". I give students cards with numbers 1,2,3. I pose a question and they rise the number which corresponds their understanding of the concept: 1- I don't now, 2- I'm not sure, I need some help, 3- I understand this concept and can explain it. The same activity can be done with by means of "Yes/ No" cards. The similar assessment strategy is entrance/ exit cards. Students get cards which is necessary to fill with the following information:

- what I already know about the today's topic;
- what I want to learn;
- what I want the teacher to know about how I learned the information about the today's topic.

Practitioners of differentiated approach also suggest such strategies as pre-test, self-evaluation, KWL (know-want-learned), questioning, peer evaluation, interest centers formation, quiz, journal entry, quick writing etc [5].

During the differentiated lesson a teacher may use a variety of assessment tools such as: records, tests, observations checklists, discussions, conferences, exit cards and rubrics. Exit cards and rubrics are the most suitable for differentiated technology.

Exit cards are given to every student at the end of the lesson and he/she should point out the following information:

- 2-3 things I have learned today;
- 2 things I want to learn more about;
- 1 question I still have.

The benefit of this strategy is the small amount of time to prepare and complete individualized analysis of students' achievements. The feedback followed this type of assessment allows us to form a needs-based group whose members require reteaching and to identify advanced students who can be challenged at a greater level of complexity.

In order to promote peer or self-assessment in differentiated lessons it is useful to conduct and an activity "Turn to your partner". An instructor poses a question, students formulate response and then turn to a partner to share the response. After 1 minute an instructor randomly calls on some pair to check their answers. Another activity is to complete the sentences with given beginning. A teacher starts "Something can be caused by...." A student completes and suggests his/her sentence to complete.

Conclusions. There are many different strategies in which we can implement tiered assignments into our classroom routine. Differentiated approach is not only a way to identify the struggling and excelling learners in the classroom, but it is also a way to reach all students. To draw a conclusion for this paper on tiering approach we should consider the benefits of the approach as it gives us opportunity to face students needs, to correspond these needs, to offer appropriate stimulating learning material, to rise motivation when students observe their personal growth, to provide more personalized feedback. It is important that students feel comfortable and confident when it comes to learning and tiered assignments are the best way to ensure the achievement of this goal.

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Ю. Е. Лавриш. Багаторівнева стратегія як метод диференційованого підходу у викладанні англійської мови.

Статтю присвячено проблемі диференційованого підходу при викладанні англійської мови. Диференціація – це потужна освітня технологія для викладачів, які розуміють різноманітність освітніх вимог студентів, їхні інтереси, рівень готовності та, відповідно до цих відмінностей, можуть організувати власні заняття з максимальною користю для кожного студента. Запровадження диференційованого підходу здійснюється з метою підтримати потенціал студентів та сприяти їхнім академічним досягненням. У статті описано одну із стратегій диференційованого підходу – багаторівневі уроки. Автором визначено, що багаторівневі заняття містять чотири основні частини: попереднє оцінювання, розподілення на підгрупи, виконання багаторівневих завдань відповідно до характеристики підгрупи та багаторівневе оцінювання. Кожне багаторівневе завдання відрізняється рівнем складності та видом кінцевого продукту, а не змістовим компонентом. Дана стратегія допомагає викладачеві досягти поставлених навчальних цілей та сприяє навчанню всіх студентів без винятку як із високим рівнем володіння мовою, так і з низьким. Це доводить, що студенти досягають спіху навчанні за умов багаторівневості завдань, що ґрунтуються на їхньому навчальному досвіді, рівні готовності, інтересах та академічних можливостях.

Ключові слова: диференційований підхід, багаторівневі завдання, попереднє оцінювання, початкові цілі, освітні потреби, рівень готовності.

Ю. Э. Лавриш. Многоуровневая стратегия как метод дифференцированного подхода при обучении английскому языку.

В статье описывается многоуровневая стратегия как метод дифференцированного подхода при обучении английскому языку. Дифференцирование – это мощный учебный инструмент для преподавателей, которые понимают разницу возможностей студентов, их особенности, интересы и уровень подготовки и, соответственно этой разнице, могут организовать уроки с максимальной пользой для каждого студента. Внедрение этой стратегии нацелено на поддержку потенциала студента и улучшение качества академических достижений. Автор раскрывает особенности одной из стратегий дифференцированного подхода – многоуровневые уроки. Автор исследует основные четыре компонента многоуровневых уроков: предварительное оценивание, разбивка на подгруппы, выполнение многоуровневого задания, соответственно характеристике подгруппы, и финальное оценивание. Каждое задание по одинаковому учебному материалу и задаётся с одинаковой учебной целью, но суть заданий разная. Многоуровневые задания варьируются по уровню сложности и количеству этапов выполнения, но конечная цель одинакова. Определено несколько возможных вариантов распределения занятия или задания на уровни: по уровню сложности, по качеству учебного материала, по конечному продукту, по этапам выполнения задания, по уровню трудности и объёму задания. Данная стратегия помогает преподавателю достичь всех намеченных учебных целей и повысить мотивацию к обучению у всех студентов без исключения. Использование многоуровневой стратегии доказывает, что студенты достигают лучшего академического успеха при условии многоуровневого обучения, соответственно их возможностям, интересам, уровню подготовки и академического опыта.

Ключевые слова: дифференцированный подход, многоуровневые задания, предварительное оценивание, учебные цели, академические потребности, уровень подготовки.