



ADAPTING LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION FOR DIVERSE LEARNERS IN EFL CLASSROOMS

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Annotation. The text provides a comprehensive overview of differentiated instruction practices in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, particularly in settings with diverse language proficiency levels such as in Finland. It emphasizes the importance of adapting reading and writing materials to meet students' varying needs, readiness levels, and interests. Reading differentiation strategies include using simplified versions of texts, providing glossaries and visual aids, varying question types and difficulty, and encouraging student-generated questions. Writing differentiation includes using RAFT assignments, sentence starters, multilingual drafting, and low-stakes writing. Teachers also employ technology such as flipped classrooms and instructional videos to personalize learning and provide additional support or challenges.

Keywords: differentiated instruction, EFL (English as a foreign language), modified texts, reading comprehension, lexile levels, newsela, rewordify, student choice, RAFT writing, sentence starters, scaffolding, first language support, low-stakes writing, flipped classroom.

Differentiated instructions are used to teach students according to their skills, interests and learning needs. Teachers at schools that have a lot of students with different English skills use a lot of modified texts in their classrooms. When reading texts and practicing reading comprehension, students can be given different versions of the same text. The teachers can make easier versions of the same texts by replacing more difficult words with simpler synonyms or by using in other ways simplified language. They can also use glossaries next to the texts to help with understanding, embedded questions before moving on to the new paragraphs, and/or pictures to help students follow the text. Most of the teachers that were using these kinds of different versions of the same text had modified the texts themselves which, of course, requires a lot of work and time, but they said that it normally pays off in the end. We can also use the website <https://rewordify.com> that simplifies the original texts automatically, but, of course, the language might slightly suffer this way. Many teachers use <https://newsela.com/>, a website that offers news articles in various versions rewritten to correspond the different reading levels, lexile levels. This is something that can prove to be very useful in EFL classrooms in Finland. The teachers who offered their students these simplified or in other ways modified versions of the original text gave each student also the original text. The goal is to bring each student up to the highest level possible and not to underestimate them, just to help them. Similarly, some English teachers give their students a variety of novels to choose from. All the novels have a similar structure and the same topic or theme, but they might differ in the difficulty level. The teachers let the students work with the same assignments and questions, and basically analyze and learn similar things, but by using different novels. Some teachers also mentioned that there are even websites available where

you can find novels that have different lexile levels, reading levels, for example <https://lexile.com>. Offering the students a variety of similar texts can prove to be very helpful.

Another way for teachers to differentiate reading activities was to give every student the same text, but, for example, various questions, some surface questions, but also more in depth questions requiring deeper understanding. Even the same questions can be modified by using slightly more difficult or simplified language.

Reading activities can also be differentiated so that the students can create their own questions and answer them. This allows students to work on the same content, but work and process the text differently. It is useful to give the students a specific number of questions they are required to create. One teacher I met uses these questions that students have created more than once by collecting the questions at the end of the lesson and sharing them back to different students next time. This time, students get questions from other students and they are required to answer them. The teacher can share the questions by paying attention to the students' readiness levels.

Differentiating writing activities. Writing can somehow be considered self-differentiating since everybody is working on their own texts and creating something unique. Writing is often challenging, however, and it is important not to forget to differentiate writing activities either. There are some activities that were used by the teachers, and that can help different students in the writing process.

R.A.F.T. activity, which basically allows students to choose different writing assignments while still working on the same main topic that has been practiced in class. The students are given a table with different choices for the Role of the writer, the Audience of the text, the Format (e.g. letter, complaint, diary, note, postcard), and the Topic of the text. The students can choose the combination they like best. By varying the format and the topic, for example, the activity can be differentiated for various students based on their interests and readiness levels. Especially teachers who have students with limited English skills used different scaffolding for their students when they were doing writing activities. For example, they offered some of their students sentence starters, which basically means giving students an outline of a text and letting the students fill out missing parts. Giving students more examples of the structure of a text, what kind of paragraphs (introduction, body, and conclusion) the text is supposed to have is often useful. Other teachers preferred to let their students use their first language when they were writing their first drafts. This encourages them to be creative and write their thoughts down without worrying about the language at first. This might be useful for some students at least when they are planning their texts and find it hard to come up with anything to say. Some teachers also said they give their students keywords that the students can use in their texts, which helps them get started. Some teachers also emphasized the importance of low-stakes writing and free writing especially for students who struggle with writing. It means writing freely, often about something personal at some point during the class. The writing is not graded, not necessarily even shared with others, but it encourages the students to write. It allows the students to write down things even in a messy way.

This differentiates the writing naturally as each one is using language creatively and freely and expressing their personal experiences and maybe interests without the worry of being evaluated.

The teacher presents a board of different of activities, where students can choose exercises they find most useful and interesting for them. Even though the teacher gives them a choice, he or she also guides the students, makes them challenge themselves. Using this strategy the students can also do independent work. The task the teacher wishes everyone to do can be placed in the center, but other than that the students can choose a certain number of exercises using their own interests and learning styles. Different tasks can be designed, for example, for more verbal, visual, kinesthetic, or musical learners.

If students are moving forward fast and there are more advanced students, who need more challenge, teachers may also give them some extra activities. Learning fast should not be considered a punishment, but more like a reward. Some foreign language teachers I use authentic videos, and other online materials as enrichment activities for students who are more advanced since these materials are often challenging but most students consider them fun.

Using flipped classroom or instructional videos. Technology can be used in other ways too to help the teacher differentiate instruction. He explained that he posts videos online of the topic they are going to deal with in class the next day and makes the students watch the videos before class. To check that everyone has watched the video, he uses a Google questionnaires to collect data on how much the students have understood, and whether they have questions. The teacher still teaches the same topic again in the classroom, but knowing what the students had found most challenging, he can adjust the instruction accordingly. The benefits of flipped classroom are many. For example, the students can watch the videos more than once, which helps students who need more time. The teacher also has more one on-one time with students who are at different levels, since he or she is not instructing the whole class at all time. Students can move on at their own pace, and this also creates ownership of their learning. Teaching and learning are more personalized this way. Even if a teacher didn't «flip» his or classroom totally and still instructed in the classroom too, instructional videos can be really helpful. For example, one foreign language teacher recorded her instruction during her class and posted it online for the students to see after the lesson. This allows the students to watch a lesson, for example, instruction on a grammatical topic several times even at home, depending on the student's needs.

Differentiated instruction plays a crucial role in supporting students with varying English language skills in EFL classrooms. By adapting reading and writing tasks to match learners' needs, interests, and readiness levels, teachers can create more inclusive and effective learning environments. Strategies such as simplified texts, leveled questions, student choice in reading materials, and scaffolded writing activities ensure that all students are appropriately challenged and supported. The use of technology, including flipped classrooms and online resources, further enhances the potential for personalized learning. Ultimately, differentiated instruction not only helps students progress at their own pace but also fosters motivation, confidence, and a deeper engagement with the English language.

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