



THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR IMPROVING ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGH DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION METHODS

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Abstract. This article analyzes the theoretical and methodological foundations for improving English language teaching in higher education through differentiated instruction methods. In the context of globalization and digital transformation, English is regarded as an essential means of developing students' academic, professional, and intercultural communicative competence. However, students in higher education English language classes differ significantly in terms of language proficiency, learning needs, interests, motivation, academic preparedness, and learning styles. Therefore, the traditional "one-size-fits-all" approach, in which all students are taught through the same content, tasks, and methods, does not always lead to the expected learning outcomes.

The article examines the theoretical foundations of differentiated instruction in relation to Carol Ann Tomlinson's concept of differentiated instruction, Krashen's theory of second language acquisition, constructivist learning theory, the theory of multiple intelligences, and recent studies in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. The article also discusses the methodological potential of such strategies as flexible grouping, tiered assignments, individualized feedback, flipped learning, AI-generated feedback, online resources, blended learning, and project-based learning in higher education English language teaching. The findings of the theoretical analysis indicate that the systematic use of differentiated instruction methods may serve as an important factor in developing students' communicative competence, written and oral language skills, independent learning abilities, and learning motivation.

Keywords: differentiated instruction, English language teaching, higher education, EFL, individualized approach, communicative competence, flipped learning, AI feedback, professional development.

Annotatsiya. Ushbu maqolada oliy ta'limda ingliz tilini o'qitishni differensial ta'lim metodlari orqali takomillashtirishning nazariy va metodologik asoslari tahlil qilinadi. Globallashtirish va raqamli transformatsiya sharoitida ingliz tili talabalarning akademik, kasbiy hamda madaniyatlararo kommunikativ kompetensiyasini rivojlantirishning muhim vositasi sifatida qaraladi. Biroq oliy ta'lim muassasalarida ingliz tili darslarida tahsil olayotgan talabalar til bilish darajasi, o'quv ehtiyojlari, qiziqishlari, motivatsiyasi, akademik tayyorgarligi va o'rganish uslublari jihatidan sezilarli darajada farqlanadi. Shu sababli barcha talabalarga bir xil mazmun, topshiriq va metodlar asosida ta'lim berishga qaratilgan an'anaviy "hamma uchun bir xil" yondashuv har doim ham kutilgan natijalarni bermaydi.

Maqolada differensial ta'limning nazariy asoslari Carol Ann Tomlinsonning differensial ta'lim konsepsiyasi, Stephen Krashenning ikkinchi tilni o'zlashtirish nazariyasi, konstruktivistik ta'lim nazariyasi, ko'p qirrali intellekt nazariyasi hamda ingliz tilini chet tili sifatida o'qitish (EFL) sohasidagi zamonaviy tadqiqotlar bilan bog'liq holda ko'rib chiqiladi. Shuningdek, maqolada moslashuvchan guruhlash, tabaqalashtirilgan topshiriqlar, individuallashtirilgan fikr-mulohaza, ag'darilgan ta'lim (flipped learning), sun'iy intellekt asosida yaratilgan fikr-mulohaza, onlayn resurslar, aralash ta'lim va loyiha asosida o'qitish kabi strategiyalarning oliy ta'limda ingliz tilini o'qitishdagi metodik imkoniyatlari muhokama qilinadi. Nazariy tahlil natijalari differensial ta'lim metodlaridan tizimli foydalanish talabalarning kommunikativ kompetensiyasini, yozma va og'zaki nutq ko'nikmalarini, mustaqil ta'lim



olish qobiliyatlarini hamda o'quv motivatsiyasini rivojlantirishda muhim omil bo'lishi mumkinligini ko'rsatadi.

Kalit so'zlar: *differensial ta'lim, ingliz tilini o'qitish, oliy ta'lim, EFL, individuallashtirilgan yondashuv, kommunikativ kompetensiya, ag'darilgan ta'lim, SI asosidagi fikr-mulohaza, kasbiy rivojlanish.*

Аннотация. *В данной статье анализируются теоретические и методологические основы совершенствования преподавания английского языка в высшем образовании посредством методов дифференцированного обучения. В условиях глобализации и цифровой трансформации английский язык рассматривается как важное средство развития академической, профессиональной и межкультурной коммуникативной компетентности студентов. Однако студенты, изучающие английский язык в высших учебных заведениях, существенно различаются по уровню владения языком, образовательным потребностям, интересам, мотивации, академической подготовке и стилям обучения. В связи с этим традиционный подход «один размер подходит всем», при котором все обучающиеся осваивают одинаковое содержание, выполняют одинаковые задания и обучаются с использованием одних и тех же методов, не всегда приводит к ожидаемым результатам.*

В статье рассматриваются теоретические основы дифференцированного обучения в контексте концепции дифференцированного обучения Carol Ann Tomlinson, теории усвоения второго языка Stephen Krashen, конструктивистской теории обучения, теории множественного интеллекта, а также современных исследований в области преподавания английского языка как иностранного (EFL). Кроме того, обсуждается методический потенциал таких стратегий, как гибкое группирование, разноуровневые задания, индивидуализированная обратная связь, перевёрнутое обучение, обратная связь, генерируемая искусственным интеллектом, онлайн-ресурсы, смешанное обучение и проектное обучение в практике преподавания английского языка в высшей школе. Результаты теоретического анализа показывают, что систематическое применение методов дифференцированного обучения может стать важным фактором развития коммуникативной компетентности студентов, их письменных и устных речевых навыков, способностей к самостоятельному обучению и учебной мотивации.

Ключевые слова: *дифференцированное обучение, преподавание английского языка, высшее образование, EFL, индивидуализированный подход, коммуникативная компетентность, перевёрнутое обучение, обратная связь на основе искусственного интеллекта, профессиональное развитие.*

Introduction. In the modern higher education system, teaching English is closely connected not only with the formation of linguistic knowledge but also with the development of students' academic, professional, and intercultural communication skills. English has become one of the main means of international science, technology, business, education, and professional cooperation. Therefore, effective English language teaching in higher education institutions is one of the urgent issues in the methodology of foreign language education.

However, the process of teaching English in higher education is associated with a number of methodological challenges. One of the most important problems is the diversity of students within the classroom. Students in the same academic group are not homogeneous in terms of English language proficiency, grammatical knowledge, vocabulary range, listening comprehension, writing, reading, speaking skills, motivation,



and professional needs. Some students are able to understand academic texts and communicate freely in English, while others need more support with basic grammatical structures, vocabulary, or oral communication.

In traditional teaching approaches, the same tasks, texts, and assessment criteria are often used for all students. Such an approach may not be sufficiently challenging for advanced students, while it may be too difficult for lower-level students. As a result, some students may not participate actively in the lesson, their motivation may decrease, or they may be unable to demonstrate their full potential. For this reason, there is a growing need for methodological approaches that take into account students' individual differences in higher education English language teaching.

Differentiated instruction can be interpreted as a learner-centered approach that responds to this need. In this approach, the teacher adapts the content, process, tasks, forms of assessment, and learning environment according to students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. The main idea of differentiated instruction is not to lower educational goals for students, but to adapt the ways of achieving these goals according to learners' needs.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the theoretical and methodological foundations for improving English language teaching in higher education through differentiated instruction methods. The article examines the theoretical sources of differentiated instruction, its significance in the EFL context, its practical application in English language classes, and the methodological conditions required for its effective implementation.

Theoretical Foundations. At the center of differentiated instruction theory lies the idea of recognizing individual differences among students and organizing the learning process in accordance with these differences. Carol Ann Tomlinson defines differentiated instruction as a teacher's conscious, planned, and purposeful response to learners' differences. According to Tomlinson's approach, content, process, product, and the learning environment can be adapted according to students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. This approach is particularly important in English language classes because students may differ significantly in their learning pace, communicative activity, vocabulary knowledge, and experience in written communication.

Another important theoretical basis of differentiated instruction is related to Krashen's theory of second language acquisition. According to Krashen's input hypothesis, language learners develop when they are exposed to comprehensible input that is slightly above their current level of competence. This idea is directly related to differentiated instruction, because the tasks given in English language classes should be



neither too easy nor too difficult for students. Instead, tasks should be close to the learner's current level while still encouraging further development.

Constructivist learning theory also strengthens the theoretical foundations of differentiated instruction. According to constructivism, knowledge is not simply transmitted in a ready-made form; rather, it is actively constructed by the learner. From this perspective, in an English language classroom, the student should not be a passive listener but an active participant who communicates, explores, compares, solves problems, and thinks independently. Differentiated instruction contributes to the creation of such an active learning environment.

The theory of multiple intelligences also plays an important role in justifying differentiated instruction. According to this theory, students acquire knowledge in different ways: some learn better through visual materials, while others learn more effectively through listening, communication, writing, movement, logical analysis, or independent inquiry. In English language classes, this requires the use of various types of tasks, audiovisual materials, interactive exercises, group work, written analysis, and project-based activities.

Thus, the theoretical foundations of differentiated instruction are based on several pedagogical and linguodidactic perspectives. Tomlinson's theory justifies the adaptation of content and process; Krashen's theory highlights the importance of level-appropriate input in language acquisition; constructivism emphasizes students' active participation; and the theory of multiple intelligences explains the diversity of learning styles. These theories provide a strong scientific basis for the use of differentiated instruction methods in higher education English language teaching.

Literature Review. Recent studies on differentiated instruction demonstrate the potential of this approach across different educational levels and subject areas. Ahearn (2024) describes differentiated instruction as a set of pedagogical strategies that respond to learner diversity. The study emphasizes that, in order for differentiated instruction to be effective, teachers should be able to use assessment data, identify students' readiness and interests, adapt lessons, and organize various learning activities.

In the context of higher education and foreign language classrooms, Benothmane's (2024) study is particularly significant. The author identifies student diversity, the dominance of the "one-size-fits-all" teaching method, the decline in some students' academic performance, lack of training, and lack of administrative support as factors that create the need for differentiated instruction in higher education foreign language classrooms.

Little (2024) investigated teachers' perceptions of differentiated instruction and their experiences in implementing it in practice. The study identifies flexible grouping, blended



learning, project-based learning, adaptive computer software, and brain-based learning as important methodological tools that support differentiated instruction.

Massey (2025) analyzed the challenges teachers face when implementing differentiated instructional strategies. The findings indicate the need for instructional tools, assessment of students' understanding, professional development, adequate resources, coaching, collaborative time, and classroom support. These results show that although differentiated instruction is theoretically an effective approach, its practical implementation requires special teacher preparation, time, resources, and methodological support.

Jashari (2025) examined the role of differentiated instruction in the development of EFL learners' writing skills. The study shows that flexible grouping, tiered assignments, targeted scaffolding, and individualized feedback are important for improving writing proficiency and learner motivation. This research supports the view that differentiated instruction in English language teaching is not only a general pedagogical approach but also an effective means of developing specific language skills, particularly writing.

Mohammed and Khalid (2025) argue that AI-generated feedback can have a positive effect on EFL learners' motivation, foreign language peace of mind, emotional intelligence, and writing development. AI tools can support the writing process by providing students with individualized, immediate, and low-pressure feedback. This is directly related to the principle of individualized feedback in differentiated instruction.

Harrison (2025) studied the effect of the flipped learning model on grammar test scores and student perceptions in an EFL setting. In the flipped learning model, theoretical material or explanations are studied outside the classroom, often through video materials, while classroom time is devoted to practical exercises, discussion, speaking, reading, and writing activities. This model allows students to prepare at their own pace and is consistent with the principles of learning pace and autonomous learning in differentiated instruction.

Folia and Malisiova (2025) analyzed EFL teachers' perceptions and preparedness for teaching students with developmental dyslexia. They found that many teachers do not have sufficient special preparation for working with learners who have such needs. This conclusion is also important for differentiated instruction because differences among students may be related not only to language level but also to cognitive, psychological, and individual learning needs.

Ndu and Makeleni (2025) define differentiated instruction as an approach that takes into account diverse learning needs and learning styles and adapts the learning process based on learner diversity. Their study found that while some teachers understand the essence of differentiated instruction correctly, others confuse it with individualized instruction or inclusive education. This shows that effective implementation of



differentiated instruction requires teachers to have a clear theoretical understanding and practical methodological preparation.

Qamariah and Hercz (2025) analyzed the professional development of EFL instructors in higher education institutions. Their findings show that professional development helps teachers improve ELT strategies, reflective teaching, research collaboration, publication skills, networking, and language proficiency. This confirms that teacher professional development is a decisive factor in the successful implementation of differentiated instruction in higher education.

Research Methodology. This article is theoretical and analytical in nature. It analyzes the issue of improving English language teaching in higher education through differentiated instruction methods on the basis of existing scientific articles, dissertations, and theoretical perspectives. The study uses theoretical analysis, comparative analysis, content analysis, and generalization methods.

Through theoretical analysis, the essence of differentiated instruction, its theoretical foundations, and its methodological potential in English language teaching were examined. Comparative analysis was used to compare definitions of differentiated instruction, strategies, teacher perceptions, and implementation challenges found in different studies. Content analysis was applied to identify recurring categories in the literature, such as student diversity, readiness, interest, learning profile, flexible grouping, tiered assignments, individualized feedback, teacher training, professional development, AI-generated feedback, flipped learning, and online resources.

Based on the method of generalization, methodological conclusions were developed for English language teaching in higher education. The analysis was guided by the following research questions: What are the theoretical foundations of differentiated instruction? Why is differentiated instruction necessary in higher education English language teaching? Which differentiated strategies may be effective in English language classes? What challenges arise in the implementation of this approach, and what methodological conditions are required to overcome them?

Analysis and Results. The results of the theoretical analysis show that differentiated instruction has several important methodological opportunities for improving English language teaching in higher education.

First, differentiated instruction makes it possible to take into account differences in students' language proficiency. In higher education groups, students often have different levels of English language competence. Under such conditions, a single task or a single method cannot be equally effective for all students. Tiered assignments, adapted materials, and gradually increasing levels of task complexity help students develop according to their individual levels.



Second, differentiated instruction contributes to increasing learning motivation. When a student completes a task that corresponds to his or her abilities but still encourages development, the student experiences a sense of success. This strengthens a positive attitude toward language learning. In particular, since students' writing skills vary in EFL writing instruction, tiered assignments and individualized feedback serve as important methodological tools.

Third, differentiated instruction can be an effective means of developing communicative competence. In English language classes, strategies such as flexible grouping, pair work, group discussion, role play, problem-based tasks, and project-based learning actively involve students in communication. These strategies are important for preparing higher education students for real communicative situations.

Fourth, differentiated instruction can be effectively applied to the development of writing skills. For lower-level students, writing tasks may be based on outlines, key words, model sentences, and guiding questions. Intermediate students may complete guided essays, summary writing, or paragraph development tasks. Advanced students may complete academic essays, article reviews, research-based writing, or argumentative writing tasks. Such an approach makes it possible to consider students' proficiency levels in writing instruction.

Fifth, individualized feedback is one of the main tools of differentiated instruction in English language teaching. Teacher feedback should not be limited to indicating errors; it should also identify directions for further development. In modern educational conditions, AI-generated feedback tools can also help provide individualized, immediate, and adapted feedback. However, AI feedback should not be viewed as a complete replacement for teacher feedback, but rather as a methodological tool that supports and complements it.

Sixth, flipped learning can serve as a convenient methodological model for organizing differentiated instruction. In higher education, grammar explanations, vocabulary input, theoretical materials, or video lessons can be assigned for independent study, while classroom time can be devoted to speaking practice, pair work, group discussion, writing workshops, and feedback activities. This model allows students to prepare at their own pace and directs classroom time toward communicative activity.

Seventh, differentiated instruction develops independent learning and self-assessment skills. In higher education, students should be prepared for autonomous learning. Within a differentiated approach, students may be provided with choice-based tasks, individual learning paths, digital resources, portfolios, reflection journals, and self-assessment tools. This strengthens students' responsibility for their own learning process.

Eighth, the use of online resources and assistive technologies in differentiated instruction is important for creating a learning environment that meets students' needs.



Digital platforms, online library resources, video materials, interactive exercises, adapted learning resources, and automated tests allow students to work at an individual pace. However, in this process, the teacher's digital competence, ability to select appropriate resources, and clear definition of methodological goals are of particular importance.

At the same time, the analysis shows that there are several challenges in implementing differentiated instruction. These include insufficient methodological preparation of teachers, lack of time, limited resources, large academic groups, difficulties in adapting assessment criteria, insufficient skills in using digital tools, and weak institutional support. Therefore, the successful use of differentiated instruction cannot depend only on the individual initiative of the teacher; it requires methodological, organizational, and institutional support.

Discussion. Based on the analysis above, differentiated instruction can be regarded as a comprehensive methodological approach that contributes to improving the quality of English language teaching in higher education. Its main advantage is that it treats student diversity not as a problem but as a basis for organizing the learning process more effectively.

Several strategies are particularly important in the application of differentiated instruction in English language classes. Flexible grouping allows teachers to group students not permanently, but according to task, level, interest, or need. Tiered assignments involve designing tasks of different levels of complexity while maintaining the same topic and learning objective. Individualized feedback provides students not only with information about their errors but also with guidance for further improvement.

Blended learning, flipped learning, and digital platforms help organize differentiated instruction more effectively in modern educational conditions. For example, a teacher may assign a grammar topic as a video lesson for homework and then involve students in speaking, writing, or problem-solving activities according to their levels during classroom time. In this way, classroom time is directed not toward passive listening but toward active communication and practical exercises.

However, it is important to understand differentiated instruction correctly. It should not be interpreted simply as separating strong and weak students. Differentiated instruction means preserving the same educational goal for all students while adapting the ways of achieving that goal. It is also not identical to individualized instruction. In individualized instruction, a separate program may be designed for each student, whereas in differentiated instruction, different learning activities are organized within the same group according to students' diverse needs.

Professional development programs on differentiated instruction are necessary for English language teachers in higher education. Such programs should provide teachers



with practical preparation in identifying students' proficiency levels, conducting needs analysis, designing tiered assignments, developing rubrics, giving feedback, using digital resources, applying AI-generated feedback methodologically, and planning lessons flexibly. In addition, higher education institutions should create a methodological environment that supports differentiated instruction. This includes organizing seminars and training sessions for teachers, creating a database of lesson plans, expanding opportunities to use digital platforms, establishing teacher collaboration groups, and developing differentiated assessment criteria.

Conclusion. In conclusion, differentiated instruction is a theoretically and methodologically grounded approach for improving English language teaching in higher education. It enables teachers to take into account students' language proficiency, interests, learning needs, learning profiles, and motivation. Tomlinson's theory of differentiated instruction, Krashen's theory of second language acquisition, constructivist learning theory, and the theory of multiple intelligences form the theoretical foundation of this approach.

The theoretical analysis shows that differentiated instruction has significant potential for developing communicative competence, written and oral language skills, independent learning, and learning motivation in English language classes. Flexible grouping, tiered assignments, targeted scaffolding, individualized feedback, blended learning, flipped learning, project-based learning, AI-generated feedback, and online resources can be used as effective strategies in higher education English language teaching. At the same time, the implementation of differentiated instruction requires sufficient methodological preparation, time, resources, assessment skills, digital competence, and institutional support. Therefore, it is advisable for higher education institutions to organize special professional development programs for English language teachers on differentiated instruction methodology, the use of AI feedback, flipped learning design, the selection of online resources, and the development of tiered assignments. Overall, the systematic and purposeful use of differentiated instruction methods can contribute to improving the quality of English language teaching in higher education, creating a learning environment that meets students' needs, and developing their academic and communicative competencies.

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