ENHANCING STUDENTS' MOTIVATION TO LEARN ENGLISH THROUGH DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION METHODS

Akbarova Umidakhon,
PhD Researcher, Center for Higher Education Development Research

Annotation. *This thesis examines the use of differentiated instruction (DI) methods to enhance student motivation in English language teaching at higher education institutions. In Uzbekistan's universities, students in the same classroom often range from A1 to B2 proficiency level, making a uniform approach ineffective. DI organizes the learning process in a learner-centered manner through tiered tasks, flexible grouping, choice, individualized feedback, and scaffolding. The analysis shows that this combination significantly increases students' motivation, self-efficacy, and classroom engagement. Teachers are recommended to employ diagnostic assessment, choice-based tasks, and communicatively oriented assignments.*

Key words: *English language, differentiated instruction, motivation, higher education, flexible grouping, communicative competence.*

INTRODUCTION

In the context of globalization and digital transformation, English has become an essential tool for accessing scientific information, engaging in professional communication, and participating in international cooperation. Uzbekistan's ongoing educational reforms — particularly the shift to CEFR-based student placement — have further underscored the importance of individualized approaches in language teaching. Accordingly, fostering sustained motivation among university students to learn English is one of the key methodological challenges facing EFL educators today.

Motivation is a decisive factor in language acquisition. Students who approach learning with intrinsic interest and clear goals participate more actively, work more independently, and fear making mistakes less. Conversely, when instruction does not match students' levels or needs, they become passive and perceive English as a difficult or monotonous subject. The diversity of learners in foreign language classrooms — in terms of interests, goals, motivation, and personal characteristics — is recognized as a significant theoretical and practical challenge [2:2]. Traditional "one-size-fits-all" approaches cannot adequately address this diversity.

Differentiated instruction addresses this problem by adapting content, tasks, grouping, and assessment to students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. This thesis analyzes DI's theoretical and methodological potential for enhancing motivation in higher education EFL contexts.

MAIN BODY

Differentiated instruction is a methodological approach that accounts for individual differences while directing all students toward a unified educational goal [8]. The teacher adapts lesson content, task format, assessment criteria, and learning activities to students' needs, focusing on how a student learns, what they are interested in, and what level of readiness they bring to a task.

The motivational impact of DI stems primarily from task–level alignment. An overly difficult task generates anxiety and a sense of failure; an overly easy task leads to boredom and reduced engagement. When students complete the tasks matched to their level yet slightly challenging, a sense of achievement and self-confidence emerges. For this reason, identifying student readiness — that is, how prepared a learner is for a particular objective — is a central concern in DI [1:46]. In speaking classes, for example, lower-level students may use model sentences and key vocabulary to hold short conversations; intermediate students expand their ideas with reasons and examples; higher-level students engage in debates or problem-based discussion. All students work toward the same communicative goal, but task complexity is differentiated.

Interest is another key motivational variable. Academic literature notes that interest strengthens intrinsic involvement, sustained attention, and active participation in the learning process [1:46]. Providing students with choice — in topic, task format, or final product — cultivates a sense of ownership. When students prepare projects, dialogues, posters, essays, or presentations on themes such as "Digital Technologies" or "Education and Career" according to their own interests, they engage with tasks as opportunities for self-expression rather than compulsory assignments, thereby intensifying intrinsic motivation.

Flexible grouping is a defining feature of differentiated classrooms. Students are temporarily grouped by readiness, interest, or task type — not fixed permanently as "strong" or "weak" [1:47]. In one session, students may be grouped by proficiency level; in another, they may work in mixed groups based on shared interests. Mixed grouping fosters peer learning: stronger students support others while lower-level students benefit from their peers. This builds collaboration and a positive psychological climate in which students feel safe to take risks.

Individualized feedback reinforces these gains. Rather than offering general comments such as "many errors," targeted feedback — for example, "your ideas are clear; try to use more linking words" or "apply the past simple consistently" — helps

students see their progress and understand specific areas for improvement. Jashari's research confirms that individualized feedback increases student confidence and fosters a sense of growth and achievement [4:282]. The same study found that DI improved EFL learners' writing skills and motivation through flexible grouping, tiered assignments, and personalized feedback, with positive changes observed in both writing outcomes and self-efficacy indicators [4:274, 283]. These findings validate the use of differentiated approaches specifically for developing writing — a complex skill that demands vocabulary range, grammatical competence, logical structure, and critical thinking.

DI also contributes to self-efficacy. According to Bandura's theory, a person's belief in their ability to succeed directly influences their performance. When teachers provide level-appropriate tasks, acknowledge small achievements, and make progress visible, students' confidence grows. Research confirms that DI-based classes produce higher motivation, confidence, and engagement — factors essential for long-term language learning success [4:283].

Nevertheless, implementing DI presents practical challenges. Preparing tiered tasks, organizing flexible groups, and providing individual feedback demand significant time and effort. Large class sizes, insufficient preparation time, and difficulties managing diverse motivation levels are among the primary obstacles reported in the literature [6:61]. In Uzbekistan's higher education context, these challenges are compounded by large enrollment numbers and limited methodological support for teachers. Effective implementation therefore requires professional development, collaborative planning, and access to appropriate resources.

CONCLUSION

Differentiated instruction methods hold significant methodological potential for enhancing students' motivation to learn English. By accounting for individual differences, adapting tasks to students' levels and needs, offering choice, providing individualized feedback, and fostering a supportive learning environment, DI strengthens motivation, self-efficacy, and classroom engagement. The findings of Jashari (2025) and other scholars confirm these outcomes empirically.

In Uzbekistan's higher education context — particularly given the introduction of CEFR-based placement — the widespread adoption of DI in university English classes is both timely and practically significant. Scaffolded tasks for lower-level students, idea-expanding exercises for intermediate learners, and creative and analytical tasks for advanced students each serve to motivate learners at their respective stages. Future

research should conduct quantitative and qualitative studies to measure DI's empirical effectiveness in Uzbekistan, providing a foundation for developing nationally adapted DI models.

References:

1. Ahearn, B. L. (2024). Preparing Teachers to Differentiate Instruction: A Systematic Review. University of North Dakota.
2. Benothmane, N. A. (2024). College Professors' Perceptions of Differentiated Instruction in a Foreign Language Classroom Setting. The College of William and Mary in Virginia.
3. Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, E. (2021). Teaching and Researching Motivation. Routledge.
4. Jashari, L. T. (2025). Role of differentiated instruction in enhancing writing skills of English as a foreign language learners. Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics, 11(3), 274–285. http://dx.doi.org/10.32601/ejal.11324
5. Little, Y. (2024). Exploring Teacher Perceptions and Implementation of Differentiated Instruction. Concordia University Chicago.
6. Ali, R. C. (2024). An Investigation of the Instructional Challenges and Needed Supports of Secondary Teachers Implementing Differentiated Instruction. University of South Alabama.
7. Ndu, O. G., & Makeleni, S. (2025). High school English as a second language teachers' narratives on differentiated instruction. Education Sciences, 15(6), 759. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15060759
8. Tomlinson, C. A. (2017). How to Differentiate Instruction in Academically Diverse Classrooms. ASCD.
9. Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes. Harvard University Press.