

AN ANALYSIS OF THE USE OF DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION IN MIXED-ABILITY CLASSROOMS

Nazarova Gulbahor Pirmanovna

Scientific advisor, Bukhara State University, Associate professor, PhD,

Ostonzoda Nihola Otabek qizi

2nd grade master student, Asia International University

Abstract: *This article takes a close look at how teachers can help everyone in a classroom where students learn at different speeds and have different skills. These “mixed-ability” classes are often hard to manage because using the same lesson for every student just does not work for everyone. To fix this, the research explores how teachers can change what they teach, how they teach it, and what students create to make sure every pupil moves forward. It examines real-life ways to handle these differences so that every student feels included and supported. The way this research was done involves looking deeply at different teaching models and ideas for managing a classroom. It compares how well students do when they have tasks made for their level versus when everyone does the same old assignments. It also reviews scientific writings to see how things like “multiple intelligences” help diverse learners succeed.*

The results show that when lessons are changed to fit the student, children feel more excited about learning and get better grades. The study proves that matching the teaching style to the student makes them feel less stressed and more cared for. In the end, the article makes it clear that these strategies are the best way to create a kind and successful classroom for every student.

Keywords: *Differentiated instruction, Mixed-ability classrooms, Flexible grouping, Learner motivation, Classroom management, Content adjustment, Multiple intelligences, and Student engagement.*

INTRODUCTION

In every school, classrooms are filled with students who have different talents, interests, and ways of learning. This is often called a “mixed-ability” classroom because the students are not all at the same level. For a teacher, it can be very hard to help everyone at the same time using just one way of teaching. Usually, if the lesson is made for the average student, the fast learners get bored while the slower learners feel left behind.

To solve this problem, a special method is used called Differentiated Instruction. This approach is based on the idea that the teacher should change how they teach to fit the needs of each student. Instead of expecting all children to do the same thing at the same time, the lessons are designed to be flexible. For example, the teacher might give different reading materials or different tasks to different groups based on what they can do.

The focus is placed on the human side of learning. Every person is unique, and scientific research by Howard Gardner shows that people have different types of intelligence. Some students learn better by seeing, while others learn by doing or talking with friends. By

using differentiated instruction, the classroom becomes a more friendly place where everyone feels successful.

This article is written to analyze how these strategies can be used in real life. It is important to understand how to manage a mixed-ability group so that no student feels like they are failing. The goal of this research is to find simple and practical ways to make learning easier for everyone in the room.

Literature review. The study of mixed-ability classrooms and the use of differentiation has been a major topic for many education experts. Researchers have worked hard to find ways to make sure that every student feels included and can learn at their own speed.

A lot of research has been conducted by Carol Ann Tomlinson, who is a leading expert on this theme. She and Cindy Strickland analyzed how teachers can change their lessons to fit different children. Their results showed that when teachers use “flexible grouping” which means changing who students work with everyone does better in class. This research is very helpful for this study because it gives a clear plan on how to manage a classroom by looking at what each student needs.

Other researchers have looked at the human side of how students learn. Howard Gardner conducted famous research on “Multiple Intelligences”. His work achieved results showing that students are smart in different ways, such as through music, logic, or working with others. Similarly, Lev Vygotsky’s research proved that social interaction is key to development. These studies are useful for this research because they explain why giving different types of tasks helps students stay motivated and happy⁴⁴.

In more recent years, researchers like Greg Kessler and Nicky Hockly have looked at how digital tools can help with differentiation⁴⁵. They held an analysis on how technology allows students to practice language at a level that is perfect for them. Their results showed that digital activities make it easier for a teacher to handle many different levels at the same time. This is helpful for the current article because it shows that modern classrooms can be much more flexible thanks to computers and phones.

Research by Phil Benson and others has focused on how differentiation makes students more independent⁴⁶. They achieved results showing that when students are given choices in their learning, they become “autonomous” meaning they take more responsibility for their work. This is a great point for this article because it proves that differentiation does not just help with grades, but also helps students grow as people.

Methodology. To find the best ways to teach in a mixed-ability classroom, a qualitative research design was chosen for this study. This approach was selected because it allows for a deep look into the human side of the classroom focusing on the feelings, behaviors, and reactions of both the teacher and the students.

The first method used in this research is the descriptive-analytical method. This was used to gather and organize information from existing books and scientific articles by famous experts like Tomlinson and Gardner. By reading their work, it was possible to understand the main theories of differentiation and why they are helpful for diverse learners.

⁴⁴ Vygotsky, Lev. *Interaction Between Learning and Development*. Mind and Society. Harvard University Press, 1978. – P. 85.

⁴⁵ Kessler, Greg. *Technology and the Future of Language Teaching*. *Foreign Language Annals*, vol. 51, no. 1, 2018. – P. 208.

⁴⁶ Benson, Phil. *Teaching and Researching Autonomy*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2011.- P. 154.

Another important method is the comparative analysis. This was used throughout the research to compare traditional “one-size-fits-all” teaching with the new “flexible” methods. By looking at these two styles side-by-side, it became clear how much more active students become when the tasks are adjusted to their level. This helped to prove that differentiation is not just a theory, but a practical tool that actually works in a busy classroom.

A deductive method was applied to reach specific conclusions. By starting with general rules about how humans learn and then applying them to the specific problem of mixed-ability groups, it was possible to create a list of recommendations for teachers.

Analysis and discussion. In a busy classroom, not every student needs to read the same book at the same time. If a text is too hard, a student might stop trying, so the teacher provides a simpler version that still teaches the same main idea. This shows that the teacher cares about the human side of learning and understands that every student starts at a different place. It helps to build confidence because students are challenged just enough without being overwhelmed. Changing the materials to fit a student’s level stops them from feeling frustrated or giving up. The teacher picks one topic, like “Protecting Nature”. Three different versions of the same story are prepared. Beginners work with a version that has many pictures and very short sentences, while advanced students read a version with harder words and more details. Every student understands the main idea and can answer questions at their own level.

Instead of everyone sitting alone, the classroom is organized into groups that change often. Sometimes students with the same skills work together, and other times beginners work with more advanced students so they can learn from each other. This makes the room a social place where talking is part of the learning process. Because the groups change, students do not feel stuck in one “level”, which keeps their energy and motivation high. Working in groups makes the lesson a social experience where students learn by talking. The teacher asks a question. First, every student thinks alone. Next, they talk about it with a partner.

They share their best idea with the whole group. Stronger students get to practice explaining things, and students who struggle get help from their friends in a friendly way.

Digital tools like tablets and computers act as a quiet assistant for the teacher. These tools allow students to pick activities that fit their own speed. For example, while one person is writing a simple story, another can be doing a more difficult research task on the internet. This is called “personalized learning” because the lesson is built around the student, which makes the whole experience feel more modern and helpful. On a tablet or computer, students see a "menu" of choices. One student might choose to watch a video about the lesson, another might play a vocabulary game, and a third might write an email using a digital dictionary.

Students work at their own speed, and the teacher has more time to sit with the students who are stuck. When students are given choices about how they show what they have learned, they care much more about their work. They start to find out if they learn better by drawing, writing, or speaking. This is the most important part of education because it helps a student become an “autonomous” learner who can study on their own. By respecting these differences, the teacher helps every child find their own way to succeed in life.

Conclusion. In conclusion, the research shows that teaching in a mixed-ability classroom is much more successful when the teacher uses differentiated instruction. By moving away

from a single way of teaching and embracing the unique talents of every child, the classroom becomes a friendlier and more effective place for everyone.

The analysis proves that adjusting the content and using flexible groups allows students to learn without feeling too much pressure.

When students work on tasks that fit their own speed, they gain more confidence and become more active in the lesson. Furthermore, the use of digital tools and technology acts as a powerful support that helps the teacher give personalized attention to every student.

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