

DIFFERENTIATION AND INDIVIDUALISATION – A DEFINITION

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4.1 External and Internal Differentiation

external
differentiation

Differentiation is a pedagogical concept that already found its way into the educational policy discourse of the sixties of the last century and has accompanied the debate about the design of great education up to this day. Today, there are basically two types of differentiation, namely external and internal differentiation (cf. Eberle et al. 2011: 3). External differentiation means all kinds of differentiation that are caused and intended by school organisational structures and educational policy. The forms of external differentiation are invariant frameworks, with the aim of dissolving the heterogeneity of learning groups by organising learners according to relatively arbitrary criteria such as age, gender, interests, or (language) proficiency. Most of these actions mean separating the pupils into different groups to get reasonably homogeneous groups or groups that are as homogenous as possible. This is usually done by grouping/setting (i.e. according to subjects) or streaming (i.e. interdisciplinary) but does not solve the problem as such because an adequate form of differentiation in those groups will still be required. While external differentiation is dependent on cultural norms as well as (school) politics and can hardly be influenced by teachers, students, or parents, internal differentiation is open, flexible, and dynamic. It can be structured individually according to a learner group, or as Diane Heacox explains:

Differentiating instruction

“Differentiating instruction means changing pace, level, or kind of instruction you provide in response to individual learners’ needs, styles, or interests” (2012: 5).

internal
differentiation

A classroom that caters to learner differentiation offers a variety of learning options designed to tap into different readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles. Thus, internal differentiation responds to students’ progress in their learning continuum (Heacox 2012: 5), i.e. what they already know and what they need to learn. This form of differentiation is necessary because it reflects teachers’ thoughtful diagnosis of students’ learning needs and purposeful planning of methods that address those needs.

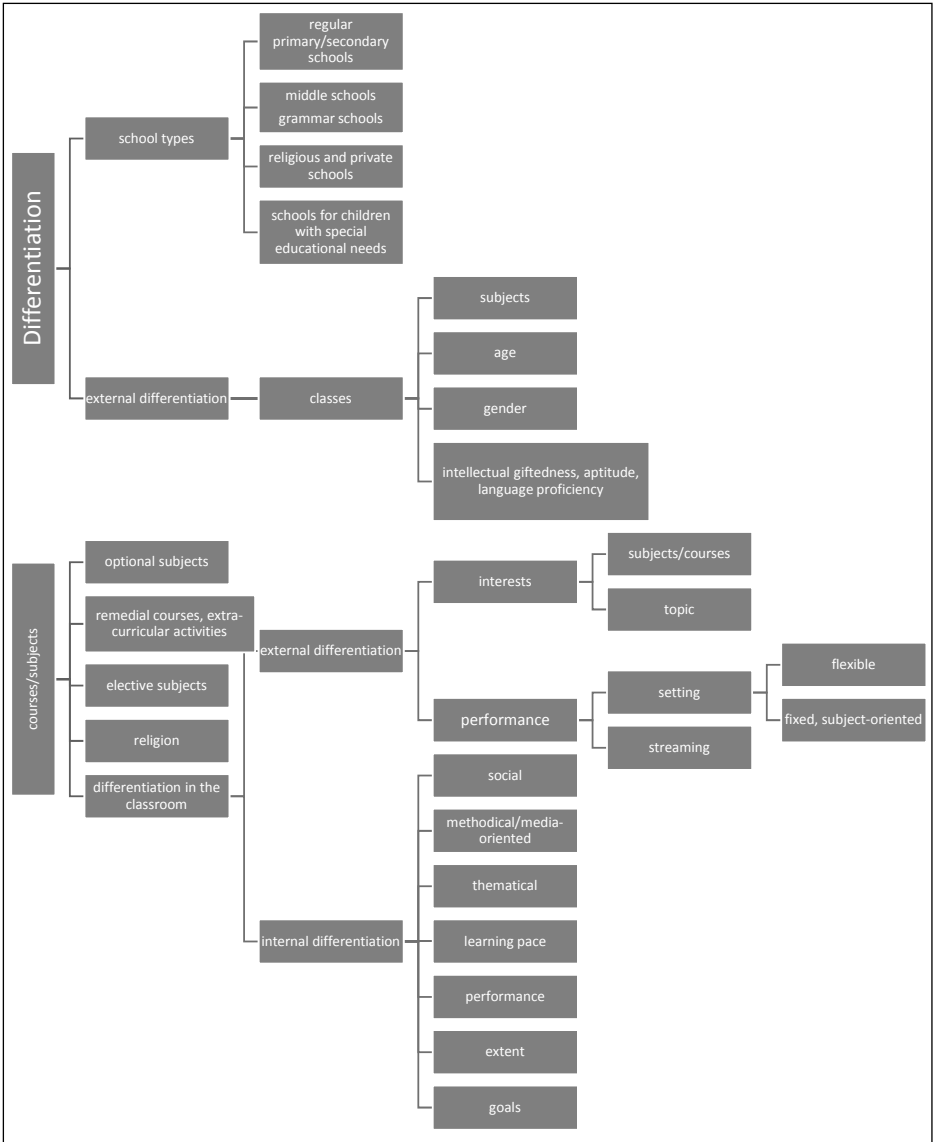


Fig. 9 | Differentiation at a Glance (adapted from Eberle et al. 2011: 6)

4.2 Individualisation and Adaptive Teaching

individualised
instruction

In recent publications, the terms ‘internal differentiation’, ‘inner differentiation’, and ‘individualisation’ are frequently used interchangeably (Bönsch 2009; Linser/Paradies 2013). However, I consider individualisation as the maximum form of differentiation that can be achieved and as one of the superior goals of English teaching, in which the demands of teaching are tailored specifically to each individual learner. Individualised instruction is a kind of high-end form of differentiation which focuses on the individuality of each student (cf. Eberle et al. 2011: 5). For foreign language teaching, this means adaptive teaching, i.e. instructional strategies for different groups of learners so that natural diversity prevailing in the classroom does not prevent any learner from achieving success. The role of the teacher is to create learning environments that enable individual self learning or autonomous learning by offering options of activities which help students to feel a sense of power and ownership in the classroom.

scaffolding

More precisely, differentiation in the EFL classroom regards individuality as a constitutive basis and pursues only one goal: each individual member of a learning group is to be considered and encouraged individually, which means the teacher should consider the individual personality of each group member. A class or group is promoted individually so that each participant forms a learning unit for him-/herself. Individualisation in this sense means giving each student the opportunity to develop their motoric, intellectual, emotional, and social potential accordingly and to support them with suitable measures. In terms of methodology, this means working on different tasks and topics, taking into account different interests and abilities and different teaching materials and approaches, as well as providing additional help and an appropriate diagnosis of the actual status of each individual’s learning progress (cf. Eberle et al. 2011: 5; Eisenmann 2014: 16). The implementation of all these measures and approaches into the classroom’s everyday life is certainly an excessive demand and simply not integratable into the reality of the current teaching structures in German schools. However, individual learning stimuli and supportive steps in the sense of Vygotsky’s constructivist learning theory of scaffolding are undoubtedly feasible. This refers to the zone of proximal development (ZPD),

which Lev Vygotsky has defined as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky 1978: 86). The learning process is supported by providing clear guidance, thought-provoking impulses, and other assistance. The arrangements should offer learners a wider range of learning opportunities according to their aptitudes and interests, which can be done by menu teaching (cf. Mattes, quoted in Hallet 2011: 87). Similar to a restaurant, which is most probably more successful when offering a variety of options on the menu rather than relying solely on one meal for all patrons, when teaching a unit, students should be offered the options of finding their own ways of learning. Through this approach, teachers are able to offer assignments for all levels of thinking, all learning styles, and all intelligences.

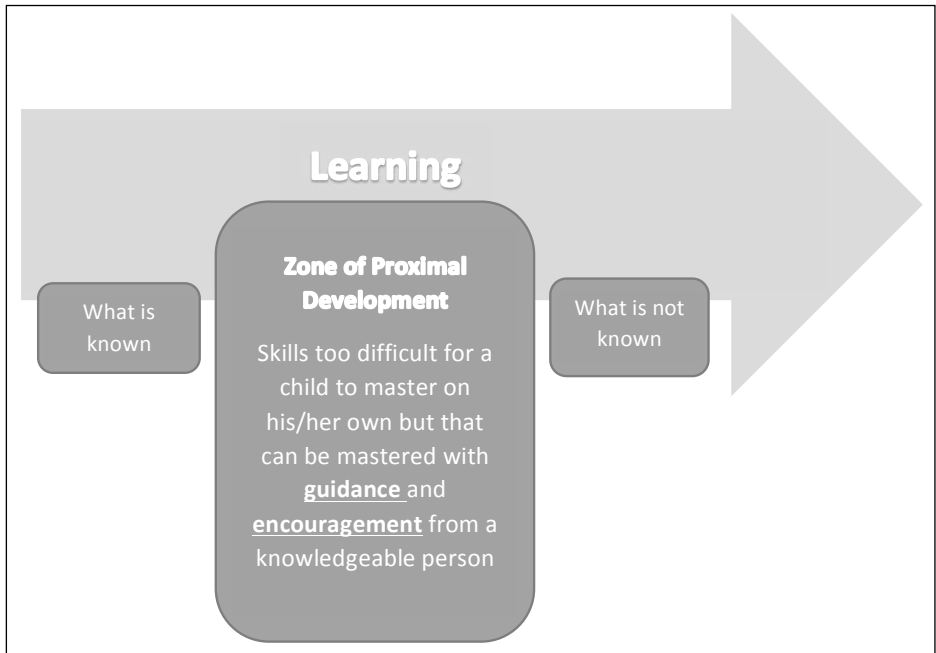


Fig. 10 | Zone of Proximal Development

development of
students' learning
skills

According to Vygotsky's theory, which supports the idea of autonomous learning, the development of students' learning skills is never entirely separable from the content of their learning. Moreover, learning a new language is quite different to learning any other subject because the medium and teaching objects are identical. This is a special challenge, because ideally the target language is spoken as much as possible. A learner autonomous approach is very useful in learning a new language because it is much more beneficial to learn a language by being exposed to it in comparison to learning patterns of grammar, e.g. different tenses.

tiered assignments

Next to flexible grouping, good scaffolding can be implemented into the EFL classroom with tiered assignments, i.e. instructional components to tailor activities and tasks to the groups. Tiered assignments are a series of related tasks of varying complexity and "are intended to provide a better instructional match between students and their individual needs" (Heacox 2012: 97). The activities all pertain to essential skills and concepts that all students are required to learn. Teachers assign the activities as alternative ways for students to access the learning, according to their individual needs. Hence, all learners are focusing on the same content or curriculum objective but the process and/or product varies according to the students' readiness or ability. Tiering can be based on challenge level (see Bloom's taxonomy, chapter 3), complexity, resources, outcome, process, and product (cf. Heacox 2012: 97ff.). In the centre are the **core tasks**, which apply to most of the students and will generally be the yardstick used to design the advanced and modified tasks. The **extended task** is pitched at those pupils who need a greater challenge than made available to them in the core task, and the **modified task** is designed for those who need extra support or guidance with the core activity. It may not be necessary to change the core activity for these students, but they may simply require additional resources, scaffolding, or one-on-one assistance.

tiering

However, due to time constraints, tiered assignments are not typically administered daily and are best used as necessary and when most appropriate. For some learning contents, it is more reasonable and practical when everyone in the classroom gets the same introduction to or explicit teaching of a concept because it is new to all. These tiered activities should be integrated when

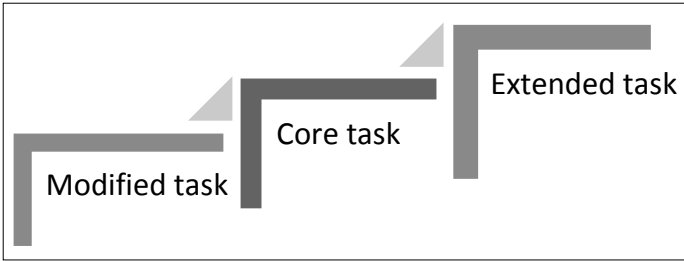


Fig. 11 | Tiered Assignment

the students are asked to practise and complete follow-up tasks which would be better tailored in a tiered fashion, for instance when....

- students show different stages of understanding after a core concept is taught;
- students indicate differing stages of readiness to tackle an activity;
- students' learning preferences are varied;
- some students need more support or scaffolding than others;
- some students need more time to complete a task and others need an additional challenge;
- students need to use different resources related to their learning needs.

4.3 Possible Fields of Differentiation

According to Brügelmann, differentiated instruction can be subdivided into “differentiation from above” and “differentiation from below” (2002: 39). While the first refers to a type of differentiation where the teacher is in charge of first diagnosing students and then providing them with appropriate tasks and materials, as is the case in mainstream teacher-led classrooms, the latter demonstrates a parallel option to the concept of learner autonomy and is present in more open and individualised teaching approaches. Differentiation from below refers to the students being in charge of choosing what they feel is appropriate for them with the teacher assuming the role of a moderator and guide. Apart from general educational differentiation based on stu-

differentiation from above and from below

dents' readiness, interests, and learning profiles, the teacher can differentiate in many fields. The theoretical demand for differentiation and individualisation can be implemented into concrete classroom practice as follows (cf. Eisenmann 2017: 300; Kuty 2017: 314):

Table 5: Fields of differentiation

Fields	Description
learning objectives	(sub)goals are set individually by teachers and students, e.g. school-related goals or improving specific competencies (learning contract, portfolio)
contents	students work on different topics in groups or individually according to their interests
methods	content is developed by using different approaches, e.g. analytical, cognitive, or creative methods and a selection of closed and open tasks
materials/media	students are provided with a variety of materials, traditional media and new technologies and encouraged to choose from their preferences, thus enabling individual learning paths
participatory structures	students work on tasks in class in the form of a group, a pair, or individual work
quality	tasks varying in their level of difficulty and complexity, e.g. for different language proficiencies are provided
quantity	different individual amounts of time for the solution of a task are allowed; faster students compare their results, help slower ones, or solve an additional task
homework	students can choose from a variety of (similarly demanding) tasks
tools	different aids and resources such as (online) dictionaries, guideline questions, or lists with useful phrases are made available
cooperation/flexible grouping	students assign themselves to a partner or a group according to criteria such as personal preferences, gender, special talents, or simply a coincidence (e.g. by drawing lots)

evaluation	The teacher takes notes of the individual learning process and progress of the students; learners get involved in self and peer assessment
products	students choose their form of presentation, e.g. scenic, poster, or PowerPoint presentations or by creating a film or a podcast

This list shows that there are many ways to differentiate and that this does not necessarily mean a largely increased workload with regard to the teacher's preparation time. It does not imply that individual worksheets have to be created and provided for every single learner and proficiency level. All these possibilities cater for individual learning processes by offering and allowing different ways of learning and giving the students the chance to choose and learn from each other.

teacher's preparation time

Individual work

Remember! Individual work is especially useful in repetition phases and less suitable for phases of elaboration.

4.4 Challenges and Pitfalls

Differentiation and individualisation create opportunities as well as pitfalls. One of the major challenges is not only to accept heterogeneity but to find a positive approach when dealing with foreign language teaching in heterogeneous learner groups and provide individuals with a productive and positive exposure to the language. It is important to note that a class is not differentiated when assignments are the same for all learners and the adjustments consist of varying the level of difficulty of questions for certain students, grading some students differently, or letting students who finish early play games for so-called 'enrichment'. Reducing the complexity and demands of a task and setting easier objectives may sound like a very good idea in the first place, but watering down the demands in such a manner can have a long-term effect of increasing the achievement gap between stu-

risks

dents with learning difficulties and others. Similarly, if advanced learners are merely assigned additional tasks to ‘keep them busy’, they will simply relearn the already known. Hence, it is not appropriate to have more advanced learners do extra work or be given extension assignments after completing their regular work. Asking students to do more of what they already know is ineffective, and asking them to do ‘the regular work plus more’ must inevitably feel punitive to them.

Importance of task quality

Remember! It is not the quantity but the quality of the task that should serve to extend students’ learning.

From the students’ perspective, the division into qualitatively different learning groups can cause frustration and demotivation. Weaker learners, who already consider themselves as inferior, might quickly feel labeled as being and remaining under-achievers. If these students then receive more attention and support from the teacher to strengthen their motivation to learn, high-performing students might feel neglected.

teacher workload

In addition, a lot of the differentiating teaching materials have to be developed by the teachers themselves. However, it is by no means trivial to adapt the levels of tasks to the individual students’ purposes and proficiencies. Organising, stimulating, and accompanying different learning processes for different learner types can overtax EFL teachers in their everyday school lives. Moreover, it is quite a challenge for teachers to offer differentiated learning content while needing to provide a foundation for all learners and supply a high performance add-on, too. If differentiation is carried out consistently and extensively, there is a risk that high-achieving learners will, at some point, move further and further away from the weaker learners.

student self-management

Another possible conflict might arise between individualisation and students’ personal responsibility for their learning, because differentiation requires some degree of self management and self control. The students are expected to independently plan their learning, carry out their plans, and evaluate their learning processes autonomously. However, not all students manage to organise themselves this well and are able to take on

this challenge. Personal responsibility and motivation are not givens; both must be built up and implemented step by step.

Furthermore, differentiation has to find the right balance between support and demand for the individual pupil. Hence, the focus should not be on how to remove or reduce weaknesses but on how to enhance and build on students' strengths. This can be achieved by making clear that every human being is unique, every student matters, and every learner has both stronger and weaker sides. At the same time, the teacher needs to make conscious efforts to encourage quieter or weaker learners to participate. This will help to make these learners feel respected and valued as individuals and will make them feel more involved (for further challenges see Thaler 2012: 131).

support and demand

4.5 Key Principles of Differentiated EFL Teaching

To overcome the above-mentioned challenges, Carol Ann Tomlinson established the following key principles of a differentiated classroom, all of which can be implemented into the EFL classroom (2014: 48):

- The teacher is clear about what matters in the subject matter.
- The teacher understands, appreciates, and builds upon student differences.
- Assessment and instruction are inseparable.
- The teacher adjusts content, process, and product in response to a student's readiness, interests, and learning profile.
- All students participate in respectful work.
- Students and teachers are collaborators in learning.
- Goals of a differentiated classroom are maximum growth and individual success.
- Flexibility is the hallmark of a differentiated classroom.

differentiated
classroom

These maxims lead to the conclusion that individual instruction lessons can only be considered truly successful when all learners are able to find their appropriate learning requirements. This means that wide-ranging learning opportunities should be provided in a self-directed learning environment, with the appropriate teaching and support needed for learners to set their own personal best learning conditions. A high level of differentiation

appropriate teaching

and, thus, individual promotion practice in language teaching can be identified in the course of the following features (based on Sorrentino et al. 2012: 22):

checklist

Checklist for a high level of individualisation:

- pupils work on different problems, questions, and tasks while making adequate progress within the limits of their abilities and language proficiencies
- there are different textbooks, materials, learning opportunities, and language support available depending on the topic, focus of interest, and performance
- very gifted students receive additional learning opportunities such as an increased language input
- all students reflect their individual learning progress (metacognition)
- learning loops based on systematic feedback are implemented into the EFL classroom (monitoring)
- slower students have enough time to complete their tasks
- students with motoric disorders or affective problems participate in short guided concentration exercises
- students whose native language is not German receive additional language support
- high-performance students are allowed to disconnect from the routine tasks after consultation with the teacher and work on their own main language focus
- all students are familiar with the fact that everyone is different and that there are different capacities among their peers
- students support each other during their learning process

teaching techniques

Successful differentiation and individualisation can furthermore be achieved through a wide range of teaching techniques, which can be varied over the school year and address different talents and interests. On this basis and from the preceding considerations, Tomlinson's general principles of a differentiated classroom, which are key principles for language teaching, can be

further developed. Hence, the following principles can be derived for EFL teaching, which should be taken into account with regard to learning arrangements in lesson planning (Eisenmann 2011a, 2014, 2017, 2018):

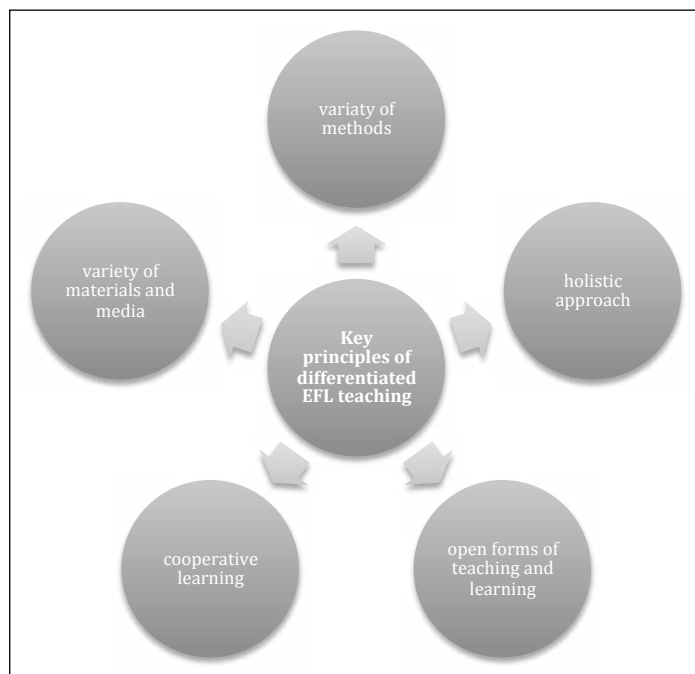


Fig. 12 | Key Principles of Differentiated EFL Teaching

4.5.1 Variety of Methods

In a communicative, action-oriented, and student-centered foreign language classroom, teachers are challenged to design teaching scenarios in which students actively use the foreign language, design their own learning process, and apply learning strategies in order to arrive at their individual solutions. For this reason, learner autonomy has to be developed as a prerequisite for enabling lifelong learning in our knowledge society. As a learning consultant, the teacher should offer a broad range of methods which serve as the basis for varied, interesting, and activating

methodological approaches

lessons. Together with the students, the teacher chooses a methodology to work on a topic. Methodological approaches that can be used in a learner-oriented foreign language classroom include free work, weekly plans, learning workshops, learning counters, station learning, project-based language learning, task-based language learning, role plays, language learning games, simulations, learning by teaching, keeping a reading diary, and working with Internet tools (for further details see chapters 6 & 7).

4.5.2 Holistic Approach

head, heart, hand

According to Pestalozzi, education should develop the powers of “learning by head, heart, and hand”.⁶ His motto refers to holistic learning in the pedagogical sense, which is communicative, social, interactive, emotional, and creative. Since learning takes place with the participation of as many sensory channels as possible, this learning-theoretical approach enables the students to actively participate and contribute to the lessons not only in a cognitive but also in an affective and psycho-motoric way. In the sense of multisensory learning (cf. Vester 1975: 49), which includes visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and intellectual learning, it is essential for the preparation of lessons to schedule learning processes that address as many senses as possible (see chap. 3). This requirement is mainly reflected in the concept of action orientation, which has been influencing debates in EFL methodology for more than two decades. Particularly psychological research on learning supports action orientation by proving that learning by doing results in a higher learning success when compared to learning by reading, seeing, or hearing.

action-oriented
learning

Action-oriented learning in the context of foreign language learning must offer opportunities for “doing”, which can be implemented by offering forms of discovery learning (e.g. inductive rule processing in grammar lessons), inviting extracurricular experts (e.g. native speakers), establishing school as a place of learning, visiting places outside the classroom in order to learn a language, or understanding the classroom as the place of au-

6 <http://www.jhpestalozzi.org> (December 2018)

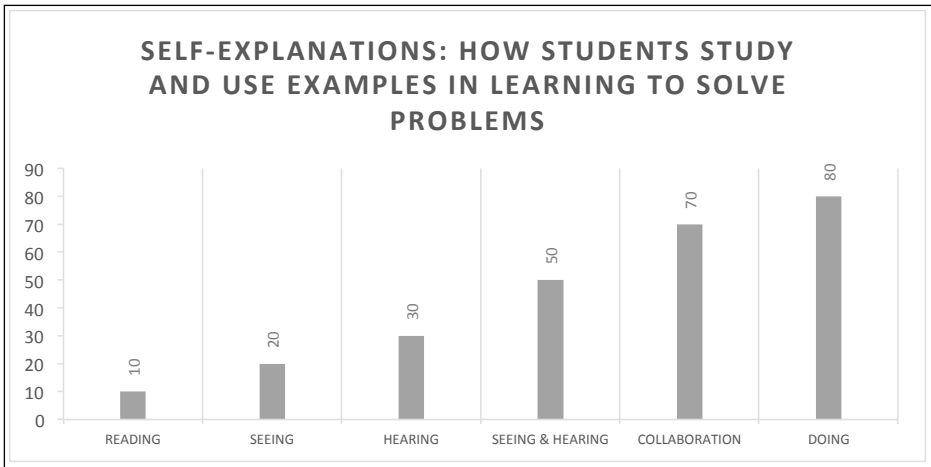


Fig. 13 | Retention (adapted from Chi et al. 1989)

thentic communication and negotiation. Hence, action-oriented learning commonly tends to also be learner-oriented learning, because it is about promoting the ability of learners to be autonomous and take independent action. Closely related to action-oriented learning is the principle of playful learning, because playing is an extension and enrichment for the learning and retention process. It can be introduced into a variety of contexts and implemented in the form of learning games, role plays, language games, simulations, and even scenic plays.

4.5.3 Open Forms of Teaching and Learning

Open instruction is an umbrella term for various forms of opening up the classroom in content, methodological, and organisational contexts with the aim of changing the ways learners interact in their learning processes. Open learning generally refers to activities that either enhance learning opportunities within or broaden learning opportunities beyond formal education systems. The basic methodological principle of open teaching and learning is discovery-based, problem-solving, action-oriented, and self-responsible learning. While there is no agreed-upon,

open learning

open teaching

comprehensive definition of open learning, it always involves interactive learning approaches, and its central focus is commonly placed on the needs of the learner as perceived by the learner. Open teaching and learning mean that students learn to plan their learning independently, manage their own learning process, and evaluate it, too. Hence, the pupils not only determine the social form, the methods, and the order of the learning tasks to be dealt with but also their individual learning goals.

The focus of open teaching is to achieve the educational goals of pupils' individuality, autonomy, and maturity through the use of appropriate teaching practices. This means that in addition to providing a solid knowledge base, important key skills such as self responsibility, team spirit, ability for autonomous learning, judgment, creativity, critical thinking, networked thinking skills, and similar skills should be acquired. Providing an open curricular and methodological environment where students are supported and encouraged to take initiative in choosing goal-oriented activities and planning work schedules (such as weekly plans) is needed to help learners execute their individual learning approaches. Learning how to learn is crucial. The most convincing form of open teaching is the concept of learner autonomy, where students should be equipped with self-directed learning skills and strategies so that they learn how to learn. This enables a natural differentiation that recognises the learners' strengths and weaknesses while at the same time increases their interest in their own learning processes (see chap. 9, Thaler 2012: 111).

4.5.4 Cooperative Learning

classroom interaction

As already mentioned, methods of differentiation and individualisation contribute to helping students to become autonomous language learners. Keeping this in mind, cooperative learning should be one of the main concerns of foreign language teaching, as it not only allows a greater focus on the pupil as an individual but also focuses on (intercultural) communicative competence. Cooperative learning describes classroom interaction in which students acquire knowledge together and develop competencies individually while at the same time learn to work together in a team with their peers. Cooperation-oriented teaching therefore

falls between teacher-centered instruction and self-regulated learning (SRL).

In cooperative education, students usually work together in groups or pairs. Therefore, the social aspect is in the centre of such learning, which enables the learners to develop their personalities, acquire knowledge, and expand their methodological competencies. Cooperative methods are particularly well suited for the foreign language classroom, because they offer great opportunities for communication between the students and, thus, result in a high degree of student activation. If language learning takes place predominantly in group or partner work, students' speaking time is considerably higher than in the conventional way of teaching with the teachers as purveyors of knowledge, corresponding to the Nuremberg Funnel approach. By using the foreign language in the protected space of the classroom, cooperative methods also help to build up confidence and extend the students' active spoken and written language skills. In addition to common cooperative scenarios such as think-pair-share, group tournament, paired reading, or partner puzzles, learning through mentoring or tandem learning can play a major role in EFL teaching (cf. Kuty 2017: 49).

social aspect of learning

4.5.5 Variety of Materials and Media

Individualised learning can be enhanced by targeted support through appropriate tools. It is indispensable to provide learners with a wide range as well as a goal-oriented use of different materials and media. At best, students choose their learning materials and media themselves and the teacher acts as a learning advisor and facilitator, providing an optimal learning environment by not only providing the materials and media but also by assisting students with problems or questions. The high degree of free choice and learning options leads to the strengthening of students' methodological competence (see chap. 1) and even encourages the individual pupil to be creative.

goal-oriented use

Thus, differentiation takes place on several levels: the choice of the media is largely left to the students themselves and also the differences in pace are taken into account. The same content can be worked out differently by students depending on their

choice

interest, media preference, (pre-) knowledge, and individual abilities. For example, one group deals with a text, another with pictures or films, and a third one with a CD or the Internet. Different techniques for creating or presenting content can also serve as a basis for differentiation, because the early development of methodological competence is crucial for individualised, self-responsible learning.

digital media

Driven by the increased media awareness in recent decades and the growing number of EFL-methodological contributions in both the fields of general media literacy and especially Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), the use of new media enjoys increasing acceptance in today's EFL classrooms. The development of digital media is not only an expression of rapid social development but also significantly influences the educational processes. The targeted use of digital media in individualised and differentiated teaching and learning contexts is extremely motivating, and the variety of media enables autonomous learning through a moderate, critical, and individualised approach (see chap. 6).

Tasks

1. Define the terms (external and internal) differentiation and individualisation.
2. Explain three fields of differentiation and elucidate them by using concrete EFL teaching possibilities.
3. Discuss the challenges of differentiation as well as individualisation and consider solutions for language teachers to deal with these problems.