

**EFFECTIVE WAYS TO IMPLEMENT DIFFERENTIATED  
INSTRUCTION IN UNIVERSITY-LEVEL  
ENGLISH CLASSES.**

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**Annotation:** *This article examines practical approaches to implementing differentiated instruction in university-level English language classrooms, with particular emphasis on supporting English Language Learners (ELLs). Drawing from current research in differentiated instruction and ELL pedagogy, it provides concrete strategies for content adaptation, assessment methods, and instructional delivery. The research offers practical solutions for university instructors facing diverse linguistic and academic needs in their classrooms.*

**Keywords:** *differentiated instruction, English Language Learners, higher education, material adaptation, formative assessment, scaffolding, university teaching, content differentiation*

Today's university classrooms represent increasingly diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, creating new challenges for English language instruction. Differentiated instruction (DI) offers a systematic approach to addressing these varying needs while maintaining academic rigor. Differentiated instruction recognizes that students learn differently and requires instructors to modify their teaching approaches accordingly. Baecher (2011) extends this framework specifically for ELL contexts, highlighting the importance of linguistic scaffolding and content accessibility.

Effective differentiation, as emphasized by Tomlinson (2001), involves adjusting content, process, and product based on students' readiness, interests, and

learning profiles. In university settings, this approach is particularly crucial as students prepare for their professional and academic careers. The need for tailored instruction becomes evident as instructors strive to accommodate diverse learning needs in their classrooms.

One key strategy for differentiation is flexible grouping. Tomlinson (2001) argues that grouping differentiation involves mixing strong and weaker students, creating opportunities for peer learning and support. In university English classes, instructors can implement various grouping configurations, such as heterogeneous groups for collaborative projects, homogeneous groups for targeted skill development, paired work for peer review and speaking practice, and individual work for personal reflection and assessment. These diverse grouping strategies foster an inclusive environment where all students can benefit from each other's strengths.

Material adaptation and resource development also play a significant role in effective differentiation. According to Tomlinson (2001), using different texts and supplementary materials increases the likelihood of providing students with appropriately challenging levels of content. Baecher (2011) emphasizes the importance of modifying printed materials, particularly through adapting versions of texts and providing word banks. University instructors can apply these principles by providing texts at different complexity levels, creating scaffolded writing assignments, developing tiered vocabulary lists, and offering multiple options for demonstrating learning. Such adaptations ensure that all students can engage with the material meaningfully.

Modern technology offers numerous tools for supporting differentiated instruction. As noted by Lawrence-Brown and Sapon-Shevin (2015), learning management systems can facilitate personalized content delivery, while digital tools enable collaborative work. Online resources allow for self-paced learning, and

multimedia materials cater to diverse learning preferences. By integrating technology into their teaching, instructors can enhance engagement and accessibility for all students.

Assessment strategies are essential for effective differentiation, relying heavily on ongoing assessment practices. Hall et al. (2003) highlight that teachers in a differentiated classroom continuously use formative assessments to ensure student comprehension and modify their teaching strategies accordingly. University instructors can implement regular progress monitoring, utilize multiple assessment formats, provide student self-assessment tools, and adopt portfolio-based evaluation methods. These practices enable instructors to gauge student understanding and adapt instruction to meet individual needs.

To practically implement differentiated instruction, instructors should follow several guidelines. Initial assessments are vital; conducting diagnostic tests, surveying student interests and learning preferences, and identifying specific learning objectives can provide a solid foundation. Planning and organization are also critical, involving the development of flexible lesson plans, preparation of varied instructional materials, and creation of clear assessment criteria. Effective classroom management is necessary, requiring the establishment of clear routines, setting expectations for independent work, and planning smooth transitions between activities.

Monitoring and adjustment are crucial components of a successful differentiation strategy. Instructors should conduct regular progress checks, collect student feedback, and modify strategies based on the results. However, implementing differentiated instruction is not without its challenges. Common issues include time management, resource limitations, large class sizes, and maintaining assessment consistency. Solutions to these challenges may involve developing efficient planning systems, sharing resources among colleagues,

utilizing technology, and establishing clear assessment rubrics. By addressing these challenges head-on, university instructors can create a more inclusive and effective learning environment for all students.

Practical implementation examples:

(Sample differentiated activities for specific language skills)

1) - T provides Ss with the text about *Why is it so hard to talk about money?*.

(The text is taken from the Newsela.com)

<https://newsela.com/view/ck9nooj4605x40iqjftgwepjc/?levelId=ck7ecwqr50vf714p7k2ot9wpu>

### **WHY IS IT SO HARD TO TALK ABOUT MONEY?**

Read the text and answer the following questions:

By Scientific American, adapted by Newsela staff  
text level 8

Over the course of our lives, we will all have to deal with uncomfortable questions and awkward conversations. Those dealing with money are perhaps the most difficult. Many Americans see personal finance as the most challenging topic to discuss with others, more so than subjects like death, politics and religion. Money is a leading cause of stress in relationships and is commonly cited as the primary reason couples divorce. Yet, many couples don't discuss how they would manage their money before getting married.

The repercussions of not talking about our finances can be severe. Avoiding the topic can have negative consequences for our health, wealth and happiness. Many people accumulate crippling debt, miss opportunities to save or are unaware of basic money-management skills, simply because they were embarrassed to ask their friends and family for advice about money.

#### **Friends And Family**

In a 2009 study, researchers found that students from households that spoke openly about finances were less likely to have problems with impulse spending. On average, they had significantly less credit card debt than students who didn't talk about their finances with others. Simply asking friends and family how they deal with money can lead to valuable insights.

In addition, it is possible to make friends and family participate more actively in your day-to-day financial life. One way to do that is to make them hold you accountable for your behavior. Researchers Felipe Kast, Stephan Meier and Dina Pomeranz found that peer groups helped Chileans with small-scale businesses save more. Their study showed a remarkable 3.7-fold increase in the number of deposits made by people who had the option to publicly announce their savings goal, which was then monitored in weekly meetings. When we make a commitment to a goal and feel accountable to someone, it is easier to follow through. What's more, this holds true even when regular meetings are not an option. In the Chilean study, the researchers found that text messages were almost as effective at keeping people accountable as in-person meetings.

Below is differentiated instruction for less proficient learners - T provides three learners whose reading comprehension is less developed with worksheets where text is from the same article Newsela but modified (text [Level 6](#)). All other Ss are given the text from that article on Level 8 [D]

### **WHY IS IT SO HARD TO TALK ABOUT MONEY?**

Read the text and answer the following questions:

By Scientific American, adapted by Newsela staff  
text level 6

Talking about money can be very difficult. Many Americans see personal finance as the most challenging topic to discuss with others. For them, it is even harder to talk about than uncomfortable subjects like death, politics or religion. Money is a leading cause of stress in relationships. It is often one of the primary reasons why marriages break down. Yet, many couples don't discuss how they would manage their money before getting married.

Not talking about our finances can have severe consequences. It can be bad for your health, wealth and happiness. Many people fall heavily into debt or miss opportunities to save simply because they were embarrassed to ask their friends and family for advice.

Good things can come from being more open to discussing money. Talking to friends and family can help jump-start positive money decisions. In other cases, our loved ones can help us realize that expert outside advice might be needed.

**Friends And Family**

In a 2009 study, researchers found that students from households that spoke openly about finances were less likely to have problems with impulse spending. They spent money more wisely and bought fewer things they didn't really need. Impulse spending is when someone makes quick or last-minute decisions to buy something.

On average, those people also had less credit card debt than students who didn't talk about their finances. When you use a credit card, you can buy things without actually paying money yet. Then, at the end of a certain period, you have to pay back that debt, or the debt will get larger.

Friends and family can help you reach financial goals, such as saving a certain amount of money every month. One way they can help is by keeping track of how you're doing. Let them know how much you want to save and show them what you've put away. Knowing someone will be checking up on our progress makes it more likely we will stick to our goal.

- Additionally, these less proficient learners can be given the list of the new words with definition from the text.

Similarly, this kind of differentiation can be created for more proficient learners or based on their ages and personal interests.

**References:**

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