

UNIVERSITY OF TARTU
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STUDIES

**The teaching techniques that support the development of students with
higher language proficiency in mixed-ability EFL classes**

MA thesis

Berit Tomlinson

SUPERVISOR: Lect. Natalja Zagura

TARTU

2024

ABSTRACT

According to the contemporary approach in teaching, a teacher needs to consider each student's abilities and the will to learn. It is a common situation to teach mixed-ability classes where students' level of English and motivation may vary tremendously. To support and provide successful strategies and tools for a teacher, the study focuses on inquiring teaching techniques that are recommended for teachers who work with students with higher language proficiency in EFL classes.

The research consists of an empirical study to find the answers to following research questions: How can teachers motivate students with higher language proficiency and keep them engaged in mixed-ability EFL classes? How do different modification techniques affect the engagement and motivation of the students with higher language proficiency in EFL classes?

The aim of the study is to examine the effects of modifying content, process, and product of an EFL course and how that can encourage, engage, and motivate EFL learners with higher language proficiency. The study group consists of five 13- and 14-year-old students in year 7 in an EFL class of 17 students. The study group was chosen due to the fact they are part of a mixed-ability class with profound differences in educational ability.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	2
List of abbreviations.....	4
INTRODUCTION.....	5
1. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	10
1.1 Differentiated instruction: definition, advantages, and challenges.....	10
1.2 The main aspects of differentiated instruction.....	12
1.3 Teaching techniques for mixed-ability classroom.....	17
2. CONDUCTING THE EMPIRICAL STUDY	
2.1 Data collection and methodology.....	23
2.2 Analysis.....	24
2.2.1 Analysis of motivation questionnaire.....	24
2.2.2 Analysis of semi-structured group interview.....	27
2.2.3 Analysis of lesson plans.....	29
2.2.4 Analysis of feedback questionnaire.....	35
2.3 Discussion.....	41
CONCLUSION.....	45
REFERENCES.....	47
APPENDICES.....	51
RESÜMEE.....	73

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EFL English as foreign language

CEFR Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment

L1 first language

L2 second language

HLP higher language proficiency

DI differentiated instruction

S1 code for student 1

S2 code for student 2

S3 code for student 3

S4 code for student 4

S5 code for student 5

INTRODUCTION

During my teaching career I have noticed differences in the way various students acquire English as a foreign language. I have noticed the gap between the students with higher language proficiency and those of average ability. The aim of the thesis is to inquire into the existing research on the effective measures for teaching English as a foreign language to the students with higher language proficiency in mixed-ability classes. In the present thesis the term “students with higher language proficiency” (HLP students) refers to certain students within a larger study group who perform better in EFL classes. This means those students who have a deeper knowledge in grammar and vocabulary, and the ability to complete tasks more quickly than their peers in the same class. Different scholars investigating the issue of teaching similar students have also used the terms like “advanced students”, “(linguistically) gifted students” and “talented students”. The meaning of these terms is briefly discussed below and in more detail in the literature review section of the present thesis.

In the context of the present study, the term “advanced students” does not apply to the term that is used in the traditional classification of students’ language proficiency levels where the term is used as the term “advanced students” would primarily refer to the language level between upper-intermediate and proficient language user. However, rather the term “advanced students” is used to indicate those students who are above average in general academic knowledge and learning ability. Some of the literature review also refers to the term “gifted students”, this term in those studies is broadly analogous to the term “advanced students” as used in other studies. The term HLP in this thesis, does not apply generally to gifted or advanced students, but it is used specifically to refer to the students with more advanced linguistic ability when compared to their classmates.

For the purposes of the present study, an experiment was conducted with a group of five 13- and 14-year-old students with higher language proficiency, who study in year 7, in an EFL class of 17 students. Although the selected study group has the most profound differences in educational ability in the school where the author of the thesis teaches, the challenge is not limited to this study group only, but it has been observed on a wider scale within the school.

The literature review on teaching students who find foreign language easy to learn and use confirmed the matter and importance of the research topic. The general search terms considered in the paper are “mixed-ability” classes, “gifted”, “talented or advanced” students. The author of the thesis refers to and examines the HLP students in the present study. While most discussed studies on how such students learn were conducted abroad, they are still relevant to how English as foreign language is taught in schools in Estonia, because they identify useful strategies and techniques to keep students with higher language proficiency engaged in learning.

As there are not enough studies conducted specifically on teenage students with higher language proficiency in EFL classes (as in the present paper), the following papers are discussed to give a wider view on the topic. I refer to Shemuda (2018), who has inquired more specifically into the notion of “linguistically gifted students”. Shemuda (2018) has pointed out the main characteristics of “gifted” EFL learners. According to her study, greater awareness of language, strong communication skills, strong leadership and exceptional talent in reasoning and argumentation have been identified as the key characteristics of linguistically gifted EFL students. In addition, Sayı and Yurtseven (2021) highlight that gifted students have unique abilities to complete tasks quickly, they have flexible thinking and the ability to quickly make connections and solve more complex tasks. Okan and Ispinar (2009) note a similar phenomenon about gifted students. Here are some of the characteristics that Okan and Ispinar (2009) have found in their study: gifted students are good readers, verbally fluent for their age,

give quick verbal responses, have wide general knowledge, learn quickly, prefer verbal to written activities, they can also be self-taught in their own interest areas, have an ability to work things out in their head very quickly, have a good memory, have strong views and opinions, have a lively and original imagination/sense of humour, focus on their own interests rather than on what is being taught and can be easily bored by what they perceive as routine tasks. The characteristics mentioned above are the reason why teachers need to modify teaching methods with linguistically gifted students.

The author of the present study claims that students with higher language proficiency in mixed-ability classrooms in Estonian schools, tend to get considerably less attention and support from their teachers compared to their weaker peers (Hallam and Ireson, 2005). The current MA thesis focuses on how students with higher language proficiency learn, what motivates them, and how to support their further intellectual growth.

In recent years there have been some studies in Estonia on teaching students with higher academic abilities (Konksi 2020), but these studies have not focused on teaching EFL students. One aspect of the research topic will consider how the findings of these studies can be applied to teaching EFL to the target group students. For that reason, the author of the research finds the topic of teaching EFL students with higher language proficiency relevant, worth investigating and supportive for all EFL teachers working in mixed-ability classrooms.

The literature review shows the evidence of the necessity of making changes in EFL classes concerning students with higher language proficiency. Many EFL teachers all around the world face similar issues when teaching mixed-ability classes. The main difference between gifted and so-called “average” language learners is that gifted students tend to study at a faster pace and risk losing motivation and failing to perform to the best of their abilities if lessons are not motivating or challenging enough for them.

Discussing the matter of teaching linguistically advanced students, Sayı and Yurtseven (2021) investigated gifted students' dispositions and learning styles in the learning centres in Turkey and examined if the modifications within the lesson plans change students' approach to the learning process. The research shows that the learning motives were inspired by an effective learning environment, interaction and the sense of accomplishment in the learning process. Even though the study was not carried out in EFL classes, it is still relevant to the research topic as it confirms the necessity of modifying the learning process according to the level of students' ability.

Hallam and Ireson (2005) point out the importance of differentiation in instruction in mixed-ability classes, where mixed-ability classroom refers to a group of students with different academic ability, comprising students with different academic levels and experience studying in the same class. Their research also supports the idea of modifying the syllabus in mixed ability groups. Hallam and Ireson point out that content, the depth the activity, the activities undertaken, and the resources should be changed according to the characteristics of the group. Although their focus is on less-able students, it is possible to draw parallels with gifted students. With less-able students more opportunities for rehearsal and repetition were given, more structured work, more practical work, less opportunities for discussion, less access to the curriculum, less homework with less detailed feedback, while work proceeded at a slower pace and was easier. Hallam and Ireson's (2005) work proves the need for modification when it comes to mixed-ability classes. It may be assumed that some strategies aimed to assist less-able students in learning can be reversed to benefit students with higher language proficiency.

In addition to the international studies, there is an Estonian study conducted by Konksi (2020) on the pull-out method on high-ability students in mathematical classes. In a pull-out programme students with higher ability are taught separately from the rest of the group. The learning process takes place at the same time as their regular classes. Normally, the pull-out

programme group is formed by students with high ability from different grades. Konksi's study proves the positive aspect of the pull-out programme by increasing the motivation of learning mathematics among primary school academically gifted students.

The research questions of the present MA thesis are as follows: How can teachers motivate students with higher language proficiency and keep them engaged in mixed-ability EFL classes? How do different modification techniques affect the engagement and motivation of the students with higher language proficiency in EFL classes? Possible answers to the research questions will be identified through the literature review and the empirical study of the thesis.

The current paper's first chapter consists of a literature review on both different foreign language teaching strategies and the strategies used with advanced and higher language proficiency students. In addition, the literature review explains the current situation in Estonia on the same matter. The second chapter includes the data collection, method, analysis and the discussion of an empirical study that was conducted on a study group comprised of 5 students with higher language proficiency in grade 7 in a rural country school in Estonia. The results and recommendations illustrated by the empirical study can be found in the discussion section. The materials of the empirical study are provided in the appendices.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Differentiated instruction: definition, advantages, and challenges

In contemporary education teachers are facing more obstacles than ever. As the times have changed, the students change within the time. The challenges educators need to overcome in teaching are a part of everyday school life in most countries, including Estonia. The general understanding of teaching when every student was taught the same way is past as this will not guarantee any success, high results, or readiness to use the learnt content in real life. Therefore, the term “differentiated instruction” should be considered. Two discussions of the definition of differentiated instruction (DI) are provided below. Tomlinson’s (2017) states the definition of differentiated instruction as follows:

At its most basic level, differentiating instruction means “shaking up” what goes on in the classroom, so that students have multiple options for taking in information, making sense of ideas, and expressing what they learn. In other words, differentiated classroom provides differentiated avenues to acquiring content, to processing or making sense of ideas, and to developing products so that each student can learn effectively. (Tomlinson 2017)

Ortega’s (2018) has identified differentiated instruction as follows:

Differentiated instruction (DI) is an instructional strategy intended to help educators succeed their diverse student population along the process of teaching and learning. Before DI is incorporated into the classroom, it is key for teachers to identify learners’ readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles. By doing so, teachers will be able to employ DI effectively during the course of instruction, which consequently will enhance teaching, support and improve learning for all learners. (Ortega 2018)

As pointed out in the previous quotations, Tomlinson (2017) gives more general explanation to the definition, mainly by referring to students’ individual approaches to learning. Nevertheless, Ortega (2018) describes DI as the tool that can be used to modify content, process and product of learning. Both authors clearly define the necessity to modify the instruction in mixed-ability students’ classrooms as the level of language proficiency varies greatly. In the present thesis both definitions are considered, and the modifications on the teaching techniques that are applied in the EFL classes during the experiment period are based on the definitions presented earlier.

As pinpointed earlier in the paper, the times when students were taught unitarily, should be over, and more individual approach to a student's development should be applied. The research on the topic and general teachers' opinions to teaching methods has shown that educators' views on differentiation may vary considerably. The greatest threat for teachers seems to be the growth of their workload, and the loss of the control of students' behaviour in the class while experiencing differentiated instruction. Nevertheless, Tomlinson (2017) establishes that the loss of control of students' behaviour is not evidenced, the opposite seems to be the case, teachers may gain more control over the two following issues, on how students behave in the class, and on their individual educational development.

It is important to realise that differentiated instruction does not refer to individual instruction. It is not reasonable to create lesson plans for each student separately but grouping the students according to their academic level in mixed-ability classrooms would be beneficial. In accordance with several studies on this issue by Theisen (2002), Tomlinson (2017) and Obilisteanu (2016), grouping students according to their academic levels would be beneficial. Most likely, teachers can identify groups of three or four different academic levels in a classroom. This gives teachers a platform from which they can continue observing and modifying the lessons in the case of a mixed-ability classroom.

To be more specific about the groups divided by students' academic level, Konksi's (2020) research on the pull-out method in the case of primary school's mathematics, is a successful example of grouping students according to their academic abilities. Nonetheless, in the case of a rural school in Estonia, the pull-out method is not the most practical choice for a rural school as there is an insufficient number of teachers who could possibly teach smaller groups of students, in the same manner as described in Konksi's (2020) study.

Several studies focusing on the issues related to working with more advanced students pinpoint that gifted students tend to get bored quickly and teaching methods and strategies should be modified according to the students' interests, learning pace and motivation. As mentioned earlier in the paper, the research on gifted students in general is quite significant; however, the focus on students with higher language proficiency in EFL classes is limited.

Referring to Dudley and Osvath's (2016) study, a teacher should study a group of students well enough before starting to draw any conclusions on the teaching methods to use with them. According to Dudley and Osvath (2016), a group observation plays a crucial role in order to identify students' motivation, interest in learning English, what students gain by learning the language, any grammar issues, and how they feel about the learning environment and the group they are part of. These are just a few of the key points a teacher needs to clarify when teaching a new group.

1.2 The main aspects of differentiated instruction

To implement differentiated instruction, three following aspects should be taken into account. According to Dudley and Osvath (2016), three aspects of differentiation should be considered: content, process and product. For example, to differentiate the content in reading comprehension the text should be modified according to the language level of the students. There are several ways how to change the content. To make it more challenging, the gaps, more difficult synonyms, anagrams and extension of the text can be used. Whereas, to make it more accessible for the so-to say "weaker" students, simpler synonyms, less text, and more explanation are given. Another possibility to differentiate the learning is to modify the process. According to Dudley and Osvath (2016), a teacher can provide students with a few options how to solve a task. For instance, the same questions are given to all students, the language

level is identical for everybody, but the ways of finding the answers vary. Going through the process part of teaching, an educator should identify and understand what essential skills need to be taught. To be more specific, the students who have not obtained certain details of the studies cannot take the next step before they have achieved the basics. According to Tomlinson (2017), students process and understand the content most naturally when the activities are interesting and encourage students to think at a higher level.

Adjusting the content refers to the information that he or she should know by the end of the lesson, as stated by Thiesen (2002). By modifying the content, texts, documents, audio materials, and other possible materials teachers use in the classroom should be altered in accordance with students' needs. According to Obilisteanu and Niculescu (2016), the content which is taught can be divided into several parts (units) in line with the semester, year, cycle of study with the aim that some units are compulsory, and others are elective for students. This depends on the student's level of language proficiency. Using a so-called modular system where the content is divided into subdivisions helps students with different abilities as the knowledge can be adopted in continuous stages rather than all at once. The same authors, Obilisteanu and Niculescu (2016) recommend both pair and group work in mixed-ability classrooms as the less abled ones receive more support from the more abled peers which, in effect, helps to accumulate self-esteem of the ones with lower language proficiency.

Based on Tyrou and Mylonas' (2023) paper, the process refers to the way teaching is demonstrated. Theisen (1997) determines as an example when planning a lesson about sport activities, in differentiated teaching an educator should find reading activities for three different sports, whereas the following action is based on the theory of multiple intelligences. In practise, one group of students should follow a kinaesthetic approach by demonstrating the sport, another group would design a poster about the sport, and the third group of students would conduct a presentation about the sport. Theisen (2002) has said that process can be changed by

making alterations to the complexity or abstractness of activities. The aim of modification exposes greater flexibility and independence for students; therefore, they take a prominent amount of responsibility for their learning process.

The last stage of modifications in the case of differentiated teaching is to adjust the product. Therefore, *product*, is the result that a student can express to show the knowledge he/she has acquired through the learning process. According to Theisen (2002), role-plays, research work, multimedia presentations, essays, plays, news shows, posters, songs, graphics, stories, videos, written assignments, and etc should be used.

Tyrou and Mylonas' (2023) argue that the evaluation procedures (written, oral, descriptive, formative, planned, unpredictable, evaluation through "file" and work plans) should be flexible as this allows providing more meaningful and encouraging feedback to students. To conclude the idea, Tyrou and Mylonas have paraphrased the following thoughts exercised by Naka (2017) and Heacox (2012) as "with differentiated learning in the foreign language classroom, we offer the opportunity for students' individual needs to lead to a meaningful and successful learning process".

Furthermore, the findings supported by Hallam and Ireson's (2005) study on teachers who were teaching in mixed-ability and grouped classes in the UK are presented. The focus of Hallam and Ireson's study was to compare teachers' responses on their teaching practise whether in mixed-ability or homogenous classes. The results of their research showed that the curriculum was differentiated more in the classes which were ability grouped by content, depth, the activities undertaken, and the resources used. However, in the classes of students with lower academic competency, more repetition, more structured work, more practical work, less opportunities for discussion, less access to curriculum, less homework with less detailed feedback was exercised. Also, the pace of working was observed to be slower than in groups

of students with homogenous academic ability. An essential finding in Hallam and Ireson's (2005) paper is that the structures themselves made the study group teachers change their teaching styles, which led to differentiated instruction. This study describes possible different results on teaching by using differentiated instruction or grouping students according to their academic level. Poorer results and lower students' motivation were evidenced in the case of grouped teaching in low ability classroom in the UK. The following example shows the detrimental effect on teaching low ability groups, where the standards of giving feedback (for example, correcting mistakes and explaining the content of the mistakes) will not reach to the same level of practice as in high ability groups where more thorough feedback is provided. Furthermore, there is obstructive evidence recognised by Page (1984) about teachers' approach who were holding low expectations towards low ability students. This might cause a situation when teachers with low expectations spread the understanding to low ability students which might then take their motivation to study at their highest possible level away. Another author, Boaler (1997) has investigated teachers' approaches to high-ability students, and finds that in that case, teachers have much higher expectations, to be more precise, their teaching has faster pace, and it is most likely presented in the way that makes students to work in a competitive environment. In other words, this might lead to the agenda whereas low ability students lose their motivation, or even further, their self-esteem.

Based on Reid's (1982) observations reported in the Hallam and Ireson's (2005) paper, successful mixed-ability teaching requires a greater amount of flexibility, to be more specific, teacher should include bigger variety of teaching styles, models and techniques within a class, and choose the study materials that allow modifications according to the academic ability of a student. Therefore, Obilisteanu and Niculescu (2016) state that planning and organizing the work in accordance with a student's level of language proficiency, and general stage of development are crucial factors to remember.

In addition to teacher's flexibility, Okan and Ispinar (2009) have pinpointed in their study that younger learners' level of motivation in English classes depends on a teacher's character, in specific, teacher's positive attitude in the class is one of the key factors. The idea that students' motivation depends on the teacher's character is also supported by Obilisteanu and Niculescu (2016), who postulate that a teacher is the one who creates a positive atmosphere in the classroom. The results of Okan and Ispinar's (2009) study point out that teachers should implement a more creative teaching and learning environment for linguistically gifted (advanced) students as more challenging activities are more engaging as well. To continue with describing the factors that support the motivation of students with higher language proficiency, real-life content should be used. For instance, Shemuda (2014) determines the necessity of using real-life content in the case of teaching grammar.

Tyrou and Mylonas (2023) claim that regular literature review shows various positive sides of differentiated instruction. For example, they comment that Theisen (2002) summarises differentiation as a successful way of teaching where relevant and suitable instruction is delivered according to students' needs. He pinpoints that teaching should be flexible, and organised in the rhythm that is based on students' readiness to learn, interests, learning style, experiences, and their living conditions. It is crucial not to overlook these details as that helps teachers to realise at which level, and how, students learn most effectively.

Beam (2009) and Bogen (2019) mention the importance of the guidance and support of a teacher as practise has shown that if teachers feel more comfortable using differentiation, the benefits on students increase. According to Tyrou and Mylonas's (2023) study, the modifications during the teaching should be done in teaching methods, motivation and interest, and the readiness of students should be examined. Georg (2005) and Haelermans (2022) have highlighted that heterogeneous groups of students in classrooms create the environment which has better preparation for real-life situations, creating new roles and relationships, and leads to

personally meaningful and long-lasting learning. Keeping in mind the positive side of differentiated instruction, teachers' focus is still targeted towards students with lower academic ability or with special needs. Modifying instruction helps students with all levels of academic capacity.

Ortega (et al 2018) introduces Smit and Humper's (2012) research on teachers' perspectives on the use of differentiated instruction. 162 teachers' responses were counted in their study about the frequency of using DI in their classrooms. The study revealed that some teachers have better understanding of DI than the others, to be more precise, several teachers use the techniques of differentiated instruction only once a week, whereas, educators who were involved in further responsibilities like tutoring, used the modification techniques every day. Their study also indicated that the modifications were mainly made on the content and process, not on assessment (in the *product* phase). According to Smit and Humper's (2012) results, teachers modified tasks and goals, adjusted allotted time, varied the number of tasks, and individualized student learning. An unexpected finding of their study is that only a few teachers evidenced and analysed their students' proficiency prior the modifications made in the lesson plan. Therefore, the researchers noted that the modifications mainly applied to the content and process of teaching.

1.3 Teaching techniques for mixed-ability classroom

To enhance differentiated instruction, literature on the matter recommends teaching techniques that should be applied and modified according to students' level of language proficiency. According to the study conducted by Tyrou and Mylonas's (2023), the following seven teaching techniques are recommended to use in the case of mixed-ability EFL classroom:

- 1) Teachers should track students' readiness for learning. For this, students' language proficiency and communication skills should be monitored. A diagnostic test can be used to identify students' language proficiency.
- 2) The following modifications in the syllabus can be applied: changes to the learning goals and the content (study materials), activities are organised according to the level of proficiency and to the pace of a student's ability to work, and alternative forms of assessment are used.
- 3) Construct a student's profile to make the learning engaging and motivating for students. For instance, a student's profile can consist of appropriate thematic areas, learning content, different types of texts, methodological approaches, and a variety of types of activities. Knowing a student's profile helps the teacher to provide the teaching which is most suitable for one's needs.
- 4) Teachers should adopt and focus on multimodality when presenting new data in the class as this allows teachers to use a greater number of sources. For example, besides using words, also visuals, gestures, sounds and spatial orientation are implemented.
- 5) The use of scalable tasks is crucial in differentiated teaching as this empowers to modify the level and content of the activities.
- 6) Working in flexible groups is recommended as then students support each other's weaknesses, and no one feels left out or not engaged enough. Changing participants and roles within groups, exploits every students' communication and cooperation skills, and confidence to express their ideas. Therefore, it is important to remember that differentiated teaching is highly connected to collaboration between students, to be more precise, peer-tutoring and peer-learning are established.

- 7) Teachers should bolster students' project work which is based on their interests and personal academic needs, that enables the organization and sharing of ideas, understanding, and analysing work conducted. To illustrate the situation, when students are using digital environments and tools, they also develop their analysis and time management skills.

To proceed with the opportunities to enhance the lesson of a mixed-ability classroom, Tyrou and Mylonas (2023) provide a lesson plan on the *Tiered Lesson*. In the *Tiered lesson* the following differentiation techniques are used: students with higher language proficiency (HLP students) are offered more complex and abstract activities (including more complex home assignment) which might include open-ended questions, whereas students with lower language proficiency are provided with closed-ended questions, less complex content, and shorter texts. It is important to remember that the topic of the lesson stays the same for all levels of proficiency. In the *process* part of differentiation, there should be various ways for students to choose from, for instance, creating a video, an interview, a digital poster, illustrating a story, or recording a podcast.

According to the literature on differentiated teaching, *learning centres* (see Figure 1) can be used in order to support the learning process of the students in mixed-ability classrooms. *Learning centres* allow educators to „scaffold“ students with all levels of proficiency as the centres meet students' individual needs, attract students' interests, and offer opportunities for self-directed learning. In the following example of differentiated teaching, Tyrou and Mylonas (2023) demonstrate seven individual *learning centres* used during EFL classes in the case of a mixed-ability classroom. In the *learning centres* model, students are asked to choose four different *learning centres* to attain the necessary learning outcomes. Students would need to complete four tasks in each *learning centre* according to their working pace and interests. For a detailed overview, see the example of a *learning centre* in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Topic: nutrition. An example of learning centres.

Learning Centre 1: Cards are given with photos related to food but also the word written in both native and the target language (these two cards will be a pair). The cards are shuffled, and the student finds the right pairs. A second student checks it, and if they wish they repeat the homework, with less time available. At the end of the activity, an answer sheet with the correct matches is given, useful for the students of low readiness.

Learning Centre 2: Utilization of an online cooking show of a local recipe in the target language. A worksheet lists the text the students are listening to and a table of materials to be used. They can use pictures, symbols or words. The Worksheet refers to expressions related to cooking or the recipe and its preparation (in the target language) and the students circle the expressions they hear on the show. They are then asked to explain the specific phrases in the native language.

Learning Centre 3: Students watch video clips from various local cuisines and on the worksheet they answer a comprehension test consisting of closed-ended and open-ended questions.

Learning Centre 4: Students are asked to choose dining areas and then 1) write three sentences with a brief description of each dining area, 2) verbally describe to a classmate the types of food included in these areas.

Learning Centre 5: Students find on the internet photos of famous chefs and typical dishes of foreign countries and then record in the Worksheet a) a brief presentation of the chef they chose (name, age, nationality, etc.) 2) a brief description of the food (place of origin, materials, method of execution, etc.).

Learning Centre 6: Students choose a country and watch online what are the national dishes of that country. Then, they create a graph with comparative percentages of popularity of each specialty in the country they chose and in Greece (they will refer to flavours and specialties that are common to both countries).

Learning Centre 7: With a video camera and a text in the target language, students prepare a cooking, interview, advertising, personal experience, or food review show. They share roles and undertake a different creation (e.g., one the text / the questions / the slogan, another the music investment, another the videography, etc.)

Howards Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences pinpoints that everyone has multiple intelligences, and the following *Think-Tac-Toe* activity (see Figure 2) is based on it. In the activity students need to choose three activities to complete out of all nine squares within a certain time frame. The activities are built up in the way that completing three squares guarantees the suggested learning outcomes. Offering such a variety of ways of conducting tasks, enhances students' independence and motivation.

Figure 2. An example of Think-Tac-Toe about a literary text / creative writing.

Design decorative mask that match a character from the story who drew your attention. Wear them and recite a short monologue based on the text.	Draw a diagram and put the scenes of the story with a gradual evolution of the scenes. Insert short explanatory texts, if necessary.	Plan and represent the development of the story, with the introduction of important facts or suggestions, if necessary.
Create a poster, ad/ or a slogan with the main characters and facts to make the text fun.	Compose an introductory melody or song to prepare listeners and readers for what is to come.	Look for pieces of music that can frame the scenes in the text or the important events being narrated
What if..." Change events or scenes in the story to create another plot.	Emphasize in a poem the main characteristics and personality of a protagonist	Choose and narrate a point of the text that impressed you, enriching it with elements that you would like

In addition to previous techniques recommended, the use of *Total Physical Response Storytelling* (TPRS) model can be applied in the mixed-ability EFL classes. To apply the technique physical movements will be tied with words or phrases for memorisation.

The aim of the literature review in present thesis is to explain the definition of differentiated instruction, pinpoint the main aspects of it, and to present the modification techniques while implementing differentiated instruction in mixed-ability classroom. Although the focus of the present paper is on the seventh grade students in a rural school in Estonia, a broader approach is covered in the literature review as there are not enough research done neither worldwide nor in Estonia specifically on seventh grade students. One of the more recent studies, compiled by an Estonian author Valk (2021), who created a set of additional activities to use with the fourth grade EFL students in mixed-ability classroom, and has investigated teachers' feedback on that set of activities. The set of activities was approved and got positive feedback from the teachers who tested it. This research does not apply exactly to the present thesis' purpose, but provides a wider approach on the topic. The main focus of the present thesis

is to clarify the growth of students' motivation and engagement specifically among students with higher language proficiency.

To conclude the findings from the literature, and to answer the first research question of the present thesis, the following recommendations should be applied in the case of teaching EFL students in mixed-ability classroom: grouping students into three or four different level groups where all different levels support each other, modification of the learning content should be done according to the students' academic level, interest, learning pace (adjustment of the allotted time and the number of activities) and motivation, students who have not obtained the certain learning outcomes cannot take the next step before they have achieved previous learning outcomes, offering flexibility in content, in other words, giving students a choice to choose from in order to gain learning outcomes, offering an opportunity to work in pairs or groups, in *product* part, the assessment should be flexible, *content* should include real-life situations, providing students with a possibility to conduct collaboration projects, and finally, teachers should receive enough support and guidance on how to implement differentiated instruction.

In the empirical chapter of the present thesis, the following modification techniques will be exercised to test the findings provided in the literature:

- Offering pair and group work
- Adjusting the content of the lesson according to the students' academic level by providing HLP students with more complex and abstract activities: using *the Tiered lesson* model.
- Allowing different time allotment for different academic levels of students.
- In the *product* phase, the assessment of the HLP students is modified.

2. CONDUCTING THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

The present thesis aims to answer the following research questions: How can teachers motivate students with higher language proficiency and keep them engaged in EFL classes? How do different modification techniques affect the engagement and motivation of students with higher language proficiency in EFL classes?

The empirical chapter of the present thesis describes how the data about students' motivation was collected, and what methods have been used to collect the data. In the following analysis, lesson observations, the motivation questionnaire, a semi-structured interview, and the final feedback questionnaire will be discussed. In the final part of the analysis, the examples on how the lessons were modified for students with higher language proficiency and the teacher's observations will be presented. In the discussion part the findings of the study will be presented with the recommendations and conclusions drawn based on both, the present empirical study, and the literature review.

2.1 Data collection and methodology

The data was collected in a rural school located in central Estonia. The school was chosen since the author of the present thesis works in that school as an English teacher. There are 92 students in that school, which is similar in size to other schools outside of bigger towns in Estonia. The experiment was conducted among a study group comprised of five 7th grade students. The five students in the study group with higher language proficiency are part of a mixed-ability class of seventeen students. The experiment was conducted during the period from 4th March until 5th April in 2024. During the experiment of the present study, the modification techniques were exercised in eight lessons. The modifications techniques that

were used whilst implementing differentiated instruction applied in eight lessons, and they were based on the recommendations provided in the literature. The modification techniques included grouping according to the students' academic level within a mixed-ability classroom, adjusting the content of the lesson for students with higher language proficiency by allowing the collaboration among the study group students, in the *product* phase, the assessment was differentiated, to summarize, Tyrou and Mylonas' (2023) the *Tiered lesson* model was used.

The participants of the study group were chosen according to the teacher's observations, as during the period of last three and a half years the teacher has taught these students in the present school. Before conducting the survey, the parents of the study group were informed about the study and asked for their consent through Google Forms.

The following data collection methods were used with the study group: the teacher observations on students' reactions to the changes made in the lesson plans, the questionnaire on students' motivation, the semi-structured group interview with the study group, and the final questionnaire to examine whether the modifications in the lesson plans changed the level of motivation and engagement among the study group.

2.2 Analysis

2.2.1 Analysis of the motivation questionnaire

Firstly, the questionnaire on motivation was conducted with the study group. Each of the participants in the study group had to complete the questionnaire by ticking the statements which apply best to them. The motivation questionnaire created by the author of the thesis included 42 statements about what motivates a student to study English. The present thesis's motivation questionnaire was inspired by Maret Kümnik's (2019) study on advanced students' motivation, whereas Kümnik's motivation questionnaire primarily based on Clement's (et al

1994) research on students' motivation. The present thesis's motivation questionnaire includes thirteen questions from Kümnik's (2019) questionnaire that were adjusted for the motivation questionnaire used in the present thesis. The statements of the motivation questionnaire provided to the study group students can be seen in the appendices (see Appendix 1). The study group was informed that their answers will remain anonymous. To identify the study group students' responses individually and in more detail, coding was used during the analysis, and the final conclusions that show the change in study group students' motivation and engagement are provided in the analysis of the feedback questionnaire. Referring to the motivation questionnaire used in the present thesis, the answers to the statements included the following options for the students to choose from are *strongly agree*, *agree*, *somewhat agree*, *disagree*, and *strongly disagree*.

The questions of the motivation questionnaire can be divided into the four following categories – using English with family and friends (category I), hearing English on TV, for example watching films or videos, and playing computer games (category II), doing activities in English class (category III), and the questions that show the connection between learning English, and the career (category IV). The study group filled in the questionnaire before the modifications with lesson plans were implemented, and it aimed to learn about students' interest and motivation to learn the language.

Among the first category, the statements about using English with family and friends, most of statements showed a stronger similarity among the study group. Those results were somewhat predictable as it is already known to the author that all the students use the Estonian language at home and none of them uses English with their parents (4 students disagreed strongly to the statements using English language at home, one disagreed). This confirms that none of the study group speaks English as L1 at home on the daily basis. It is possible to assume that the student who answered *disagree* most likely uses some slang words in English

at home with his/her parents. The question about using English with (online) friend(s) gave slightly varied answers, four of them strongly disagree or disagree with the statement, one answer strongly agrees that they use English with a friend.

In the second category the results showed most of the students had watched cartoons in English while they were in kindergarten, three students agreed they had played the computer games for more than five years with the fifth student agreeing strongly with that statement. Most of the participants strongly agreed or agreed with statements about watching the videos with more challenging or new content. The result proves the motivation theory where the content should be slightly more challenging not to reduce the interest of engagement.

The third category explains what keeps the students' motivation high in English classes. That part of the questionnaire focuses on the activities and the students' readiness of helping classmates in the class, and what characteristics the study group sees about the teacher. The participants agreed or somewhat agreed with statements about finding the classroom activities interesting, important, and necessary. The question about the students' patience to wait when the teacher explains the task to other students gave multiple results, two students agree somewhat with the statement and two agree or agree strongly, and one strongly disagrees. It is possible to assume that this depends on the character of a student and that too long of a waiting time in the classroom might be demotivating for him/her.

The responses to the questions on speaking tasks seem to be neutral to the study group, in so much as none of the answers indicated a strong preference to agree or disagree with the statements. Using English in the future plays an important role amongst the study group as four strongly agree and one agrees with the statement about being able to communicate well in English guarantees a good job in the future.

In the block of statements about the teacher's characteristics, all the participants find that their teacher is a cheerful and positive person who cares about the students and makes the

lessons fun. This supports the general knowledge about learning languages where the atmosphere a teacher creates plays an important role. According to the questionnaire, independent work and projects are well tolerated by the study group.

In the fourth block of statements about the future the participants strongly agreed or agreed with all of the statements. According to the results, travelling, being able to use English at work, helping to find a better job in the future, and “opening up” the world are all high motivators for the study group.

2.2.2 Analysis of the semi-structured interview

In the following paragraph, the semi-structured group interview with the study group will be discussed. The questions for the semi-structured interview with the 7th grade study group is presented in Appendices (see Appendix 2).

Five study group students were interviewed on 4th March during their first lesson in English classroom. The first lesson was not English in their timetable. The interview recording lasts for 37 minutes. To scaffold the process of interviewing the study group, the interview was conducted in the Estonian language. All five members of the study group participated in the interview. On the basis of the interview all members confirmed that making the modifications in the tasks is acceptable for them.

The answers varied slightly in terms of the length of the task – all of them admitted that it is preferred when the modifications are only made for shorter tasks and activities, not for longer ones as otherwise they might feel excluded from the whole class.

For the question about working with a partner versus working independently the students gave the same answer – they all prefer working with a partner rather than working independently. In addition to that, the study group pointed out the importance of having a

partner/classmate who has the same working pace as they do. In other words, having a much slower partner might take their motivation down.

The study group mentioned the following activities that are engaging and exciting to them: watching films and analysing them, the activities that require moving around while doing the task and playing Kahoot. One of the students admitted that the fact that you can compete while studying adds extra excitement and is motivating for him. Out of the four skills – reading, writing, speaking, and listening that are developed in language classrooms – listening was rated the highest among to HPL students in terms of the importance and interest. This was followed by the importance of reading, speaking and writing skills. The result is somewhat surprising as the author of the thesis has evidenced throughout the lessons the speaking activities, not listening activities have been the most favourable for the study group. The participants' answers about gap filling exercises showed that they complete the exercises with pleasure, and it motivates them as it is easy enough to finish the task quickly. Tasks where students need to correct the mistakes in sentences seem to be the most difficult. A reason might be that the content is not interesting enough for them or is not one that encourages them to learn it. In other words, students' motivation is improved when they have a say in choosing the ways and order how the activities are done. The input does not refer to the situation when a teacher allows students to choose whatever they feel like doing in the class, but giving a choice on how something is learnt, to be more precise, the tools or ways how to organise the learning process. The ways of acquiring new vocabulary can be through activities that include music or movement, or a pair or group work, and the sequence of the activities can be changed.

To conclude, the semi-structured group interview with the study group demonstrates the significance of choosing “the right” topic for students. As pointed out in the literature review of the present paper, according to Tomlinson's (2017), Reid (1982) and Hallam and

Ireson (2005) publications on differentiated instruction, the content and the activities must be interesting and encourage students to think at a high level.

2.2.3 Analysis of the lesson plans

According to the literature review, it is recommended to modify not only content, but also process, and product with mixed-ability classes. This is also relevant for the groups of students with higher language proficiency. Keeping this in mind, the following adjustments have been made in eight 45-minute-long lessons during the present study.

The Gateway to the World B1 Student's Book and accompanying Workbook by Tim Foster (2021) have been used as a study material for 7th grade students in the school where the experiment was conducted. The coursebook with ten units in it is used for two years with one group of students, in grades 7 and 8. The coursebook offers a variety of activities where all four skills (reading, speaking, listening, and writing) are supported. The coursebook also has a digital student's book, workbook, and *On-the-Go Practice* exercises which include digital gamified content to bolster up students' improvement. The coursebook includes activities for the ones who need more challenge. Those activities are called *Reach higher* activities in the coursebook. In *Gateway to the World B1* Teacher's book there are guidelines for teachers how to support quicker students, and some advice what to do in the case of mixed-ability class. I have applied those recommendations and adjustments to the classes I teach (2nd, 6th-9th grades) throughout last three years when the series of *Gateway to the World* coursebook have been in use in the school, and can confirm from personal experience both that the changes are crucial to make when teacher notices the necessity for the adjustment, and one can expect the improvement in students' motivation and engagement as a result.

In the present study eight lesson plans (each lesson being 45-minute-long) were changed for students with higher language proficiency. The first lesson plan (see Appendix 5) included two 45-minute-long lessons with a 5-minute break between the lessons. In that lesson the students had to form teams of three to work on a collaborative project about family life routines in Estonia.

Students with higher language proficiency were divided into two separate teams with two and three members in a team. Besides the regular task for the whole class, the HLP students needed to run a survey among themselves and the other HLP team about who is the most popular Estonian food producer and what their most popular products among Estonia families are. The certain Estonian food producers were provided by the teacher to the study group.

Although the difference between the whole class task and the HLP task was not huge, it took some time for the study group to understand what exactly they would need to do. I noticed that additional guidelines gave the students more confidence as then they started the work immediately. I found it slightly unusual that the study group needed additional explanations as in the regular lessons an additional instruction is rarely necessary with HLP students. Nevertheless, after the additional instruction was given, the HLP groups continued the project work in a successful manner which fitted in the planned time frame. The planned time frame represents the outlined time for this activity. It is necessary for a teacher to estimate the time planned for each activity cautiously and with a full understanding of the sudden obstacles that might occur.

In accordance with the teacher's lesson observations, the modification caused excitement among the whole class. Even though the teacher had explained the details of the study for the study group before the adjustments were made in the lessons, some HLP and many regular students still got distracted over the modifications at the beginning of the lesson.

The third lesson plan (see Appendix 6) includes a 45-minute lesson with the focus on the oral presentations of the collaborative projects delivered by each team. The non-HLP students who were listening to the presentations had a task to fill in the evaluation form (see Appendix 7) while listening. HLP students filled in the evaluation form (see Appendix 8) which required deeper listening of the presentations as well as the ability to give examples about the investigated research areas, and then comment on the statements provided in the evaluation form about presentations.

To summarise the third lesson plan, it is important to point out that all activities and instruction took longer than it was originally planned. Some of the obstacles the teacher noticed during experiment lessons are as follows: introducing the task for three students who were absent in the lesson when the instruction about the task was given, two technical issues with laptops, five non-HLP students needed more support and guidelines about the task, the topic seemed not to be the most engaging/interesting for the students. On the positive side, it was perceived the HLP students created projects with a deeper knowledge, and they were able to evaluate and analyse other teams more precisely. The third lesson plan needed one extra 45-minute lesson to complete the tasks.

The fourth and fifth lesson plan (see Appendix 9) consisted of two 45-minute lessons. The focus of the lessons was on learning the new vocabulary on different languages, countries, and nationalities by complementing it with a specific vocabulary in order to speak about learning languages.

As the first modification for the HLP students, the capital cities of each country represented in the coursebook needed to be searched online and added to the notebook next to the country's name. The HLP students did it after they had finished the task that was given to the whole class. All students finished their task at the same time, and they were ready for the

next one where all students together needed to find the locations of the countries targeted in the lesson on the map by pointing at the countries.

The additional task for HLP students was to say the names of the countries in Estonian. The lesson continued with the pair work where one of the partners had to say the language and wait for their partner's response with the name of the corresponding country. For example, one student says *Arabic* while his/her partner replies with *Egypt*. HLP students followed the same instruction, except they had to add the capital city every time when they guessed the country.

For the next word search exercise, the class needed to find twelve names of the countries. Everyone was allowed to use the textbook with the list of the countries. The group of HLP students needed to fill in an additional task about writing the nationalities. As the HLP students are faster in their working pace, the whole class finished their activities at the same time. As the activities took longer than planned, the activities of the fourth and fifth lesson plan were not completed and needed to be implemented in the subsequent lessons. The exercises were checked during the following lesson.

For the following task while the rest of the class is still concentrating on filling in the reading task with missing nouns, verbs and adjectives, additionally the HLP students were asked to find three more recommendations from the Internet on how to learn English in an easy and successful way. The recommendations (the HLP students' findings) needed to be written in their notebook and presented to the whole class at the end of the reading task. After completing the gap filling, everyone had to work in pairs and take turns in reading out the text to each other.

In the following lesson number six, which was a single 45-minute lesson, the use of negative prefixes in the context of a country's description was discussed as the topic of the class. Students learnt the negative prefixes *un-*, *in-*, *im-*, *ir-*, *il-* in order to use them with the following adjectives *comfortable*, *correct*, *formal*, *happy*, *legal*, *logical*, *official*, *polite* and

possible. The task for the class was to describe a day by using some of the negative adjectives. HLP students followed the same routine except four more adjectives (*regular, responsible, usual, visible*) were given to them.

The following task in the sixth lesson included a table forming with four different categories (*animals, food, mountains, and people*) about the chosen country. The names of the countries were presented on the board. Students had to choose one country and fill in the categories in the table. The use of the Internet was allowed. HLP students needed to add two more categories to their table. The choice of four additional categories (*sightseeing, waterbodies, language, landmarks*) was given by the teacher. After finishing the task everyone had to work in groups of three to present their findings about the country (the groups were mixed with HLP students). HLP students presented six categories instead of four.

At the conclusion of the lesson six, I can reflect that HLP students worked enthusiastically in all parts of the lesson. The timeframe worked well by allowing everyone in the class to work according to their working pace and rhythm. Hence, it is important for teachers to remember that giving a choice to (more advanced) students guarantees higher motivation and engagement. In the sixth lesson the choice of choosing two categories out of four was given. Referring to Obilisteanu and Niculescu (2016), students' choice or the variety of solving the tasks should be taken into consideration.

The next paragraph explains the lesson modifications made during lessons seven and eight. The lessons had two different topics: practising negative adjectives in the seventh lesson and learning about the invented language called Toki Pona. The purpose of the first of the two lessons was to revise the content learnt in the previous lesson (the use of adjectives with negative prefixes when talking about a country). This time the work continued in pairs (still mixed pairs with HLP students). Students needed to point out to their partner what they remembered about the country that their last lesson's partner had told them. Students were

encouraged to question their previous lesson's partners in case they had forgotten about the content and details. The activity in mixed pairs was successful for all levels of language proficiency.

In the second part of that lesson plan the focus was on learning about the invented language called Toki Pona. As the lead-in, teacher asked about the number of words in different languages, including Estonian. Then the class watched a 4-minute video about the language of Toki Pona. After that the class needed to listen to the recording and fill in the gaps in the exercise provided in the textbook. Teacher played the recording to the class twice, except the HLP students listened to the recording only once as they needed to conduct an additional task. In the additional task HLP students worked in pairs and noted down the facts they know about the four following languages: *Japanese, Spanish, Esperanto, French*. After finishing the task, HLP students introduced their findings about the four languages to the class.

The differentiation of the previous task encouraged HLP students to have a discussion with their partner. As they had completed the listening task within listening to the recording only once, it gave the teacher a chance to add an extra task to avoid the boredom or demotivation of the advanced students.

As the last activity of the lesson, students had to imagine that they were going to interview the lady (Sonja Lang) whom they heard while listening to the recording. They needed to form 3 questions for Sonja Lang. The group of HLP students needed to create 6 questions instead of 3. Timewise the activity fitted in the planned timeframe – all students (including the HLP students) finished writing the questions at the same time. As HLP students had somewhat more questions prepared, it took longer to accomplish the next class activity which was to walk around the classroom by questioning each other. This did not have a negative effect on the activity, just I, as their teacher, noticed some pairs were having a conversation (asking and answering the questions) longer than the others. In other words, HLP students did not feel

demotivated as they needed to form extra questions and their dialogue took more time than the regular students' dialogues.

2.2.4 Analysis of the feedback questionnaire

To see how the study group students felt about the modifications made in the lesson plans, the final feedback questionnaire was conducted after the experiment period of modified lessons (see Appendix 12). The feedback questionnaire aimed to inquire if students' engagement and motivation improved during the testing period. The feedback questionnaire consisted of 21 questions. The questions were on the modifications made in the lessons during the experiment period. Five questions out of 21 assumed more detailed answers and explanation by HLP students. The study group students' responses were coded to enable the qualitative assessment of the answers and to identify the possible individual changes in their motivation and engagement. In the analysis, the codes S1 (Student 1), S2 (Student 2), S3 (Student 3), S4 (Student 4) and S5 (Student 5) are used to mark the study group students. The feedback questionnaire was conducted in Estonian as this is the HLP students' mother tongue, and I am convinced that this helps the study group students to express their ideas the best.

The three questions about group work received identical answers in terms of the results – all the five HLP students responded that group work in general motivates them more than the individual work. Therefore, it is important to pinpoint that the similar working pace in a team plays a significant role for the students. The question and the results about the similar working pace are represented in Appendix 4. In addition to that the study group members S1, S2 and S3 point out the following reasons why they prefer group or pair work to individual work: the variety of viewpoints on the topic/task/activity, the opportunity to develop cooperation skills, the working environment is more motivating in a group, more fun, less tension or stressful

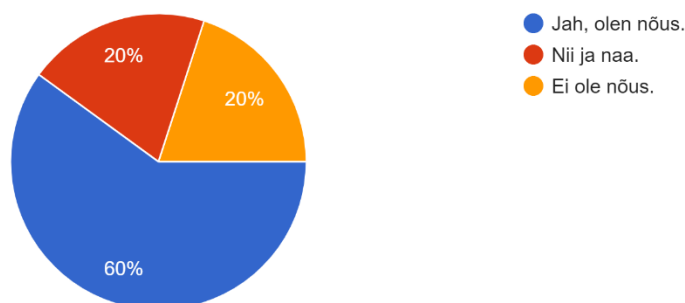
situations within the lesson, gives an opportunity to speak to friends, and the work gets done more quickly when working in a team.

A question about the Estonian food producers (see Figure 1) as an additional task showed that three students (S1, S3 and S4) enjoyed examining the Estonian food producers, one student said he did not (S5), and the fifth student (S2) answered so and so. Although according to the results in feedback questionnaire, the study group students preferred when the topic was provided by the teacher, HLP students' responses included a slight difference as two students (S2 and S5) said the topic chosen by the teacher was not interesting enough for them. This confirms the recommendations stated in the literature by Theisen (1997), Reid (1982) and Tomlinson (2017) where a teacher should inquire the students carefully about their interests and preferences before choosing the topics and take this into account while planning the work. I agree that traditionally teachers select most of the topics, but it could be suggested that when adding extra activities, “the voice of students” should be heard.

Figure 1

Projektitöös "Pere rutiinid" meeldis mulle, et saime uurida lisaks kõige populaarsema Eesti toidutootja kohta.

5 responses

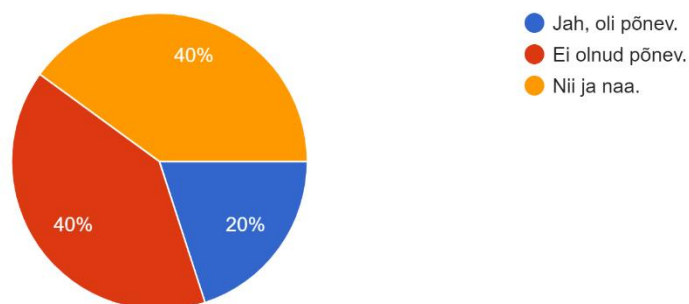


The study group students' reasons why they prefer when the additional task is given by a teacher are as follows: teacher chooses an interesting topic, the new knowledge about something is guaranteed, and the fact that the task differed from the task which was given to

the rest of the class. Students' first response about the topic reflects the trust students have towards their teacher. In Figure 2 results about inquiring about classmates' favourite food producer are introduced. The results show the variety of answers. This can be explained in several ways. Firstly, the topic about food producers was not motivating enough as four students did not find the task interesting, and only one of them found the task engaging. When justifying their choice, one student confirmed the task was engaging as he had a chance to question the others on the topic that was educating and engaging for him. Another student mentioned that now he knows more about the products of the Estonian food producers, and he is willing to try some new tastes and products. Two study group students' answers (S2 and S5) were as follows: the task was boring (no further explanation was given by the student), and there was no reason to ask a question like that. This shows the issue that the content of the lesson needs to be interesting to students, then the engagement and motivation is guaranteed.

Figure 2

Kas kaaslaste küsitamine lemmik toidutootja kohta oli sinu arvates põnev?
5 responses



In the next block of questions of the feedback questionnaire the students were asked whether they enjoyed talking about the additional topics while presenting their collaborative project (see the results in Figure 3), receiving additional work from the teacher made the English classes go by fast (see Figure 4), whether English classes were exciting and engaging

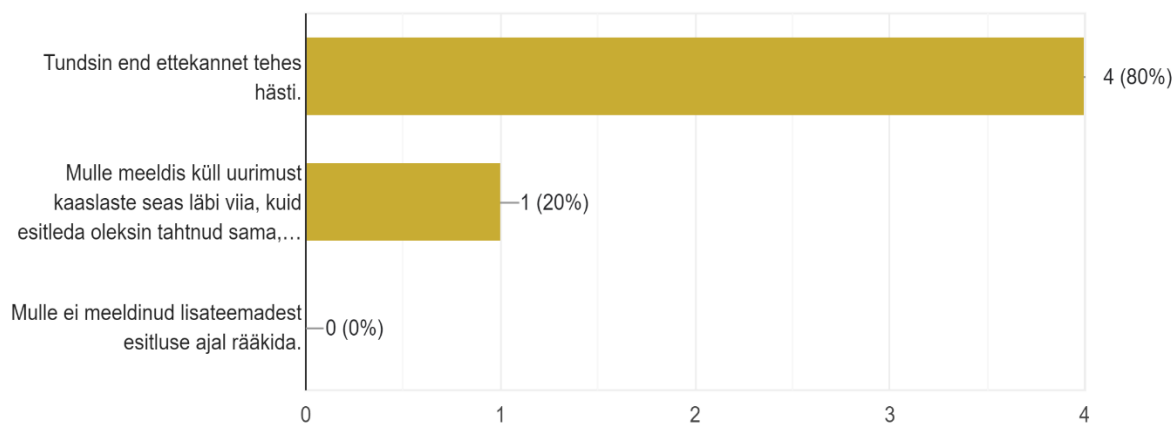
(see the results in Figure 5). Four students confirmed they felt good during the presentation of the collaborative project, and it did not cause any issues even though it involved some additional work. One of the HLP students pointed out that he had no problems with presenting the extra knowledge (meaning here the additional activities gives by the teacher), but he would have preferred to present the same amount of the topics and knowledge as the rest of the class did. From this it is possible to infer that adding an extra task for oral performance suits to the students and supports thier motivation and engagement. Based on the results of the feedback questionnaire, the students are motivated to complete the extra activities. Figure 4 reflects the study group students responses on if they felt any difference in the pace of the lesson as the additional work was provided. Results show that the majority of HLP students (three out of five) do not feel the connection between the additional task and the pace of work in English classes. One student (S5) responded with *so and so* answer, and the fifth student, contrary to the previous answers, agreed with the statement that extra activities made the classes go past more quickly than usually. According to the results shown in Figure 4, it is possible to assume that most of HLP students cannot draw the conclusions between the additional work in the lesson and the management in the class. In Figure 5, we can see that most of the study group students enjoy when the English class is exciting and engagaing.

These results on the diagram are not surprising, but the reasons provided by HLP students, somewhat are. For example, one of the students (S3) points out the lesson passes faster if the lesson is engaging and fun. This elicits that students' motivation is highly related to the excitement a certain activity creates. The high connection between the students' motivation and the excitement is supported by the literature.

Figure**3**

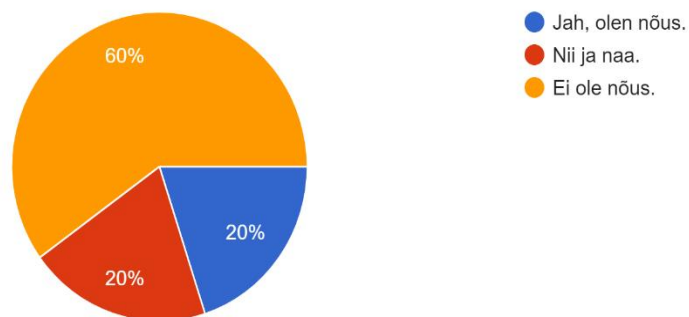
Kuidas sa end tundsid, kui projektitöö esitluse ajal pidid rääkima ka lisateemadest, mis olid antud vaid üksikutele õpilastele? Mõtlen siin Eesti pop...a meeskonnas kui uurimusgrupi teises meeskonnas.

5 responses

**Figure 4**

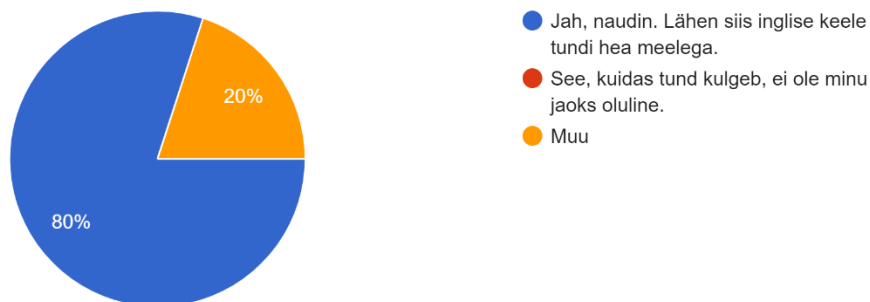
Tänu sellele, et sain lisaülesandeid möödusid inglise keele tunnid kiiresti.

5 responses

**Figure 5**

Naudin kui inglise keele tund kulgeb põnevalt ja kaasahaaravalt.

5 responses



To analyse the reasons what motivate the students to learn English, they were asked to pinpoint the activities that are exciting and engaging for them during English classes. The students identified that playing interactive games, including Kahoot, conducting collaborative projects, speaking to each other in English, writing stories, listening to recordings, watching films or videos are the most engaging activities for them. As watching films and videos in English was mentioned four times in the feedback questionnaire, this might be one of the top activities that motivate the students. The responses to the questions on the reasons why HLP students learn English are as follows: they can communicate with different nationalities by using English, they use English while traveling, knowing English would guarantee them better educational and job opportunities, and they would have a bigger chance to find new friends. The reasons mentioned above elicit the strong inner motivation of learning the subject. The HLP students find interactive games, using technology, watching films, conducting collaborative projects, doing activities outdoors, and playing Kahoot in English classes motivating and engaging.

To conclude the analysis of the feedback questionnaire, the study group students (all five students) realise why the modifications in the lessons were made. The results show a strong link between students' motivation and the activity chosen by the teacher. According to the results, we cannot assume that all activities work for everyone as students' learning styles,

language learning skills and their academic skills differ from each other. Based on the semi-structured group interview (discussed earlier in the paper), the study group students' preferences towards the activities vary. Some enjoy speaking more, some reading, listening or writing activities. It can be concluded that a teacher should first learn about the students' interests and motivations, and then make modifications according to those interests and motivations in the case of mixed-ability classroom. Dudley and Osvath's (2016) research on mixed-ability classes, also recommends that teachers should first study students' abilities, preferences and motivation, and then reinforce the adjustments in the lesson plan.

2.3 Discussion

The focus of the present paper is to examine the literature on teaching EFL classrooms in the case of a mixed-ability class, and to choose the techniques that allow differentiated teaching, to be more precise, the techniques that provide support to all levels of language proficiency within a mixed-ability classroom. The present thesis aims to test whether the modifications made in the 7th grade lesson plans during the experiment period would enhance the motivation and engagement of the students with higher language proficiency in mixed-ability EFL classes. Therefore, the research questions of the present MA thesis are stated as follows: How can teachers motivate students with higher language proficiency and keep them engaged in mixed-ability EFL classes? How do different modification techniques affect the engagement and motivation of the students with higher language proficiency in EFL classes? The literature review pinpoints the main findings on what differentiated instruction is, and how a teacher should implement it. The answer to the first the research question was revealed in the literature by stating the necessity to adjust *the content, process* and *product* of teaching in

mixed-ability classroom. The answer to the second research question will be discussed in more detail in the further subsection where the study group students' opinions, and the applied modification techniques represent the findings of the empirical study in the present thesis.

The need for differentiated instruction and modification techniques comes from the issue that there is no ability grouping nor levelling for EFL classes in the rural school which is in the focus of the present study. The author of the thesis teaches English as foreign language in the mixed-ability class. Most of the student groups taught by the author of the present thesis are academically diverse classrooms, in other words, they are mixed-ability classes.

According to the lesson observations, the modifications made in the lesson plans pinpoint the growth of engagement among the HLP students. The situations when students say *Hey teacher, I'm ready! What can I do next?* were less frequent during the modified lessons (compared to regular lessons) since the study group had activities that required deeper focus and/or extra work. This finding is supported in the literature, for instance by Tomlinson (2017) and Theisen (2002). This shows that keeping students occupied for a longer period, and with the greater interest helps to decrease the pace gap between those of slower pace and HLP students. Offering students in an academically diverse classes various ways to solve the task, to give more independence is one of the recommendations suggested by Tomlinson (2017) who is one of the educators who has researched the topic thoroughly. The following procedures were conducted among the study group students to test the recommendations from the literature: a motivation questionnaire based on Kümmik's (2019) and Clement's (1994) research was carried out, followed by semi-structured group interview, different modification techniques stated by Tyrou and Mylonas (2023) were implemented in the lesson during the experiment period, and finally, the feedback questionnaire was completed. Whilst modifying the lesson plans, a model of *Tiered lesson* (where more complexity, abstract activities, and open-end questions are exercised) was applied (Tyrou and Mylonas, 2023). The motivation

questionnaire showed the HLP students' higher interest in working in pairs and groups, and also the differentiated instruction that was given by the teacher did not add any discomfort to the students, except, the study group students would appreciate that the modified tasks would not take much longer time than the activities meant for the rest of the class. It is possible to explain it with the understanding that all students, including the HLP ones, need to be part of a bigger group, therefore working with the same material (doing the same activity) as everyone else in the classroom is crucial. This supports the general idea of differentiated instruction where a teacher can change either the content, the process or the product in accordance with the students' proficiency (Ortega 2018). For instance, modifying the content means that some students use different study materials, but the product, here the outcome of the learning still needs to stay the same. On the basis of the present thesis' experiment, there were several ways how the content was changed. Some examples of modifications are given as follows: HLP students needed to do extra research on the collaborative project by interviewing the teammates on the same topic as everyone else in the classroom (Theisen, 2002), the study group members had to fill in the evaluation form with more sophisticated details in it or in the lesson where new languages, countries and nationalities were taught, and HLP students had to inquire the capital cities of the countries. These examples of modifications showed a positive impact on students with higher language proficiency, and were also supported by the literature (Reid, 1982, Tomlinson 2017, Hallam and Ireson, 2005). An outstanding finding of the present paper is that all modification techniques can be used with any level of proficiency in the classroom, to be more specific, the counterparts of a group of students with higher linguistic level might change according to the activity taken. For instance, the ones who are doing great in speaking might struggle in reading or any other linguistic skill. It is highly recommended according to the experiment conducted in the present study, to keep the "grouping" and the modification

techniques as flexible as possible, as this supports the academic progress of each student despite the ability.

To continue, the modification techniques used throughout the eight experiment lessons firstly created some excitement within the classroom, not only among the HLP students, but also the rest of the class. This can be avoided by a teacher via creating the modifications slowly and firmly, so that students have a chance to get used to the “new rhythm” of the lesson where not all students take part in the activities the same way. Although the current study’s experiment was announced to the students where the modifications were made, it interrupted slightly everyone’s focus and the pace of working at the beginning of the experiment period. The present paper poses an opportunity for teachers to plan their work in mixed-ability classrooms effectively, whereas the winners are all parties, students with diverse linguistic ability, and teachers who see the engagement and motivation of students.

The limitations of the present thesis are as follows:

- The lack of sufficient research on the topic on differentiated instruction, and more specifically on teaching English as foreign language in 7th grade mixed-ability classrooms.
- The lack of deeper and wider empirical study where more than one school’s students with higher language proficiency are involved as this guarantees more reliable and comparable results with other similar studies from across the world.

The implications of the study reveal the opportunities for teachers how to modify teaching techniques in their mixed-ability EFL classroom. As a practicing teacher, I can state that differentiated instruction is a tool for EFL mixed-ability classroom teachers as this allows to meet the needs of students of all academic levels, including students with higher language proficiency as inquired in the present thesis.

CONCLUSION

As the level of language proficiency varies tremendously in EFL classes, differentiated instruction should be considered. Differentiated instruction refers to the way of teaching when the three parts of teaching, content, process, and product, are modified by using several modification techniques. The literature review points out the main suggestions on how to implement the differentiated instruction in a mixed-ability classroom, the advantages and challenges of DI, and provides a set of practical examples, which are given in the third subsection of the first chapter. In the empirical study of the present thesis the modifications made during eight 45-minute lessons show a positive impact on students' motivation and engagement. One of the most important findings, while implementing differentiated instruction, is the necessity to remember that the level groups within a classroom might change, as students, including the ones who are linguistically on a higher level, might not have all the language learning skills at the same level, for example a student with good reading skills may not have equally good speaking or writing skills. This requires teachers to use the techniques that support the progress of the weaker language learning skills.

The present MA thesis considers the following questions: How can teachers motivate students with higher language proficiency and keep them engaged in mixed-ability EFL classes? How do different modification techniques affect the engagement and motivation of the students with higher language proficiency in EFL classes? Focusing on the first research question, the empirical study and the literature shows that teachers can motivate and engage students with higher language proficiency in mixed-ability EFL classroom by firstly observing and accessing students' language proficiency, then by giving students a freedom to choose how they are going to achieve the necessary learning outcomes, where teacher provides the suitable options and activities. It is important to remember that students need to hear that "their voice is heard" which helps guarantee their focus, motivation, and engagement. Regarding the second

research question, according to the empirical study conducted in the present study, HLP students do not feel comfortable and motivated when they sense that there is a greater amount of work compared to their peers. This shows that the modification should be done step by step by a teacher with careful planning before the lesson to prevent the situation where some students feel somehow “special” or even “punished” by receiving different type and amount of work. It is recommended for a teacher to explain the changes in the classes at the beginning of the school year on how the lesson will be organized, and what is the reason for differentiated instruction. This allows all parties to have a smoother pace and will reduce tension and frustration in the classroom due to misunderstanding.

My personal motivation as a teacher is to support all levels of language proficiency, and the present research, supported by the literature and the empirical study shows that differentiated instruction is the best teaching technique to follow in the mixed-ability classroom.

REFERENCES

Boaler, Jo. (1997a) Setting, social class and the survival of the quickest. Available at: <https://bera-journals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/0141192970230503>, accessed April 2024.

Boaler, Jo. (1997b) *When even the winners are losers: evaluating the experiences of 'top set' Students*. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/002202797184116>, accessed April 2024.

Boaler, Jo. (1997c) Experiencing school mathematics: teaching styles, sex and setting. Available at: <https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.utlib.ut.ee/stable/1393452>, accessed May 2024.

Bogen, Elisa C., Schlendorf, Christine P., Nicolino, Peter A., Morote, Elsa-Sofia. (2019). *Instructional Strategies in Differentiated Instruction for Systemic Change*. Available at: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1235692.pdf>, accessed in April 2024.

Clement, Richard, Zoltán Dörnyei and Kimberly A. Noels. 1994. English Language Learning Survey. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1994.tb01113.x>, accessed March 2024.

Dudley, Edmund and Erika Osvath. 2016. *Mixed-ability teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Foster, Tim. 2021. *The Gateway to the World B1 Student's Book*. Macmillan Education Limited, London.

Georg, Paul S. 2005. A Rationale for Differentiating Instruction in the Regular Classroom. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip4403_2 Available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1207/s15430421tip4403_2, accessed April 2024.

Haelermans, Carla. 2022. The Effects of Group differentiation by students' learning strategies. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11251-021-09575-0> Available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11251-021-09575-0>, accessed January 2024.

Hallam, Susan and Judith Ireson. 2005. Secondary school teachers' pedagogic practices when teaching mixed and structured ability classes. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267152052000341318> Available at: <https://www-tandfonline-com.ezproxy.utlib.ut.ee/doi/pdf/10.1080/0267152052000341318>, accessed September 2023.

Heacox, Diane. 2012. Differentiating instruction in the regular classroom: How to reach and teach all learners. Available at: <https://www.teachercreatedmaterials.com/estore/files/samples/899144s.pdf>, accessed May 2024.

Konksi, Karin. 2020. Pull-out programm võimekate õpilaste toetamise meetmena 3.klasside matemaatikaringi näitel. Available at: https://dspace.ut.ee/bitstream/handle/10062/68307/konksi_karin_ma.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y, accessed September 2023.

Kümnik, Maret. 2019. Identification and motivation of advanced students in a regular EFL classroom in an Estonian basic school. Available at: https://dspace.ut.ee/bitstream/handle/10062/63914/Kumnik_Maret_MA_Thesis.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y, accessed September 2023.

Naka, Laura. 2017. The importance of differentiated instruction in EFL learning. Available at: <https://knowledgecenter.ubtuni.net/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1261&context=conference>, accessed May 2024.

Obilisteanu, Georgeta and Niculescu, Brândușa-Oana. 2016. Differentiated Learning in Foreign Language Classes. Available at: <https://sciendo.com/es/article/10.1515/kbo-2016-0079>, accessed January 2024.

- Okan, Zuhail and Ispinar, Duygu. 2009. Gifted students' perceptions of learning English as a foreign language. Available at: <https://academicjournals.org/journal/ERR/article-full-text-pdf/C32373B3783>, accessed September 2023.
- Page, R. N. 1984. *Perspectives and processes: the negotiation of educational meaning in high school classes for academically unsuccessful students*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin.
- Reid, Margaret, Clunies-Ross, Louise, Goacher, Brian & Vile, Carol. 1982. Mixed ability teaching: problems and possibilities. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3444033>, accessed April 2024.
- Sayi, Ayşin Kaplan and Yurtseven, Nihal. 2021. How do gifted students learn? Their learning styles and dispositions towards learning. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2021.1929380> Available at: <https://www.tandfonline-com.ezproxy.utlib.ut.ee/doi/pdf/10.1080/03004279.2021.1929380>, accessed August 2023.
- Shemuda, Maryna. 2018. Strategies for teaching gifted students English grammar. DOI: 10.20535/2410-8286.109786 Available at: <https://ae.fl.kpi.ua/article/view/109786>, accessed August 2023.
- Smit Robbert, Winfried Humpert. 2012. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.utlib.ut.ee/10.1016/j.tate.2012.07.003> Available at: <https://www-sciencedirectcom.ezproxy.utlib.ut.ee/science/article/pii/S0742051X1200114X?via%3Di> hub, accessed February 2024.
- Theisen, Toni. 2002. Differentiated Instruction in the Foreign Language Classroom: Meeting the Diverse Needs of All Learners. LOTE CED Communiqué: Issue 6. Available at: <https://sedl.org/loteced/communique/n06.html>, accessed April 2024.
- Theisen, Toni. 1997. *Exploring multiple intelligences: Respecting the diversity of learning*. In R. DiDonato, (Ed.) *Building Community Through Language Learning*, 1-20. Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook Company

Tomlinson, Carol Ann. 2017. *How to differentiate instruction in Academically Diverse Classrooms (3rd edition)*. Alexandria, Virginia: ASCD.

Tomlinson, Carol Ann and Sally M. Reis. 2004. *Differentiation for gifted and talented students*. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press.

Tyrou, Ioanna and Mylonas, Konstantinos. 2023. <https://doi.org/10.37745/bjmas.2022.0124>
Available at: <https://bjmas.org/index.php/bjmas/article/download/311/829>, accessed April 2024.

Valk, Sofia. 2021. Available at: <https://dspace.ut.ee/server/api/core/bitstreams/721ac64b-1d05-4a08-aacb-98ecf5f9ab89/content>, accessed May 2024.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 (Motivation questionnaire)

Statement
Category I / using English with family and friends
<p>I use mainly the Estonian language at home with my parents.</p> <p>I often use English with my parents.</p> <p>I have a family member(s) with whom I can practise English.</p> <p>I have a family member(s) with whom I can practise English at least three times a week.</p> <p>I have a family member(s) with whom I can practise English at least three times a week.</p> <p>I have lived abroad in an English-speaking country.</p> <p>I need to know English as one of my best (online) friends is an English speaker.</p>
Category II / hearing English on TV, for example watching films or videos, and playing computer games
<p>I watched cartoons/films in English during my kindergarten years.</p> <p>In my free time I like to watch films in English.</p> <p>I have played computer games for more than 5 years.</p> <p>The computer games I play are mostly in English.</p> <p>I use English to communicate with other players when I play computer games.</p> <p>I have my own computer at home.</p> <p>I can use my parents' computer for my schoolwork.</p> <p>I enjoy watching videos in English that tell me something I didn't know before.</p> <p>I enjoy watching videos which use simple English language.</p>

I enjoy videos with more challenging content (the language is not so easy to understand, but the topic interests me).

Category III / doing activities in English class

I enjoy watching videos in English class.

I don't like reading tasks in English class.

I enjoy reading tasks.

I like to read out loud to my classmate.

I like to listen to my classmate as I can help him or her in case of misreading.

While reading it annoys me when there's a word which I don't understand.

If there's a word in the text I don't understand, I still keep reading.

I enjoy speaking tasks where I can express myself freely or have a conversation in English.

I enjoy role plays and acting.

I think English is very useful and practical lesson in my timetable.

My English teacher makes the lessons interesting.

My English teacher makes sure that everyone in the class is involved and no one is left behind.

I have patience to wait when the teacher has to explain the task to my classmates.

My English teacher is a cheerful and positive person.

My English teacher cares about her students.

My teacher makes English classes fun.

I find all the activities interesting in the English class.

English classes go by quickly.

English classes are slow and boring.

Most things we do in English classes are important and necessary.

An independent work or project work in English classes motivates me a lot to study English.

Category IV / the connection between learning English, and the career
--

I learn English as I think I would need it in my work in the future.
--

I need English when I'm travelling.

It might be useful in the future to be able to communicate fluently in English.

Knowing English "opens" the world to me.
--

Being able to communicate well in English will help me to find a good job in the future.
--

Appendix 2

Questions for semi-structured group interview with the 7th grade study group
--

First, teacher explains to the study group why the semi-structured interview is taking place, and what the aims and objectives of the study are.
--

Here are some ideas that support the progress of students with higher language proficiency in English classes. Therefore, let's have a discussion on how you would feel about those ideas/changes in your English classes.
--

a) How would you feel about having slightly different tasks from your classmates?

b) What do you think, why modified tasks would be useful for you?

c) Would you enjoy doing tasks that differ from your classmates' ones? Would you prefer working on your own or together with a partner?

d) Do you feel relaxed by expressing your personal opinion on different matters?
--

e) Can you describe an interesting activity or task? Have we used this type of an interesting task in our classes? What makes it interesting for you?

f) Out of four skills that is developed in English classes (reading, writing, speaking, listening), what skills are the most useful or important to you? What are the most challenging (difficult) ones to you? Think about the most challenging skill of yours – are you ready to practise more to get better in it?

g) There's a list of activities and tasks that have been changed according to general recommendations for students with higher language proficiency, please say how you feel about doing these activities and tasks:
--

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An exercise where verbs are mixed up and you would need to find the right place in a text for each verb. The verbs are given in the correct tense. |
|--|

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An exercise where the verbs are mixed up and you would need to find the right place in a text where the verb goes and change the tense form into the tense which is given in the description of the exercise. |
|---|

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An exercise where the verbs are mixed up and you would need to find the right place in a text where the verb goes and change the tense form into the tense form |
|---|

which suits the best. There are three different tenses given that you can choose from.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are mistakes in sentences, and you would have to correct the mistakes.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In vocabulary tasks, the definition of the word is given, you would need to select the right word from the options given in the box as part of the exercise.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While reading the text, make a short (3-sentence long) summary of each paragraph and tell it to your partner.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After reading a story you would need to come up with the new ending of the story.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instead of describing a picture, your task is to talk about your personal experience with the topic represented by the picture.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose a character from the story whom you would like to be, step out of the story and create your normal day from morning till night in the role of that character.

Appendix 3

Märtsikuu alguses tegime tunnis koostööprojekti teemal "Pere rutiinid". Töötasime 2-3-liikmelistes meeskondades. Kas sulle sobis, et töötasid koos sarnast töötempot omavate kaaslastega?

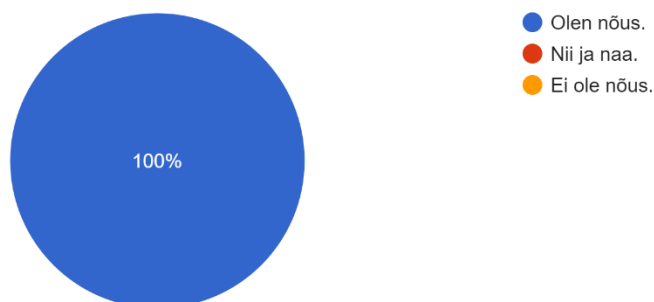
5 responses



Appendix 4

Mind motiveerib kui olen ühes meeskonnas või teen paarisööd kaaslasega, kel on minuga sama töötempo.

5 responses



Appendix 5

Lesson plans 1 and 2

Date: 4.03.2024, 2 x 45 minutes

Grade: 7th

Topic of the lesson: “Family life in your country”

Learning outcomes: In teams of three, students find on the Internet information about family routines in the UK and list corresponding features for Estonia. Having worked on a collaborative project for two 45-minute lessons, they present a poster, a presentation, a video message or an information leaflet comparing and contrasting family routines in Estonia and in the UK. The team introduces their main findings orally within 5 minutes.

Materials: Gateway to the world, Student’s book B1

Time	Activity
5 min	<p>Activity for the whole class:</p> <p>Welcome the students, ask them to have a seat and focus on the board where they see 9 pictures of families spending time together. Their task is to describe one of the pictures until one of the classmates guesses which picture has been described. The one who guesses the picture, needs to come to the board and point at it.</p>
10 min	<p>Activity for the whole class:</p>

	<p>Explain the project task where the students search for information on the Internet but also discuss how families spend time together between themselves.</p> <p>The students need to prepare a poster, a presentation, a video message or an information leaflet as a result of their enquiries.</p> <p>Teacher explains how to share the work between team members and points out that the discussion within the team should be in English.</p> <p>The students take the laptops and start working on the project.</p>
5 min	<p>Additional activity for the students with higher language proficiency (HLP):</p> <p>Students with higher language proficiency will be divided into two teams. They need to run a survey (questioning) between themselves and the other HLP team about who (what company) is the most popular food producer among Estonian families. For this, they need to visit the websites of the following companies: Salvest, Põltsamaa, Veski Mati ja Kalev, and find at least 3 products from their lists that they think are the most popular products. Then question the other team about the popularity and make a list of products according to the popularity.</p>
25 min	All students work on the project.
5 min	Break
10 min	Asking about the progress of the projects, answering the students' questions.
20 min	Finishing the projects.
20 min	Presentations for all students. The students have 5 minutes to present their project. The students need to give feedback and evaluate each other's presentations.

APPENDIX 6

Lesson plan 3

Date: 5.03.2024, 1 x 45 minutes

Grade: 7th

Topic of the lesson: "Family life in your country"

Learning outcomes: Students have finished their collaborative projects. Each team introduces their main findings of the collaborative project orally within 5 minutes. Students evaluate and give feedback to each presentation by filling in an evaluation form.

Materials: an evaluation form, an evaluation form for HLP students

Time	Activities
10 minutes	<p>Activity for everybody in the class:</p> <p>Teacher welcomes students and asks whether students enjoyed doing the project during the last two lessons. The idea of the lesson is to listen to each team's presentation, evaluate it and give feedback. Teacher explains how to evaluate, what feedback is, why it's given and how to give constructive feedback. Teacher gives guidelines on which categories evaluation is given. These categories are project's content, presentation, design and the use of language. Teacher explains how to use the evaluation form.</p> <p>Additional activity for the students with higher language proficiency (HLP):</p> <p>Students with higher language proficiency fill in a more challenging evaluation form. This evaluation form is more detailed and consists of more sophisticated analyses.</p>
30 minutes	<p>Activity for everybody in the class:</p> <p>Teams start their presentations one by one. There are 6 teams in total. The teams do not evaluate their own work as they will be asked to provide oral feedback about their own work at the end of the class.</p> <p>Each presentation takes around 5 minutes.</p>
5 minutes	Teacher highlights pluses and minuses of each presentation at the end of the class.

APPENDIX 7

EVALUATION FORM

Please tick the statement if you think it's true about the presentation (tick= 1 point).

CONTENT

The project has 5 research areas.

Tick the reasearch areas that you hear in the presentation:

Research areas	Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Team 4	Team 5
Family meals					
Typical size of immediate and extended families					
Activities that families do together					
Family holidays and celebrations					
Time spent with family versus time spent with friends					
Total points for each team					

PRESENTATION

Tick the following statements about the general look of the presentation:

Statements about the presentation	Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Team 4	Team 5
presentation looks attractive					
each member of the team contributes the same amount of effort into presenting the project					
only English language is use					
grammatically correct English is used					
team brings out some interesting facts that I didn't know before					
Total points for each team					

Answer the following question. What do you like about this presentation most?

Evaluate each team separately.

Team's number	Write your answer here:

Team 1	
Team 2	
Team 3	
Team 4	
Team 5	

APPENDIX 8

EVALUATION FOR THE HLP STUDENTS

Please tick the statement if you think it's true about the presentation (tick= 1 point).

CONTENT

The project has 5 research areas.

Tick the reasearch areas that you heard in the presentation and **give the examples you hear in the presentation per each team:**

Research areas	Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Team 4	Team 5
Family meals					

Typical size of immediate and extended families					
Activities that families do together					
Family holidays and celebrations					
Time spent with family versus time spent with friends					
Total points for each team					

PRESENTATION

Tick the following statements about the general look of the presentation, and **explain why do you think so**.

Statements about the presentation	Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Team 4	Team 5
presentation looks attractive					
each member of the team contributes the same amount of effort into presenting the project					
only English language is use					
grammatically correct English is used					
team brings out some interesting facts that I didn't know before					
Total points for each team					

Teams	Your explanations, comments
Team 1	
Team 2	
Team 3	
Team 4	
Team 5	

Answer the following question. What do you like about this presentation most?

Evaluate each team separately.

Team's number	Write your answer here:
Team 1	

Team 2	
Team 3	
Team 4	
Team 5	

APPENDIX 9

Lesson plans 4 and 5

Date: 11.03.2024, 2 x 45 minutes

Grade: 7th

Topic of the lesson: “Languages, countries and nationalities”

Learning outcomes: Students learn the names of different languages, countries and nationalities, and acquire vocabulary to speak about learning languages. As the result of the two 45-minute lessons students learn the new vocabulary and they can demonstrate how to use it by completing the classroom tasks. Students learn the following vocabulary –

- the names of the languages: Spanish, French, Arabic, Russian, German, Polish, Turkish, Portuguese, Bulgarian, Thai, Japanese and Italian
- the names of the countries: Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Bulgaria, Egypt, Japan, Mexico, Poland, Russia, Switzerland, Thailand, and Turkey
- the nationalities: Austrian, Brazilian, Bulgarian, Egyptian, Japanese, Mexican, Polish, Russian, Swiss, Thai, and Turkish
- acquired vocabulary: accuracy, accurate, fluency, fluent, memorisation, memorise, practice, practise, revise, revision, translate, translation

Materials:

Time	Activities
10 min	<p>Activity for the whole class:</p> <p>In the warm-up activity teacher writes the word <i>hello</i> on the board in different languages and asks students to guess in which language each word is written. Teacher encourages students to discuss the answers with a partner. The discussion in pairs will be followed by a whole-class discussion. The discussion should be in English.</p> <p>Teacher explains the topic of the lessons (two 45-minute lessons). Teacher asks, <i>why do you think it's important to know different languages and how could this change your life?</i> Teacher asks students to share their opinion with their partner.</p>
20 min	<p>Activity for the whole class:</p> <p>Students need to match the twelve languages to the twelve countries where the languages are spoken. The languages and countries appear on the board. Students need to do the exercise in writing in their notebooks. The students who finish the task earlier come to the world map to find the countries.</p> <p>Additional activity for the students with higher language proficiency (HLP):</p> <p>a) After finishing the task for the whole class, HLP students need to find the capital of each country and write it down into their notebook next to each country's name. For example, Brazil - São Paulo. They can search for the information on the Internet.</p> <p>b) HLP students move to the world map and join the other students to find the locations of the countries. Teacher asks the HLP students to say the names of the countries in Estonian.</p>
5 min	<p>Activity for the whole class:</p> <p>Students work in pairs and say the name of one of the languages and wait for their partner's response with the name of the corresponding country. For example, one student says <i>Arabic</i> while his/her partner replies with <i>Egypt</i>. They need to continue with the task until all twelve languages/countries have been used.</p> <p>Additional activity for the students with higher language proficiency (HLP):</p>

	HLP students follow the same instruction, except, when responding to their partner they include the capital's name along with the country name.
10 min	<p>Activity for the whole class:</p> <p>Students fill in the word search exercise (WB ex 1 p 22) to find twelve names of the countries.</p> <p>Additional activity for the students with higher language proficiency (HLP):</p> <p>HLP students fill in an additional exercise (WB ex 2 p 22) where the nationalities of the twelve countries should be written out.</p>
10 min	Break
15 min	<p>Activity for the whole class:</p> <p>Students need to form pairs and ask/answer the following questions: <i>which of the countries do you already know in the world, which of the countries would you like to visit, which of the languages can you speak, which of the languages would you like to learn, and can you speak any other language?</i> Students need to answer orally and have a conversation with their partner. Teacher encourages students to give as long/informative sentences as possible.</p> <p>Teacher asks feedback from the students about how the conversation went.</p>
15 min	<p>Activity for the whole class:</p> <p>Teacher explains to students that to speak about different languages it is good to know some specific vocabulary. Students are asked to have a look at ex 5a page 32 in their textbooks. Teacher asks students whether they can tell the difference between nouns, adjectives, and verbs. What do these words mean in Estonian?</p> <p>Students are asked to form a table with 3 different columns in their notebook (nouns, adjectives, verbs), and write the words given in the exercise in the correct column. Students then discuss the meaning of the words with their partner. Students can use online dictionaries.</p>
7 min	<p>Activity for the whole class:</p> <p>Students turn to the reading task with the missing nouns, verbs and adjectives in it. Students are asked to use the words given in ex 5 to fill in the gaps in the text.</p> <p>Additional activity for the students with higher language proficiency (HLP):</p>

	While completing the task HLP students need to find 3 more recommendations from the Internet on how to learn English in an easy and successful way. The recommendations should be written in their notebook.
3 min	Activity for the whole class: Students work in pairs and take turns in reading out the text they have completed with the missing words. Teacher makes corrections if necessary.
5 min	Additional activity for the students with higher language proficiency (HLP): HLP students read out their findings on how to learn English in an easy and successful way to the class. The rest of the class listens to their findings.

APPENDIX 10

Lesson plan: 6

Date: 12.03.2024, 1 x 45 minutes

Grade: 7th

Topic of the lesson: “The use of negative prefixes in the context of a county’s description”

Learning outcomes: Students learn negative prefixes *un-, in-, im-, ir-, il-*. In the end of the lesson students can form and use adjectives with and without negative prefixes in the accurate context. Students can use negative prefixes in describing a county. Students can say and use the following adjectives (9 words) with negative prefixes in the end of the class: *comfortable, correct, formal, happy, legal, logical, official, polite, possible*.

Time	Activity
10	Activity for the whole class: Teacher welcomes the students by describing a day with some adjectives. Then teacher encourages students to make those sentences negative by using negative prefixes (<i>un-, in-, im-, ir-, il-</i>) that students can see on the board. Students work in pairs and practise saying the sentences with negative out to the partner. Teacher asks students to add 1-2 sentences with negative adjectives while describing the day.

	<p>Additional activity for the students with higher language proficiency (HLP):</p> <p>HLP students follow the same activity except teacher has added 4 more adjectives (<i>regular, responsible, usual, visible</i>) they would need to use in their sentences. Five study group members work in two groups – 2 and 3 students together.</p>
10	<p>Activity for the whole class:</p> <p>Teacher asks students to say a sentence with negative prefixes. Teacher writes only the words with negative prefixes that students have said on the board.</p>
5	<p>Activity for the whole class:</p> <p>Students listen to the recording with all negative prefixes used in the class within that lesson.</p>
20	<p>Activity for the whole class:</p> <p>Teacher asks to choose a country among the following countries: <i>Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Bulgaria, Egypt, Japan, Mexico, Poland, Russia, Switzerland, Thailand and Turkey</i>. Students then would need to form a table into their notebooks with the following categories they are going to inquire about the country chosen. Students need to use the Internet to fill in the following categories about the country: <i>animals, food, mountains, people</i>. After finishing the table about the country, students continue working in pairs by presenting and comparing the results to each other.</p> <p>Additional activity for the students with higher language proficiency (HLP):</p> <p>HLP students follow the same task except, they would need to choose two more categories to their table. Teacher offers extra categories (<i>sightseeing, waterbodies, language, landmarks</i>).</p>

APPENDIX 11

Lesson plan: 7 and 8

Date: 18.03.2024, 2 x 45 minutes

Grade: 7th

Topic of the lesson:

1st lesson: “Practising negative prefixes”

2nd lesson: “Invented language called Toki Pona”

Learning outcomes: Students can use adjectives with and without negative prefixes in the accurate context. Students can use the specific vocabulary (introduced in Lesson 6) talking about languages. Students know what Toki Pona language is, who invented it, and can draw parallels when comparing different languages, including Estonian.

Time	Activity
10	<p>Activity for the whole class:</p> <p>Teacher greets the students and asks them to tell the information about the chosen country to their partner (pairs are mixed with HPL students). Teacher writes the negative adjectives on board to support students.</p>
10	<p>Activity for the whole class:</p> <p>Students fill in the WB exercise 1 (page 25) where the correct negative prefix needs to be added. Teacher asks students to read out the words, everyone is checking the exercise.</p> <p>Additional activity for the students with higher language proficiency (HLP):</p> <p>HPL students also complete the dialogue in WB (ex 2, page 25).</p> <p>Teacher asks two of the HPL students to read out the dialogue, the rest of the class is listening to the dialogue.</p> <p>Activity for the whole class:</p> <p>When HPL students read out the dialogue, the rest of the class needs to listen and write an adjective down when it is mentioned in the dialogue.</p>
15	<p>Activity for the whole class:</p> <p>Students are going to listen to an interview with Sabine Reclos (WB ex 3, page 25). Students need to put the topics of the interview in the order they hear them. The listening task will be done twice.</p> <p>Additional activity for the students with higher language proficiency (HLP):</p> <p>While listening to the recording, HPL students take notes in order to explain to the class about what they heard when listening to the recording.</p>
5	<p>Activity for the whole class:</p>

	Students listen to the recording once again and fill in WB ex 4 (page 25).
5	<p>Activity for the whole class:</p> <p>The recording task will be checked.</p>
	Break
10	<p>Activity for the whole class:</p> <p>Teacher introduces the new topic and activities for the 2nd lesson. As a warm-up activity teacher asks if students know how many words are there in Estonian and English language. Teacher reveals the numbers and asks students to focus on watching <u>the video about the invented language</u>. (First 4-minutes will be watched). Before watching the video teacher asks students to find the answers to the following questions from the video: <i>How many words are there in Toki Pona language? When and where was the language invented? Who invented Toki Pona? How many people in the world use Toki Pona? Is there an online dictionary that translates Toki Pina into Estonian?</i> Teacher shows the video about the invented language called Toki Pona.</p> <p>Teacher asks students to share their answers in pairs.</p>
10	<p>Activity for the whole class:</p> <p>Students are going to listen to the recording and fill in the exercise (TB page 38, ex 2) about Toki Pona. Before listening, teacher asks students to read the sentences of the incomplete exercise. Students are going to listen to the recording twice.</p> <p>Additional activity for the students with higher language proficiency (HLP):</p> <p>HLP students listen to the recording only once and then fill in the gaps. After that teacher writes four languages (<i>Japanese, Spanish, Esperanto, French</i>) on the board and asks the students to think and note down what they know about these languages. For discussion HLP students work in pairs.</p>
5	<p>Activity for the whole class:</p> <p>The activity (TB page 38, ex 2) will be checked all together.</p>
10	<p>Additional activity for the students with higher language proficiency (HLP):</p> <p>HLP students introduce their ideas about the four languages to the class. Teacher comments on the answers.</p>

5	<p>Activity for the whole class:</p> <p>Teacher asks students to imagine they have the opportunity to interview Sonja Lang. Within 5-minutes students need to create 3 questions they want to ask from Sonja Lang.</p> <p>Additional activity for the students with higher language proficiency (HLP):</p> <p>HLP students follow the same routine as the rest of the class, except they would need to create 6 questions.</p>
5	<p>Activity for the whole class:</p> <p>Students need to stand up and walk freely in the classroom to ask the questions from each other. Students need to ask 3 or 6 questions from each other depending on how many questions they formed. The aim of the task is to ask the question from the partner who checks the grammar of the question.</p>

APPENDIX 12

Tagasiside küsimustik 7.klassi uurimusgrupile

Hea seitsmendik!

Allolevalt leiad tagasiside küsimustiku, kus palun sul hoolega meenutada viimase 4 nädala vältel toimunud inglise keele tunde ja neis toimunud tegevusi.

Palun anna oma siiras vastus. Varu aega, et küsimuse ja oma vastuse üle mõtiskleda.

Suur aitäh!

Sinu inglise keele õpetaja

Õp. Berit Tomlinson

* Indicates required question

Kirjuta siia oma nimi.*

Your answer

Märtsikuu alguses tegime tunnis koostööprojekti teemal "Pere rutiinid". Töötasime 2-3-liikmelistes meeskondades. Kas sulle sobis, et töötasid koos sarnast töötempot omavate kaaslastega? *

Jah, mulle sobis.

Nii ja naa.

Ei, mulle ei sobinud.

Mind motiveerib kui olen ühes meeskonnas või teen paaristööd kaaslasega, kel on minuga sama töötempo.*

Olen nõus.

Nii ja naa.

Ei ole nõus.

Projektitöös "Pere rutiinid" meeldis mulle, et saime uurida lisaks kõige populaarsema Eesti toidutootja kohta.*

Jah, olen nõus.

Nii ja naa.

Ei ole nõus.

Palun põhjenda oma eelmise küsimuse vastust.*

Your answer

Palun too 2-3 põhjendust, miks sulle meeldib või ei meeldi grupitöö/paaristöö.*

Your answer

Projektitöös "Pere rutiinid" oli ette antud neli Eesti toidutootjat. Kas sa oleksid eelistanud valida toidutootjad ise?*

Jah, oleksin soovinud valida toidutootjad ise.

Ei, mulle sobis, et toidutootjad olid ette antud.

Muu

Kas kaaslaste küsitlemine lemmik toidutootja kohta oli sinu arvates põnev?*

Jah, oli põnev.

Ei olnud põnev.

Nii ja naa.

Palun põhjenda oma eelmise küsimuse vastust 2-3 lausega. *

Your answer

Kuidas sa end tundsid, kui projektitöö esitluse ajal pidid rääkima ka lisateemadest, mis olid antud vaid üksikutele õpilastele? Mõtlen siin Eesti populaarseim toidutootja ja populaarseim toote välja selgitamist nii oma meeskonnas kui uurimusgrupi teises meeskonnas.*

Tundsin end ettekannet tehes hästi.

Mulle meeldis küll uurimust kaaslaste seas läbi viia, kuid esitleda oleksin tahtnud sama, mis ülejäänud klassikaaslased.

Mulle ei meeldinud lisateemadest esitluse ajal rääkida.

Projektitöö "Pere rutiinid" teema meeldis mulle väga, kuna sain teada, mil moel kaaslased oma perega vaba aega veedavad. *

Olen väitega nõus.

Nii ja naa.
Ei ole väitega nõus.

Tänu sellele, et sain lisaülesandeid möödusid inglise keele tunnid kiiresti.*

Jah, olen nõus.
Nii ja naa.
Ei ole nõus.

Mind ei häirinud, et sain tunnis kohati klassikaaslastest erinevaid tööjuhiseid.*

Jah, olen nõus, et mind ei häirinud.
Veidi häiris.
Mind häiris see väga. Oleksin soovinud teha seda, mida kõik ülejäänud klassikaaslased tegid.

Mõistan hästi, miks inglise keele õpetaja annab aeg ajalt tunnis mulle teistsuguse sisuga tegevusi/ülesandeid. *

Jah, mõistan hästi.
Nii ja naa.
Ma ei mõista, miks õpetaja annab aeg ajalt mulle erinevaid ülesandeid.

Kui jõuan inglise keele tunnis tegevuse/harjutuse varem valmis kui kaaslased, siis meeeldi ei teeks ma midagi lisaks. *

Jah, olen nõus.
Nii ja naa.
Ei ole nõus.

Naudin kui inglise keele tund kulgeb põnevalt ja kaasahaaravalt. *

Jah, naudin. Lähen siis inglise keele tundi hea meelega.
See, kuidas tund kulgeb, ei ole minu jaoks oluline.
Muu

Palun põhjenda eelmise küsimuse vastust.*

Your answer

Nimeta 4-5 tegevust, mis on sinu arvates kõige põnevamad tegevused inglise keele tunnis. *

Your answer

Nimeta 3 põhjust, miks sa õpid inglise keelt.*

Your answer

Kui sina oleksid inglise keele õpetaja, kuidas sa oma tunnid huvitavaks muudad? Palun kirjuta 3 mõtet koos põhjendusega. *

Your answer

Ühes eelmise kuu tundides õppisime me erinevate riikide nimesid, rahvusi ning keeli, mida seal räägitakse. Sul oli lisaülesanne otsida internetist vastava riigi pealinna nimi ja seda teadmist kaaslastega jagada. Kas see oli sinu jaoks motiveeriv tegevus?*

Jah, oli küll.

Nii ja naa.

Ei olnud minu jaoks motiveeriv.

Palun põhjenda oma eelmise küsimuse vastust.*

Your answer

Submit

Clear form

RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL

ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Berit Tomlinson

The teaching techniques that support the development of students with higher language proficiency in mixed-ability EFL classes

Õpetamistehnikad, mis toetavad akadeemiliselt võimekate inglise keele õppijate arengut varieeruva keeleoskustasemega klassis

Magistritöö

Aasta: 2024

Lehekülgede arv: 76

Annotatsioon:

Hariduses on tavad ja tõekspidamised muutunud juba mõnda aega. See, mis oli kohane ja töötas kümneid aastaid tagasi ei pruugi enam tänapäeval sama tulemust anda. Parima õpitulemuse ja õppija igakülgse toetamise nimel peab õpetaja lähtuma igast õppijast individuaalselt. Lisaks eelnevale peab õpetaja aru saama õppija akadeemilisest võimekusest ja inglise keelt võõrkeelena õppiva õppija vajadustest. On tavapärane, et ühes klassis õpivad erineva võõrkeele tasemega õppijad, kus õpetaja peab hoolega planeerima tunde nii, et toetatud oleks nii aeglase kui kiirema tempo ja omandamisvõimega õppija. Sageli langeb hästi edasijõudvate keeleõppijate motivatsioon ja kaasatus kui õpetaja tähelepanu kaldub pigem neile, kes on silmnähtavalt rohkem hädas.

Käesoleva magistritöö eesmärgiks on anda ülevaade diferentseeritud õppe olemusest, sealhulgas tutvustad õpetamistehnikaid, mis toetavad eelkõige akadeemiliselt võimekamaid keeleõppijaid klassis, kus on varieeruv keeletase. Magistritöö uurimusküsimused on järgnevad: Kuidas saavad õpetajad motiveerida ja kaasata akadeemiliselt võimekaid võõrkeeleõppijaid

varieeruva keeletasemega klassis? Kuidas erinevad õpetamise muutmistehnikad mõjutavad akadeemiliselt võimekate võõrkeeleõppijate kaasatust ja motivatsiooni?

Magistritöö koosneb kirjanduse ülevaatest diferentseeritud õppe teemal, tuues välja selle positiivsed küljed koos praktiliste näidetega, mil moel saab õpetaja varieeruva keeletasemega klassis oma tööd muuta selliselt, et kõigile tasemetele oleks pööratud piisavalt tähelepanu. Magistritöö teine peatükk koosneb empiirilisest uurimusest, mis on läbi viidud viie inglise keele tunnis akadeemiliselt võimeka seitsmenda klassi õppijaga Kesk-Eestis koolis. Empiirilise uurimuse käigus muudeti kaheksat tunnikava lähtudes kirjanduse ülevaates välja toodud soovitudele akadeemiliselt võimekatele õpilastele varieeruva keeletasemega klassis. Uuringu tulemusena selgus, et diferentseeritud õppe rakendamine tagab akadeemiliselt võimekate keeleõppijate motivatsiooni ja kaasatuse varieeruva keeletasemega klassis. Ühe leiuna toob töö autor välja, et diferentseeritud õppe rakendamise tulemusena on toetatud nii võimekamad kui ka kõigi teiste keeletasemega õppijad.

Märksõnad: diferentseeritud õpe, akadeemiliselt võimekad keeleõppijad, õpetamistehnikad, varieeruva keeletasemega klass.

Lihtlitsents lõputöö reprodutseerimiseks ja üldsusele kättesaadavaks tegemiseks

Mina, Berit Tomlinson,

1. Annan Tartu Ülikoolile tasuta loa (lihtlitsentsi) minu loodud teose *The teaching techniques that support the development of students with higher language proficiency in mixed-ability EFL classes*, mille juhendaja on Natalja Zagura, reprodutseerimiseks eesmärgiga seda säilitada, sealhulgas lisada digitaalarhiivi DSpace kuni autoriõiguse kehtivuse lõppemiseni.
2. Annan Tartu Ülikoolile loa teha punktis 1 nimetatud teos üldsusele kättesaadavaks Tartu Ülikooli veebikeskkonna, sealhulgas digitaalarhiivi DSpace kaudu Creative Commons'i litsentsiga CC BY NC ND 3.0, mis lubab autorile viidates teost reprodutseerida, levitada ja üldsusele suunata ning keelab luua tuletatud teost ja kasutada teost ärieesmärgil, kuni autoriõiguse kehtivuse lõppemiseni.
3. Olen teadlik, et punktides 1 ja 2 nimetatud õigused jäävad alles ka autorile.
4. Kinnitan, et lihtlitsentsi andmisega ei riku ma teiste isikute intellektuaalomandi ega isikuandmete kaitse õigusaktidest tulenevaid õigusi.

Autorsuse kinnitus

Kinnitan, et olen koostanud käesoleva magistritöö ise ning toonud korrektselt välja teiste autorite panuse. Töö on koostatud lähtudes Tartu Ülikooli maailma keelte ja kultuuride kolledži anglistika osakonna magistritöö nõuetest ning on kooskõlas heade akadeemiliste tavadega.

/allkirjastatud digitaalselt/

Berit Tomlinson 14.05.2024

Lõputöö on lubatud kaitsmisele.

/allkirjastatud digitaalselt/

Natalja Zagura 14.05.2024