



DEALING WITH MULTILEVEL ENGLISH TEACHING CLASSES: APPROACHES, CHALLENGES, AND SOLUTIONS

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ANNOTATION

In English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching contexts, teachers often encounter multilevel classes where students possess varying degrees of proficiency. This research article explores the challenges and strategies involved in managing multilevel English classrooms, emphasizing the importance of differentiated instruction, formative assessment, and technology integration. Through a combination of literature review and practical teaching strategies, this paper offers solutions for optimizing learning outcomes and ensuring inclusivity in diverse language proficiency environments. The article provides practical insights and case studies from real classroom settings to support ESL educators in enhancing their teaching methodologies.

The phenomenon of multilevel classes is common in many ESL (English as a Second Language) settings, especially in contexts where the student population is large, diverse, or from different backgrounds. In multilevel classes, students' language proficiency ranges significantly, presenting unique challenges for instructors. These classes are composed of students at varying stages of fluency in reading, writing, speaking, and listening, making traditional teaching methods less effective. Teachers in these environments must tailor their approaches to meet the needs of students at different proficiency levels while maintaining a cohesive and inclusive classroom dynamic.

This article aims to explore the complexities of teaching multilevel English classes and suggest actionable strategies for instructors to deal with these challenges. It highlights the importance of differentiated instruction, collaborative learning, and the use of technology to create an engaging, student-centered learning environment. Additionally, it examines how formative assessments can help instructors adapt their teaching and track individual progress.

The most prominent challenge in multilevel classes is the wide variation in language proficiency among students. According to Richards (2015), students in multilevel classrooms often exhibit diverse learning needs, ranging from beginners who are just acquiring basic vocabulary and grammar to advanced students who require refinement in nuanced language use. Beginners may

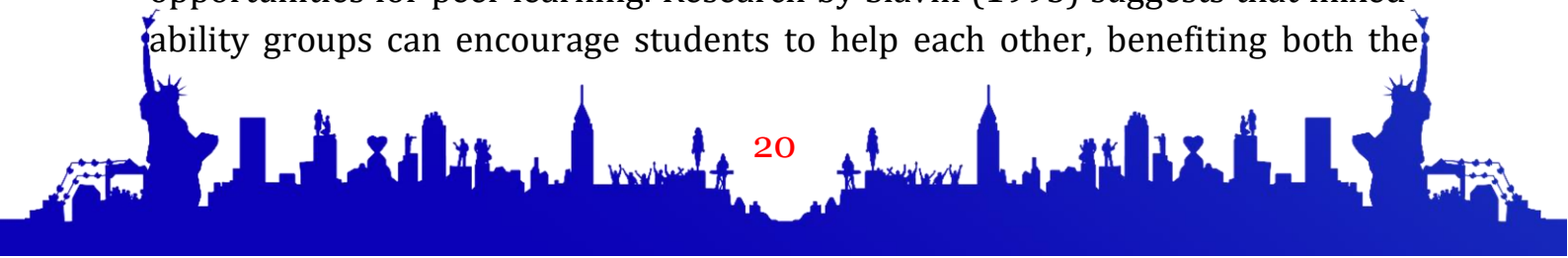




struggle with understanding simple sentences and pronouns, while intermediate learners often need help with complex sentence structures and vocabulary. Advanced learners may require practice in academic or professional English but can quickly disengage if the content is not challenging enough. Teachers must address these varying needs while ensuring that no student is left behind. For example, a lesson on subject-verb agreement could be approached differently for beginner students (focusing on simple sentence structures) compared to intermediate or advanced students (who might practice more complex sentence forms or subtleties in formal written English). Managing a multilevel classroom can also be time-consuming. Teachers often have limited time to address each student's needs, especially when class time is split among students of varying proficiency levels.

As noted by Harmer (2015), there is often a temptation for teachers to focus on the middle group (those at the average proficiency level), leaving the more advanced or lower-level learners without the necessary attention. This can lead to disengagement and stagnation in learning for students at both extremes of the proficiency spectrum. Another challenge is student motivation. Lower-level students may feel frustrated by their inability to keep up with more advanced peers, while advanced students may become bored with tasks that are too simple. The classroom atmosphere is critical to student engagement, and instructors must create a space that fosters cooperation rather than competition. Teaching in a way that allows all students to feel successful at their level is key to maintaining high motivation across the proficiency spectrum. One of the most effective strategies for handling multilevel classes is differentiated instruction. This teaching approach involves tailoring lessons to meet the diverse needs of students. According to Tomlinson (2001), differentiated instruction means providing students with different paths to reach the same learning goal, depending on their readiness, interests, and learning profile.

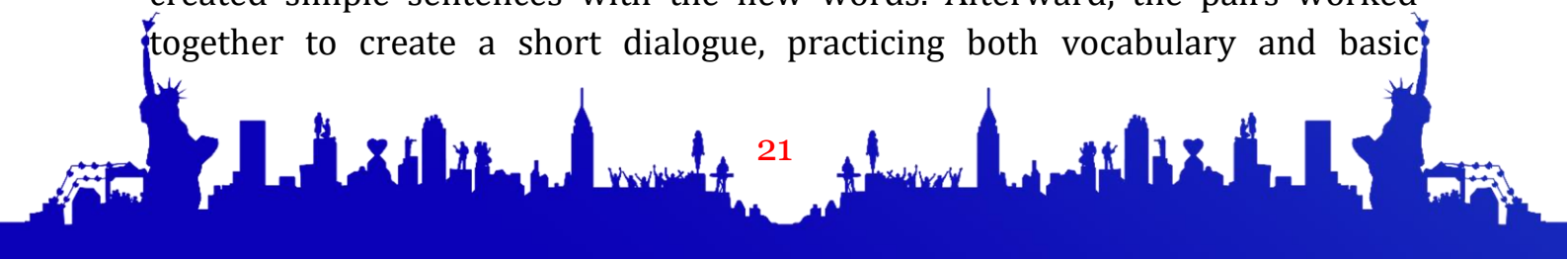
For vocabulary building, beginner students might use flashcards or picture dictionaries, while intermediate learners might create sentences using the new words, and advanced students could use the words in context within an essay or short story. Grammar exercises can be tailored by providing simpler, fill-in-the-blank activities for beginners and more complex sentence correction tasks for advanced learners. In multilevel classes, collaborative learning is a powerful tool. By grouping students of different levels together, teachers create opportunities for peer learning. Research by Slavin (1995) suggests that mixed-ability groups can encourage students to help each other, benefiting both the





higher and lower proficiency learners. More proficient students reinforce their knowledge by explaining concepts, while less proficient students gain confidence through interaction and peer support. Pair work can involve more proficient students supporting beginners in understanding vocabulary or reading texts. Group projects could encourage students to collaborate on research or present information together, ensuring that each group member contributes according to their skill level. Technology integration can play a significant role in managing multilevel classes. Digital tools and apps allow teachers to provide individualized learning experiences. According to Bax (2011), technology can cater to the needs of diverse learners by offering a range of activities that appeal to different learning styles. Language learning apps (e.g., Duolingo, Babbel) offer a range of activities tailored to various proficiency levels. Online quizzes and interactive grammar exercises (e.g., Kahoot, Quizlet) allow students to practice at their own pace. Video resources (e.g., YouTube or educational platforms like TED-Ed) can help expose students to different accents, vocabularies, and cultural contexts, improving listening and speaking skills. By using technology in this way, teachers can offer a more personalized approach to learning that supports students at different proficiency levels. Formative assessment is an essential part of dealing with multilevel classes. It involves ongoing, low-stakes evaluations that provide teachers with real-time insights into student progress. Formative assessments allow teachers to adapt lessons to suit the needs of their students, as opposed to relying solely on summative assessments (which occur at the end of a unit or course). Exit tickets where students write down one thing they learned and one question they still have. Peer assessments, where students provide feedback on each other's work, allowing for both peer learning and individualized reflection. Continuous feedback helps to pinpoint areas where individual students may be struggling, and teachers can adjust their teaching accordingly.

A case study from a language school in South Korea illustrates the successful implementation of differentiated instruction and collaborative learning in a multilevel class. In this case, students were divided into pairs according to their proficiency levels (beginner and intermediate). The teacher used scaffolded activities that required students to first practice individually and then collaborate in pairs or small groups. For example, beginner students worked on matching vocabulary with pictures, while intermediate students created simple sentences with the new words. Afterward, the pairs worked together to create a short dialogue, practicing both vocabulary and basic





conversational structures. The class also made use of language learning apps to reinforce vocabulary outside of class time. Results showed that beginner students increased their vocabulary retention through peer interaction, and intermediate students improved their ability to use new words in context. The mixed-ability setting fostered a sense of community and collaboration, enhancing motivation across proficiency levels.

Dealing with multilevel English teaching classes is undoubtedly challenging, but with effective strategies in place, these challenges can be transformed into opportunities for deeper learning and engagement. Differentiated instruction, collaborative learning, technology integration, and formative assessment are key strategies for successfully managing multilevel classrooms. These methods help ensure that students at varying proficiency levels are not only included but are actively engaged in the learning process. By adopting these approaches, ESL teachers can create a supportive, inclusive, and dynamic environment where all students, regardless of their language proficiency, can thrive.

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