

## ON THE ESSENCE OF THE CONCEPT OF DIFFERENTIATION. PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF DIFFERENTIATION OF TEACHING IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

*Smagulova M.B.<sup>1</sup>, Mukhatayeva Z.E.<sup>2</sup>*

*Abstract:*

This paper investigates the concept of differentiation in foreign language teaching, examining its psychological and pedagogical underpinnings. It delves into the core of differentiation, highlighting the need to cater to individual student needs, learning styles, and readiness levels. It acknowledges the challenges of implementing differentiation and provides practical guidance for teachers to successfully integrate it into their teaching practices.

*Key words:* differentiation, foreign language teaching, individual approach, psychological bases, pedagogical bases, training level, motivation.

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The word differentiation is of Latin origin and means «difference», or «division». From this point of view, «differentiation» is the identification of separate groups of students who are taught differently. In reality, the concept of differentiation is deeper and broader. In the conditions of differentiation, there is a selection of groups of students and construction of the learning process, which corresponds to certain features of students. Individual characteristics can be taken into account in order to make learning more effective and maximise the individuality of the pupil.

Differentiation of education ensures that all pupils master the content of education, which may be different for different pupils, but with the obligatory allocation of the invariant part for all. The main meaning of differentiation in teaching is knowing and taking into account individual differences in the learning of students, to determine for each of them the most rational nature of work. Thus, the learning process in the conditions of differentiation becomes as close as possible to the cognitive needs of students, and their individual characteristics.

Differentiation of students in the learning process is conditional. It should be flexible and movable, allowing for an individual approach to each pupil.

Modern society puts the personality at the centre of the educational process, the goals of education include the need to ensure the actualisation of the personal functions of students: self-determination, self-disclosure, and self-realisation of personality.

Therefore, along with the psychological features of the personality, it is necessary to take into account the existing subjective experience of the individual, his preferences, and values.

Taking into account all of the above, three main aspects can be distinguished in the understanding of differentiation:

1. Taking into account individual (typological and personal) features of students.
2. Grouping pupils on the basis of individual-typological features.

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<sup>1</sup> *Smagulova M.B., Karaganda University named after Academician E.A.Buketov, Karaganda, Kazakhstan*

<sup>2</sup> *Mukhatayeva Z.E., Karaganda University named after Academician E.A.Buketov, Karaganda, Kazakhstan*

3. Organisation of learning activities in groups at different levels for mastering the unified programme material.

The first aspect - taking into account individual peculiarities of pupils is characteristic of both differentiation and individualisation.

The greatest difficulty in defining the concept of differentiation is caused by the fact that two such notions «individualisation» and «differentiation» are mixed up. The preference for one or the other word in pedagogy is mostly a matter of tradition or agreement.

Most of the most famous researchers of individualisation of learning use the notion of individualisation as the organisation of the learning process, in which the choice of methods, techniques, and pace of learning takes into account individual differences of students, the level of development of their learning abilities (A.A. Budarny, E.S. Rabunsky, A.A. Kirsanov). Individualisation here does not necessarily imply mandatory consideration of the peculiarities of each student. More often researchers limit themselves to taking into account groups similar in some complex of qualities. (A.A. Budarny, E.S. Rabunsky, I.E. Unt).

However, the use of the concepts «individualisation» and «differentiation» as synonyms is common. Thus, in the same meaning they speak about individualised and differentiated approaches to students in the lesson. E.Y. Golant generally limits herself to «differentiation of learning».

I.M. Osmolovskaya, speaking about the individualisation of learning, considers it as the ultimate variant of differentiation when the learning process is built taking into account the peculiarities of each individual pupil rather than of groups [1].

Individualisation of learning does not imply differentiation of students into groups, but differentiation of teaching material, development of systems of tasks of different difficulty and volume, and allocation of basic and variable content of teaching material for work with different groups and individual students.

The specificity of differentiated teaching is to take into account individual characteristics inherent in a group of pupils and to organise a variable learning process in these groups.

The organisation of groups is designed to take into account certain group differences, which are not yet a manifestation of individual differences. The organisation of pupils into groups, homogeneous in terms of the subject content they master, does not exclude the presence of individual (within-group) differences in the structure of their intellect.

Designing differentiated teaching is impossible without knowing the individuality of each student as a given, with its inherent features.

Differentiation and individualisation should be distinguished from differentiated approaches in teaching.

The «differentiated approach» to students in the learning process is understood as a special approach of the teacher to different groups of students or to certain students, which consists of the organisation of educational work different in content, volume of complexity, and methods.

E.S. Rabunsky considers differentiation to be synonymous with the concept of «individualisation». At the same time, he considers «differentiation» in a narrower sense, namely, as the division of a school into streams, sometimes even as the formation of special schools and classes. Concerning the notion of «individualisation», differentiation, according to E.S. Rabunsky, is a necessary condition for the successful implementation of the individual approach, as it is aimed at fighting against the orientation exclusively towards the class [1, p.17].

I.D. Butuzov considers differentiation as a form of learning organisation that ensures the quality of students' knowledge. Its use helps to solve the problem of grade repetition. In I.D. Butuzov's understanding, differentiated teaching is a consideration of individual differences in the learning ability of pupils and intra-class division of pupils into groups with

the same level of learning ability to carry out educational work with these groups at different levels [2].

A.A.Kirsanov does not limit his study to taking into account only groups of pupils according to a certain characteristic but also speaks about the possibility of taking into account the peculiarities of an individual pupil. He considers individualisation of educational work as «a system of educational and didactic means, corresponding to the goals of the activity and real cognitive capabilities of the class collective, individual pupils and groups of pupils, allowing to ensure the learning activity of a pupil at the level of his potential capabilities taking into account the learning objectives». [2, p.46]. A.A.Kirsanov sees the purpose of individualisation as the elimination of gaps in pupils' knowledge, and the formation of necessary techniques of mental activity, thus, the development of pupils' individuality, their aptitudes and abilities is out of the question. As a means of individualisation, the author considers varying the degree and volume of teacher's assistance to pupils as a means of individualisation.

I.Unt understands differentiation as taking into account individual features of pupils in the form when they are grouped on the basis of some features for separate learning. In her opinion, it is necessary to take into account individual peculiarities of children in teaching and, if possible, individualisation should cover all forms and methods of taking these peculiarities into account [3]. At the same time, she considers «individualisation» in the narrow sense, in the sense of in-class individualisation of learning tasks, inappropriate, because it is not able to cover the consideration of individual characteristics in their entire scope. When defining differentiation, I. Unt proceeds from the peculiarities of an individual, his or her personal qualities.

I.M. Osmolovskaya understands differentiation as «a way of organising the learning process that takes into account individual-typological features of a person» [4].

Osmolovska distinguishes between «individualisation» and «differentiation», in her understanding differentiation is broader and includes individualisation [4, p.35]. The goal of differentiation is to provide each student with conditions for the maximum development of his/her abilities, aptitudes, and satisfaction of cognitive needs and interests in the process of mastering the content of general education.

I.G. Butuzov, R. Groot, and V.V. Davydov note the provision of each student with maximum conditions for harmonious development on the basis of the choice of education programme and the creation of favourable conditions in the social environment as the main function of differentiation of education.

In the works of M.K. Akimova, and A.A. Kirsanov differentiation is considered as the most important factor in the development of cognitive activity of students.

In the studies of V.M. Monakhov, V.A. Orlov, and V.V. Firsov differentiation of learning is considered as the most important factor in the development of students' cognitive activity. Firsov, V.M. Monakhov, V.A. Orlov, V.V. Firsov differentiation of education is understood as an organisation and methodology of education, in which each student, mastering a certain minimum of general education training, gets the right and guaranteed opportunity to give priority attention to those areas that best meet his/her inclinations [5].

Thus, most researchers agree that differentiation of learning focuses on making certain changes in the learning process that take into account the individual and typological characteristics of students.

It should be noted that the focus on individual characteristics is a characteristic feature of not only differentiation but also individualisation of learning and differentiated approach to learning. In the context of our study, further analysis of these concepts is required. The implementation of a differentiated approach to teaching requires, first of all, the differentiation of such concepts as «differentiation of teaching», «individualisation of teaching» and «differentiated approach». These terms are widely used in pedagogical and

psychological literature and are often identified because in the common understanding and in the didactic context they are synonyms, but at the same time, the content of each of these concepts has its own essential features.

Along with the concept of «differentiation of learning» discussed above, the term «individualisation of learning» is often used. For a long time, individualisation and differentiation were considered as a means of preventing failure (P.P. Blonsky, A.A. Budarny, etc.). According to these researchers, individualisation of learning implies such an organisation of the learning process, in which the choice of methods, techniques, and pace of learning takes into account the individual differences of students and the level of development of their learning abilities.

As follows from the above definitions, differentiation and individualisation of learning are closely related. In our opinion, it is hardly appropriate to contrast them, because from the didactic point of view, individualisation, being the goal of learning, can be implemented through differentiation.

The analysis of different researchers' points of view shows that the main difference between these concepts is that individualisation is primarily aimed at organising the learning process for each individual student separately, while differentiation involves the use of variable methods and forms of learning, including group learning, taking into account different characteristics of the individual.

Some works use the concept of «differentiated approach». For example, I.D. Butuzov, characterising the differentiated approach to teaching, along with the need to study the individual characteristics of students, notes such a characteristic aspect of its implementation as the division of students into groups according to individual psychological qualities [5].

E.S. Rabunsky, who defines a differentiated approach as a didactic provision that involves dividing the class into groups, for example, by interests, academic performance, etc., agrees with him. [5, p.34].

Thus, differentiation of learning implies a focus on the process of making certain changes in the course of the learning process for certain groups of learners. The result of such changes is differentiated learning. The approach to the learning process, assuming differentiation in various types and forms, is a differentiated approach.

Differentiation is understood as «a way of organising the learning process, which takes into account individual-typological features of personality. Differentiation is characterised by the creation of groups of students in which the elements of the didactic system differ».

Individualisation is the goal, and differentiation is the means of achieving it. Individualisation is impossible without differentiation, as they are interrelated and interdependent.

Scientific and methodological literature indicates a number of important conditions, the fulfilment of which is necessary for the successful and effective implementation of level differentiation [6].

The first one is that the allocated levels of material mastering and, first of all, compulsory learning outcomes should be open to students. The success of a differentiated approach in teaching depends significantly on the cognitive activity of students. The openness of level training is a mechanism for the formation of positive learning motives and a conscious attitude to academic work.

The second most important condition is the presence of certain «scissors» between the level of requirements and the level of learning. In other words, level differentiation is carried out not due to the fact that some students are given less and others more, but due to the fact that by offering the same amount of material to students, different levels of requirements for its assimilation are set.

The third condition, which complements the previous one, is that there should be consistency in the progression of students by level. This means that the training work should be feasible for each learner; it should correspond to the individual pace of mastering the material at each stage of training. The content of control and assessment should reflect the adopted level approach. The control should provide for the verification of the achievement by all students of the mandatory learning outcomes: Therefore, an appropriate assessment scale should be developed for each level.

Thus, we have considered various approaches to the definition of differentiation. This allows us to draw the following conclusions:

1. The concept of differentiation is closely related to individualisation and they should be considered in interrelation.

2. Differentiation can be used to prevent underachievement in the learning process, as a way to take into account individual characteristics as much as possible and to actualise personal functions in learning.

3. Depending on the purpose of learning, differentiation can be a means, a form, or a result of individualisation.

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