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**A DIFFERENTIATED APPROACH AS AN EFFECTIVE TOOL
FOR TEACHING ENGLISH TO CADETS
WITH DIFFERENT LANGUAGE LEVELS**

Abstract: this paper focuses on the potential of a differentiated approach to teaching foreign languages to mixed-level groups of students in a military university setting. Three methods for developing varied tasks for different language aspects are proposed. Internal and external forms of differentiation are also described.

Keywords: differentiated approach, military university, foreign language for specific purposes, multi-level language teaching, internal differentiation, external differentiation.

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**ДИФФЕРЕНЦИРОВАННЫЙ ПОДХОД КАК ЭФФЕКТИВНЫЙ
ИНСТРУМЕНТ ОБУЧЕНИЯ АНГЛИЙСКОМУ ЯЗЫКУ КУРСАНТОВ
С РАЗНЫМ УРОВНЕМ ВЛАДЕНИЯ ЯЗЫКОМ**

Аннотация: в статье рассматриваются возможности применения дифференцированного подхода при обучении иностранного языка в группах с разноуровневыми обучающимися в условиях военного вуза. Предлагаются три методики разработки ранжированных заданий для разных аспектов обучения языку. Рассматриваются внутренняя и внешняя формы дифференциации.

Ключевые слова: дифференцированный подход, военный вуз, иностранный язык для специальных целей, разноуровневое обучение, внутренняя форма дифференциации, внешняя форма дифференциации.

In foreign language teaching domain, the problem of differentiated teaching has always been and remains relevant. This is particularly true at universities and faculties that do not specialize in linguistics, where foreign language teachers (teachers of English in our case) must contend with students who demonstrate various levels of a foreign language proficiency being placed in one same group. We have to face such a situation at the Chelyabinsk branch of the Military Aviation Academy and it is due to the following factors:

1) the first-year cadets are enrolled from various cities and regions, where a foreign language (English) teaching may vary in its quality despite unified educational standards;

2) our branch enrolls applicants who studied English, German, or French at school. Thus, a group of 10 – 15 cadets may include those who studied different foreign languages.

Nevertheless, teaching a professionally oriented foreign language or language for a specific purpose remains compulsory, despite the existing challenges regarding the student population and their basic linguistic knowledge. Professionally oriented training is viewed as addressing the needs of cadets in learning a foreign language (English), conditioned by the specifics of their future profession. It involves combining the acquisition of a professionally oriented foreign language (LSP – language for specific purposes) with the development of personal qualities, knowledge of the for-

eign country's culture, and the acquisition of a set of specialized linguistic skills in the field of aviation, aircraft design and maintenance, radiotelephony, etc [1, p. 9].

Therefore, the difficulty of mastering English for some cadets is undeniable: they struggle to overcome the so-called language barrier, hesitating to speak for fear of making errors. Whereas, some other cadets excel already at their first lessons, actively participating in communicative tasks, interviews, listening exercises, text work, and so on.

In our opinion, the most appropriate way to optimizing the English language teaching process at a military university is to apply the principles of a differentiated approach, which presupposes a balanced combination of frontal work with the entire group with individual work with each student separately. Let us have a close look at the theoretical and methodological foundations of the «differentiated teaching» concept.

Sergey Filippovich Shatilov interprets the concept of a differentiated approach quite broadly. According to this linguist, a differentiated approach is expressed, first and foremost:

- in taking into consideration the psychological, linguistic, and methodological characteristics of each type of speech activity (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) as well as positive influence of these types of speech activity on each other;
- in appropriate selection of methods and forms of work [3, p. 112].

Perhaps the above-described conditions sound paradoxical in the military background, where the primary emphasis in the educational and upbringing processes, as well as in professional training, is placed on standardization, collectivism, and a kind of equalization of all cadets. However, it should be noted that the «English (Foreign) Language» subject specifically has the potential to differentiate the educational process, aimed at acquiring a set of necessary linguistic competencies by cadets in accordance with their capabilities individually.

Under the conditions of educational process at a military university in particular, the differentiated approach enables to take into account individual characteristics of cadets, manifested in the peculiarities of their thinking processes, cognitive memory

properties, memorization mechanisms, and mastering language material by each individual cadet. The implementation of the differentiated approach in practice of teaching English is carried out through the development of assignments / tasks within the framework of the approved curriculum, but nevertheless in accordance with the cadets' linguistic abilities. According to the differentiated teaching model implemented at the Department of Foreign Languages, assignments for cadets can be categorized into three groups:

- 1) for different work stages directly in the classroom;
- 2) for activating the cognitive activity of individual cadets, which can take place at a simulation or creative level (business games, case studies);
- 3) for each cadet's independent work.

In order to better illustrate the application of the differentiated approach, we will describe examples of specific types of assignments on grammar and vocabulary topics included in the syllabus. These assignments were developed for mixed-level groups of cadets with the aim of ensuring a feasible and effective acquisition of the necessary language material by all of them, with simultaneous providing at least a basic level for «weaker» cadets, and increasing the complexity of the material thus promoting a deeper acquisition for «advanced» ones. All assignments were developed leaning upon three strategies:

- *a ranging strategy* (qualitative assignment ranking by transforming exercises in the coursebook according to the language proficiency of each cadet);
- *an extension strategy* (preparing extended tasks that allow cadets with a sufficiently high level of language proficiency to reach an advanced communicative level);
- *a support strategy* (transforming exercises with the aim of assisting weaker cadets so that they do not give up tasks but continue working on them using a simplified version of the task).

For example, when reviewing the *grammar* topic Past Simple, one and the same task was transformed according to a *ranging* strategy.

1 – For cadets with a lower level of the language command: Open the brackets use the Past Simple Tense, looking up irregular verbs in the table if necessary.

1. *Someone (to tell) me that news.*
2. *They (to know) nothing about her problems.*
3. *Nobody (to make) any mistakes in the dictation.*

The support method is also implemented in this exercise.

2 – For cadets with an intermediate level of the language command: Open the brackets using the Past Simple Tense of the verbs by memory, put the sentences into negative and interrogative forms.

1. *Someone (to tell) me that news.*
2. *They (to know) nothing about her problems.*
3. *Nobody (to make) any mistakes in the dictation.*

This exercise also employs the extension method.

3 – For cadets with an advanced level of the language proficiency: Open the brackets using the Past Simple Tense. Make up your own sentences in Russian using the verbs from the exercise, then work in pairs, translating the made-up sentences from Russian to English by ear with your partner.

1. *Someone (to tell) me that news.*
2. *They (to know) nothing about her problems....*

This exercise uses the expansion method.

It is worth noting that grammar work is based on one and the same exercise, but the tasks for cadets with different levels of language proficiency vary, depending on the most appropriate strategy and method selected.

The same strategy can also be applied when working with vocabulary and teaching comprehension of professionally oriented texts. For example, after reading the text «Airplane Structure», cadets had to complete a task that varied depending on the level of language command and the degree to which the cadets had assimilated the material. Those with lower language proficiency completed the following task: «Read the text 'Airplane Structure.' Complete the English phrases using the verbs from the word bank».

Развивать тягу – ... thrust; крепить к фюзеляжу – ... to the fuselage; крепить на шарнирах к килю – ... to the fin; размещать экипаж и груз – ... crew and cargo; создавать подъёмную силу – ... lift; поддерживать самолёт – ... the aircraft; управлять самолётом – ... the aircraft; заставлять набирать высоту – ... to climb; развивать скорость – ... speed; обеспечивать взлёт и посадку – ... take-off and landing; состоять из стоек – ... of units.

Word bank: to consist, to attach; to provide, to develop; to hinge; to support; to accommodate; to control.

Thus, using a *support strategy*, we gave weaker cadets an opportunity to carry out translation leaning upon a limited number of lexical units by selecting the correct ones.

Intermediate cadets completed the following exercise: «Read the text 'Airplane Structure.' Complete the English phrases using verbs from the text.»

Развивать тягу – ... thrust; крепить к фюзеляжу – ... to the fuselage; крепить на шарнирах к килю – ... to the fin; размещать экипаж и груз – ... crew and cargo; создавать подъёмную силу – ... lift; поддерживать самолёт – ... the aircraft...

So, these group of cadets had to scan the text themselves in search of appropriate lexical units. Such version of the exercise is based on the ranging strategy.

Cadets with advanced language proficiency completed a more challenging exercise: «Complete English phrases using verbs from the text, then use the resulting phrases to translate sentences from Russian into English.»

a) *Развивать тягу – ... thrust; крепить к фюзеляжу – ... to the fuselage; крепить на шарнирах к килю – ... to the fin; размещать экипаж и груз – ... crew and cargo; создавать подъёмную силу – ... lift; поддерживать самолёт – ... the aircraft; управлять самолётом – ... the aircraft...*

b) Translate from Russian in to English

1. *Функция силовой установки – развивать тягу.*

2. *Функция фюзеляжа – размещать экипаж, груз, приборы и оборудование.*

3. *Функции крыла – создавать высокую подъёмную силу, поддерживать самолет в полете.*

4. *Функция элеронов, рулей высоты и направления – управление самолетом в полете.*

The extension strategy is applied to such a variation of the exercise.

Let us consider another aspect that is crucial in language learning, as it is supposed to be the ultimate outcome of a foreign language learning process. *Speaking* is particularly challenging for all language learners, regardless of their level of proficiency, as speaking requires a combination of knowledge and skills in both grammar (sentence construction) and vocabulary (the semantic content of statements on a given topic).

When preparing a monologue on the topic «Types of Military Aircraft," cadets with a low language command were asked to prepare a monologue based on a diagram / picture and supporting questions. The number of questions was limited to fifteen (a support strategy is applied). A list of sample questions is provided below.

1. *How are military aircraft classified?*
2. *What are fighters divided into?*
3. *What are interceptors designed for?*
4. *What performances do interceptors have?*
5. *What missions can bombers fly?*

Intermediate cadets were required to prepare a monologue using a diagram / picture without leading questions.

Finally, advanced cadets prepared a monologue without any aids: either verbal or visual. Thus, when shaping and developing speaking skills in cadets, we took the advantage of both support and ranging strategies within the differentiated approach.

In addition to the opportunity for teachers to rank and range assignments, a differentiated approach also serves as a motivating factor for cadets, as it suggests that by completing a higher-level assignment successfully, they have a chance to receive a «good» or «excellent» mark, thereby increasing their average grade in the subject.

Furthermore, it should be noted that a differentiated approach presupposes a flexible teaching system that takes into account the specific implementation of general methodological principles depending on the learning environment, the age and individual characteristics of students / cadets, the content of the material, and many more other factors.

All of the abovementioned proves the effectiveness and success of the implementation of a differentiated approach to teaching English at a higher military educational institution, where the educational process in this discipline is carried out in the environment of study sections with cadets possessing different language levels.

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