

## INTEGRATED METHODS IN ESL TEACHING IN MULTILEVEL GROUPS

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**Abstract.** This study investigates the effectiveness of integrated teaching methods in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms with multilevel learners. Such classrooms include students with diverse proficiency levels, learning needs, and educational backgrounds, which often limits the effectiveness of single-method instruction. To address this issue, the study applies an integrated pedagogical approach combining communicative language teaching, task-based learning, differentiated instruction, and collaborative learning.

A qualitative case study was conducted over a 12-week period with 20 adult learners representing beginner to upper-intermediate levels. Data were collected through classroom observations, student questionnaires, interviews, and teacher reflective journals, and analyzed using thematic analysis.

The findings indicate that integrated teaching methods significantly enhance student engagement, promote peer-assisted learning, and improve communicative competence. Lower-level learners demonstrated increased confidence and reduced language anxiety, while higher-level learners benefited from cognitively challenging tasks.

**Keywords:** integrated teaching, ESL, multilevel classroom, differentiated instruction, task-based learning, communicative language teaching, collaborative learning

**Аннотация.** Данное исследование посвящено изучению эффективности интегрированных методов обучения английскому языку как иностранному (ESL) в разноуровневых группах. Такие группы включают студентов с различным уровнем владения языком, образовательным опытом и учебными потребностями, что снижает эффективность традиционных методов обучения.

В работе применяется интегрированный подход, объединяющий коммуникативный метод, обучение на основе задач, дифференцированное и кооперативное обучение. Исследование выполнено в формате качественного кейс-анализа в течение 12 недель с участием 20 студентов уровня от начального до выше среднего.

Сбор данных осуществлялся с помощью наблюдений, анкетирования, интервью и педагогической рефлексии, а анализ проводился методом тематического анализа.

Результаты показывают, что интегрированные методы повышают вовлеченность учащихся, способствуют взаимному обучению и развитию коммуникативной компетенции. У студентов начального уровня отмечено снижение языковой тревожности, а у более продвинутых — рост познавательной активности.

**Ключевые слова:** интегрированное обучение, ESL, разноуровневые группы, дифференцированное обучение, коммуникативный метод, обучение на основе задач

**Annotatsiya.** Ushbu maqolada ingliz tilini chet tili sifatida (ESL) o'qitishda multilevel sinflarda integratsiyalashgan metodlarning samaradorligi o'rganiladi. Bunday sinflar turli darajadagi o'quvchilarni o'z ichiga olgani sababli, an'anaviy yagona metodlar yetarli natija bermaydi.

Tadqiqotda kommunikativ yondashuv, vazifaga asoslangan o'qitish, differensial ta'lim va hamkorlikda o'qitishni birlashtirgan integratsiyalashgan model qo'llanildi. Tadqiqot 12 hafta davomida 20 nafar (boshlang'ichdan yuqori o'rta darajagacha) o'quvchi ishtirokida o'tkazildi.

Ma'lumotlar kuzatuv, so'rovnomalar, intervyu va o'qituvchi refleksiya orqali yig'ilib, tematik tahlil asosida o'rganildi.

Natijalar integratsiyalashgan metodlar o'quvchilarning faolligini oshirishi, o'zaro yordam asosida o'rganishni rivojlantirishi va kommunikativ kompetensiyani yaxshilashini ko'rsatdi. Past darajadagi o'quvchilarda ishonch ortgani, yuqori darajadagi o'quvchilarda esa murakkab topshiriqlar orqali rivojlanish kuzatildi.

**Kalit so'zlar:** integratsiyalashgan o'qitish, ESL, turli darajali sinf, differensial ta'lim, kommunikativ yondashuv, vazifaga asoslangan o'qitish

**Introduction** Teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) in multilevel classrooms represents one of the most persistent and complex challenges in contemporary language education. Multilevel classes – also referred to as mixed-ability or heterogeneous groups – bring together learners with differing levels of linguistic proficiency, cognitive readiness, motivation, learning strategies, and sociocultural backgrounds. These differences are particularly evident in contexts where institutional constraints, limited resources, or enrollment patterns make homogeneous grouping impractical.

Traditional ESL teaching approaches, which often rely on a single dominant methodology, tend to assume a relatively uniform learner profile. However, in multilevel classrooms, such approaches frequently fail to address the diverse needs of students, resulting in unequal participation, reduced motivation, and suboptimal learning outcomes.<sup>1</sup> Lower-level learners may feel overwhelmed and disengaged, while higher-level learners may experience boredom due to insufficient challenge. Consequently, there is a growing recognition among educators and researchers of the need for more flexible, inclusive, and adaptive pedagogical frameworks.

In response to these challenges, the concept of integrated teaching methods has gained increasing attention in the field of applied linguistics. Integrated methods involve the deliberate combination of multiple pedagogical approaches – such as communicative language teaching (CLT), task-based learning (TBL), differentiated instruction, and cooperative learning – to create a more dynamic and responsive learning environment.<sup>2</sup> Rather than adhering rigidly to a single methodology, teachers adopting integrated approaches draw selectively from various theories and practices to meet the needs of diverse learners.

The theoretical basis of integrated ESL teaching comes from several important approaches. First, communicative competence theory shows that meaningful interaction and real-life communication are essential for learning a language.<sup>3</sup> Second, sociocultural theory, developed by Lev Vygotsky, explains that social interaction, support from others (scaffolding), and the zone of proximal development play a key role in how learners develop language and thinking skills.<sup>4</sup> Third, the theory of differentiated instruction highlights the need to adapt teaching methods, materials, and assessment according to learners' levels, interests, and individual learning styles.<sup>5</sup>

Recent research in second language learning also supports the use of different teaching methods together. Studies show that combining grammar-focused instruction with communicative activities helps students learn a language more effectively than using only one method.<sup>6</sup> In addition, working in groups helps learners become more independent, think critically, and understand different cultures better.

Although many studies support integrated teaching, there is still a need for more research based on real classroom practice, especially in multilevel ESL classes. Many previous studies focus on single methods or controlled experiments, which may not reflect the real challenges of everyday classrooms. For this reason, this study aims to explore how integrated teaching

methods affect student engagement, participation, confidence, and language development in a multilevel ESL classroom.

**Methods** This study employed a qualitative case study design, which is particularly suitable for exploring complex educational phenomena within real-life contexts. The case study approach allows for an in-depth examination of classroom dynamics, teaching practices, and learner experiences, providing rich, contextualized insights.<sup>7</sup>

The research was conducted over a 12-week instructional period, during which integrated teaching methods were systematically implemented and observed.

The study took place in a private ESL learning center. The participants consisted of 20 adult learners aged between 18 and 35. The group was intentionally multilevel, reflecting common classroom realities.

Learners were categorized into three proficiency levels based on placement testing:

*Beginner (A1–A2): 8 students*

*Intermediate (B1): 7 students*

*Upper-intermediate (B2): 5 students*

The participants represented diverse educational and professional backgrounds, including university students, job seekers, and working professionals. The instructional design was based on an **integrated methodology model**, combining four primary approaches:

1. *Differentiated Instruction*: Tasks were designed at multiple levels of complexity to accommodate learners' varying abilities. Activities included tiered worksheets, flexible grouping, and optional extension tasks.<sup>5</sup>

2. *Task-Based Learning*: Lessons were structured around meaningful tasks such as role-plays, problem-solving activities, debates, and simulations. These tasks required learners to use language for authentic communication.<sup>3</sup>

3. *Communicative Language Teaching*: The classroom emphasized fluency, interaction, and real-life language use. Error correction was often delayed to encourage confidence and spontaneous communication.<sup>6</sup>

4. *Collaborative Learning*: Students worked in mixed-ability groups, enabling peer scaffolding and cooperative problem-solving. This approach aligns with Lev Vygotsky, where learning occurs through interaction.<sup>4</sup>

*Scaffolding Techniques* – To support learners at different levels, the teacher employed various scaffolding strategies:

Visual aids and graphic organizers

Sentence frames and language prompts

Vocabulary pre-teaching

Guided questioning

Peer modeling

**Data Collection** Multiple data sources were employed to ensure *triangulation, reliability, and validity* of the findings. The use of different instruments allowed for a comprehensive understanding of classroom processes and learner development across the intervention period.

1. **Classroom Observations (weekly)**: Systematic observations were conducted throughout the 12-week period to monitor student participation, interaction patterns, engagement levels, and teacher–student dynamics in real instructional settings.

2. **Student Questionnaires (pre- and post-intervention)**: Structured questionnaires were administered before and after the intervention to measure changes in learner attitudes, motivation, confidence, and perceived language improvement.

3. **Semi-Structured Interviews (selected participants)**: A sample of learners from different proficiency levels participated in interviews to provide deeper insights into their learning experiences, challenges, and perceptions of integrated teaching methods.

4. **Teacher Reflective Journal:** The teacher maintained a weekly reflective journal documenting instructional decisions, classroom challenges, student responses, and pedagogical adjustments throughout the study.

These combined data sources provided both **behavioral and perceptual evidence** of learning processes, ensuring a well-rounded dataset for analysis.

**Data Analysis** Data were analyzed using **thematic analysis**, a qualitative method designed to identify, organize, and interpret patterns within complex datasets.<sup>7</sup> The analysis followed a structured multi-step process.

First, all collected data (observations, questionnaires, interviews, and journal entries) were transcribed, reviewed, and subjected to **initial coding**, where meaningful units related to engagement, participation, confidence, and language development were identified.

Second, these codes were organized into broader **categories and emerging themes**, such as learner interaction, scaffolding effectiveness, task engagement, learner motivation, and instructional challenges. This step helped to reduce complexity and highlight recurring classroom patterns.

Third, in the **interpretation phase**, the identified themes were analyzed in relation to established theoretical frameworks, including communicative language teaching, sociocultural theory, and differentiated instruction. This allowed for a meaningful connection between empirical findings and pedagogical theory. To strengthen *credibility and validity*, data triangulation was applied by comparing findings across multiple sources, ensuring consistency between student responses, teacher reflections, and observed classroom behavior.<sup>7</sup>

This systematic approach enabled a deep and reliable understanding of both learner outcomes and classroom instructional processes.

**Results** The findings demonstrate that integrated teaching methods had a substantial positive impact on the multilevel ESL classroom.

*Increased Student Engagement:* One of the most significant outcomes was a noticeable increase in student engagement across all proficiency levels. Beginner learners, who initially exhibited reluctance to participate, became more active due to scaffolded tasks and supportive group dynamics.<sup>8</sup>

Higher-level learners also remained engaged, as differentiated tasks provided sufficient challenge.

*Peer-Assisted Learning* Mixed-level collaboration facilitated effective peer learning. Advanced learners reinforced their knowledge by explaining concepts, while lower-level learners benefited from simplified input and guidance. This supports Lev Vygotsky's principle that learning occurs through social interaction.<sup>4</sup>

*Confidence and Anxiety Reduction* A key finding was the reduction of *language anxiety*, particularly among beginner learners. The communicative and collaborative environment encouraged risk-taking and active participation.<sup>1</sup>

*Language Skills Development:*

- Speaking and listening improved significantly due to interactive tasks
- Reading and writing showed moderate improvement
- Vocabulary acquisition increased through contextualized exposure

Effectiveness of Differentiation: Differentiated tasks ensured balanced cognitive demand:

- Beginners avoided overload
- Advanced learners avoided boredom

This contributed to improved classroom harmony and learning efficiency.<sup>5</sup>

**Discussion** The findings of this study strongly support the effectiveness of integrated teaching methods in multilevel ESL classrooms. By combining multiple pedagogical approaches, teachers can create a more inclusive, flexible, and responsive learning environment.<sup>6</sup>

A key contribution of this study is the confirmation of **sociocultural learning principles** in practice. Peer collaboration functioned as a natural scaffolding mechanism, enabling learners to extend their capabilities beyond individual limits.<sup>4</sup>

Another important implication is the role of **instructional adaptability**. Differentiated instruction allowed teachers to address learner diversity without fragmenting the classroom into isolated groups.<sup>5</sup>

However, the study also identified challenges:

- Increased preparation time
- Need for teacher expertise
- Classroom management complexity

Despite these challenges, the benefits – enhanced engagement, improved confidence, and better learning outcomes – clearly outweigh the limitations.

**Conclusion** This study demonstrates that integrated teaching methods provide an effective solution to the challenges of multilevel ESL classrooms. By combining communicative, task-based, differentiated, and collaborative approaches, teachers can create a more inclusive and flexible learning environment that addresses diverse learner needs.

The findings show that integrated methods improve student engagement, enhance communicative competence, and increase learner confidence. Lower-level students benefit from scaffolding and peer support, while higher-level students remain motivated through appropriately challenging tasks. In addition, collaborative learning promotes autonomy and active participation.

However, the implementation of integrated teaching requires careful planning, strong pedagogical skills, and effective classroom management. Despite these challenges, the advantages outweigh the difficulties.

Overall, integrated teaching represents a practical and necessary approach in modern ESL education, particularly in multilevel contexts. Future research should examine its long-term impact and application in different learning environments.

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