



DIAGNOSING STUDENTS' LANGUAGE COMPETENCE AND PLANNING DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION IN MOTHER TONGUE LESSONS

Rasulova Nozigul

Chief Specialist of the Education Quality Control Department at Andijan Regional Pedagogical Skills Center, Uzbekistan

ABSTRACT

Effective mother tongue teaching in primary school depends on teachers' ability to recognize learners' diverse language competence and to translate diagnostic evidence into differentiated instructional planning. In many classrooms, however, "differentiation" is reduced to assigning more tasks to stronger pupils and simplifying work for those who struggle, while diagnostic practices remain episodic and focused on error counting rather than on the mechanisms behind performance. The approach integrates criterion-referenced micro-diagnostics across reading, vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and text production, and links them to planned variation in task demands and scaffolding. The synthesized results highlight that reliable differentiation emerges when teachers diagnose specific barriers, design aligned task variants, and embed formative feedback and revision opportunities. The paper concludes that diagnostic-based differentiated planning strengthens both learning outcomes and learner agency by making expectations transparent and supporting gradual independence.

KEYWORDS: Language competence, diagnostic assessment, mother tongue lessons, differentiated instruction, formative assessment, literacy, primary education.

INTRODUCTION

Mother tongue lessons in primary school provide the foundation for literacy, academic communication, and cognitive development. Yet pupils arrive with unequal language experience, different degrees of phonological awareness, varied vocabulary exposure, and diverse capacities for sustained attention and self-regulation. These differences are not simply "levels" of achievement; they reflect distinct developmental trajectories and learning conditions. When instruction is uniform, high-achieving pupils may stagnate due to limited challenge, while those who experience difficulties accumulate gaps in decoding, comprehension, and writing that later constrain learning across the curriculum. Differentiated instruction is a widely accepted response, but it becomes effective only when it is based on diagnostic evidence that identifies what learners can do, what they cannot yet do, and why. The purpose of this thesis is to describe how teachers can diagnose pupils' language competence and convert diagnostic findings into differentiated planning in mother tongue lessons without lowering common curricular goals.

The study employs a design-oriented synthesis of pedagogical and psycholinguistic research on literacy development, formative assessment, and differentiation. Language competence is operationalized as an integrated set of abilities observable in performance: decoding and reading fluency, comprehension strategies, vocabulary breadth and depth, grammatical awareness in meaning-making, spelling and punctuation control, and coherent oral and written

expression. Diagnosis is conceptualized as recurring micro-assessment embedded in instruction rather than as rare high-stakes testing. The methodological framework assumes criterion-referenced interpretation: pupils' results are compared with explicit descriptors of mastery, not with classmates' averages.

The diagnostic toolkit described in this thesis consists of short, frequent tasks that capture mechanism-specific evidence. Reading diagnosis includes accuracy and fluency measures combined with comprehension prompts that separate literal retrieval from inference and interpretation. Vocabulary diagnosis combines contextual meaning tasks and word-use tasks, revealing whether difficulties stem from limited lexical knowledge or from weak contextual reasoning. Grammar diagnosis focuses on functional use of forms in sentences and texts, not merely rule recall, while spelling diagnosis distinguishes between stable rule-based errors and attention-related slips. Writing diagnosis collects evidence of text-level coherence, sentence construction, and revision behavior. Planning is defined as the alignment of lesson objectives, task variants, scaffolding tools, and assessment criteria. Differentiation is designed through planned variation of support and complexity while maintaining unity of learning goals.

The synthesis yields a coherent diagnostic-to-planning model with three key outcomes. First, diagnostic evidence becomes instructionally useful when it is specific to mechanisms rather than generalized as "weak language." For example, low reading comprehension may result from limited vocabulary, insufficient inference strategies, or unstable decoding that consumes cognitive resources. When teachers identify the dominant mechanism, they can select the most appropriate support, such as vocabulary pre-teaching, inference prompts, or additional fluency practice, instead of lowering text difficulty across the board.

Second, differentiated planning becomes systematic when task variability is aligned with the same competency target. In text-based lessons, all pupils can work toward identifying the main idea and supporting details, but the pathway varies through scaffolding intensity and independence demands. Some pupils may receive segmented text, guiding questions, and a lexical glossary, while others work with the full text and justify interpretations using evidence. In writing, pupils can share the same communicative purpose and genre, but differ in supports such as sentence starters, planning templates, or editing checklists. Such planning preserves equity by keeping the learning goal common while ensuring that each pupil's task is within reach and still cognitively meaningful.

Third, formative feedback and revision function as the bridge between diagnosis and growth. Diagnostic findings guide what feedback emphasizes, while revision tasks create opportunities for learners to act on criteria and improve performance. Over time, repeated cycles of criterion-based feedback support self-regulation, because pupils internalize what quality looks like and how to achieve it. The model therefore treats revision not as remediation for a few, but as a normal learning practice that can be scaffolded differently across pupils.

The proposed framework clarifies why diagnosis must be embedded and continuous in differentiated mother tongue teaching. Literacy development is gradual and uneven; a pupil can be fluent in oral expression but weak in spelling control, or accurate in decoding but fragile in inference. If diagnosis is occasional and global, planning will rely on stereotypes and fixed grouping, increasing the risk of labeling and unequal learning opportunities. Mechanism-specific diagnostics, by contrast, support flexible grouping that changes across competencies

and lessons. This flexibility reduces stigmatization and allows pupils to experience both support and challenge depending on the objective.

The framework also addresses feasibility. Teachers often perceive differentiation as burdensome because it appears to require separate lesson plans. Diagnostic-based planning reduces this burden by promoting a stable lesson architecture with variable scaffolds. When a teacher designs a core task and prepares a limited set of scaffold templates that can be activated based on diagnostic signals, differentiation becomes a routine rather than an exceptional effort. Importantly, the model aligns with research on formative assessment showing that feedback improves learning when it is timely, specific, and connected to opportunities for improvement. In mother tongue lessons, feedback is most powerful when it targets strategies and choices, such as how a pupil inferred meaning, structured a paragraph, or checked spelling, rather than merely pointing out errors.

Equity remains a central concern. Differentiation can unintentionally reduce access to rich language if struggling pupils are consistently given simplified texts and low-demand tasks. The proposed approach counters this by insisting on common competency targets and by using scaffolding to enable participation in meaningful language activity. Supports are designed to fade as competence grows, reflecting the developmental logic of scaffolding. As pupils gain control, they move toward greater autonomy, transferring responsibility for monitoring and revision from teacher to learner.

Diagnosing pupils' language competence and planning differentiated instruction are inseparable components of effective mother tongue teaching. This thesis proposes a criterion-referenced, mechanism-specific diagnostic approach and an aligned planning model that preserves common learning goals while varying scaffolding and complexity to support equitable progress. The synthesis indicates that differentiation becomes academically rigorous and practically manageable when teachers collect frequent micro-evidence across key language domains, interpret it in terms of underlying learning mechanisms, and embed formative feedback with revision opportunities. Implemented consistently, this framework can improve literacy outcomes and foster learner agency by making growth pathways transparent and achievable.

References

1. Выготский Л. С. Мышление и речь. М.: Лабиринт, 1999. 352 с.
2. Бабанский Ю. К. Оптимизация процесса обучения. М.: Педагогика, 1982. 192 с.
3. Tomlinson C. A. How to Differentiate Instruction in Academically Diverse Classrooms. 3rd ed. Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2017. 176 p.
4. Black P., Wiliam D. Assessment and classroom learning // Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice. 1998. Vol. 5, No. 1. P. 7–74.
5. Hattie J., Timperley H. The power of feedback // Review of Educational Research. 2007. Vol. 77, No. 1. P. 81–112.
6. Stiggins R. J. Assessment for Learning: A Key to Student Motivation and Learning. New York: Pearson, 2005. 304 p.
7. Snow C. E., Burns M. S., Griffin P. (eds.) Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children. Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1998. 432 p.

8. Ehri L. C. Learning to read words: Theory, findings, and issues // Scientific Studies of Reading. 2005. Vol. 9, No. 2. P. 167–188.
9. Nation I. S. P. Learning Vocabulary in Another Language. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. 624 p.
10. Graham S., Harris K. R. Writing better: Effective strategies for teaching students // In: Graham S., MacArthur C. A., Fitzgerald J. (eds.) Best Practices in Writing Instruction. 2nd ed. New York: Guilford Press, 2013. P. 3–23.
11. Guskey T. R. Implementing Mastery Learning. 2nd ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2010. 224 p.
12. Zimmerman B. J. Becoming a self-regulated learner: An overview // Theory Into Practice. 2002. Vol. 41, No. 2. P. 64–70.

