

Linguistic heterogeneity in higher education: Practical advices for teachers

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Abstract

Linguistic heterogeneity in higher education reflects the diverse cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds of students, enriching the academic environment while posing challenges for educators. This paper explores the role of teachers in recognizing and promoting linguistic diversity through adaptive teaching methods and practices that foster mutual understanding, communication, and community building. Emphasizing differentiated instruction and interactive activities, the study highlights the importance of adaptive approaches in creating an inclusive educational framework. The role of technology and personalized learning paths are also examined as essential tools in addressing linguistic diversity. By integrating these strategies, educators can enhance the learning experience, ensuring no student is disadvantaged due to language barriers.

Keywords: *Linguistic heterogeneity, Adaptive teaching methods, Inclusive education, Multilingualism, Differentiated instruction.*

Linguistic heterogeneity in higher education reflects the rich variety of cultural, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds of students (Garcia, 2008). While it adds richness to the university environment, teachers face the challenge of creating an educational context that supports all students.

In the multicultural environment of higher education, teachers must recognize linguistic diversity and develop practices that promote learning and social inclusion (Cummins, 2000). Establishing conventional learning requires an understanding of students' different language concerns.

In order to meet these challenges, teachers can adopt practices that enhance mutual understanding. The dialogue between teacher and student can be enhanced, allowing the exchange of cultural elements (Canagarajah, 2013). In addition, adaptive teaching methods ensure that every student can understand and acquire knowledge, regardless of language background.

Encouraging open communication and community helps recognize and capitalize on students' language in the course. In this way, the teacher forms a shared educational journey where linguistic coherence is crucial (Tsitsanoudi-Mallidi, 2018).

The role of the teacher

The role of the teacher in highlighting linguistic diversity is essential. Depending on the need for diverse practices, the teacher can incorporate activities that promote the use of diverse languages in the classroom. For example, it can encourage students to share myths or stories from their languages, thus offering a glimpse into the diverse linguistic aspects of the classroom.

In addition, he can use languages subtly during lessons in order to highlight linguistic diversity. For example, by encouraging students to exchange ideas in their mother tongue during discussions, the teacher contributes to highlighting and strengthening linguistic diversity.

At the same time, it can promote projects that highlight linguistic diversity, such as poetry collections or publications in multiple languages (Tsitsanoudi-Mallidi, 2018). Through these practices, students realize the value of linguistic diversity and the power it brings to the educational area.

The teacher forms a conscious approach that fosters tolerance, mutual understanding and respect for linguistic diversity in higher education.

Adaptive teaching methods for everyone

The development of adaptive teaching methods is an important factor in dealing with linguistic heterogeneity in higher education. The central idea behind the use of these methods is the recognition that "one size does not fit all" and therefore tailoring education to the individual needs and skills of each student. This approach seeks to create an educational environment that encourages learning for all, regardless of their language abilities.

Adaptation of content and presentation reflects an important aspect of this approach. In courses such as linguistics, where diversity in language skills is strong, the use of alternative learning methods is suggested. According to Tomlinson, 2014, differentiated teaching practices are vital to meeting the needs of all students.

For example, offering alternative methods widens the range of students who can benefit from the course, ensuring that no one is "left behind" due to language challenges. According to Gardner's, 1993, Theory of Multiple Intelligences,

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adapting to the different preferences of students enhances the effectiveness of education.

Also, incorporating interactive activities such as language games and group discussions is a key element of adaptive practices. According to the research of Hall, Strangman, and Meyer (2003), cooperation and mutual exchange of language experiences is enhanced through activities that promote active participation.

In addition, the application of technology, as mentioned in the work of Rose and Meye (2002), through electronic platforms for online courses, offers students additional flexibility. This allows them to choose the way of learning that best suits their individual preferences, as also supported by the work of Tomlinson (2014), enhancing self-management and ease of access.

Communication and community: the role of the teacher

In terms of communication and community building in the educational area, the role of the teacher emerges as a critical mediator. Communication plays a key role in developing an environment that promotes linguistic heterogeneity. The teacher is responsible for creating an open and encouraging environment that allows students to freely express their ideas (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

Active communication, the exchange of ideas, opinions and knowledge, enhances mutual understanding (Ganratchakan, 2015). The teacher, as the facilitator of this interaction, has the task of creating an open and encouraging climate where students feel comfortable expressing their thoughts. Creating such an environment allows the educational process to be rich and varied, reflecting knowledge as complex and multidimensional (Vygotsky, 1978).

In this context, the organization of language events and workshops emerges as an effective practice (Tomlinson, 2014). An example of effective practice is organizing a language event, where students have the opportunity to present their creative works on a diverse language platform. It can include poetry readings, theatrical performances, or even presentations in different languages. This type of event promotes multilingualism and artistic expression, while also creating a space where students can interact and share personal language experiences. Another example of effective practice is the fun and interactive language workshop. Students may participate in activities such as language games, role plays or communicative language exercises. These events encourage collaboration and active participation, creating an environment where students exchange ideas, work together to solve language problems and enhance their language skills (Papadopoulos, 2023).

In addition, the formation of open communication spaces and support for activities that promote interaction are necessary practices for the teacher (Hall, Sharples, Mitchell, Cambourne, & Macionis, 2003). These processes help create a rich learning environment that promotes interaction and collaboration among students.

The adaptation of teaching methods, combined with the teacher's role as mediator, form a rich educational environment that recognizes and exploits linguistic heterogeneity. By supporting communication and community building, cohesion and mutual engagement are promoted, thereby enhancing the educational experience for all.

Practical advices

In summary, here are some suggestions regarding the adaptation of teaching methods that will provide students with the opportunity to develop their language skills in the most effective and adaptive way:

- *Adapting assessments:* An example of adaptive practice is adapting assessments. Depending on the language abilities of each student, assessments may include various forms, such as oral exams, written assignments, or even alternative forms of assessment that allow students to choose how they express themselves best (OECD, 2013). Below we present two examples of student evaluations: (*example 1*) Oral exams - for a language or literature course, the assessment can be adapted to take into account the different language abilities of the students; course assessment stages: all students present a written coursework on a literary paper; adaptation of course assessment - oral examinations: depending on language abilities or level, some students will be asked to present their coursework orally instead of a written submission; alternative forms of course assessment: students who have difficulty expressing themselves verbally can submit personal video feedback on their coursework - students can choose between an oral presentation, podcast recording or video creation. In this way, students have the opportunity to choose the way they feel most comfortable and demonstrate their language skills. This promotes the development of their skills in an adaptive and encouraging way, and (*example 2*) Portfolio of language coursework - as part of a language course, students have the opportunity to create a portfolio of language coursework that will be assessed at the end of the semester. This portfolio will include various forms of coursework, thus enabling students to choose the way they express themselves best. Oral exam (20% of the total grade): students will choose a topic and present their opinion orally before the teacher. The oral exam allows direct assessment of oral communication and language expression; written coursework (30% of the total grade): students will choose a topic of interest and submit a written coursework. Written work allows students to express their thoughts in

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more detail; alternative forms of course assessment (e.g., podcast or video) (15% of total grade): students have the option to present their ideas via podcast or video. This alternative format allows for creative expression and the use of different skills. With this approach, students have the opportunity to choose the mode of assessment that best suits their own language abilities and preferences.

- *Adapting the learning pace:* During a series of lectures, students can adapt their learning pace according to their individual needs. Some may need more time to understand topics, while others may be able to move faster. Through registration or online materials, students can adjust their learning pace (Murphy, 2014). Below we present two examples that can be applied to the idea of adjusting the pace of learning in a language course: (*example 1*) personalized listening activities: during the week, the teacher offers various listening activities to the students, such as audio files with interviews, radio programs, and various listening materials; students have the freedom to choose which activities to attend, adjusting their pace of understanding to their level or each lecture of the language course is accompanied by an audio and video recording. Students, depending on their level of understanding, can choose to attend the entire lecture or view specific sections that interest them most. In addition, providing extra notes with explanations on difficult topics helps students who need more time to understand, and (*example 2*) interactive exercises and online text library: During lectures, the lecturer encourages students to progress to different levels of learning. On the online platform, interactive exercises with different levels of difficulty are available. Students choose the exercises that suit their needs, enhancing their learning step by step. At the same time, an online text library offers material for translation and comprehension, allowing students to explore texts of interest and progress at their own pace.
- *Group work:* Within adaptive methods, students can participate in group work that allows for mutual support. Groups can be formed based on language skills so that students of a similar level can work together and exchange ideas in their own language (King, 2017). Below we present two more concrete examples of group work in a language course: (*example 1*) students are divided into groups based on their level of language learning. Each group receives an online article in the target language and a dictionary for the corresponding language. Their task is to translate the article into the language they are learning, taking into account the content, the overall goal of the article, and the intended audience. After the translation, they must explain their language choices in a short report, and (*example 2*) creating a digital book for children: students are tasked with creating a digital book in the language they are learning, designed for primary school children. Groups choose a theme such as nature, friendship or adventure. Each team member contributes a page of the book that includes text, images, and audio. The team uses interactive elements to make the book interesting and educational.

The books are then shared throughout the class for students to share with each other and peer-review. These activities promote collaboration, creativity and the development of language skills through practice and mutual support.

- *Personalized learning paths*: Using learning platforms that provide personalized learning paths is another example of adaptive teaching. Each student can follow a customized learning program that meets their individual needs and is adjusted according to their progress (Laakkonen, 2011). Below we present two examples of using personalized learning paths: (*example 1*) *customized lesson chapters*: in a language course, the learning platform can provide different chapters and topics with different levels of difficulty. Each student starts with an initial level and can only move on to the next chapter when they are ready. Thus, the learning path is fully personalized, and (*example 2*) *self-assessment and adjustment*: students start with an initial diagnostic test that analyzes their abilities and weaknesses in the language. Based on the results, each student receives a personalized learning plan, which includes exercises and activities to strengthen the specific areas that need more attention. As they progress, the program automatically adjusts based on their progress.

These examples are just a small introduction to how adaptive methods can be integrated into environments with linguistic heterogeneity, thus promoting full and effective education for all.

Conclusion

The adaptation of teaching methods in the context of linguistic heterogeneity in higher education is emerging as a vital factor in promoting effective learning. Recognizing the diversity in students' language abilities leads to the need to create adaptive methods, which ensure that no student is left behind because of language challenges.

Adaptation of content and presentation is critical, with the use of alternative learning methods responding to the diversity of language skills. Incorporating interactive activities such as language games and group discussions encourages active participation and mutual exchange of language experiences. The use of technology, such as online platforms, offers flexibility in education, allowing students to choose the way of learning that best suits their individual preferences.

The proposed teaching practices are closely linked to basic principles of the educational process, focusing on differentiating instruction and supporting individual students' progress. Differentiation allows methods to be adapted to each student's needs and skills, while the emphasis on individual progress encourages each student to develop at their own pace.

The key point is the integrated approach to adaptation, which highlights knowledge as complex and multidimensional. This approach enables students to develop their language skills in a way that is both effective and adaptive. In this way, an educational framework is created that reflects the diversity of students and encourages their continuous development and involvement in the learning process. Overall, the adaptation of teaching methods creates an interesting, interactive and stimulating environment that enhances language skills and promotes cooperation between students.

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