

CAN DIFFERENTIATED ASSESSMENT TEACH NON-PHILOLOGICAL STUDENTS TO MANAGE THEIR OWN LEARNING?

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Abstract. *This study investigates whether differentiated formative assessment — feedback calibrated to a student's actual proficiency level rather than a single fixed standard — helps non-philology students develop stronger self-regulated learning behaviour over the course of a semester. Self-regulation was measured through a validated questionnaire and coded learning logs, with semi-structured interviews used to explore the mechanism behind any observed change. The study hypothesizes that the effect of differentiated assessment will be strongest among initially lower-proficiency students, for whom generic feedback tends to be least informative. If confirmed, the findings would reposition differentiated assessment as a tool not merely for managing classroom heterogeneity, but for building durable, autonomous learning habits in students who have limited further opportunity for structured language instruction.*

Keywords: *differentiated assessment, self-regulated learning, foreign language teaching, non-philological education, formative feedback.*

Most discussions of differentiated language instruction focus on what gets taught and to whom — which tasks go to stronger students, which scaffolding goes to weaker ones. Less attention goes to a quieter effect that may matter just as much in the long run: whether being assessed differently, rather than against one fixed standard, changes how students think about their own progress. For non-philology students, who typically get only a couple of hours a week of language instruction and cannot rely on a teacher to track their development closely, the ability to judge and adjust one's own learning — what the literature calls self-regulation — may matter more than for students immersed in a full philology programme. Self-regulated learning is usually described as a cycle: setting a goal, monitoring progress toward it, and adjusting strategy based on what the monitoring reveals. Standard, one-size-fits-all assessment gives students a single number against a single bar, which tells a strong student little they did not already expect and tells a struggling student mostly that they are behind, without much information about what to do next. Differentiated, formative assessment — feedback pitched to where a student actually is, on tasks matched to their level — is hypothesized to give both groups something more usable: information specific enough to act on.

This study aims to determine whether a system of differentiated formative assessment, used over a full semester of foreign language instruction for non-philology

students, leads to measurable improvement in students' self-regulated learning behaviour, compared with conventional summative assessment. The hypothesis is that students who receive ongoing, level-adjusted feedback develop stronger goal-setting and self-monitoring habits than students assessed only through periodic standardized tests, and that this difference is more pronounced among students with lower initial proficiency, for whom generic feedback is least informative.

The study uses a pretest-posttest design with an experimental group (n=87) receiving differentiated formative assessment — short, frequent, level-adjusted feedback tied to individual learning goals — and a control group (n=84) assessed through the institution's standard testing schedule. Self-regulation was measured using a validated self-report questionnaire administered before and after the semester, supplemented by students' own learning logs, which were coded for evidence of goal-setting, self-monitoring, and strategy adjustment.

To understand the mechanism behind any measured change, not just its size, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subsample of fifteen students from the experimental group, asking them directly how differentiated feedback changed — or did not change — the way they approached studying between sessions. These accounts were analysed thematically, alongside instructor reflections collected through brief structured debriefs after each assessment cycle.

If the hypothesis is supported, the findings would suggest that differentiated assessment is not only a tool for managing classroom heterogeneity in the moment, but a way of building habits that outlast the course itself — habits particularly valuable for students who will have limited further opportunity for structured language instruction once their elective hours run out. This reframes differentiation less as a teaching technique and more as a form of preparation for autonomous learning, which is arguably the more realistic long-term outcome for non-philology students than fluency achieved within the classroom alone.

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