

Heterogeneity in the English Language Classroom

Introduction: content and tasks

Winter Term 2026/27



Build the skills you need for today's diverse English classrooms.

This online seminar combines collaborative group work, authentic teaching scenarios and digital tools such as CoLearn! to make your learning practical and engaging.

You will work with peers from different locations, guided by experienced tutors. Along the way, you will build expertise in multilingualism, heterogeneity and lesson design. This prepares you for your exams and for your future career as an English teacher.

We look forward to welcoming you to the course.

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Welcome!

Welcome message by Prof. Dr. Petra Kirchhoff

Transcript

Difference is something to celebrate. The fact that our students come from different backgrounds, speak different languages, hold different views and engage with media in different ways – that is not just a challenge. It is exactly what makes English teaching so rich. My name is Petra Kirchhoff and I hold the chair of English language teaching didactics at the University of Augsburg. Why this course? Because the English classroom is one of the most diverse spaces in school today and I want us to think seriously and creatively about how we can work with that diversity, not against it. My expertise sits at the intersection of instructional quality, language learning research and teacher knowledge. I've worked at the universities of Munich, Regensburg and Erfurt and since 2023, I've been here in Augsburg. But before academia, I taught in schools in Ireland, Bavaria and Thuringia and the classroom experience is at the heart of everything I research and teach today. What fascinates me the most? Well, teaching English is never just about language. It's about helping young people think critically, read thoughtfully and navigate a complex world. We do not just teach grammar; we actually teach humanity. And difference is our greatest resource in that work. I'm glad you're here. Let's get started.

Welcome to the demo version of the VHB seminar “Heterogeneity in English Language Teaching”.

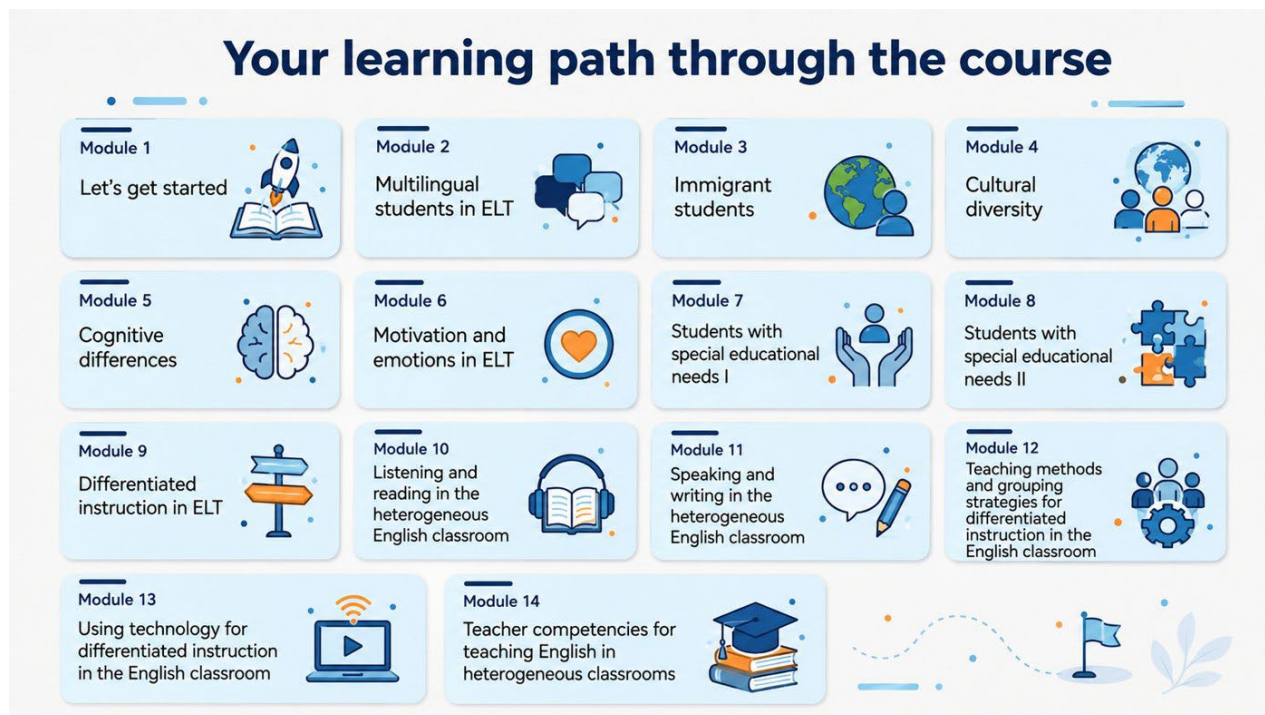
We are delighted that you are interested in our course. This demo offers a brief insight into one of the seminar modules. You will see an excerpt designed to give you an impression of the course style and content. We also provide an overview of the learning objectives and other relevant course information here. This course is designed at an intermediate seminar (Proseminar) level.

Our society has become more and more diverse in recent years, and schools reflect this change. In Bavaria, we still have different types of schools, but if you look inside the classroom, you will not find one single “typical” learner. Instead, students bring very different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, they show different strengths and levels of motivation, and some learners have disabilities or are neurodiverse.

Because of this, teachers cannot work with a one-size-fits-all lesson anymore. They need to design learning opportunities that reach as many learners as possible, that support them at different levels, and that show that every learner is valued. The key question for us is What does this mean for teaching and learning English?

In this seminar, we will look at central dimensions of diversity that matter in the English classroom. We will explore core ideas and practical strategies of differentiated instruction. Together, we will discuss how inclusive, learner-centered approaches can be planned, tried out, and reflected on in real English lessons.

About the course



Overview of modules

Slide 1 of 3

Course Organization and Assessment

The course is made up of **14 modules**, which will be released week by week.

- We begin with an **introduction to the topic**. After that, Modules 2–8 explore key dimensions of diversity in today's language classrooms.
- In Modules 9–13, you will learn more about **differentiated instruction** and how it can be used in different teaching contexts.
- The final module focuses on the **professional teaching competencies** you will need to plan and apply differentiated instruction effectively.

To receive the **ECTS credits** for this course, you are expected to take an active part in the seminar tasks and complete a **final written exam**.

Slide 2 of 3

Learning Aims

To teach well in a differentiated classroom, teachers need to be able to:

- value learner diversity
- support all learners
- work with others, including in multi-professional teams
- keep developing professionally throughout their careers

In this course, you will learn to see diversity as a resource. You will also develop practical ideas for supporting all learners in your English classroom.

Slide 3 of 3

Learning with stories, not just theories

In this seminar, you will not just *read* about diversity in the English classroom – you will experience it through case studies, visuals, and short audio scenes.

- **Fictional teachers and learners**, based on real interviews with learners and experts as well as research, make abstract concepts feel concrete and relatable.
- Carefully chosen **readings** and **interactive quizzes** help you build solid theoretical knowledge.
- **Reflective questions, lesson-planning tasks, and forum discussions** then give you space to try out ideas, compare perspectives, and connect everything to your own future teaching.
- **CoLearn!** in every other module in a small group of four students from different locations

Meet the authors

Britta Hertneck has been a Lehrkraft für besondere Aufgaben (teacher with special responsibilities) at the Chair of English Language Teaching in Augsburg since September 2022. She completed her teacher-training degree for Mittelschule with English as her major and German as a Second Language as an extension subject in 2011, and subsequently taught at several schools, including several years as class teacher of a German-language class for newly arrived learners. Her current teaching includes the practice-oriented accompanying course "Umgang mit Heterogenität – Adapting English language classes to heterogeneous learners" and work with H5P-based course formats.

Prof. Dr. Petra Kirchhoff has held the Chair of English Language Teaching at the University of Augsburg since April 2023, having previously been a professor at the universities of Regensburg and Erfurt and an Academic Counselor at LMU Munich, where she also earned her doctorate. Her research focuses on the professional knowledge of English teachers, subject-specific instructional quality in a transdisciplinary perspective, reading pedagogy, and the literary canon of English-language literatures in secondary schools, informed by her membership in the FALKO research group. She chaired the German Society for Foreign Language Research (DGFF) from 2021 to 2023, reviews for journals such as ELTJ and Applied Linguistics.

Benita Singer is a student assistant (studentische Hilfskraft) at the Chair of English Language Teaching in Augsburg. In this role she supports the chair's teaching and project work alongside her own studies. She passed her First State Examination for teaching in primary school at the LMU, München.

Shiva Santjohanser is a student assistant at the Chair of English Language Teaching. She assists with the chair's ongoing teaching and development tasks while studying.

Alessio Carnevale has been a research assistant at the Chair of English Language Teaching since January 2026, after studying English and Geography for the Gymnasium teaching degree in Augsburg and passing the First State Examination in 2025. He is a Hanns Seidel Foundation scholarship holder and a member of the doctoral programme "Zukunft aktiv gestalten" of the Catholic universities in Bavaria. His doctoral project investigates AI-supported feedback in process-oriented writing in the English classroom, and he teaches the heterogeneity-focused accompanying course as well as an exam preparation course.

Meet our learners



Learners on the course

Slide 1 of 2



Throughout this online course, we use **case studies** that anchor theories and practical ideas in everyday situations.

To **protect real students' privacy**, all learner profiles and student data used in this seminar were carefully researched and then images and audio-texts were generated using AI. This means that any names, backgrounds, classroom scenarios, and learner characteristics you encounter in the tasks are entirely fictional and created solely for learning purposes.

We know that working with AI-generated learners may feel unfamiliar at first. Therefore, we ask you for a small **leap of faith**. Trust the process, follow us along and you will find that these profiles open up valuable opportunities to apply your skills as a future English teacher in case studies.

The next slide offers you an example.

Slide 2 of 2



Audio: In the course, Noah introduces himself and talks about his multilingualism.

Task – Over to you

Listen to Noah explain his multilingualism. You will meet him later in the course.

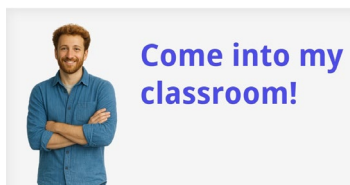


Meet our expert teachers



Teachers on the course

Slide 1 of 4



**Come into my
classroom!**

Meet **Sven**. He is your expert companion throughout this seminar! With his hands-on experience as a teacher educator in the second phase (*Referendariat*), Sven brings real-world insight straight into your learning journey.

He is here to challenge your thinking, spark new ideas, and give you the kind of expert guidance that bridges theory and the realities of the modern English classroom.

Slide 2 of 4



Always happy to share my expertise!

Bettina strongly believes in setting clear learning objectives for the students, engaging activities and classroom management. She expects trainees to justify their methodological decisions and to reflect critically on their teaching. At the same time, she understands the pressures of the induction phase and encourages steady professional growth rather than perfection.

Slide 3 of 4



Follow my first steps into teaching English!

Lukas wants to be highly attentive to his students' needs and reflects carefully on his own teaching. He values inclusive practices and wants to support every learner. However, he also experiences moments of doubt when lessons do not go as planned.

Slide 4 of 4



New in the English classroom!

Sophia is only starting out as a teacher. She approaches it with strong subject knowledge and many ideas for creative lessons. At the same time, she sometimes feels unsure when classroom situations become complex or unpredictable. She is still learning how to balance planning, flexibility, and classroom management.

Unit preview

The unit preview consists of 6 static screenshots from Module 2 “Multilingual students”. They give prospective participants an impression of the course format; the tasks visible in each screenshot are described below it.

Slide 1 of 6: What to learn (page 2 of 10)

The screenshot shows a presentation slide titled "What to learn" (page 2 of 10). On the left is a navigation menu with the following items: "Welcome!", "What to learn" (selected), "Welcome to this Module", "What is multiling...", "Different types of ...", "Key questions", "Case studies I", "Case studies II", "In the classroom", "coLearn!", and "Zusammenfassung und Einsenden". The main content area is titled "Welcome to this Module" and contains the following text:

Look around your classroom. Chances are, at least one in three of your students grew up with more than one language.

Your multilingual students are not starting from zero. Many of them already navigate two or three language systems every single day. They code-switch, they translate for their families, they think across cultures. That is a remarkable cognitive toolkit — and it belongs in your English classroom.

In this module you will ...

- (1) Develop a comprehensive understanding of multilingualism
- (2) Discover how multilingualism affects foreign language learning at school
- (3) Learn about the many ways to support multilingual students in your lessons
- (4) Focus on native speakers in your classroom and understand their perspective

At the bottom of the slide, there is a navigation bar with an up arrow, the text "What to learn", and the page number "2 / 10" with left and right navigation arrows.

Module opener with an introductory text and the four learning aims of Module 2.

Slide 2 of 6: Different types of multilingualism (page 4 of 10)

☰ Different types of multilingualism

4 / 10

◀ ▶ 🔍

2 Multilingual Students ...

- Welcome! ●
- ▶ What to learn ●
- What is multiling... ●
- ▼ Different types of... ○
- Test your knowledge
- ▶ Key questions ○
- ▶ Case studies I ○
- ▶ Case studies II ○
- ▶ In the classroom ○
- coLearn! ○

Zusammenfassung und Einsenden

DIFFERENT TYPES OF MULTILINGUALISM

There are many different types of individual multilingualism. Some important technical terms are explained in the graphic. Do you recognize any of them? **Click on the icons** to find out.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE!

Listen to Paula's short introduction and decide which type of multilingualism best describes her.

- simultaneous multilingualism
- unbalanced multilingualisms
- balanced multilingualism
- receptive multilingualism

Progress bar: 50%

Interactive graphic: clicking the icons explains key terms (heritage speakers, balanced/unbalanced, receptive and simultaneous multilingualism). Task "Test your knowledge": learners listen to Paula's short introduction and decide which type of multilingualism best describes her (single choice).

Slide 3 of 6: Key questions (page 5 of 10)

Key questions

5 / 10

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2 Multilingual Students ...

Welcome!

What to learn

What is multiling...

Different types of ...

Key questions

Key questions

Case studies I

Case studies II

In the classroom

coLearn!

Zusammenfassung und Einsenden

KEY QUESTIONS

The team has some questions about bilingual students. **Click on the speech bubbles** to find answers to their questions. After finishing one question, click on the little house icon to **go back to the first slide** and continue from there.



Is it true that simultaneous bilingualism can be **harmful** for a child's cognitive development?

Do bilingual learners have **cognitive advantages**?

Sometimes the bilingual children in my class **know fewer words**. Are the many languages just **too much** for them?

Is it really **easier** for bilingual students to learn a **third or fourth language**?

Should parents speak **German** with their children? **Will it harm the children** if they grow up speaking two or three languages? Could they become **overloaded** learning English?

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> Sources

Key questions

5 / 10

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Learners click on speech bubbles containing typical questions from teachers and parents (e.g. "Do bilingual learners have cognitive advantages?") and read research-based answers. Sources are listed below.

Slide 4 of 6: Case studies II (page 7 of 10)

Case studies II

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2 Multilingual Students ...

Welcome!

What to learn

What is multiling...

Different types of...

Key questions

Case studies I

Case studies II

Case studies

Case study: Teresa

Case study: Edon

In the classroom

coLearn!

Zusammenfassung und Einsenden

SO FAR, YOU HAVE LEARNED ...

- ... what multilingualism is.
- ... what different types of multilingualism there are.
- ... what concerns teachers and parents might have.
- ... how to deal with native speakers in the EFL classroom.

NEXT, YOU WILL ...

... get to know two of Sophia Schüller's students, and you will try to help Sophia navigate the students' multilingualism in the EFL classroom.



CASE STUDY

CASE STUDY



MEET TERESA!

Teresa is a 10th grader in Ms. Schüller's class. She's an exceptional English student. She seems to take in new words and grammatical structures really easily, and uses them in the real world. She loves thinking about languages in a meta-linguistic way. She's also got excellent translation skills.

Ms. Schüller meets Teresa's parents at a parent-teacher conference. Her dad is a primary school teacher. He's German, while Teresa's mum is Spanish and speaks Spanish with her kids at home.

Teresa is bilingual and uses both languages in her everyday life. She likes reading Spanish magazines and novels, but she prefers to watch German television channels. She often uses English on the internet and loves the BBC adaptations of Jane Austen's novels. Teresa is really keen to learn English and other languages.

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Recap of the module so far and case study "Meet Teresa", a bilingual 10th grader in Ms Schüller's class; a second case study (Edon) follows.

Slide 5 of 6: In the classroom (page 8 of 10)

In the classroom 8 / 10

2 Multilingual Students ...

- Welcome! ●
- What to learn ○
- What is multiling... ○
- Different types of ... ○
- Key questions ○
- Case studies I ○
- Case studies II ○
- In the classroom** ○
- In the classroom ○
- coLearn! ○

Zusammenfassung und Einsenden

OVER TO YOU What kind of encouragement for multilingualism have I just tried to achieve?

- Recognizing multilingual achievement
- Building metalinguistic awareness through comparison
- Encouraging maintenance of first languages
- Valuing students' languages as resources
- Affirming language as part of identity and belonging
- Showing curiosity and equal respect for all languages

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Task "Over to you": after listening to Sven, learners decide which kind of encouragement for multilingualism he tried to achieve (single choice, six options).

Slide 6 of 6: coLearn! (page 9 of 10)

coLearn! 9 / 10

2 Multilingual Students ...

- Welcome! ●
- What to learn ●
- What is multiling... ●
- Different types of ... ○
- Key questions ○
- Case studies I ○
- Case studies II ○
- In the classroom ○
- coLearn!** ○

Zusammenfassung und Einsenden

OVER TO YOU

Get together with your coLearn! group members and work on the group task. Together, you will be creating a podcast episode.

1 / 1

coLearn! 9 / 10

Task "Over to you": learners work together in their coLearn! group and create a podcast episode.

How to come on board

Before you start: check credit recognition if you are not enrolled in Augsburg or Bamberg

This VHB course was developed in cooperation between the University of Augsburg and the University of Bamberg. Students from these two universities are therefore guaranteed credit for the course.

If you are not a student at Augsburg or Bamberg University, check with your home university before enrolling. Your study adviser, module coordinator or examinations office will be able to tell you whether this course will count towards your degree programme and which module it will count towards.

Please do this first, because recognition is decided by your university, not by the vhb.

Step 1: Register with the vhb

- Go to vhb.org and open the **CLASSIC vhb course programme**.
- If you are new, create an account. If you already have one, re-register for the current semester. You need to do this every semester.
- Log in with your vhb username and password.

Step 2: Enrol in the course

- Find the course in the course programme or with the course search.
- Click the course title to see the details and deadlines.
- Click "**zum Kurs anmelden**".
- The course will then appear under "**Meine Kurse**". Click "**zum Kurs**" to get started.

Step 3: Register at your home university

- If you are a student at Augsburg or Bamberg University, please, also register for the course or exam at your own university, using its usual system and deadlines.
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Important: Enrolment is only possible during the registration period, so don't leave it until the last minute.