



RESEARCH PAPER

Effectiveness of Using Differentiated Instruction for Enhancing ESL Learners' Individual Needs

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ABSTRACT

The present study intends to explore the use of differentiated instructions in Pakistani ESL classrooms. The concept of differentiation is deliberated as a determinant in quality education whether in theory or practice. As far as the ESL/EFL context is concerned, English being lingua franca holds great significance. Differentiated Instruction provides the solution to the challenges faced in learning a language due to the complexity of a language, and the diversity of the learners. A one-size-fits-all strategy is considered a left-out strategy keeping pedagogical approaches in line with 21st-century skills, there is a dire need to prepare learners for global demands. The study followed an interpretive approach and was qualitative. Six ESL teachers were interviewed to gauge their experience regarding DI. Data was analyzed thematically and it has been analyzed that only some elite schools of Pakistan are practicing DI in their ESL classrooms. Therefore, it is recommended to make arrangements for its implementation on a larger scale in Pakistan.

KEYWORDS Differentiated Instruction (DI), English as a Second/Foreign Language, Learners' Learning Styles, Needs Analysis, Pakistan

Introduction

The basic need for every human being is to communicate and that can only be possible through interaction and communication:

"Language has subsisted, acclaimed as the hallmark of humankind, the capability that separates humans from beasts" (Berko-Gleason, 1997, p.7).

The phenomenon of learning a language is complex:

"Language is not something that comes in nicely packed units and it certainly is a complex multiple and kaleidoscopic phenomenon" (Ron Scollon, 2004).

Need for Differentiated instructions in ESL classrooms

Differentiated Instruction aims to provide students an equal opportunity to get an education but in a variety of ways. DI offers learners to learn through ways that interest them and engage them in their classes (Tomlinson 2003). At the same time, it creates an environment that invites students to a positive, motivated classroom to cater to their individual needs. Differentiated Instruction is the philosophical approach to carry the process of learning keeping in view the multiplicity, variety, divergence, and globalization. The basic elements of DI consist of content, process, product, and learning environment based on learner context, needs, interests, or learning preferences (Ginja, T. G., & Chen, X. 2020).

In a country like Pakistan, where the English language has an official status as well as is used as a second language it is used as a medium of instruction. A paradigm shift in teaching has been introduced to meet learners' individual needs. According to Khalil, A., Baig, S., & Javed, F. (2023), sustainable development goals and 21st century skills also target

learners to prepare for global demands and needs. DI can also be related to achieve these goals.

Use of Differentiated instructions in ESL classrooms

Hoffman (2011) maintains that classrooms that implement differentiated instruction have fewer behavioral problems. Learners may feel inadequately when they're weary, alienated, or disengaged (Fox & Hoffman, 2011). Engaging learners, connecting with them in a particular position, and meeting their requirements within this setting, are vital to good instruction and association (Fox & Hoffman, 2011; Hall, 2003). The learners are proficient style-shifters, being able to change from informal to formal speech or vice versa, depending on the situation (Yule, 2007:208): A socio-constructivist view also insists that learners' learning is facilitated when students are challenged in their learning—a belief that is informed by Vygotsky's (1986) theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1986) posits that instruction should be just beyond students' readiness levels, to facilitate academic growth. Carol Ann Tomlinson's work based on Differentiated Instruction has been vital, based on the course of this present day, not only discusses the concept of Differentiation but also elaborates how it can be done.

It is through the use of Differentiated Instruction that teachers can through the aid of material that is foreign, give instructions based on local relevance. Pedagogically, consideration of the social framework requires effort on its part. Therefore, while teaching keeps in view the Differentiated Instruction, it does keep into account the socio-cultural practices of the society for contextual relevance for effective learning. With Globalization, the diversification in learners is widening and so are the consequences of it. Whether it is the learning content, process or teaching outcomes, everything needs to be taken into consideration for Differentiation as part of empathetic pedagogy. Unfortunately, the learner's differences when it comes to effective pedagogy, have been long ignored, and unanimous teaching methods have been applied. We tend to neglect the reality that all learners have different needs, and if we want them all to be successful in learning, we owe it to them through Differentiated Instruction.

The diversification in the educational system requires a need for the appropriation of instructions. It is through the implementation of differentiated instructions that the challenges of diversification are met. A one-size-fits-all teaching strategy cannot fulfill the needs of all learners belonging to a variety of backgrounds. There are many variables responsible for the differences amongst the learners ranging from internal to external factors therefore it necessitates the power of differentiated instruction in the pedagogical world.

Literature Review

Differentiated Instruction Theory- Theory of Differentiation

Differentiated Instruction Theory, also known as the theory of Differentiation in education, is the philosophy of teaching learners based on their differences. It varies from individual to individual in so many ways based on their abilities, preferences, styles, etc.

According to Carol Ann Tomlinson, "differentiating instruction means 'wobbling up' what happens in the classroom; consequently, learners have a variety of ways for gaining knowledge, comprehending thoughts, and communicating whatever they know (p.16)".

Tomlinson, 2003 suggested a one-size-fits-all approach is not as effective as Differentiated Instruction in education. He further explained how differentiation is done through the four elements taken into consideration. They include content, process, product, and environment as shown below:

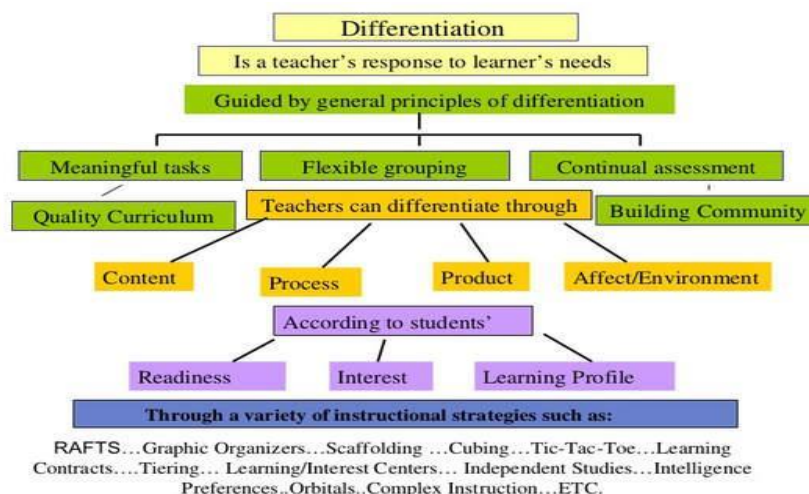


Figure 1: Differentiation demarcation suggested by Tomlinson, 2003.

One-size-fits-all approach

Learners come from diverse academic backgrounds hence they vary in different ways within the classroom. This diversity in the classroom leaves three options:

1. Use a one-size-fits-all approach
2. To segregate the learners
3. Amalgamation of the diverse learners in the classroom.

It is important to have learner-centered classrooms, with learners having a safe learning environment without any cut-throat competition, through the use of authentic materials, and giving them the most appropriate tasks. This just does not stop here; rather the process of differentiation ensures the production of the right kind of assessment that helps the different kinds of learners to make improvements. Backing up the argument made earlier in the study regarding the one-size-fits-all approach to teaching, researchers like Borja (2015), one learning instruction which is provided by the teacher might not be able to fit all of the students' differences in one classroom. It is not wise to believe that one teaching approach would be effective for all students possessing different individual differences. Keeping this in mind experts emphasize the pressing need to implement the differentiated instruction approach in classrooms which is believed to provide students with equal opportunities to learn the target language effectively.

Exploring differentiation practices to address student diversity

Indeed, though, educational systems have responded to pupil diversity by establishing classrooms with different situations of pupil capability, globally (Dupriez, 2008). Recent exploration in this regard reveals that a different pupil population is becoming more common and important than it was earlier. Almost all EFL classroom settings are filled with students who vary from one another in terms of abilities, interests, learning styles, and many other individual differences. The reason behind this could be the fact that every single student brings a different learning background to the classroom which has an impact on their ability to connect their prior knowledge to the new one. The individual differences might be unique but they might affect the teaching and learning process, especially the learning instruction that teachers give in the classroom.

Material and Methods

Interpretive paradigm was used to conduct the research study as it construes meaning out of the findings, is open-ended, exploratory, descriptive, and naturalistic in nature which is subjective to each individual and their varied and diverse experiences of a phenomenon under study

Qualitative research design is followed through the inductive approach to get the final results. Inductive reasoning begins with specific observations based on some standards. Therefore in the current study differentiated instruction was a main variable to see whether this is being practiced in the Pakistani context or not. (Baig 2022).

Population

Six ESL teachers were selected to take semi-structured interviews to gauge whether differentiated instruction practices in Pakistani ESL classrooms.

Results- Thematic Analysis

Differentiated Instruction

Most of the teachers were of the view that differentiated instruction helps learners in improving their individual needs. However, they think that DI is implemented on a very small scale and has significantly better results than teaching through traditional pedagogical approaches.

“Some of the kids would be learning, but only on the surface level, others would be learning, you know, in in more depth, and some wouldn't be learning at all. So not the same type or style of learning could be adapted to all learners, you need to understand what you know, what will help that specific, and tailor it to them. Otherwise, it's a surface level learning and that doesn't help any” (interviewee. 1. P2)

Learning Style and Strategies

Some teachers are of the view that differentiated instruction also contributes to the concept of implementing students' varied learning styles:

“Not everyone will have the same learning, you can say curve or learning way how they learn their, their way of learning, their way of understanding things might be different”. DI can better be implemented through a needs analysis. (interviewee. 5)

Process-based approach

A few teachers shared that differentiated instructions not only help in improving individual needs but also help teachers in implementing a process-based approach in their instructions.

Differentiated instructions cater to learners' learning

One interviewee shared that differentiated instruction helped one of her students who was struggling with learning language and was diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

I made specific worksheets and plan for that students' and that had amazing results (Interviewee. 2).

Limitations/challenges while Differentiated Instructions

However, teachers shared limitations in implementing differentiated instructions in the ESL classrooms of Pakistan are lack of teacher training, large classes, and limited teaching time to complete the course.

Because of less exposure people as well administration don't focus on DI *"And it becomes a burden for us (Interviewee 3).*

Discussion

It is analyzed differentiation is not in exercise in Pakistani context because of lack of awareness of this concept. According to pedagogical trends the best way to teaching is through inclusivity and diversity. By the same token, the research also propagates that differentiated instruction aids learners in enhancing their learning and improves their deficiencies (Dupriez, 2008)

Large classrooms also hinder in its implementation, findings of the study unfolded that large class sizes in Pakistani ESL classrooms hinder effective teaching. Similarly, in Tomlinson's 2003 research, he also revealed the large class size practices.

Hartwig, S. J., & Schwabe, F. (2018) explored similar issues when it comes to teaching practices concerning DI. He also stressed teacher training as it plays a central role in the incorporation of differentiated instruction, by making use of various teaching methods, styles, or techniques.

It is analyze that learners with learning disabilities like autism spectrum, speech delays and ADHD (Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) must be given more teaching time and they must be made technologically smart through using EYERIS, or other technology oriented gadgets.

Conclusion

It is concluded that DI usage is in a small scale. It is exercised only in a few elite schools of Pakistan. But teachers find adverse effects of this as it has made students engaged in their learning as well made them more creative. But they have a view that because of limitations of a large classrooms it is difficult for them to implement it.

Recommendations

- Further research must be conducted to implement and monitor the use of DI in educational institutes of Pakistan.
- The barriers towards the implementation and exercise of DI must be minimized
- DI must be implemented especially for learners with learning disabilities like autism spectrum, speech delays or ADHD
- Class size must not be more than twenty students for a successful implementation of DI
- DI should also be applied for distance learning programs to cater to a larger scale population of Pakistan

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