

APPLICATION OF DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTIONS IN ENGLISH CLASSES

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Abstract: Teachers sometimes fail to give appropriate teaching instructions that are suitable for a mixed-ability classroom because these instructions do not match students' needs, interests, and proficiency levels. The main purpose of the present study is determining the practicability of the "Differentiated Instruction" (DI) activities in school grades in Namangan, in accordance with the teachers' perceptions, by considering important roles in the practice of the approach. Data for this study were collected using non-participant natural type of observation and unstructured interview with English language teachers (N=3) from the same school (School 7) in Namangan city. Observation and interview data revealed that teacher experience affect the way of utilizing DI strategy. Also it was identified that EFL teachers need a special trainings and workshops concerning the usage of DI effectively in teaching.

Key words: differentiated instructions, grammar, RAFT, tiered activity, challenges.

INTRODUCTION

An important and predominant theme in educational psychology is the uniqueness of individual students. In recent years, there has been a growing number of publications focusing on differentiating instructions in the classroom to meet students' needs. In differentiated classrooms, teachers provide specific ways for each individual to learn as deeply as possible and as quickly as possible and there is no one "right way" to create an effectively differentiated classroom; teachers craft responsive learning places in ways that are a good match for their teaching styles, as well as for learners' needs (Tomlinson, 1999. p.3).

LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the most pressing problems of teaching a foreign language at school is a differentiated approach to teaching. Each teacher, along with the use of this method, faces difficulties, such as: inability to find the optimal combination of individual, group and frontal forms. There is a growing body of literature that recognises the importance of differentiated instructions (DI) and it has been the subject of much systematic investigation. A number of studies have reported the benefits of DI in education. Differentiated instruction can help students choose their learning and evaluate their improvement. Furthermore, DI allows students to showcase what they have learnt based on their interests. However, planning for differentiated instruction and the noises the groups made while implementing it are two main barriers in differentiated instruction implementation (Magableh & Abdullah, 2020. p. 538).

By understanding the needs of students, teachers are able to modify their teaching practices and use different instructional methods to deal with diversity, allowing all students to reach the same target, even if they take different routes (Jamoliddinova & Kuchkarova, 2019. p.4).

Uzbek classrooms are filled with students who have diverse backgrounds, experiences, abilities, interests and learning styles. It is therefore difficult for teachers to meet the needs of all students in the classroom with traditional teaching approaches. Jamoliddinova and Kuchkarova emphasize the interface of teachers' classroom instructions and learners' abilities, interests and level lead to extensive research focusing on the instruction strategies. Considering the mixed ability of learners, there is a big need to implement DI strategies in secondary school classes in Uzbekistan (Jamoliddinova & Kuchkarova, 2022).

Teachers and educators when craft classrooms, should discern that they cannot stick to one method of teaching as children do not learn through one teaching style. Some students want to learn alone, while others with peers; some prefer rapid-fire learning while others want demonstration and reflection (Aftab, 2015).

Determining the individual characteristics of the student's personality and organizing on this basis the teacher's activities aimed at developing the mental abilities of each student. Since the ability of students to learn a foreign language is not the same: some find the language easy, others have great difficulty. It should also be noted that educational material in different training courses can be acquired by students of the same course in different ways: some learn vocabulary more easily due to well-developed mechanical memory; others have more developed auditory perception, so they easily and successfully cope with listening tasks. In addition, all students have a different way of thinking. Studying the interests, inclinations of children, their educational capabilities, as well as analyzing the prospects for the development of these opportunities should serve as the starting point in a differentiated approach to teaching a foreign language.

Despite of the usefulness of DI in all classes including language lessons as well, there is a gap in utilizing it in the classroom by teachers. The reasons for the impracticability of the approach are: the limited time and the intensity of the content areas, the inconvenience of the classroom structures because of crowded and multi-grade classes, the inadequacies in teacher education, and inadequacies in the participation of education shareholders (family, school management etc.) in the teaching process (Pilten, 2016. p.30).

The main difficulty lies in the selection and use of tasks of a differentiated complexity system. The second difficulty lies in the psychological perception of why one student (weak in level of training) should perform an easier task and is assessed well by the teacher, while another (strong in level of training) with a large investment of time and mental abilities must complete a more complex task.

The teacher has only one way out - strengthening the motivation of students, using all the teacher's reserve motivational capabilities to successfully solve the same task with the whole group of students. I, as a teacher, try to get out of this situation with the help of another principle - an individual approach to each student, otherwise material not mastered once can make the student constantly lagging behind. An individual approach allows teachers to anticipate the occurrence of possible conflict situations in the classroom, which is also important during the lesson.

A differentiated instructions to training should be considered not only as "tasks of different difficulty and complexity to achieve the same ultimate learning goals," but also

somewhat broader. These kinds of implementations can be defined as useless or a systematic as students are assigned to a task that is more advanced, or much easier than the conceptual framework they learn. However, differentiation in education is not an approach based on “more” or “less” challenge trials (Pilten, 2016).

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative experiment was conducted based on the observation of classes and unstructured interviews with teachers after the classes considering teachers’ perception and the aim of using DI strategy during the lesson. For data collection three English language teachers from the same school (School#7) of Namangan city were chosen as a convenient sample who volunteered to take part in the experiment.

DATA

Participants

Three English language teachers of different age and experience volunteer to participate in data collection process. To preserve the anonymity, the participants and their answers were coded in the code books as T1, T2, and T3. Participants were thanked for their time, effort and contribution to the research.

Table 1 Age and Experience

Participants	Age	Experience
T1	33	10
T2	33	8
T3	45	23

Tools

Non-participant natural type of observation was organized in which a researcher, do not get involved in the activities of the group but remain a passive observer, watching and listening to its activities and drawing conclusions from this (Kumar, 2011. p. 141-143). *Observation sheet* was designed with the following sections to observe English lessons in Grade 7: Topic, Number of students, Teacher’s action, Student’s action, Comments.

Unstructured interview was conducted with participants after the lesson. The strength of unstructured interviews is the almost complete freedom they provide in terms of content and structure (Kumar, 2011). During the interview the main focus was on the questions about teacher experience, class profile to create a friendly atmosphere with the participant and continued with questions about DI strategy so that to identify a teacher’s perception and ideas, and finish with questions discussing the purpose of using and activity based on DI strategy.

DATA ANALYSIS and RESULTS

Observation

Teacher#1: utilizing DI in teaching grammar.

Teacher 1 conducted the lesson in Grade 7. The topic was: The present perfect tense and the simple past - similarities and differences in use and translation. The development of structures with these tenses was carried out through clarity, visual action, and pictures.

Students' answers are corrected by additional questions from the teacher. Strong and weak students worked together. The strong students helped the weak ones by correcting mistakes.

Mastery of this grammatical material is successfully carried out with the help of handouts - cards. Tasks of 3 degrees of difficulty were offered, depending on the level of students' mastery of these structures:

- for students with a high degree of preparation, a task was given - describe the Picture with the available choice of cards;
- less prepared – look at the picture, answer questions;
- students with a low level of proficiency were asked to use cards with verbs of the required tenses. The students were allowed use a reference book or table.

By practicing such grammatical structures in this way, students mastered them at a level accessible to them.

Teacher#2: utilizing DI in teaching and developing writing skills

The lesson was with Grade 7 students and the main aim of the lesson was focused on developing writing skills on letter writing. The four elements of RAFT were introduced to students before giving the task:

- **Role of the Writer:** Who are you as the writer? A pilgrim? A soldier? The President?
- **Audience:** To whom are you writing? A friend? Your teacher? Readers of a newspaper?
- **Format:** In what format are you writing? A letter? An advertisement? A speech?
- **Topic:** What are you writing about?

T2 showed a sample letter and discussed key elements of the letter with the whole class.

RAFT

ROLE	AUDIENCE	FORMAT	TOPIC
Plant parts	Plant needs	Picture	We have made for each other
Roots	Leaf, flower, seeds	Letter	You would be lost without me
Flower	Stem, leaf, seeds, roots	Advertisement	I am more than just a pretty face
The sun	plants	Speech note and role play	I am very important for the world

It seemed that rafting was a familiar task to the students as they completed the tasks without difficulty. During the interview T2 is also prove it that she used RAFT often because it helps students to work easily either individually or in pairs and produce writings according to their interests or learning profile.

Teacher#3: tiered activity in writing class

T3 also conducted a writing lesson using Tiered activity which allows creating more than one version of a task so that teachers can respond to students' varied levels of readiness. T3 grouped students into 4 levels according to their readiness and language level.

Level 1:

1. a What types of technology do you use at home? At school? At your grandparents' house?

- I have...
- My school has ...
- At my grandparents' house, they have...

1. b What types of technology do you use every day?

- I use...
- Every day,
- I always use...

Level 2:

2. a What types of technology do you use at home? At school? At your grandparents' house?

2. b What types of technology do you use every day?

Level 3:

3. a Describe unacceptable uses of cell phones or computers.

3. b Describe how technology has changed. Give specific examples.

Level 4:

4. a Your neighbor doesn't know how to use the computer. Write out a series of steps to help him/her send an email.

4. b Have you ever had problems connecting to the internet? If you answered "yes," tell about the problems you had and how you solved them. If you answered "no," tell what you do that helps you always have a good connection.

Interview

An interview process took an approximately 15 minutes to discuss the flow of the lesson, aim of the activity, teachers' perceptions about DI strategy, benefits and personal challenges in using DI activity in the lesson. The interviews were recorded and transcripts were made for making grounded analysis.

T1: *"Learning grammar is not very interesting for students. They prefer reading or watching a movie and discussing what they listened to and watched. From this point of view, I try to provide the grammar rule with more communicative tasks, which allows students to complete the tasks and learn the grammar. Considering students' different level of language it is very productive to differentiate the tasks and instructions. However sometimes it is time consuming process to design the activity"*.

T2: *"I often use RAFT. Students very like this activity and do it with a great interest both individually or in small groups. Also I give sometimes a writing task based on RAFT table as homework. When students come to the class they read their writings and discuss. As a teacher I would like to take training how to use other strategies of DI effectively in my classes"*.

T3: *"Actually I have a little idea about DI but I read it and heard about it from my colleagues that DI is a chance to involve almost all students to the learning process and organise collaborative atmosphere during the lesson. So, it was the first time for me to practice tiered activity and I realise that DI really works well for me and my students. But I should read more about this teaching strategy (DI)"*.

CONCLUSION

Differentiated instruction is a cyclical process of finding out about the learner and responding by differentiating. As we continue to learn more about the learner, we respond by differentiating instruction with increased precision and effectiveness. Effective differentiated instruction requires that educators take thoughtful and deliberate actions to address the particular needs of students. One of the most significant current discussions in X is ...

Empirical research shows that there are many challenges of implementing DI because of the wide spectrum of students' differences, needs and concerns, and patterns of thinking (Aldossari, 2018; Dixon et al., 2014) and teachers struggle to implement instructional approaches to address the needs of students (Islam, C., & Park, M., 2015).

The study conducted by Jamoliddinova and Kuchkarova has found that generally teachers are not so much aware of DI; teachers are textbook oriented; teachers assume that they are conducting lessons in communicative approach but in reality, it can rarely be observed. The research has also shown that teachers mostly utilize Grammar-translation method using L1 a lot and in consequences learners do not have access to English; there is little opportunity for students to interact; grammar and vocabulary are taught in word level or in sentence level rather than in context. (Jamoliddinova, N. & Kuchkarova, Y. 2022).

It can be observed that in Uzbek context:

- teachers seldom experienced DI in their teacher preparation programs;
- teachers had few, if any, opportunities to see multitasking classrooms in their training;
- teachers need more practice in differentiation through workshops that allow them to understand DI concepts and have a clear picture.

Teachers need to conduct needs assessment of students in the classroom and check and evaluate them by grouping students with the same interests, readiness level, learning needs and background. Also, differentiated instructions generate the desired results when the teachers not only use them frequently, but maintain a record of its success in their planners so that successful strategies can be shared (Aftab, 2015. p.9).

Differentiated instruction application needs the teachers' commitment in order to make it reality. It needs commitment from the school administrations to train teachers on using the differentiated instruction strategies and to provide them with the necessary materials for application. Teachers need to alter their teaching strategies in order to use the styles that best fit to a given student. Besides, teachers should provide more scaffolding for learners who lack some basic skills and provide more challenge to above grade level students according to the Zone of Proximal Development. When overcoming the barriers, differentiated instruction will become the right solution to mixed-ability classrooms (Magableh & Abdullah, 2020).

Aftab indicates that the responsibility of implementing differentiated strategies does not fall only on teachers, but joint and coordinated effort is required from all stakeholders of middle schools to make it possible. Teachers find it toilsome to implement differentiated instructions due to classroom management issues where discipline is a main problem. Also, they are given a planned course content which they have to cover in the given time (Aftab, 2015. p.9).

When teachers recognize diversity in their students, in terms of how and what they identify with and how they learn, and when this recognition is reflected in how teachers teach, students are free to discover new and creative ways to solve problems, achieve success, and become lifelong learners." (Ferguson et al., 2005).

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