

# Implementing Differentiated Instruction (DI) Strategy in Teaching English for Low Achieving Fifth Grade Students of Cuenca Central School

Angelene Lojo\*

*Teacher III, Department of Education, Division of Batangas Province, Philippines*

\*Corresponding author: angelenelojo17@gmail.com

**Abstract:** Identifying an effective and appropriate instructional strategy to help the growing diverse learners in today's classrooms reach their full potentials is a goal for educators. Teachers need to differentiate instruction and provide students with different avenues of learning to maximize their learning process. Differentiated instruction has received much attention as a key solution but seems challenging. The current study dealt with the usefulness of differentiated instruction and traditional-based pedagogy in the promotion of male and female learners reading comprehension in separate gender educational system. The purpose of this study was to systematically reflect upon the teaching practices, and to investigate the benefits and impact of this strategy. Fifth grade students of Cuenca Central School were chosen and divided into experimental and control groups. The students of the experimental group were taught through the strategies of differentiated instruction. The students of the control group also received traditional instruction strategies. The outcomes from posttest results indicated that the students of the experimental group outperformed the control one. Findings of this study are presented and highlight the necessity for further explorations on the effect of differentiated instructional practices on enhancement results thus, we hypothesized that students would benefit from the varied instruction. Quantitative data was collected in the form of grades from pretest and posttest. The differences between the results of these tests revealed the positive impact on the implementation of differentiated instruction. Some conclusions and suggestions are proposed for further and practical development of this topic.

**Keywords:** DI Strategy, Differentiated instruction, English, Language.

## 1. Introduction

Like Science and Math, English is a difficult but an important subject because the curriculum considers it as a tool subject needed to understand the different content subjects. Basically, it is concerned with developing competencies in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and viewing. The K to 12 Basic Education Curriculum aims to help learners understand that English is involved in the dynamic social process which responds to and reflects changing social conditions. The curriculum aims that pupils are given an opportunity to build upon their prior knowledge while utilizing their own skills, interests, styles, and talents. However, teachers find difficulties

in teaching different kinds of pupils with different intellectual capacities, talent or skills, interest, and learning styles especially in heterogeneous groupings of pupils. This situation calls for teachers to create lessons for all pupils based upon their readiness, interests, and background knowledge. Differentiated instruction is an approach and philosophy of education that aims at addressing and meeting the students' diversity. Considering the purpose of the approach Tomlinson (2000) suggested a comprehensive and concise definition for it: "differentiation consists of the efforts of teachers to respond to variance among learners in the classroom. Whenever a teacher reaches to an individual or small group to vary his or her teaching to create the best learning experience possible, that teacher is differentiating instruction." Differentiated instruction is based on the concept that the teacher is a facilitator of information, while students take the primary role of expanding their knowledge by making sense of their ability to learn differently (Robinson, Maldonado, & Whaley, 2014). According to Tomlinson (2009), DI as a philosophy of teaching is based on the premise that students learn best when their teachers accommodate the differences in their readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles. It sees the learning experience as social and collaborative. The responsibility of what happens in the classroom is first to teacher, but also to the learner (Subban, 2006). This is all about an effort to put differentiation in practice by following the guidelines of effective differentiated instruction and evaluating its implementation and its effectiveness aiming to find a way to reach all students. The information presented in this research will provide teachers with further information about the differentiated instruction approach and its effectiveness on student's achievement. Therefore, a differentiated teacher plans the instruction based on individual students. The teachers should accept that students differ from many perspectives, so as to prepare and design curriculums according to the students' interests, and abilities using various channels of presenting the lessons and with varied complexity. To this end, the study differentiated instruction as a strategy in developing the reading comprehension of the students would be important to teachers, administrators, parents, and community stakeholders.

## 2. Literature Review

This literature presents a summary of the relevant literature and the research supporting differentiated instructional strategies and practices and provides the necessary information to understand what a differentiated instruction approach looks like in a classroom. It is true that with more students in classrooms and more responsibilities put on teachers, the relationship between students and teachers is more demanding and challenging. Therefore, individualization is more difficult to obtain. In the meanwhile, it is important to bear in mind that with different students in class, more flexibility is needed so that no one is left behind, and success is achieved by all. Differentiated instruction is a teaching approach based on the evidence that instructional approaches and strategies should vary and differ according to the different needs of the diverse learners in a classroom. There are also students who prefer working individually while others prefer working with partners or in teams, as stated by Anderson 2007, (p. 50). M. Nordlund, (2003) points out some types of students that teachers may come across in classrooms: “students who demonstrate above-average intelligence, students who are considered ““at risk”” of school failure, students with cultural/language differences, students who are educationally disadvantaged, students who have a slow rate and student who qualify for special education services” (p. 1). Each student has his/ her own and unique way of understanding and processing information. They may see the same thing in a different manner or have different perspectives or interpretations of an action or sentences, for example, depending on the aspects pointed above by Nordlund. Students are all different; they come to school from different backgrounds with different interests, knowledge, and learning styles. Nordlund (2003) states, “teachers are clearly challenged by the task of diversifying instruction in order to help every child meet their full potential” (p. 1). When teachers consider and are aware of students’ diverse interests, readiness levels, and learning profiles then they will provide better instruction and plan learning opportunities that promote student success. Interest, readiness, and learning profiles match with content, process, and product when planning for a differentiated classroom. Tomlinson (2001) stated “A differentiated classroom provides different avenues to acquiring content, to processing or making sense of ideas, and to developing products so that each student can learn effectively” (p. 1). According to Tomlinson 2001, content is the “input” of teaching and learning. It is what is being taught or what teachers teach (p.72). Content can be differentiated by targeting specific goals for the student to master (Bailey & Williams-Black, 2008). Using quantitative and qualitative methods, data gathered were in support of the differentiation variables that had a positive relationship to student achievement. Choice, interest, learning styles, and pre-assessment were the most variables found to have impact on student achievement. Findings of the research support the theory of learning styles and the researcher suggests that teachers just beginning differentiation should first

process a learning styles inventory to their students. Besides, the researcher provides teachers with two manageable techniques with which to begin differentiation: choice and interest.

## 3. Results

Our initial hypothesis was that implementing strategies of differentiated instruction (DI) could positively impact students' progress. We attempted at implementing teaching strategies with a DI approach. An open-ended survey was distributed among the teachers to register their experience of differentiated instruction. It can be unstated from the outcomes of the research that one standard curriculum cannot answer to the needs of all students of the same ability level. Thus, the managers and teachers should effort at scheming and applying varied educational programs to meet the students' interests and needs. The following are the findings of this action research. The mean scores of both control (11.76, Sd=4.06) and the experimental (12.07, Sd=3.56) groups do not significantly differ based on the t-coefficient result of 0.8109 which is lesser than the tabular of 1.9845 at 98 degrees of freedom. The mean scores of the control (16.45, Sd=2.34) and the experimental (13.82,

Sd=3.53) significantly differ which favor the use of DI from the t-ratio of 3.423 is greater than the tabular value of 1.9845 at 0.05 level of significance using 98 degrees of freedom. During the pretest, majority of the pupils are average (control group, 35 or 71.43% and 37 or 72.55%). After the conduct, however, majority of the pupils in the control group became average (34 or 69.39%) and above average (35 or 68.63%). There is no significant difference between the control group's pretest and posttest scores based on the computed t coefficient of 0.09 which is lesser than the tabular value of 1.9850 using 96 degrees of freedom but significant difference exists for the experimental group as signified by the calculated t-ratio of 1.02 is greater than the tabular value of 1.9840 using 98 degrees of freedom.

## 4. Conclusion

In the light of the results, it could be determined that the DI strategies was real in teaching English among the fifth-grade students of Cuenca Central School.

The study reached the following conclusions:

1. Using a diversity of lessons can be a source of reformation among students.
2. Students' collaboration with each other enables the process of education.
3. DI approaches upgraded the teacher's teaching in the class since they provide for individual differences, learning styles and intelligences. Students interacted more actively with DI strategies rather than the traditional methods.
4. School children improved when they learn according to their needs.
5. Differentiated Strategies are a must for each class to stimulate students and to expel any source of boredom.

### 5. Recommendations

Based on the above findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are suggested.

1. DI should be used in teaching pupils in English especially in heterogeneous classes because it improved their classroom performance.
2. Teachers should be given in-service trainings on DI for them to gain more knowledge and clear understanding of the approach.
3. Although tedious on the part of the teachers, they should be encouraged to prepare and use DI to motivate pupils to participate in class discussions.
4. Teachers should pay attention to the students' desires and level at the beginning of the semester so that they can address those needs using different appropriate strategies.
5. DI is a philosophy and teachers may use different methods other than those mentioned in the study teacher's guide.

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