ELT in a Multilingual Country: Is Differentiated Instruction the Way forward?

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Structure of Presentation

• What is differentiated instruction?
• Why do ESL/EFL teachers need to differentiate?
• Previous study
• Ongoing project
Suggestion for teaching differentiation is not new

Washburne (1953: 139): the assessment system treats learners as if “all children could learn the same things at the same chronological age if they tried hard enough”

“It is generally and not unreasonably regarded as the sign of a good teacher that he should be able to differentiate between the abilities of his respective pupils and to know their natural bent. The gifts of nature are infinite in their variety, and mind differs from mind almost as much as body from body” (Quintilian, 95 CE, trans. Butler, 1922: 265)
Recurring general principles to be adopted for teaching differentiation in a single classroom

1. Focus on important ideas and skills in the respective content area (Rock, Gregg, Ellis & Gable, 2008; Tieso, 2003; Tomlinson, 1999).
2. Modify learning content, process, and products to match students' needs (Bender, 2012; Piggot, 2002; Subban, 2006; Tomlinson, 1999).
3. Ensure the classroom to respond to individual students' differences to help students experience success (Chick & Hong, 2012; Pham, Rock, Gregg, Ellis & Gable, 2008; Tieso, 2003; Tomlinson, 1999).
4. Allow for flexible groupings (Ernst & Ernst, 2005).
5. Create a student-oriented environment where students are meaningfully challenged (Ernst & Ernst, 2005; Subban, 2006).
6. Employ formative assessment by integrating assessment and instruction to allow for adjustments in instruction (Ernst & Ernst, 2005).
7. Cater for students' prior knowledge, critical thinking, and preferred styles of expression (Rock, Gregg, Ellis & Gable, 2008; Tieso, 2003; Tomlinson, 1999).

Definition

Tomlinson (1999): a set of instructional modifications at three levels: content, process, and product.
Selected Literature

Problems with teaching to the middle

Teachers attempt to find a middle point and focus on learners with middle academic ability mainly through whole-class instruction (Bondie, Dahnke, & Zusho, 2019).

Some challenges to differentiate teaching:
- Time-consuming
- Lack of training
Why differentiate in ESL classrooms?

Preparation, Data Collection and Data Analysis
Results

QUAN DATA
• Student-participants scored significantly higher in the post-test (M=114.62, SD=10.00) than the pre-test (M=108.38, SD=10.62).
• Null hypothesis that there was no difference is rejected, t(25)= 4.581, p ≤.005.
• Cohen’s d = 0.89

QUAL DATA
• (+) reaction in classroom
• Increase in learner autonomy
• acknowledgment of differing learning tasks

Textbook Analysis: Malaysian Curriculum

Comparative Analysis of English Textbooks

Advantages
- Good students’ engagement (Nurul-Ain & Aztina, 2019)
- Various ELT strategies possible especially speaking activities
- Adequately challenging vocabulary lesson (Abdul-Hakim et al., 2019)

Disadvantages
- Limited cultural relevance (Nurul-Ain & Aztina, 2019)
- Negative effect on reading comprehension and recall (Hoff & Raye, 2021)
- Little synchronisation between textbook content and national curriculum (Abdul-Hakim et al., 2019)
Ongoing Project

Differentiated ESL Module for learners from non-urban areas

- English culture: increase affective component
- Local cultures: acknowledge identity, avoid threat to national language (UNESCO)
- Other cultures: inculcate appreciation for other groups of people

Thank you

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