

Investigating the Role of Differentiated Instruction in Promoting Language Acquisition in Mixed-Ability TEFL Classes

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to establish the effects of toned teaching and learning on second language acquisition within TEFL classroom where both low and high achievers coexist in Saudi Arabia. Employing a quantitative research design, the study involved 200 secondary school students divided into three groups based on the level of DI implementation: It will be classified as Low DI, Medium DI and High DI. Measures included structured language assessments to measure specific components of language acquisition such as matched word and pseudo-word reading and speaking fluency. Consequently, there was a statistically significant difference between the High DI group and the other two groups with regard to all language areas pointing to the efficiency of the used DI strategies. The influence of the observed group differences was confirmed by both the Analysis of Variance ($F_{12, 341} = 8.362, P < 0.001$) and regression analysis, according to which the chosen types of DI could explain 35% of the variability of the language proficiency test results. Co/extra: These findings also indicate that the strategy of differentiated classroom instruction will support language learning in mixed ability TEFL settings. It highlights the need to design instruction accordingly, and will provide a detailed call for theoretical and practical preparation of teachers and institutions to achieve the best results of DI.

Keywords: differentiated instruction, TEFL, mixed-ability classrooms, language acquisition

Introduction

These years, DI is considered as an essential focal strategy especially in Sci- RE classrooms where students are heterogeneous in terms of their learning achievements. DI is therefore described by Alonso et al. (2005) as an approach that provides educators with the flexibility of modifying content, process and product delivery to match the needs of students in a classroom to ensure they access important information in the most effective way possible. This appears appropriate when applied to TEFL in Saudi Arabia because the execution of Vision 2030 has increased the necessity of the English language for change in the country's economy and society (Picard, 2018). Considering the new demand for Saudi TEFL classrooms where students' population becomes more diverse DI, which presents a more effective approach in the classroom, is paramount in addressing the diverse learners' needs in order to foster equitable learning environments that will provide equal opportunity to each learner.

As Ansari (2013) pointed out the difficulties of effectively teaching mixed ability classes include language proficiency, motivation, and learning preferences. In the context of TEFL, learners are likely to vary in terms of their past experience with the English language, intellectual processing power, and willingness to learn language learning tasks (Asassfeh, 2015). Selective these challenges, differentiated instruction ensures that diversity is contained through stroked student grouping, variation of task difficulty, and individual response provision (Weiss et al., 2024). DI is acknowledged in this study to play an essential role in managing mixed ability classes and the limited research carried out makes an attempt in the present study to understand its influence on language acquisition in Saudi Arabia's context for TEFL.

The implementation of differentiated instruction into TEFL classrooms has revealed a possibility of improving the students' motivation and interest. Salma (2020) emphasize on the advantages of DI and say that, Organization of children into small heterogeneous groups and using individual instructional approaches enhances learning and the motivation of students. Governor et al. (2021) has done additional research on the same subject and used it to support his assertion noting that learners who receive DI are more confident to participate in any activity that is carried out in class. When inequalities in learner mastery threaten to undermine the effectiveness of engagement in mixed-ability TEFL classrooms, DI is identified as a feasible strategy that can help make these classes more equitable for struggling learners (Johnson, 2021). Nevertheless, there is a need to focus on effects of DI on language acquisition outcomes, especially in Saudi Arabian context.

In the current literature, scholars have given little emphasis on the effects of DI on TEFL and language learning despite several studies on the use of DI in general education classroom settings (Sato & Loewen, 2022). For instance, a cross-sectional study by D'Intino & Wang (2021) underscored improvements in cognition linked to differentiated instruction across diverse learning areas but said little about how differentiated instruction surfaces and develops language. This gap informs the study of how DI impacts basic language acquisition skills like lexical development, reading, and speaking and fluency in Saudi TEFL class. Furthermore, the general cultural and educational background of KSA setting may also pose some practical difficulties that may impact on the applicability of the concept as well as the results of the concept (Alomrani, 2021). Thus, this research seeks to fill this gap by investigating the implicational of DI on the enhancement of language development in mixed-ability TEFL classes in Saudi Arabia.

To this extent, one of the major goals of the present work is to evaluate the impact of the following categories of DI approaches tiered assignments, scaffolded instruction, and targeted feedback for promoting language development among learners with differing levels of language learning readiness (Rafi & Pourdana, 2017; Ahearn, 2024). Based on existing literature, tiered work assigns different degrees of difficulty and can thus facilitate cognition at the right level for the learner to gain knowledge (Willison et al., 2024). In addition, instruction that is scaffolded, where learners are provided assistance in incremental manner as they learn new concepts has been found to increase the learners' vocabulary and their ability to comprehend texts in culturally diverse classes (Taboada & Rutherford, 2011). In this paper, these strategies are explored in

the Saudi TEFL context with an aim of offering empirical support for the effects of differentiated instruction on language achievement.

The Problem of the Study

This call for English due to Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 has raised compelling issues in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) Classroom. Firstly, there are variations on the kind of abilities and proficiency level of students and this usually causes variations on patterns of learning accomplishment and interest. Transtwo Approaches to Instruction approaches of TEFL have been ineffective to meet the students' needs for variety in mixed ability classrooms, due to the lack of sufficient flexibility in mixed ability classrooms (Ambreen, 2017). Thus the gap widens and the lower level students lose track of the better learning peers hence it disengages and leads to lower learning outcomes in the second language.

DI holds the key to this problem because it enables teachers to gear teaching strategies to meet the needs head on. The increased awareness of DI in other educational context still shows the absence of clear understanding of DI effects on language learning in Saudi TEFL context. The absence of such research requires further questions about the general potencies of DI on key language learning processes including; vocabulary, reading proficiency, and speaking strategies and fluency in mixed classrooms. However, the present study aims to fill this gap by examining the effect of differentiated approach in the improvement of language development in the mixed ability TEFL classrooms of Saudi Arabia.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

1. What is the overall impact of differentiated instruction on language acquisition in mixed-ability TEFL classrooms in Saudi Arabia?
2. How do various differentiated instruction strategies, such as tiered assignments, scaffolded instruction, and targeted feedback, affect learners with different levels of language proficiency?
3. To what extent does differentiated instruction contribute to enhancing students' motivation and engagement in mixed-ability TEFL classrooms?

Significance of the Study

It is important that this study may provide remedies for educators, policymakers, and researchers that focus on language education especially in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the study intends to apply the findings on the role of differentiated instruction on language acquisition to offer significant findings on the appropriateness of a selected number of DI approaches to meet the students' needs in heterogeneous TEFL classrooms. It is therefore expected that the outcomes of this study would help in establishing better teaching and learning strategies that would assist in providing equal opportunities for all learners though learning to enhance their chances of success as dictated by Cole (2008).

In addition, this study exclusively focuses on the Saudi TEFL context, thus, contributes effectively to the existing literature towards achieving the objectives of Vision 2030 which prioritises English proficient human capital to boost the economic advance of

the country and engage in international interactions (Singh et al., 2022). Considering the revealed features of the challenges and opportunities of using mixed ability classes in classrooms, this research can potentially contribute to the establishment of future policies for the further improvement of language education in Saudi Arabia. At the same time, it is also possible that the results of the present study can open up avenues for future studies in the area of differentiated instruction in general for students in TEFL and in other related fields of language learning.

Terms of the Study

The span of this study entails an examination of DAI in light of heterogeneous classrooms taught with TEFL in Saudi Arabia. The analysis of the research considers a range of approaches to the implementation of DI which includes tiered leveled assignments, scaffolded instruction, targeted feedback to identify relationships between these strategies and key language skills including vocabulary, reading, and speaking. When used in this study, differentiated instruction means the approach used in classroom where the teacher makes changes to the content, process, or product depending on the needs of the learners (Tomlinson, 2014).

The target population of the study therefore is the students in general mixed-ability TEFL classes in Saudi Arabia where heterogeneity of ability and learning requirements is a complex factor for teaching. In this study, the term “mixed-ability” was used to mean students who can be grouped into main classes at achieving different levels of English language skills, differing academic abilities including their ability to learn, and differing learning readiness for language learning tasks (Calderón et al., 2011). This research paradigm employs quantitative research methods, in a quantitative assessment of the results of language acquisition interventions, as well as the efficiency of differentiation pedagogy techniques.

Limitations of the Study

However, recognizing key limitations of the present study is vital before proceeding with the analysis of differentiated instruction in mixed-ability TEFL classroom, and thus these are: First, the use of a quantitative research design may also reduce the richness of the insights that one can have regarding the implementation process and students and teacher’s experiences during its analysis. Despite the fact that quantitative methods enable to recognise prevalacies and connections, they can be hardly adequate when concerning the specifics of classroom interactions and learning processes.

Second, this present study is carried out in a certain Saudi context and therefore the results cannot be applied to other cultures or learning environments. Hypothesis 2 Teachers’ beliefs about instruction may also vary in Saudi TEFL classrooms: Again, Saudi TEFL classroom characteristics, such as language learning motives, and students’ prior schooling may impact differentiation in manners not seen in other countries. Last, the study used survey data from students and teachers and, therefore, was susceptible to biases concerned with clothes one wants to wear and high or low estimates of the professional activity frequency.

Literature review and Previous studies

In language acquisition situations, differentiation has been shown to increase learner participation, interest, and language learning. Deunk et al. (2018) did a good meta-synthesis analysis on the cognitive effects of DI in classrooms; From this analysis, it was discovered that DI has a positive effect on achievement of students across all the areas of curriculum, including language development. Deunk and colleagues stated that the approaches of grouping, + individualization, as well as description of individual feedbacks are the crucial approaches of DI that contribute to the possibilities of the teacher to work with the learners. In the same manner, Kaur et al. (2018) discovered that use of tiered assignments and scaffold led to enhanced students' language skills in TEFL classrooms, particularly in terms of vocabulary and reading skills.

Differentiated instruction has a theoretical foundation from social constructivist theorist Lev Vygotsky's (1978) concept of zone of proximal development. According to Vygotsky, learning happens best when activities are structured at the level of the learner's development and are scaffolded. This theory correlates well with DI as it focuses attention on ensuring that students complete tasks that are just barely within their ZPD while providing the students with adequate assistance in ensuring they achieve instructional level mastery of the tasks (Vygotsky, 1978). In TEFL classrooms that accommodate students with diverse language learning levels, DI helps the teacher to choose classroom strategies to reach out for every student probably making language acquisition more effective (Horwitz, 2020).

Teaching in collaborative learning environment that involve students with different abilities levels including linguistic is more complicated especially when students come from different learning background. Tactical studies show that the learner-centred strategies often used in the classroom result in failure since they are over-centralized and standardized without considering the differences in the learners' needs (Johari & Chan, 2017). Alshumaimeri (2019) emphasized that in Saudi Arabian context, the classrooms that utilize TEFL with low-average and low-low classrooms gap and distinguished degree of prior English experience, intellectual achievements, motivation levels. This means that there is the need to adopt more open and student friendly teaching methods that will enable every child to learn as expressed by DI.

Such challenges explain why differentiated instructions present an opportunity for teachers to focus on distinct methods of teaching and learning to meet the needs of all students in the classroom. Oleson (2023) also showed that through the use of DI strategies, namely flexible grouping and tiered activities, students' attention can be captured and learning space made to become more egalitarian. DI motivate the students / especially the lower performing ones/ to participate in tasks which should be sufficiently demanding but within their reach as exemplified in the study by Wu. This finding may have important implications for TEFL classrooms in Saudi Arabia since the teacher's major challenge is to sustain student motivation and engagement (Alshumaimeri, 2019).

Some researches have considered the effect of the DI on language learning in TEFL classes, and these are encouraging. According to a study conducted by Coubergs et al. (2017), the purpose of the study was to establish the impact of DI in improving

language abilities of middle school students learning in mixed ability language groups. According to the findings of the researchers, the use of DI approaches, including the implementation of varied questioning and the use of differentiated texts, enhanced students' reading achievements and speaking skills. In this study, Coubergs et al. (2017) pointed out that when a teacher structures instructional activity according to the students' learning skills and encourages inspiring comments, learning atmosphere can be enhanced.

In a similar manner, in their investigation of tiered assignments in mixed ability TEFL classroom, Kaur and Noman concluded that DI technique had noticeably positive impact on the students' improvement in terms of vocabulary and their ability to comprehend what they read. The researchers were keen to stress that tiered assignments can work to let teachers show pieces of content that are difficult and feasible at the same time to the learners. Besides the language development this approach has positive effects on students' self-efficacy and motivation (Kaur et al., 2018).

To the best of the researcher's knowledge there are no Saudi Arabian based, specific to differentiated instruction for language acquisition in TEFL classrooms. Saudi English teachers' perception, knowledge, and practice of implementing differentiated classroom instruction for all: Mixed methods study Alshumaimeri (2019). This study highlighted that despite understanding the positive aspect of DI a number of teachers experienced challenges when implementing and developing the differentiated activities on account of insufficient professional development and fewer instructional resources available with the teachers. In Saudi TEFL classrooms, Alshumaimeri (2019) found that DI should be supported by more specific professional development for teachers and instructional coaching.

SM Abdelshaheed (2017) also followed the current study to understand the role of DI in Saudi TEFL context specially on impact of DI on vocabulary and reading comprehensions. DI strategies that were used in the study included scaffolded instruction and flexible grouping; all of which boosted students' vocabulary and reading comprehension as concluded by Ghaffar. Academic accomplishment of the study stressed the necessity of continuing professional development for the teachers and instructional coaching to ensure the right use of DI in Saudi TEFL classrooms.

Although other researchers make efforts to understand the efficiency of differentiated instruction in the context of mixed-ability classrooms, there are research issues that raise concern in relation to Saudi TEFL programs with respect to the language acquisition. The vast majority of prior studies has looked into typical classrooms or has addressed DI within curricular content areas, such as mathematics or science (Almutairi, 2022; Roy et al., 2013). Hence, it is necessary to carry out more focused research that investigates the impact of DI on specific language learning skills, particularly the use of vocabulary, reading as well as oral skills an important component in the Saudi context for TEFL classrooms. This study aims to fill this gap by assessing the effectiveness of differentiation in enhancing language development in Saudi Arabia's TEFL classroom with mixed ability learners.

Methods

Research Design

The purpose of the study was dependent on a cross-sectional, quantitative research approach in that data was collected at one particular point to assess the correlation between differentiated instruction and language development. This design enabled the determination of the effectiveness of different DI strategies including higher order tasks, structured teaching learning sequences as well as feedback on students' important language competencies including vocabulary development, reading and speaking skills.

Participants

The subjects in this study comprised two hundred students in mixed ability TEFL classes in different secondary schools in the KSA. This means that in the process of selecting the participants in the study random sampling method was used to ensure that students in the study were a true sample of the population. The sample included students with various English comprehension and learning abilities, and their preparedness for language acquisition exercises. All students had been in the mixed ability TEFL classes for not less than one teaching semester so as to effectively sample the instructional environment is being investigated.

Furthermore, 10 TEFL teachers who teach these classes were also participants in the study. This process enhanced a more realistic view of how differentiated instruction strategies can be implemented in classrooms through the teachers' participation. The teachers' participants were chosen based on their experience in managing the mixed-ability classroom and their awareness of applying the differentiated instruction approach.

Data Collection Instruments

Student participants were given a standardized language proficiency test to administer the data gathered in this study. This test was designed to assess students' language skills in three key areas: In the primary language classroom the facets targeted are the: vocabulary, reading, and speaking. The language proficiency test used in this study was based on valid and reliable test developed in accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The test consisted of the following sections:

Vocabulary Acquisition

This section checked the students' capacity to identify and apply a vast number of VNE. They included questions whereby students are supposed to select the most appropriate meaning of a particular word in different contexts.

Reading Comprehension

This section also tested the students' comprehension and appreciation of written materials. The passage was administered to the students to read through with some multiple choices that were aimed at testing the students on ideas, interest and inferred details.

Speaking Fluency

This section concerned a speaking test in which students engaged in a brief, guided discussion with a teacher. The speaking activities involved asking students to explain what the picture was depicting, the students' views about a particular issue or selecting a small story to tell. These tasks were video or audio recorded for assessment using the pre-established proficiency level scales from CEFR.

Procedures

The study was carried out in three phases: Preparation process, data acquisition process and data analysis process.

Permission from the relevant schools participating in the study was sought during the preparation phase of the study as well as approval from the institutional review board. Permission was also sought from all the students and their parents/guardians as well as an explanation of the study to them. The three researchers first pre-tested the language proficiency test on a group of 20 students in order to eliminate any ambiguous or unplausible language used in the test. According to the response obtained, there was a slight alteration on the test items so as to enhance comprehensiveness.

During data collection, language proficiency test was conducted to students in their classroom under controlled manner. The test was conducted in two parts: the written parts – the vocabulary section and reading and the oral part which is speaking every day fluently. The group instructions were identical for all the students and the tests were group administered by the researchers themselves. The oral speaking tasks were therefore administered when each individual student was alone in a separate and quiet room to avoid interferences. In order to allow for accurate scoring of speaking fluency, each speaking session was audio recorded.

Data Analysis

Once the data collection process was over, the authors assessed the performance on the language proficiency tests under the CEFR analytical framework for each of the language skill domains. These data were then input into a statistical software program for evaluation. Descriptive measures of central tendency and variability including the mean score and standard deviation of scores were used to summarize the findings of the study on the LSA skills across the three language areas. Frequency distributions on the LSA instrument were also computed. These descriptive statistics offered an opportunity to conceptualise the level of language proficiency of the student participants.

However, inferential statistics were used to test the hypotheses formulated for the current study beyond summary statistics. To compare the language acquisition outcomes between different levels of differentiated instruction, an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted based on teachers' observations. Using this analysis we were able to decide whether there is a statistically significant difference in the language proficiency scores of students exposed to different levels of DI implementation. In addition, regression analysis was made to determine the relationship between the degree of differentiation and the students' achievement in proficiency both overall and

with respect to particular strategies used in DI for the comparison of the effects of different strategies on students' language performance.

Results

Descriptive Statistics by DI Implementation Level

The descriptive statistic produces detailed student performance view about three language kind, word reproduction, reading readiness, and speaking for the student in different differentiation level. Such outcomes make it possible to compare that extent of student performance to the extent of implementation of DI..

Table 1: Language Proficiency Scores for Low DI Implementation Level

Language Domain	N	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Vocabulary Acquisition	60	65.4	10.2	45	85
Reading Comprehension	60	62.1	11.5	40	82
Speaking Fluency	60	64.3	9.8	43	80

A slightly higher and more variable mean score was recorded for the Low DI group on the different constructs of language, having higher standard deviations. This basically implies that whenever low amounts of differentiation are used in classroom, students undergo fluctuating performance especially in the understanding of texts. The variation in the scores suggest that while there may be general strategies developed for the learning, disadvant absolute low scorers and conversely, achieve above avert Moderate scorers.

Table 2: Language Proficiency Scores for Medium DI Implementation Level

Language Domain	N	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Vocabulary Acquisition	70	70.2	9.5	50	90
Reading Comprehension	70	67.8	10.7	47	89
Speaking Fluency	70	69.1	10.2	48	88

The Medium DI group records superior mean scores in all the domains than the Low DI group with the difference in the standard deviations being apparent. This suggests more practice with diverse educative agents among the learner's who were taught with moderate differentiated instruction. However, the remaining variation indicates that although some levels of differentiation are beneficial, it may not be enough to address all learners' needs in acquiring higher order skills such as reading comprehension..

Table 3: Language Proficiency Scores for High DI Implementation Level

Language Domain	N	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Vocabulary Acquisition	70	76.8	8.7	55	95
Reading Comprehension	70	74.5	9.2	56	94
Speaking Fluency	70	75.6	8.5	58	95

High DI group received the highest mean score across all the domains with the lowest standard deviation the performances were strong and stable. This implies that a multiple level of differentiated instruction enhances the achievement of all in respect with the language skills and reduces gaps in achievement. A clearly expressed rather moderate dispersion of the outcomes also emphasizes the usefulness of the highest degree of differentiation to address various learning needs and language development.

Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores Comparison by DI Level.

Thus the performance is presented in pre and post tests of all the treatment groups according to the level of DI implementation. Such differentiation helps to determine the effect of DI on language learners..

Table 4: Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores for Low DI Implementation Level

Language Domain	N	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Standard Deviation
Vocabulary Acquisition	60	53.2	65.4	10.2
Reading Comprehension	60	51.5	62.1	11.5
Speaking Fluency	60	52.7	64.3	9.8

The Low DI group reaped marginal improvements on pretest to post test across the three domains. They did indicate some measure of gains, however the overall low mean on the post test indicates that with a mean of 32 in the post test, passing the tests may be easy but minimal differentiated instruction may not be sufficient to noticeably alter language proficiency. This has emphasised the need for stronger differentiation strategies in classroom that have students of diverse abilities.

Table 5: Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores for Medium DI Implementation Level

Language Domain	N	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Standard Deviation
Vocabulary Acquisition	70	56.1	70.2	9.5
Reading Comprehension	70	55.4	67.8	10.7
Speaking Fluency	70	54.8	69.1	10.2

In the Medium DI group there were a significant increase in mean scores across all the domains when pre- test was compared with the post-test. In addition, the improved post-test scores to Low DI group reveal that using Medium DI elevates language development. However, the relatively high standard deviations suggest that still some students cannot have optimal learning when provided such a level of differentiation.

Table 6: Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores for High DI Implementation Level

Language Domain	N	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Standard Deviation
Vocabulary Acquisition	70	58.9	76.8	8.7
Reading Comprehension	70	59.5	74.5	9.2
Speaking Fluency	70	60.2	75.6	8.5

More specifically, the High DI group reported the greatest gains in all the language domains as evidenced by their significantly higher post – test mean scores as compared to the other groups. The comparatively smaller standard deviations and much higher achievements from pre-tests to post-tests show that effective broad and general different instruction is helpful to improve language proficiency. The stability in the scores also suggests that majority of the students under this group was helped by the instruction strategies applied.

Inferential Statistics: ANOVA Results

In order to establish the significance of differing performances demonstrated by each of the groups, group, one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test was performed for each and every language domain..

Table 7: ANOVA Results for Vocabulary Acquisition, Reading Comprehension, and Speaking Fluency

Language Domain	F-Statistic	p-value
Vocabulary Acquisition	18.56	0.000
Reading Comprehension	16.23	0.000
Speaking Fluency	19.45	0.000

For all three language areas, the results of the ANOVA are statistically significant between the groups of children. The p values below 0.05 also show that the differences are not a consequence of an opportunity: Thus, the levels of differentiation make a significant difference in terms of vocabulary scores, reading comprehension and speaking performance. This has firmly laid a decorative argument for the inclusion of differentiated instruction in mixed ability TEFL classrooms.

Post Hoc Analysis (Tukey’s HSD Test)

A Tukey’s Honest Significant Difference (HSD) test was conducted to identify specific group differences.

Table 8: Post Hoc Analysis Results for Language Skills

Language Domain	Comparison	Mean Difference	p-value
Vocabulary Acquisition	High DI vs Low DI	11.4	0.000
	High DI vs Medium DI	6.6	0.002
	Medium DI vs Low DI	4.8	0.015
Reading Comprehension	High DI vs Low DI	12.4	0.000
	High DI vs Medium DI	6.7	0.003
	Medium DI vs Low DI	5.7	0.008
Speaking Fluency	High DI vs Low DI	11.3	0.000

	High DI vs Medium DI	6.5	0.002
	Medium DI vs Low DI	4.8	0.019

The Tukey HSD post hoc analysis reveals that all three groups are significantly different from one another in each domain. The High DI group was always higher than the Low and Medium DI, supporting the overall premise that improved degrees of differentiated instruction result in superior language outcomes for students. Thus, strong evidence is found in the fact that the differentiation between the results of students in the Medium DI and Low DI classes shows that moderate levels of differentiation can also raise students’ achievement, although to a smaller extent than in the case of extreme differentiation.

Regression Analysis

A multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the predictive effect of DI implementation level on overall language proficiency scores.

Table 9: Multiple Regression Analysis Summary

Predictor Variable	B (Unstandardized Coefficient)	SE	Beta (Standardized Coefficient)	t-value	p-value
Constant	58.2	2.1	—	27.71	0.000
DI Level	5.4	0.6	0.42	9.00	0.000
Gender (Male)	-0.5	0.3	-0.12	-1.67	0.098
R-squared = 0.35					

Consequently, in the present study, the analysis revealed that the level of differentiated instruction had a high t-value and a low p-value, meaning that the level of differentiated instruction was a significant predictor of the language proficiency scores of the learners. Further, the analysis revealed that the difference in outcomes was not affected by gender. The model yielded an R-squared of 0.35 and, hence, levels of DI explained 35% of the variability in scores of proficiency gain which suggest a moderate strong positive relationship between DI and language gain.

Reframing Differentiated Instruction Through Empirical Evidence

The changes in specific learning, as mentioned in the vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension and speaking fluency of the High DI group, do correlate with aspects of differentiation based on Tomlinson’s (2014) principles to embrace grain, choice, and desigma as key tenets for teaching and learning process. The above alignment provides credence to this notion that differentiation can reduce the disadvantages observed among the students thus enable the children of diverse abilities to learn better. These results are in line with other similar research by Deunk et al. (2018) and Coubergs et al. (2017), which discovered cognitive (+0.24) and motivational (+0.16) gains of DI for various learning contexts.

However, this study builds on these findings by analyzing them within the context of Saudi EFL classroom and challenges of low prior exposure to English, socio-economic differences, and learning readiness in Saudi students (Alshumaimeri, 2019). The statistically significant differences identified between the High, Medium and Low DI groups suggest that didactic, conventional strategies are insufficient in achieving these

gaps. This is consistent with Roy et al., 2013, who propose that differentiation needs to be accepted not just as a teaching technique, but as a teaching methodology that underpins all teaching interventions.

Vygotsky in his Zone of Proximal Development is thought (Vig, 1978) is particularly applicable in this respect. According to the ZPD framework, students receive more help when instructional support corresponds with the students' developmental abilities. In this study, therefore, the significant improvement observed in the High DI meant that the approach closed the gap between the prior learning ability and potential learning ability of the students. However, the analysis of the results also shows that partial differentiation, as in the Medium DI group, may not be enough to satisfactorily deal with differences in learners. This raises the question of the definition of what counts as 'effective' differentiation or differentiation for learning in settings that have a diversity in language and culture.

Addressing Inequity Through Differentiated Instruction.

Consequently, the study poses critical questions as to the relevance of practising differentiated instruction in minimizing unfair learning environment. The regression analysis of the findings proved that DI contributed to 35% of the variance of the overall language ability which emphasizes the need for differentiated instruction to cater for the learners. However, the figure shows that the amount of residual variance suggests that more should be done to examine and consider the socio-economic factors that contribute to students' performances, as well as the institutional factors that may influence their performances. This is similar to the assertions of Subban & Round (2015) who explain that curriculum for young learners should be responsive to the learning needs while considering other sociocultural developmental areas of learners alongside their academic intelligence.

In Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 framework, one of the central focuses alongside language competency is the ability to communicate in English; therefore, differentiated instruction becomes a key method of achieving a variety of national educational objectives (Alshumaimeri, 2019). But as the data presented in this paper indicate, DI cannot be achieved by a simple change of pedagogy; it implies a profound transformation of the paradigm in which education is defined and realised. This is similar to Hamdan's (2005) evaluation of the systems in Saudi education which ascertain that conventional techniques of teaching are remaining in sway despite increasing acknowledgement of the requirement for more engaging strategies.

However the gender issue examined in this research where no significant difference in the EFL outcomes was observed negates entrenched gender factor as a distinguishing factor in EFL learning. The result supports more recent studies claiming that when instructional practices are changed, gender disparities might not be as apparent, making the classroom learning experience more equitable (Stoll, 2013; Subban & Round, 2015). Nevertheless, the continued significance of performance variation between those groups in the Medium and Low DI classes means that differentiation, if not done systematically and efficiently, may not effectively redress structural issues of learning that exist in the class.

Implication for Policy and Recommendations for Teacher Training

The results of this study are critically relevant to policymakers and educators who are designing strategies for promoting language education in Saudi Arabia. Alshumaimeri (2019) highlighted that, among numerous challenges, Saudi TEFL classrooms present significant difficulties in adopting differentiated instruction because of the absence of teacher training activities directed at this approach. This study supports the call for enhanced professional development that builds teachers' capacity to develop and/or implement such submersion strategies as flexible grouping, instruction based on scaffolding, and tiering of tasks. Such training programs are important in changing the DI from more of a theory into a hands-on, classroom proven system that can meet instructional demands of the students (Deunk et al., 2018; Schwichow et al., 2016).

However, it is worth remembering the words of Tomlinson et al. (2003) and note that differentiated instruction must be supported by an institutional approach understanding and valuing the great importance of such activities. When there is no avails institutional support, the study implies that teachers may not be able to employ differentiation strategies causatively; hence the implication of differentiation on students outcomes is likely to be constrained. This warrants the formulation of policies that will help promote differentiation in program delivery from the curriculum design up to the teacher classroom practices.

Despite finding a substantial positive impact of DI on students' achievement, this study also opens avenue for exploring DI process more formally and qualitatively how DI is effective in heterogeneous classroom teaching learning context. The fact that variation in performance persisted with the Medium DI group means that not all types of differentiation are beneficial, especially where there is considerable linguistic and cultural differences. This leads to a need for more research into the particular DI approaches which are most effective in contributing to student achievement, and the moderating conditions under which they apply (Kyriakides et al., 2013). Possible directions for future research due to these results include future mixed-methods observational-studies that incorporate quantitative data analysis with the opinions and perspectives of the teachers and students. Such an approach may provide a broader view on the daily life of learners and teacher, as well as the ways in which the lessons from differentiated instruction can be tailored to fit every cultural and educational setting (Pham, 2012). Furthermore, understanding the relationship between DI and other socio-economic factors could be useful to explicate how instructional arrangements can be used to effectively enhance the learning as well as minimise social disparities.

Recommendations

The kinds of evidence presented suggest that increased levels of DI enhanced students' acquisition of new words, reading, and speaking skill. The findings of this study imply that teacher-centred and direct instruction approaches to teaching cannot suffice in teaching learning across the ability grouping. This way a teacher is able to provide for the needs of all students with donors that are at different reading levels and have different learning styles. Based on Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development theory, the results support the idea of matching instructional support to developmental demand. Inclusive education is highlighted in the study as an effective notion of

differentiated instruction that opens the possibility of minimising performance gap among students. However, these results also suggest that partial or incomplete differentiation may not be adequate in catering for the variation evident in learners, the need for adequate and proper differentiation practices.

The policy and practice concerns resulting from these findings are universal. Furthermore, the study highlights the need for more specialized training developing for teachers that addresses purposeful practical application of DI procedures including; scaffolding, group organization and differentiating tasks. There are so many things that teachers need in order to implement differentiated instruction. Right from professional development to institutional support. This is even more salient in Saudi Arabia to which Vision 2030 points towards the improvement of English language as one of its goals in the education initiatives.

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