

## **“I am a Unique Student”: Differentiate Instructions Applied in English Classroom in Eastern Taiwan**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Student’s diversity and uniqueness should not be the reason for left-behind student in the learning process. Process, content, and product are the main elements of differentiated instruction that bridge the diversity issues in the classroom, including in the process of learning English as a foreign language in Taiwan. Differentiate instruction is believed as the fittest approach that can reach every single student’s profile, uniqueness, readiness, and schemata understanding which is understood as the element of reaching success in the English teaching and learning process. The approach then enhances students’ self-confidence and manages the structural thinking ideas through the variety of activities conducted during the class. The research method was used qualitatively involving English class observation of 22 students which was performed at one of the Junior High Schools in Eastern Taiwan. The research results provided wider information by preparing various media and activities, recognizing students’ competency levels, and activating students’ awareness of the teacher’s instructions.

**Keywords:** Teaching English, Differentiate Instructions, Student’s Needs, Students’ Profiles, Student’s Uniqueness

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the classroom, teachers face up many students with different characters, different needs, different profiles, and different learning styles. The use of homogenous material, media, and approach cannot accommodate the various backgrounds in the classroom. As the result, learning outcomes cannot easily be achieved. In most classroom activities, teachers tried to reach all the students in same way and generalized them into the homogeneous level. The use of the one-size-fits-all curriculum no longer meets the needs of the majority of learners (Tomlinson, 2014). Tomlinson (2014) stated that the ability to differentiate instruction for middle school aged learners is a challenge. As the statement of Tomlinson, revealing the students’ diversity is not easy. The general understandings of mixed-ability classroom have already known, but the process on finding something inclusive towards certain classroom with a group of students will be particularly difficult.

The teacher should be master on advance differentiate instruction academically towards the key principles on revealing the students’ needs and profiles. Moreover, addressing students’ differences and interest appears to enhance their motivation to learn while encouraging them to remain committed and stay positive (Tomlinson, 2014). Ignoring these fundamental differences may result in some students falling behind, losing motivation and failing to succeed (Tomlinson, 2014). The following are the research questions that are addressed in this current study: (1) How the teacher recognizes students’ competency levels?

(2) How to make students being aware and usual with the teacher's instructions? (3) How to prepare different methods and assessments in same period of teaching?

Recognizing that every single student in classroom is unique, having different learning needs and motivation is crucial. Every student has different modalities on understanding learning topics and material since they have different of learning style. Furthermore, students differ on the performance and readiness levels in learning process. Some students will focus on the content of the materials, whether they have high interest or not towards the learning topics. Those uniqueness of the students builds some challenges for the teacher in classroom. Teacher has broad responses to the uniqueness by conducting the teaching-learning process that highlight in detail on students' individual needs, interests and abilities. Differentiate Instructions, currently, is chosen as an ideal way in bridging this phenomenon.

Tomlinson (2014) notes that at the broadest level, differentiation refers to providing students with a variety of methods to understand content, to process idea, and to develop product. Moreover, differentiate instruction is to acknowledge various student backgrounds, readiness levels, languages, interests and learning profiles. Although today's classrooms are highly diverse aligned to class, socio-economic background, gender, culture, language and abilities/disabilities, it appears students are being failed, because their individual needs were not being met (Department of Education, 2014; Civitillo, Denessen and Molenaar, 2016). Dixon et al. (2014) argue differentiated teaching requires practice. Teachers' experiences and skills in adapting lessons to fulfill students' varied learning needs are paramount to successful implementation of teaching and learning framework such as differentiation (Dixon et al., 2014). Those various of differentiation came from the understanding that students are having different background in their life as huge population. The focus of differentiate instruction is in collaboration between students in grouping activity in order to make a balancing interaction between teacher and students, student and other students in the classroom.

Those understandings cannot be separated from the learning process theory delivered by Russian psychologist, Vygotsky as central to instructional enhancement, classroom change and redevelopment. The theory has essential implications for teaching, schooling and education in today's era. The understandings of the theory related to the premise that learner should be pursuing learning process towards cultural and social context. It can be underlined that the learning process always related to the ideas that students can achieve the highest competences when they can work in social setting, working together with other as a part of cooperation and collaboration.

It also can be seen in other lenses that as a departure from other theories regarding cognition, Vygotsky's theory views education as an ongoing process, not a product. Furthermore, Tomlinson (2014) defines a differentiated classroom provides different avenues to acquiring content, to processing and making sense of ideas and to developing products so that each student can learn effectively. From those statement, Differentiate Instruction can be differed from the content, process and product. Content-some students will learn the functions of certain contents, and others will still learn the basic concepts of knowledge. *Process*-will be diverse in some crucial points, such: diverse learning activities for different skill-level students; grouping levels of students' readiness; tasks-based students' learning styles. *Products*-differentiate assessments allows students' creativity. Tomlinson (2014) identifies three elements of the curriculum that can be differentiated: Content, Process, and Products.

Additionally, several guidelines are noted to help educators form an understanding and develop ideas around differentiating instruction. (1) Content focuses on: (a) Several elements and materials are used to support instructional content. These include acts, concepts,

generalizations or principles, attitudes, and skills. The variation seen in a differentiated classroom is most frequently the manner in which students gain access to important learning. Access to the content is seen as key; (b) Align tasks and objectives to learning goals. Designers of differentiated instruction determine as essential the alignment of tasks with instructional goals and objectives. Goals are most frequently assessed by many high-stakes tests at the state level and frequently administered standardized measures. Objectives are frequently written in incremental steps resulting in a continuum of skills-building tasks. An objectives-driven menu makes it easier to find the next instructional step for learners entering at varying levels. (c) Instruction is concept-focused and principle-driven. The instructional concepts should be broad based and not focused on minute details or unlimited facts. Teachers must focus on the concepts, principles and skills that students should learn. The content of instruction should address the same concepts with all students but be adjusted by degree of complexity for the diversity of learners in the classroom; (2) Process focuses on: (a) Flexible grouping is consistently used. Strategies for flexible grouping are essential.

Learners are expected to interact and work together as they develop knowledge of new content. Teachers may conduct whole-class introductory discussions of content big ideas followed by small group or pair work. Student groups may be coached from within or by the teacher to complete assigned tasks. Grouping of students is not fixed. Based on the content, project, and on-going evaluations, grouping and regrouping must be a dynamic process as one of the foundations of differentiated instruction; (b) Classroom management benefits students and teachers. Teachers should consider organization and instructional delivery strategies to effectively operate a classroom using differentiated instruction. (3) Products focuses on: (a) Initial and on-going assessment of student readiness and growth are essential. Meaningful pre-assessment naturally leads to functional and successful differentiation. Assessments may be formal or informal, including interviews, surveys, performance assessments, and more formal evaluation procedures. Incorporating pre-assessment and on-going assessment informs teachers to better provide a menu of approaches, choices, and scaffolds for the varying needs, interests and abilities that exist in classrooms of diverse students; (b) Students are active and responsible explorers. Teacher's respect that each task put before the learner will be interesting, engaging, and accessible to essential understanding and skills. Each child should feel challenged most of the time.

## **METHODS**

### **METHOD OF THE STUDY, SITE AND PARTICIPANTS**

This study used qualitative descriptive as the method of the research which focused on techniques and triangulation ways in practice. The focus of the research was on detail and structured observation. The observation was done in ninth grader of Junior High School in Eastern of Taiwan. The observation involved one English teacher and 22 active students in the classroom.

### **DATA COLLECTION**

A well-prepared observation done by some observers involved including the researcher. Teachers should be mentored and be provided with the opportunity to observe each other's differentiated lessons, give feedback after observation as well as being given the time to collaborate resources for effective differentiation (Dixon et al.,2014). Observational research techniques have advantages over other qualitative data collection methods when the focus of research is on understanding actions, roles and behavior. The five senses—sight, smells, touch, taste, and hearing-involves, are an essential part of an observation. It enables

the researcher to gain, observe and interact rich portray of participants in natural setting. The Junior High School opened cooperative communication with team and prepare an English classroom. The teacher prepared a clear lesson objective, lesson-plan, materials and media needed. The researcher applied Direct Observation. Here, the researcher collects subjective data under the investigation at the site. The researcher used an investigation guide of observation in detail. In the process of organizing and preparing the for analysis, the researcher came over the typing up field notes and collecting all the documents used in the site of the research.

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

In this phase, the researcher used qualitative descriptive towards the observational data. Obtain the overall data from the process of collecting data, resume general sense of information by reading the data and reflecting the results in very specific meaning. Afterwards, make a meaningful summary and findings of the research. The naturalistic inquiry is one of the vital parts in the analysis.

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

There are some steps toward on how to create an effective differentiate instruction planning, namely: Step 1. Analyze the student's characteristics, covers survey the students' interest, determine the competence level of the students, determine learning styles and preferences, determine the way how to manage difficulties; Step 2. Preparing and mastering teaching strategies repertoires such as Inquiry-based learning, Task-based learning, Cooperative learning, Direct instruction, etc.; Step 3. Having understanding on various kinds of instructional activities. Good activities led the students to find the meaningful relevant and engage students more in learning process; Step 4. Preparing multi-assessment for students. The various kinds of questions will open an opportunity for every student on demonstrating authentic learning process.

### **OBSERVATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS**

In this observation process, the teacher suggested the observers to be aware and have some considerations on some important dimensions of teaching learning activities which happened in the classroom as follows:

1. What the teacher should do on reducing students learning difficulty on studying and reaching new information/ knowledge.
2. What are the processes that used to help different level of students (what kind of activities that can engage students more compared with the common activities); building different activity for different level students (level A, B, C, and D).
3. How to manage cooperation and collaboration among students to help students jump from lower into higher level of competency. Many teachers did not think 'collaboration and cooperation' is impossible if they still have more than two students in classroom. More important is how to handle students to be aware on 'collaboration and cooperation.
4. How to decide what kind of formative assessment that are appropriate for the students; (whether the formative assessments same as the post-test or not). In formative test, the teacher should focus on:
  - a. The use the formative assessment based on the differentiate instructions;
  - b. Ways to help the student raising their competence and performance towards those formative tests;

- c. Ways to implement the formative test complete with some consideration on students' competency levels.
5. How to correlate between the topic into real life condition which are suitable with the students' life experiences.

Moreover, there are some considerations on teacher's challenges during the teaching-learning process. These challenges focus on some points, such as:

1. How then the teachers recognize students' competency levels;
2. How to make students being aware and usual with the teacher's instructions;
3. How to prepare different methods and assessments in same period of teaching.

### **OBSERVATIONAL RESULTS**

The differentiate instruction done in an English Classroom of ninth grader of Junior High School in Eastern of Taiwan. The observation involved one English teacher and 22 active students in the classroom. The material come closer to integrated English skills, involving Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing which cover teaching vocabulary and grammatical structure which use certain topic set by the teacher.

In this part, the researcher discussed the three main classroom activities as clearly seen in the observational process, namely: (1) Planning; (2) Application and Implementing, involves (a) *Pre-Activities*, (b) *Whilst-Activities* and (c) *Post-Activities*; and (3) Reviewing and Reflecting. Those three activities are described in detail. The first activity totally done by the teacher, focusing on Planning activities. Based on the observation process, the teacher did several main activities before she came to the classroom. The activities described as follows:

1. Teacher set the learning goals/objectives  
The learning goals set by the teacher was "Students can define the process on how to trip from one place to others";
2. Teacher set the interesting and engaging topic of the material "***How to Have a Trip from London to Amsterdam***".
3. Teacher set the interesting and engaging materials such as:
  - a. The general ideas of "Trip from London to Amsterdam"
  - b. The topic of travel vehicle choices, entitled: (a) Driving Non-stop Car-Trip from London to Amsterdam; (b) Direct Eurostar trains from London to Amsterdam; (c) Coach from London to Amsterdam; (d) Airflight from London to Amsterdam; (e) London to Amsterdam Road Trip; and (f) London to Amsterdam Road Bike Trip.
  - c. More specific and engaging topic "Choose the Fast Way to Go from London to Amsterdam".

All the activities above met the one of specific guidelines of differentiate instruction in creating the concepts and general understanding which are meaningful relevant through certain materials used in the classroom. The topic chosen should be focused on students' comprehension needs towards certain knowledge.

4. Teacher set the methods  
The teacher set some appropriate methods toward this differentiate instruction which focuses on 'Collaborative and Cooperative Learning'. Cooperative learning focuses on maximizing students' heterogeneous nature of interest, background, profiles and needs into same goal of learning and working together as a group. In addition, the

teacher also implemented ‘Task-Based Learning’ and ‘Inquiry-Based Learning’. Those two methods focus on the scientific process of learning in developing critical thinking skill and problem solving which involving active students in conducting independent investigations towards certain problem. Involving the teacher as guide and facilitator on the process of discovery and analysis. This method focused on some activities as follows:

- a. Grouping method, the teacher divided the class members into five (5) different mix ability groups. The function on making mix ability groups in order to create heterogeneity in the group, so that the beneficial goal towards the understanding of high-competences learners can help the low-competences learners in learning process.
- b. Pairing Method (Conversation in Pairs)
- c. Mind Mapping
- d. Question-Answer Relationship

All the activities above met the one of specific guidelines of differentiate instruction in encouraging students on having high critical thinking ability and high creativity towards all the learning process. The process and product of differentiate instruction should meet the needs of understanding and implementing activities which are meaningful and relevant to the students’ real-life condition.

5. Teacher prepared some intriguing teaching and learning media, such as:
  - a. Video about “A City Called London”
  - b. Power Point of Material and Series Questions
  - c. Visual Dictionary
  - d. Mind Map (Series Questions)

The above media set in order to meet the other specific guidelines of differentiate instruction in the point of learning engagement. The student’s diversity should encourage teacher on providing more lessons which can motivate the students in active and happy learning process. single structure of classroom activity will be bored for the students. Teacher somehow should be very creative on preparing and providing more attractive and engaging lessons.

6. Teacher sets the assessments
  - a. Mind Map Questions (Series Questions)
  - b. Short Answer Questions
  - c. Essay Questions

The next point focused on the last goal to meet the other specific guidelines of differentiate instruction in the point of the using of assessment/ evaluation as a continuing process of learning. The assessment should occur as assessment of learning, assessment as learning, and assessment for learning. The assessment should be varied related to students’ needs and students’ optimal ability. In addition, it was also important for every teacher in differentiate instruction to make sure that the students having many option of learning assessment.

The last phase of the implementation of differentiate instruction is **Reviewing and Reflecting**. In this period of phase, the teacher tries to reflect all aspects of teaching-learning process and share with the Group Discussion to get some reflecting questions and ideas (in this case, the observers are the group discussion indeed).

## DISCUSSION

After having more or less 45-minute observation the researcher found some important findings related to the implementation of differentiate instruction in the ninth grade of Junior High School in Eastern Taiwan in detailed observation results presented in Table 1 (see Attachment 1):

### 1. Treating and Considering the Dimensions

The teacher focused more on considering teaching differentiate instruction dimensions. The teaching-learning process showed some crucial activities as follows:

#### a. *Reducing Students' Learning Difficulty*

Differentiate instructions believe that every single student has different modalities in understandings the material. This condition creates further impact on students' learning difficulty. Some students can finish the assignment faster and others even slower. In this teaching process, the teacher uses various media and individual approaches.

The media prepared to help the students on reducing their learning difficulty were: (1) 'Engaging Video'; (2) 'Visual Dictionary'; and (3) 'Interactive and Colorful Power Point'. By having these kinds of helpful media, students could minimize the learning difficulty unconsciously. They study in happily, unpressured and full spirit learning atmosphere. More powerful activity that is used by the teacher was about 'The Approaches'. The teacher tried to avoid 'making a gap' with every single student. At some first minutes, the teacher conveyed that *'If you have some questions, don't worry I will help'*. In the middle minutes of teaching period, she was coming closer to the student who has an individual learning difficulty one by one and helping the students on problem solving towards the materials understandings. The details can be seen in Note 6 in Table 1 (see Attachment 1).

#### b. *Collaboration and Cooperation*

In this part of differentiate instructions, the teacher used 'Collaborative Learning' as one of teaching approach. Collaborative learning understood as a familiar approach in educational setting which focuses on grouping activity to support the learning process by cooperating with others (teacher-students or students- students). In this class, the teacher divided a class into five (5) groups of students and the sitting arrangement is coming into circle (*can be seen in figure 3*) and choose 1 student as a 'group leader' in each group.

At very beginning, after greeted the students, the teacher gave some rules (*can be seen in Table 1. Note 2*). Teacher said *"No matter with who, No hate!!"*. This sentence sound like powerful weapon to lead the students to do collaboration, cooperation and help each other. Moreover, it gave clear barriers to students, 'what should they do or not to do' during grouping activity.

In this grouping activity, teacher made sure that every single student did ideal collaboration and cooperation each other. Furthermore, in every activity, the teacher encouraged students to work and help each other (*can be clearly seen in Table 1. Note 5 and 7*). The student who had high performance and competence will help the student who was in vice versa.

c. *Differentiate Assessments*

In this Differentiate Instructions implementation, the teacher emphasized more on using Differentiate Assessment as the emphasize of this instruction is in the 'product'. The product allowed the students' creativity. Mind Map Questions (Series Questions), Short Answer Questions and Essay Questions were chosen as a part of the assessments. By having various assessments, students choose and solve the appropriate as their own level of performance. Furthermore, these various assessments engaged the students more.

d. *From Subject Topics into Real Life Experience*

In this process, teacher emphasized on selection of standard-based content which closely relate to students' real-life experience. The topic chosen should be easily implemented in their daily life. Teacher focused on topic entitled "**How to Have a Trip from London to Amsterdam**". This topic consisted of some sub-topics relevant which gained the students to feel direct and real experience on doing a trip to certain destination. Apart from London and Amsterdam, students could apply the information to go to another places and destination with the same way to go and same process of travelling.

**2. Teacher's Ways to Meet the Challenges**

a. *Recognizing students' competency levels*

It was a difficult homework for teacher to recognize students' competency levels one by one. Teacher showed unique way to get accurate result. Teacher asked the students to make grouping activity and offered the volunteer to be a leader. It seemed effective since the one who has high confidence usually is a student with high performance level. Then the teacher asked and emphasized that they should help each other, the leader will take a big part on this responsibility.

b. *Students' awareness of teacher's instructions.*

- (1) Always repeat the instruction twice or three times.
- (2) Using strong words or sentences
- (3) Using powerful intonation and loud voice.

c. *Preparing different methods and assessments in same period of teaching*

Differentiate instructions always relevant with differentiate students, contents, activities, assessments, products, etc. which require the teacher on having high creativity and sensitiveness towards those diverse. Giving much consideration on (1) how to use all elements in differentiate instructions; (2) how to help students in achieving goals; and (3) how to do and combine.

## **CONCLUSION**

The use of differentiate instruction in teaching learning process is believed to create the strong belief that not all the students are alike. This approach requires teacher to be more flexible in the teaching learning process in meeting the most suitable curriculum used in specific classroom. Differentiate instruction blends the whole class members towards group or individual instruction. From the observation, the researcher highlights that differentiate instruction is one of choices in order to bridge the issues of students' diversity that exist in classroom which focus on three main points, namely: content, process and products.

Moreover, some teachers have perspective that implementing differentiate instruction is



hard thing to do, in fact, the meaning is not differentiation is all about. Differentiate Instruction is totally a way of thinking, not only discussing about the hard process of teaching plan. In the application, it is all about teacher's mindset. Fair is not all about something that we give in equal ways. Considering that there is no neglect towards students' uniqueness and every single student can bring different gifts and challenges is the major issue. The teacher should make an appropriate judgement towards these diverse and give flexibility responds in teaching-learning process professionally. Moreover, it is essential for the next researcher that differentiate instruction need very specific and well lesson plan, in order to cover all the students' diverse, exist in the classroom.

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Attachment 1.

*Table 1. The Detail Teacher-Students Activities in Every Phases*

<b>Activity Phase</b>	<b>Teacher 's Activities</b>	<b>Students' Activities</b>
Pre-Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher opens the class with greetings and apperception, <i>What do you do this morning?"</i></li> <li><b>Note 1: Teacher opens the class with energetic greetings and apperception, encouraging the students' motivation with loud and full spirit voice of greetings; Teacher also uses a music back-sound)</b></li> <li>Teacher gives some class rules to the students:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Don't chat, Listen!!"</li> <li>"No matter with who, No hate!!"</li> <li>There are some questions, please raise hand.</li> </ol> <p><b>(Note 2: Teacher emphasizes if each of student has questions, the teacher will come closer to the student)</b></p> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The students answer teacher's questions with enthusiastic, for instances: A: "<i>I have breakfast with...</i>" B: "<i>I do ....</i>"</li> <li>Students listen and do the class rules.</li> </ul>
Whilst-Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher shows the video of "A City Called London".</li> <li>After showing video, teacher conveys some questions relate to the video:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What do you see in the video?</li> <li>What do you think about the video?</li> <li>What do you wonder from the video?</li> </ol> <p><b>(Note 3: Teacher says big thanks to the students who have pay attention to the video and answer her questions).</b></p> <li>Teacher gives 'naming' randomly to the students in group as <b>Student No. 1 (First Student), Student No. 2 (Second Student), Student No. 3 (Third Student), and Student No. 4 or 5 (Fourth or Fifth Student).</b></li> </li></ul> <p>p.s.: some groups consist of 4 students and some consist of 5 students).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher offers to the members of group who wants to be the 'group leader' and he is the one who will explain the group discussion results.</li> <li>Teacher asks the students to answer some question related to the video in group.</li> <li>Teacher give feedback answers to the students.</li> <li>Teacher shows the 'Visual Dictionary' related to vocabulary that can be found in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students pay attention on watching the video.</li> <li>Students answer the teacher's questions individually.</li> <li>Students raise the hand randomly to choose the 'naming' number.</li> <li>Student who relies on to be the 'group leader' raise the hand.</li> <li>Students do group discussion and convey the answers.</li> <li>Students pay attention to teacher's feedback.</li> <li>Students watch the 'Visual Dictionary', listen the way</li> </ul>

the video rapidly. In the same time, teacher pronounces the 10 words and asks the students to listen the words, see and write down the words. The vocabulary such as: *gallop, park, journey, relax, expensive, cheap, crowded, aero-plane, comfortable, etc.*

**Note 4: Teacher remains repeating the instructions some times and turn on the PPT slides in three times)**

- Teacher gives the text entitled “London to Amsterdam” and completed with some parts of subtexts.
- Teacher gives some questions relate to the text.

**Note 5: Teacher always encourages students to do together and helps each other; Teacher asks the leader to read the group answer; Teacher repeats the questions some-times)**

- Teacher makes further discussion about the text and gives question to each member of group about ‘traveling vehicle’.

**Note 6: Teacher comes closer to the student who want answer the questions)**

- Teacher gives some feedbacks related to the previous questions by using PPT text.
- Teacher asks the students to ‘Read Aloud’ the feedback text.

how teacher pronounce and write down the vocabulary in note book rapidly.

- Students read the text carefully.

- Students discussing and answering the questions in group.

- Student answers each teacher question one by one.

- Students pay attention to teacher’s feedback.
- Students read aloud the text together.

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Post-Activities

- Teacher asks the students to do ‘Text Scanning’ related to “Good/Bad Points of Ways of Travelling”.

**Note 7: Teacher always encourages students to do together and helps each other)**

- Teacher does overview and makes conclusion about “**How to Travel from London to Amsterdam**”.
- Teacher conveys parting to students and says ‘big thanks’ for the cooperation by saying:

*Thank You, You are Wonderful”*

**Note 8: Teacher always gives reward and verbal motivation to students)**

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- Students do ‘Text Scanning’ related to “Good/Bad Points of Ways of Travelling”.

- Students pay attention to the teacher.

- Students answer teacher’s parting expression.