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THE IMPACT OF THE TEACHER IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

Daniela PASCARU
PhD, Associate Professor
Moldova State University, Republic of Moldova
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1337-8531

Abstract: ***The aim of this study is to investigate the role of teachers' experience and qualifications in the implementation of differentiated instruction. It is focused on teacher efficacy as a way to explain teacher willingness to differentiate instruction. Teachers often struggle to provide all students access to specific learning activities that work best for them – and what works best for some students will not work for others. Differentiating instruction makes sense because it offers different paths to understanding content, process, and products, considering what is appropriate given a child's profile of strengths, interests, and styles. In their classroom, teachers around the world are confronted with a highly diverse student population that differs not only in performance and academic readiness, but also in their learning preferences, cultural backgrounds, language competence, learning styles, and motivation, as well as social, methodological, and self-regulatory competencies. Differentiated instruction stands as a cornerstone in modern pedagogical practices, aiming to cater to students' diverse needs and learning preferences.***

Keywords: *differentiated instruction, experience, implementation, qualification, teacher attitudes; teacher motivation*

From the past to the 21st century we are in, many changes have occurred and continue to be experienced. These changes take place in all areas and affect people's thinking styles, needs, desires, and expectations of societies. Education has a very important place in order to be able to direct these effects well and to adapt to changes. One of the main goals of education is to make students ready for the conditions of the age they live in [1]. In order to raise individuals who are ready for the conditions of the age, outdated teaching methods will be insufficient. For this reason, teaching methods should be followed and adopted in education systems. One of these teaching methods is the differentiated teaching method.

Owing to the diversity of student needs, teachers in contemporary classrooms need to be proactive and creative in their teaching styles [8]. Teachers need to be fully equipped with knowledge and skills related to teaching strategies and techniques. Evidence from literature reveals that differentiated instruction is an important instructional strategy that teachers can employ for successful curriculum delivery as it allows instruction that is aligned with student needs. When differentiated instruction is employed in teaching, teachers modify curricular goals, teaching methods, resources, learning activities, and student products in order to maximize the learning opportunity for all the students in a classroom [11]. Students progress at varying rates and show significant differences in their capacity to think abstractly or grasp complex concepts. This reflects not a value judgment, but an observable reality in every classroom. To respond effectively to this diversity, teachers can design a supportive and adaptable learning environment – one in which they adjust the pace of instruction, the

teaching methods, and the ways students demonstrate understanding according to individual learning needs. Although each learner should experience challenge and personal growth, the teacher must reinterpret these goals based on students' interests, prior knowledge, and levels of readiness.

Today, in the context of new reforms in higher education, it is especially important to understand that students learn in different ways: some memorize information more quickly, while others require more time to comprehend and assimilate it; they also differ greatly in their ability to think abstractly or understand complex ideas. Differentiated instruction means offering students a range of pathways for accessing information, engaging with ideas, and showing what they have learned. In a differentiated classroom, learners are provided with varied methods to absorb content, process and internalize concepts, and produce meaningful outcomes. This flexible approach ensures that every student has the opportunity to learn in a way that is both efficient and empowering.

Therefore, teachers must create a friendly and welcoming classroom environment, one in which they flexibly adapt the learning pace, as well as the teaching and learning techniques and methods, to the differentiated needs of their students. The differentiated classroom creates multiple options for receiving and assimilating information/content, understanding ideas, and expressing learned content. Unlike teachers who use a single teaching/learning approach, teachers who practice differentiated instruction must not only direct and monitor multiple activities simultaneously with their specific steps and instructions, but also help students develop the main rules of behavior in the learning process. Differentiated classrooms include greater student involvement and active student communication.

S. Cristea believes that differentiated instruction capitalizes on the philosophical and technological foundations of the curricular design strategy of educational activity. He supports, on the one hand, "the resources of maximum educability of each student, achievable under conditions of equalizing the chances of school success, and on the other hand, individual and collective training modules, achievable through the analysis of special needs under conditions of continuous self-evaluation" [3].

G. Dorofeev defines differentiation as "an educational system that offers students with a minimum mandatory preparation the opportunity to adapt to various conditions and to orient themselves towards those directions that correspond to a greater extent to their predispositions" [14].

According to Tomlinson differentiated instruction provides teachers with a variety of methods to meet students' different needs by adjusting what and how they teach. She adds that every classroom is comprised of students with different abilities and the onus relies on the teacher to tailor the instruction and curriculum to cater to these various students ensuring them a chance to succeed in school. [11] The fundamental concept of differentiated instruction is to take a responsive instructional attitude towards not just the students' needs but also their interests and learning styles. Tomlinson's model of differentiated instruction is one of the most respected and valued models in the world of education. She suggests that teachers must accommodate and alter the content, process, and products of a lesson to enhance the chances of students' achievement and engagement. This model advocates teachers to be alert to lesson design to help students broaden their understanding and knowledge of the subject. Teachers are encouraged to use multimodal approaches such as audio, visuals, manipulatives, various texts, and varied materials to supplement the content. Teachers are urged to scaffold the learning for students to help them succeed and reach grade level proficiency. Tomlinson defined differentiated learning as "a philosophy of teaching

that is based on the premise that students learn best when their teachers accommodate for the differences in their readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles" (p. 940). His vision of a teacher is a professional who guides students through the use of appropriate techniques toward their fullest potential within the learning context. [12]

According to Roberts, teachers face significant challenges in implementing differentiated instruction due to constraints like time, resources, preparation, and standards. Creating learning experiences tailored to students' individual needs takes more time than preparing a single lesson plan. Pre-assessments can help identify students' prior knowledge, saving instructional time. Teachers who become comfortable with differentiated classrooms would probably say their role differs in some significant ways from that of a more traditional teacher. [7] When teachers differentiate instruction, they move away from seeing themselves as keepers and dispensers of knowledge and move toward seeing themselves as organizers of learning opportunities. While content knowledge remains important, these teachers focus less on knowing all the answers, and focus more on "reading their students." They then create ways to learn that both capture students' attention and lead to understanding. Organizing a class for effective activity and exploration becomes the highest priority. The teachers who differentiate instruction focus on their role as coach or mentor, give students as much responsibility for learning as they can handle, and teach them to handle a little more. These teachers grow in their ability to (1) assess student readiness through a variety of means, (2) "read" and interpret student clues about interests and learning preferences, (3) create a variety of ways students can gather information and ideas, (4) develop varied ways students can explore and "own" ideas, and (5) present varied channels through which students can express and expand understandings. "Covering information" takes a back seat to making meaning out of important ideas. Most of us have not been trained to look at teaching in this light, but we are learners, too. We may not be able to transform our image of ourselves in a flash, but we can change over the course of a career.

Differentiation calls on a teacher to realize that classrooms must be places where teachers pursue our best understandings of teaching and learning every day, and also to recall daily that no practice is truly best practice unless it works for the individual learner. For instance, most of us who teach know that a lesson that "hooks" students has many merits. Differentiation affirms that principle, but reminds us that what may "hook" one student might well puzzle, bore, or irritate others. Differentiation doesn't suggest that a teacher can be all things to all individuals all the time. It does, however, mandate that a teacher create a reasonable range of approaches to learning much of the time, so that most students find learning a fit much of the time. Making the link between best practice teaching and differentiation helps set the stage for understanding the role of the teacher in a differentiated classroom.

Teachers also need time to gather resources that meet varying student abilities, such as materials with different reading levels. A lack of adequate training on differentiated instruction is another issue, as many teachers do not receive enough guidance, particularly for teaching advanced students. Observing experienced educators and engaging in discussions about differentiation could improve its implementation. Another issue is the lack of adequate training and information on how to implement differentiated instruction effectively. Teachers often do not receive enough guidance during their university education, especially when it comes to teaching advanced students. Furthermore, many teachers have not experienced differentiated instruction themselves. Observing this method in practice, engaging with experienced teachers, and discussing the differentiation process would be

beneficial for improving its application. Classroom management is a concern, with some teachers associating differentiated instruction with disorder.

According to Dack (2018), 'A teacher in a differentiated classroom recognises that students enter learning experiences at different starting points and with different backgrounds; they will benefit from multiple options to access information, an array of ways to process information, a variety of outlets to demonstrate learning, and a range of supports' [4]. Thus differentiated instruction is a way of thinking about teaching and learning rather than a prescriptive or packaged approach.

Differentiated instruction may mirror tracking as some teachers attempt to provide for the academic diversity of contemporary classrooms. This was evident in a study by Blozowich who found that teachers used a variety of techniques but continued to prepare lessons as they would for a tracked classroom. This researcher concluded that teachers implementing differentiated instruction require continuous and consistent professional development, coupled with intensive dialogue and consultation about how these techniques are being implemented in the classroom [2]. Robison calls for further research into the utilisation of differentiated instruction techniques, as teachers view the issue of increased planning time with unease. Teachers also require support structures and cooperative teamwork to assist them as they prepare lessons incorporating differentiated instruction [7]. Both tracking and time constraints require further investigation as potential barriers to the implementation of differentiated instruction.

Differentiated activities must challenge and engage students, as this is a fundamental condition for success. As for the students, they must assume significant responsibility for their own learning process and be active in making and evaluating their own decisions. When students learn to participate actively in the learning process, teachers gain the possibility of using class time more efficiently, giving attention to all groups of learners. Differentiated instruction involves a combination of activities in which all students, small groups, or pairs are engaged. All of this is possible because certain teaching materials are more effectively presented to the entire class, in groups, or individually.

It is important to take into consideration the ways students are grouped during activities because, in addition to their different levels of preparation, some students are stronger in certain components or aspects of the subject and weaker in others. For example, a student may be very good at interpreting a text but not as skilled at listening to audio material, or very good at reproducing information from reading but less capable when it comes to writing essays. At the same time, some students may learn at a slower pace at the beginning and then gradually accelerate, while others may slow down over time. It is also important to consider the types of activities students prefer, as some work more effectively in groups or pairs, while others perform better individually. A teacher who understands the needs of teaching and learning does not miss any opportunity to get to know their students better. They pay close attention to conversations with students, classroom discussions, students' progress, and assessment as a way to learn more about what best suits each learner. A teacher who understands teaching and learning needs never misses an opportunity to get to know their students better. They pay close attention to conversations with students, class discussions, the progress students make, and assessment as a means of discovering what best suits each learner.

Dividing the class into high-achieving and lower-achieving students requires clearly defining and distinguishing the objectives set for each group. It is important to raise the expectations for high-achieving students in such a way that they compete with their own potential rather than merely with curriculum objectives. For lower-achieving students, it is

essential to establish clearly what they must know and understand in order to make progress in learning a foreign language: not only in acquiring and comprehending the material, but also in applying it in practice. Both categories of students require appropriate support from the teacher based on the objectives set for them. Throughout these activities, we must find ways to help students feel that we trust their learning abilities. This type of instruction creates a hierarchy among students, and problems may often arise. Those engaged in simpler tasks may see themselves as inferior to those working on more complex ones. Complex tasks tend to be more interesting and challenging for almost everyone, except for advanced students, who may find them too time-consuming.

The primary goal for each individual student is to achieve maximum progress from their current level of learning. The teacher's goal is to better understand the role of learning so that the instructional process corresponds to each student's expectations.

Students vary in **readiness, interest, and learning profile**. *Readiness* is a student's entry point relative to a particular understanding or skill. Students with less-developed readiness may need:

• someone to help them identify and make up gaps in their learning so they can move ahead;

• more opportunities for direct instruction or practice;

• activities or products that are more structured or more concrete, with fewer steps, closer to their own experiences, and calling on simpler reading skills; or a more deliberate pace of learning.

Advanced students, on the other hand, may need:

• to skip practice with previously mastered skills and understandings;

• activities and products that are quite complex, open-ended, abstract, and multifaceted, drawing on advanced reading materials; or

• a brisk pace of work, or perhaps a slower pace to allow for greater depth of exploration of a topic.

At the same time, because students have different levels of readiness, there is no guarantee that they perceive the same things in the same way. Students learn differently – some more quickly, others more slowly – and an activity that is appealing for some may be frustrating for others. Some students require more support than others when constructing arguments; some can argue verbally, while others express themselves better in writing. Some may need to use materials in a language other than the one being studied, or may initially need to write in their native language before producing work in a foreign language.

Interest is defined as "that which engages the attention, curiosity, and involvement of a student" [13]. When people are interested in something, their motivation to learn about it increases, enhancing learning outcomes as a result. The goal of interest differentiation is to help students engage with new information, understanding, and skills by making connections with things they already find appealing, intriguing, relevant, and worthwhile. Such things, write Tomlinson and Imbeau, are "typically linked to a student"s strengths, cultural context, personal experiences, questions, or sense of need".

Learning profile has to do with how we learn. It may be shaped by intelligence preferences, gender, culture, or learning style. Some students need to talk ideas over with peers to learn them well. Others work better alone and with writing. Some students learn easily part-to-whole. Others need to see the big picture before specific parts make sense. Some students prefer logical or analytical approaches to learning. Other classmates prefer creative, application-oriented lessons. Teachers may adapt one or more of the curricular elements (content, process, products) based on one or more of the student characteristics

(readiness, interest, learning profile) at any point in a lesson or unit. However, you need not differentiate all elements in all possible ways. Effective differentiated classrooms include many times in which whole-class, nondifferentiated fare is the order of the day. Modify a curricular element only when you see a student need and you are convinced that modification increases the likelihood that the learner will understand important ideas and use important skills more thoroughly as a result.

Therefore, it is essential to plan the process of foreign-language instruction through multiple modes of presenting the material, adapting it to each group of students so that it meets their particular needs. For our students who learn English in a non-English-speaking environment, it is beneficial to experiment with and engage in real-life situations from which they learn to express their own opinions and attitudes, and in which they are treated as people, not merely students. Activities that highlight factors affecting them personally also serve as motivation. Discussions about students' preferences, desires, and dislikes bring their values and goals to the surface.

Differentiated instruction becomes more effective when students are actively involved in the process. Learning a foreign language does not involve only memorizing information, but also applying it in practice. Students' curiosity can be sparked through reading, illustrative materials containing mistakes or inconsistencies, or logically incoherent information. This very curiosity ignites the desire to find answers, to arrange ideas in a logical order, or to fill in missing gaps. With regard to integration skills, students are invited to prepare radio and TV programmes, interviews, opinion polls, problem-solving activities, short stories, and simulations of real-life situations that allow them to use the tape recorder, ask each other questions, express opinions, cooperate, and be receptive to the feelings and emotions of others.

The teacher is the inevitable leader in any effective classroom. Leadership can and should be shared with the learners, but responsibility for the leadership resides with the adult who is charged by professionalism, tradition, and law with that task. A teacher who plays that leadership role effectively must be secure about himself – must like himself. A teacher who is essentially insecure about himself is unlikely to create a climate of acceptance an affirmation between himself and the students, or among the students. That does not mean a secure teacher lacks doubts, is free of uncertainty, or is unwavering in direction. Quite the contrary: The variables in a classroom are so great they make uncertainty both inevitable and proper. Instead, a secure teacher expects to be a learner all day, every day, and he is comfortable with the ambiguity of that role. It's not so important to be right as to be open. It's not so important to have all the answers as to be hungry for them. A secure teacher comes away from today with important questions to puzzle about overnight and the belief that today contains the insights necessary for a more effective tomorrow. A secure teacher believes that having these kinds of insights is professionally challenging and personally satisfying. Further, the secure teacher accepts the reality that he controls the climate in the classroom. His approach to students and instruction determines whether respect, humiliation, delight, drudgery, possibility, or defeat wins the day. He knows that he will err some days, but he also knows that he has the capacity and responsibility to avoid the same error another day. Bob Strachota reflects what it means to be a teacher who knows he does not have all the answers, but that he has the power to find them. Strachota's primary goal is to develop students' capacity to take control of their own lives and learning. He also is aware that he is atop the learning triangle in facilitating that end. [9]

When thinking about differentiated curriculum and instruction, three questions are useful for analysis: What is the teacher differentiating? How is she differentiating? Why is she differentiating?

In the examples given in the sections that follow, *Differentiate What* refers to the curricular element the teacher has modified in response to learner needs. That is, it illustrates the teacher modifying

• content (what students will learn and the materials that represent that),

• process (activities through which students make sense of key ideas using essential skills),

• product (how students demonstrate and extend what they understand and can do as a result of a span of learning), or

• learning environment (the classroom conditions that set the tone and expectations of learning).

One or more of these elements can be modified for any given learning experience.

Differentiate How refers to the student trait to which the differentiation responds. It shows how the teacher differentiates in response to student readiness, interest, or learning profile. Again, any learning experience can be modified to respond to one or more of these traits.

Differentiate Why addresses the teacher's reason for modifying the learning experience. Teachers believe modification is important for many reasons. Three key reasons include access to learning, motivation to learn, and efficiency of learning. Any or all of these three reasons for differentiating instruction can be tied to student readiness, interest, and learning profile. For example, we can't learn that which is inaccessible to us because we don't understand it. We can't learn when we are unmotivated by things that are far too difficult – or too easy – for us. We learn more enthusiastically those things that connect to our interests, and we learn more efficiently if we have a suitable background of experience. We also learn more efficiently if we can acquire information and express our understanding through a preferred mode. The following sections present examples of differentiated curriculum and instruction. Some of them reflect modest, though important, modifications. Others are more elaborate. Each section is followed by an analysis of what the teacher was thinking as he planned in response to student needs. You might find it interesting to do your own analysis before reading the one provided.

Few of us as teachers automatically know how to lead a classroom that responds to the daunting reality of learner variance. It is a learned skill, in the same sense of any other art or craft. Perhaps a good place to begin is by listing some key skills that a teacher will develop over time as she consciously and reflectively works on differentiating instruction. Teachers who become comfortable and competent with differentiation almost inevitably develop skills of:

• organizing and focusing curriculum on essential information, understandings, and skills,

• seeing and reflecting on individuals as well as the group,

• hunting for insights about individuals,

• thinking of and using time flexibly,

• scrounging for a wide range of materials,

• diagnosing student need and crafting learning experiences in response to diagnoses,

• thinking of what could go wrong in an activity or task and structuring student work to avoid potential problems,

• sharing responsibility for teaching and learning with students, ensuring that students are prepared for the shared roles,

• moving students among varied work arrangements as a way to see students in new ways and to help them see themselves in new ways.

As teachers become more experienced, they learn to focus on essential knowledge and skills that truly matter for student learning. They also grow in their ability to understand each student as an individual while still managing the dynamics of the whole group. Over time, teachers become more attentive to the unique needs, interests, and abilities of their learners. Flexibility in managing time and resources becomes a key strength in adapting lessons effectively. Teachers also learn to use a variety of materials to support diverse learning styles. By diagnosing student needs, they can design more meaningful and engaging learning experiences. Anticipating possible challenges allows them to better structure activities and avoid potential difficulties. Sharing responsibility with students encourages active participation and builds a collaborative learning environment.

To conclude, differentiated instruction has been on the policy agenda in many countries for several years and is part of the supervisory framework of education inspectorates; however, there is still not a clear joint vision from all parties involved. This calls for substantive collaboration between teacher training courses, schools and, ultimately, all education professionals in the entire education chain. Learning to apply differentiated instruction is a valuable and necessary part of the journey for teachers to ensure that all students receive the education to which they are entitled. Education should draw out the potential from all students in the classroom; otherwise, it fails not only the students but also society as a whole.

When teachers are efficacious in their beliefs about their ability to teach students effectively, they are more likely to differentiate. We suggest that if schools believe in differentiation, they should offer practice in differentiation through workshops that allow teachers to write leveled or tiered lessons together. A necessary follow-up to the writing lessons stage is the time to observe each other actually implementing a differentiated task in the classroom. Feedback about the lesson observed is helpful in a teacher's development of efficacy to continue the practice. Although differentiation is a complex process, in that students are doing different tasks based on a central concept, it relies on strong and skillful teachers to plan and implement different levels of the same concept at the same time. The study indicates that teacher efficacy and professional development are important to teachers in the process of differentiating instruction.

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