

Differentiated Instruction Strategies in English Language Teaching for Gifted Students

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ABSTRACT

Differentiated instruction is a teaching approach sparked from the pedagogical shift brought by scholars who placed learner differences as important. Accordingly, given its long-standing practice in the education field and the need to improve the teaching and learning of English and student achievement in the subject, the Ministry of Education Malaysia has recently launched the Differentiated Teaching and Learning of English Language program to be implemented in the public schools across the country. Despite the acclaimed benefits of this teaching approach, practitioners especially teachers are still in dilemma toward their own practice of differentiation. For this study, the researcher conducted a mixed method case study exploring differentiated instruction strategies employed by teachers in the teaching of English language and its impact on the motivation of gifted students. The researcher in this study focused on the qualitative research design on the differentiated instruction strategies employed by teachers in the teaching of English language among gifted students. The main aim was to highlight the thematic network analysis procedure. The data collection involved teacher interviews, field note, and document analysis in gathering differentiated instruction strategies from the teachers. The utilization of the thematic network analysis strategy reveals nine differentiated instruction strategies employed by the teachers that were deemed beneficial for the gifted students in the teaching and learning of English language. The findings illustrate the benefits of employing the pedagogical approach in tackling gifted students.

KEYWORDS: Differentiated Instruction, English Language Teaching, Gifted Students.

INTRODUCTION

Differentiated instruction is a classroom approach that has been in practiced for decades. It is a teaching approach that sparked from the pedagogical shift brought by scholars who placed importance on learner differences in delivering knowledge. Given its long-standing practice in the education field and the need to improve the teaching and learning of English and student's achievement in the subject, the Ministry of Education Malaysia has recently launched the Differentiated Teaching and Learning of English Language program to be implemented in the public schools across the country. In this instance, the researcher conducted a mixed method case study exploring differentiated instruction strategies (DiS) that are being applied in the teaching of English language [11]. The study also investigated its impact on the motivation and achievement of gifted students at PERMATApintar through both qualitative and quantitative approaches in gathering the data from the participants i.e. teacher interviews, student question, field note and document analysis. In this article however, the research aims to highlight the qualitative part of the study i.e. the exploration of differentiated instruction strategies practiced by English language teachers in the teaching of English language at PERMATApintar. The inquiry towards understanding the implementation of differentiated instruction approach therefore should be focused on the teachers' practice of differentiation i.e. how it is actually realized in the English language classroom, and how has it influenced the gifted students' English language learning. In this article, the researcher intends to highlight a qualitative data analysis procedure called thematic network analysis [3] which was employed in this presentation of the qualitative phase of a case study mixed method research in the methodology section. But first, literature pertaining to the practice and issues of differentiated instruction in teaching and learning in general were reviewed extensively.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Importance of Employing the Differentiated Instruction in Teaching and Learning

According to [7], even though existing studies have revealed positive effects of differentiation, more studies focusing on the implementation of differentiated instruction or the actual classroom practice especially in the English language classroom which involved gifted children are needed. In addition, in [48] states that despite ongoing effort indicated by existing studies in introducing strategies and revealing the outcomes on student's learning, differentiation continues to linger among educators which baffle the educators due to inappropriate or superficial implementation.

Differentiated teaching and learning thus is worth explored upon, as it is central to Malaysia's education reform in the teaching and learning of English language and due to its complex nature that leads to conflicts in its implementation. Studies have supported such claim that differentiated instruction is indeed a complex instructional approach that it is difficult to be understood, talked about and implemented [8, 51]. The complex nature of differentiation has led to confusion, misinterpretation and frustration in its implementation. In [8] affirm that differentiation is highly complicated:

Educators mistakenly think that differentiation means teaching everything in at least three different ways-that a differentiated classroom functions like a dinner buffet. This is not differentiation nor is it practical. A classroom in which teaching is tailored to the individual needs of students does look different from a one-size-fits-all classroom, but often these differences are less dramatic than teachers believe. For example, a teacher who conjures up a metaphor matched to a student's cognitive ability and personal interests is differentiating, as is a teacher who pushes the thinking of an advanced student during a whole-class discussion.

In [46] state that:

Both the current reform and standards movement call for enhanced quality instruction for all learners. Recent emphasis on heterogeneity, special education inclusion and the reduction of out-of-class services for gifted learners, combined with escalations in cultural diversity in classrooms, make the challenge of serving academically diverse learners in regular classrooms seem an inevitable part of a teacher's role. Nonetheless, indications are that most teachers make few proactive modifications based on learner variance.

This study was to provide beneficial and practical solution to PERMATApintar, as well as other public schools in Malaysia (that will be implementing differentiated teaching and learning for English language subject). The employment of the differentiated instruction strategies is not only appropriate for gifted students, but also English as a second language student in general. Differentiated instruction is an approach that caters for every student's learning needs, which improve his or her academic achievement. The only thing that matter now is to attend to the teachers' dilemma in implementing the differentiated teaching and learning approach.

Therefore, in the present study, the researcher intended to bridge the gap of insufficient research on the practice of differentiated instruction in English language teaching and learning among teachers by revealing the differentiated instruction strategies that could positively influence students in English language learning. Specifically, this study explores the differentiated instruction strategies employed by teachers for the teaching and learning of English language among PERMATApintar students and the rationales in executing those strategies. The present enquiry stems from the researcher's personal experience in the differentiated teaching and learning of English language among gifted students at PERMATApintar. The insights yielded from this study would contribute to a more systematic and reliable practice of differentiated instruction in the teaching and learning of English language. As asserted by [17], the implementation of any educational policy should focus on both understanding what really works as well as the circumstances that permit it to work.

Conceptualization of Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction has been described in many ways in which teaching and learning are student-cantered. In [45] states that differentiation reflects a teacher who will always consider the learning needs of small group of learners while preparing for the lesson. In addressing diversity, differentiated instruction recognizes individual learners as unique and thus offers various ways in learning [31, 45, 50]. It is not only a pedagogical approach, but also involves organization of learners' personal needs aiming towards their personal outcome [24]. Throughout the process, teachers involved will ensure that the lesson plan is aligned to learner's learning styles with suitable pedagogy, curriculum objectives and providing opportunities for demonstration of knowledge acquired [14, 47]. It is

also a constructive and responsive teaching that it provides multiple learning pathways that suit learners' learning capacity [32]. We can see that as a whole, it is a process of planning the curriculum objectives, teaching and learning activities and assessment methods based on the learner needs [26]. Therefore, through the employment of the differentiated instruction learners definitely are placed at the center of teaching and learning where other educational elements such as curriculum objectives and goals are centralized towards the learners. In short, differentiated instruction refers to the patterns of instruction practiced in the classroom that include among others varied grouping styles, informal assessments and various teaching strategies that serve different student needs at the same time [45].

Theoretical Perspectives Underpinning Differentiated Instruction

Theoretically, differentiated instruction is grounded under the sociocultural perspectives of learning as explained through Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD). Through differentiation, students are given slightly higher expectations, but appropriate to every individual student's ZPD. Thus, it is beneficial for mixed ability classroom as lessons are tailored to individual student's level of readiness, interests and learning profiles [44]. Student achievement increases when instruction is matched to student learning needs [10]. In [40] acknowledge this as they found out that children learn well if lessons are tailored to their preferences, while [53] explained that differentiating instruction maximizes students' growth [18].

Tomlinson's Model of Differentiated Instruction

In order to fully understand the concept of differentiated instruction, this section will define the types of differentiation i.e. content, process, product, readiness, interest and learning profile. The elements of differentiated instruction have been extensively empirically, developed by [44-49] Tomlinson. As the renowned advocate of differentiated instruction, in [44] formulation of the three learner characteristics and the three pedagogical components has been influential in the development of the literary scope of differentiated instruction. Much of the scholarly work on differentiated instruction has been credited to and expanded from the work of [8].

Tomlinson's model of differentiated instruction consists of components in which teachers can plan their differentiated lessons. In brief, the review on differentiation literature concluded that learner differences (i.e. readiness, interest, learning profile) are the main catalyst of differentiation that determines how the pedagogical components (i.e. content, process and product) are planned. When learner differences match with the pedagogical components, it enhances learner engagement throughout the learning process. In [44] points out that teacher can lead students to reach their actual potential by giving attention the learner readiness, interest and learning profile.

Differentiated Instruction and Language Classroom

In its entirety, the review on the practice of differentiated instruction indicates the gap in scholarly literature investigating differentiated instruction in ESL context. Most studies investigating the effectiveness of differentiation on learning have been conducted on Mathematics and Science subjects [6, 33, 54]. In language, most of the existing studies have focused on the impacts of differentiation on reading literacy [5, 10, 12, 13, 38]. Differentiation is deemed useful for language and literacy as it adapts and enriches the curriculum [28]. Literacy levels vary among children because they have different experience in life and learning. Pedagogical experience received by students might affect their performance either positively or negatively. At micro level, literacy abilities not only vary from one school to another but also from one classroom to another.

Central to differentiation is a teacher who responds to his or her students' readiness, interest, learning profile (i.e. learning preferences, styles, culture) and also environment. This is demonstrated in Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) that explains the development of one's knowledge (or rather the occurrence of learning) as one is given a task slightly higher or more challenging than his or her level of ZPD. Through appropriate instructional strategies applied in differentiation, students are provided with choices in their learning that increase their engagement and motivation and eventually academic performance.

Existing studies have indicated instructional strategies such as learning center, tiered tasks and varied learning products (assessments) as beneficial to improve reading. This is because these reading strategies improved engagement, motivation and attitude of learners due to the choice provided through differentiation. Differentiation allows students to choose their preferred reading materials. By providing this opportunity in learning, teachers assist students to develop their fluency based on their readiness level and refer to their interests and learning profiles to choose appropriate materials [21].

In addition, levelled texts, vocabulary activities and repeated readings are also useful to develop fluency [42] through flexible groupings, e.g. combination of whole-group, small-group and individual instruction. Increased engagement and motivation in reading were observed as this provides choice for students.

In [25] explains that by providing comprehensible and interesting reading materials allows ample reading choices that would motivate the students to read thus engaged in the classroom. Thus, teachers could set up a mini library in the classroom [21] to provide convenient access to the students. In addition, access to reading materials would contribute to more reading [25].

In retrospect, the practice of differentiation has started to be employed by most schools. Having been developed and practiced for more than fifty years, many of the previous studies were conducted particularly in the U.S. district schools context and have resulted in various instructional strategies appropriate for specific students [1, 2, 4, 16, 19, 20, 23, 30, 35, 36, 37]. The following section reveals inconsistent research findings with regards to students' learning outcome.

Studies on Differentiated Instruction Strategies

Existing considerable number of research on differentiated instruction have examined instructional strategies that contribute positively to learning as revealed through students' motivation and engagement in classroom.

In [55] indicated in their study that collaborative teaching facilitates English language learners. Similarly, in [27] found in their study that English language learners were engaged in learning when the instructor employed cooperative learning that provided the students avenues for meaningful conversations.

In [9] found in a study that English language learners would benefit from tiered performance tasks. However, contradicting effect was revealed, when [29] found in a study that tiered assignment was the least effective strategy. The study reasoned out teachers' knowledge of differentiated instruction as the factor for such result. Nonetheless, in [22] found that tiered tasks were convenient to be conducted. The study found that open-ended and spiralling-scaffold tasks were also convenient to facilitate students' learning. In supporting this, in [15] stated that tiered approach serves as the fundamental for teachers to provide varieties for students e.g. creating a poster, giving a presentation or giving a performance, all simultaneously in a single lesson unit.

Some studies have focused on students' grouping strategy such as flexible grouping, ability grouping and also independent study. In [34] concluded that flexible grouping and independent study were able to engage and challenge students in their learning, and in [6] found placing students according to ability groups contributes to positive learning. Interestingly, in a more recent study, in [39] concluded that high ability students did benefit from differentiated instruction but such was not the case for average ability students.

Therefore, the present study is to find out what differentiation strategies work better with the Malaysian gifted students in English language teaching and learning at PERMATAPINTAR.

METHODOLOGY

Conceptual Framework

The objectives of the mixed method case study were to explore the differentiated instruction strategies and its impact on the motivation and achievement of gifted students in the teaching and learning of English language. The researcher was guided by the study's conceptual framework, rooted from the research problem grounded in the social constructivism context i.e. the implementation of differentiated instruction in English language teaching. Differentiated instruction is grounded within the context of social constructivism learning theory as it is central to instructional enhancement, classroom change and redevelopment [41]. In order to approach this inquiry, socio-cultural theory was utilized. The proponents of differentiated instruction have highlighted that this pedagogical approach contributes to learners' learning growth. Nonetheless, scholarly literature on differentiated instruction reveals mixed findings pertaining to the impact of the use of differentiated instruction approach toward student learning. Some of the studies have found that differentiated instruction either had varying kinds of influence on learners, while some revealed insignificant influence on student learning. In addition, a great deal of studies has observed inconsistent success of its implementation. This conflicting findings warrant further examination on differentiated instruction and its impact. In order to be able to carry out this investigation, a theoretical-base framework is required to accommodate the said objective.

Figure 1 displays the theoretical components featured in the conceptual framework of the study. The framework called Motivational Orientation toward Differentiated English Language Teaching serves as the guide for the researcher in exploring differentiated instruction strategies and its impact on the motivation and achievement of gifted students in the teaching and learning of English language. Framed by the social constructivism learning perspectives, utilizing Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, two instructional principles i.e. Model of Differentiated Instruction [44] and Dornyei's Framework of Motivational Teaching Practice, the researcher was able to reach the objectives of the study. In this article though, the researcher aims to focus on the differentiated instruction strategies used in English language teaching among gifted students.

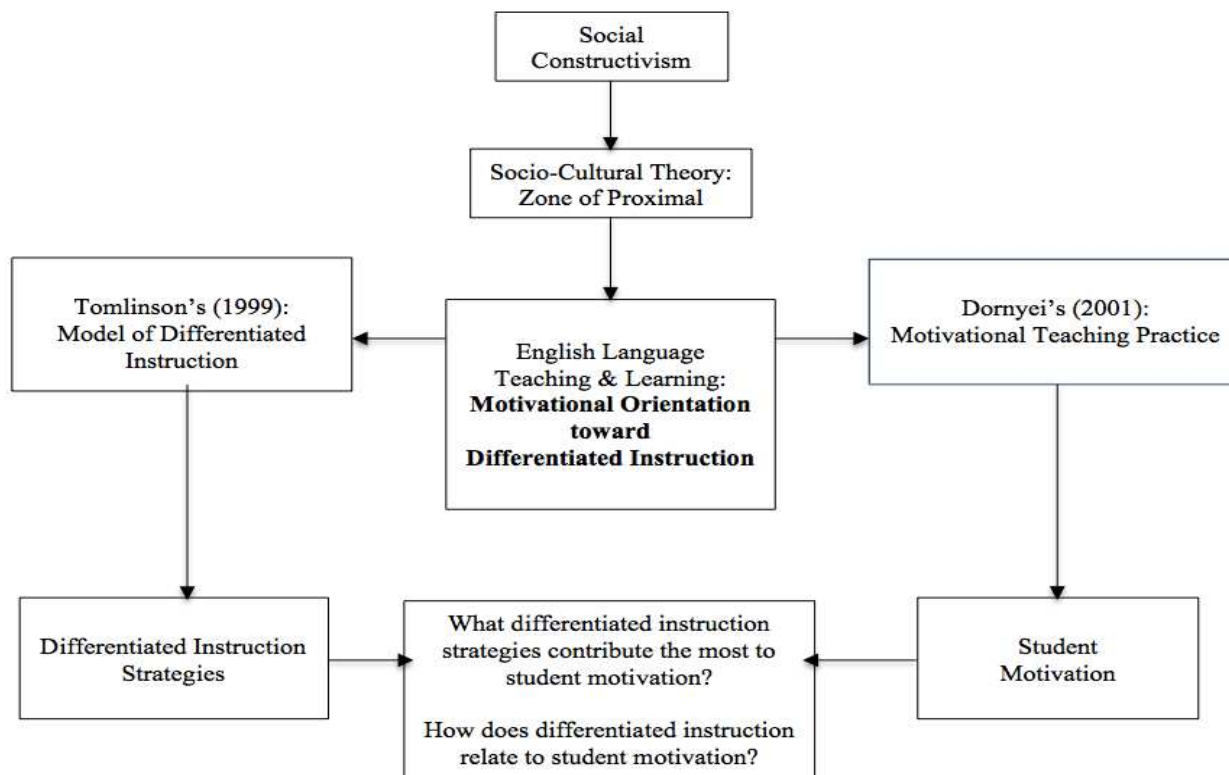


Figure1: Conceptual framework exploring differentiated instruction strategies and motivational orientation toward differentiated instruction in English language teaching

Research Method

As mentioned previously, this research article presents a part of a two-fold study. The main study was a mixed method case study involving two phases i.e. qualitative and quantitative. However, with the aim to introduce the thematic network data analysis [3], the researcher presents the qualitative phase that consists of data collection methods that allow this particular qualitative data analysis to be utilized. Specifically, readers can see in Figure 1 (on the left side) the qualitative part of the study in which the researcher employed [44] model of differentiated instruction in gathering the data through interviews, field notes and document analysis.

Purpose, Participants and Data Collection

In the qualitative phase, the purpose was to explore differentiated instruction strategies (DiS) employed by PERMATApintar teachers in the teaching of English language. This purpose provided the researcher with the research question i.e. What are the patterns of differentiated instruction strategies employed by the teachers for the teaching and learning of English language at PERMATApintar? Two teacher participants contributed to the data in this phase providing their responses i.e. strategies of differentiated instruction that they employed in English language teaching among the gifted students. The participants were purposively chosen in order to get as many teachers as possible. However, there were only 3 English language teachers at PERMATApintar. One had been opted out in order to test out the interview questions, thus two teachers remained for the main study. The teachers had previously received trainings on differentiation and thus far had implemented the approach for about five years. The data collection procedures involved teacher interviews initiated with semi-structured open-ended questions, field notes and document analysis of lesson plans.

Data Analysis

The data from the interviews, field notes and lesson plans were transcribed and sent to Atlas.ti. This qualitative data analysis software serves as the platform accumulating and managing the qualitative data, and most importantly assisting the researcher in conducting the thematic analysis. The researcher employed a thematic network analysis [3] guided by a model of differentiated instruction [44]. This thematic network analysis aims either to explore an

issue in order to understand it or to explore the representation of an idea [3]. In this study, the researcher aimed to explore the representation of differentiated instruction strategies in the teaching of English language in order to convey its meaning in relation to the context of the study. Figure 2 shows a sample of a thematic network analysis of this study. The thematic networks analysis involves several steps.

Preparing the Data

The first step towards analysing qualitative data is transcribing the tape-recorded conversations which in this case, the interviews, the field notes and document analysis. The data from the interviews were transcribed. The content of the field notes were listed down. It consists of phrases and sentences jotted down during the interviews, and were expanded to include the researcher's reflection and thought. The lesson plans accumulated from the teacher participants were scrutinized and described in details. These data were pooled into Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software.

Prior to coding the materials, word count was initiated. This involved scanning for spelling errors and total occurrence. Then, each word was visited in the context of the data sources in order to determine the importance and relevance of each word.

Coding the Materials

The first step of the analysis aims to reduce the raw data by dissecting the paragraphs/sentences/phrases into manageable and meaningful text segments. This can be done based on either the theoretical interests guiding the research questions, based on the prevalent/salient ideas/issues arisen in the text or on the basis of both. In this study, both approaches were applied. Since the researcher was exploring the differentiated instruction strategies, therefore, the data were coded based on the salient ideas/issues emerged as well as based on the components of differentiated instruction of Model of Differentiated Instruction [44]. This coding framework assisted the researcher in exploring the salient themes from the data and shaping them into finite and discrete set of codes. Specifically, through Atlas.ti, coding involves:

- a) Creating initial codes-code automatically i.e. based on the word list extracted from the word count, e.g. abilities, ability, able... etc. This enables the researcher to search, select and code automatically (Figure2).

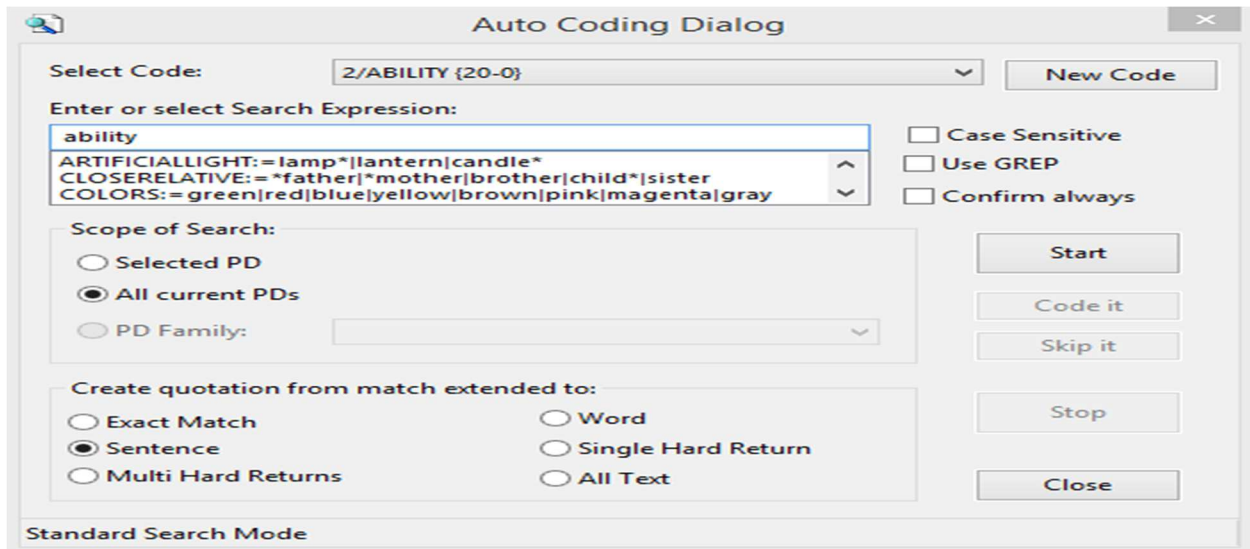


Figure 2: Code automatically using the function Auto Coding in Atlas.ti

- b) Creating meaningful codes-conducting code selection by visiting each code for meaning in the data and reassigning the quotations/texts. Here, the initial codes were selected and grouped accordingly based on the initial themes pre-determined based on the constructs from the interview questions, existing literature on differentiated instruction underpinning the research as well as based on other emerging themes created/added during this process. Thus, the initial codes were revisited, read and understood and memos were written, noting for the relevant themes in order to filter for relevant and meaningful codes. Redundant or irrelevant codes were

deleted (appeared more than once in the same quotations or referring to the same quotations or irrelevant or meaningless).

Identifying Common Themes-Basic Themes

Once the codes were determined and categorized as meaningful, the researcher continued on abstracting themes that are common or significant as grounded in the coded data texts. The data texts were reread within the context of the codes they were classified under. This is where the texts' patterns/structures were abstracted and reframed, then reconstructed [or written] into themes and treated as basic themes.

Constructing the Networks

Thematic networks were constructed on the basis of the basic themes constructed earlier. Before the researcher can finalize all themes as Differentiated Instruction Strategies (DiS), the basic themes were revised into broader categories. This step is called refining themes.

Refining the Themes

At this stage, the researcher refined the themes into i) more discrete and ii) broad themes which are labelled as the organizing themes and global themes. This stage involved greater amount of interpretive work in order to arrive at/derive themes [or categories] that succinctly encapsulate and represent the data texts. Refining themes involve several stages as described below:

- i). Selecting and arranging the basic themes. The basic themes were selected and arranged into coherent groups/categories that bear common patterns, and thus scaffold the particular thematic network. As mentioned previously, the categorizing of the themes was decided/made based on the content inherent to the data texts and also based on the constructs mentioned in the coding framework.
- ii). Establishing organizing themes. The common patterns underlying the groups of the basic themes then were labelled as organizing themes. The example of thematic network as shown in Figure 3 illustrates one organizing theme and one basic theme that are anchored to the global theme. However, two or more basic themes may scaffold two or more organizing themes in order to make up one global theme, hence the thematic network. Therefore, one thematic network will represent one DiS.
- iii). Establishing global themes. Finally, in relation to the basic themes, the researcher summarized the meanings or proposition, assertion or assumption underlying the organizing themes. This creates the global themes.
- iv). Illustrating and describing the thematic networks. At this stage, all of the themes are illustrated in web-like representations. The thematic networks and their descriptions reveals the conceptualization of differentiation instruction strategies found in the data gathered in Phase 1.

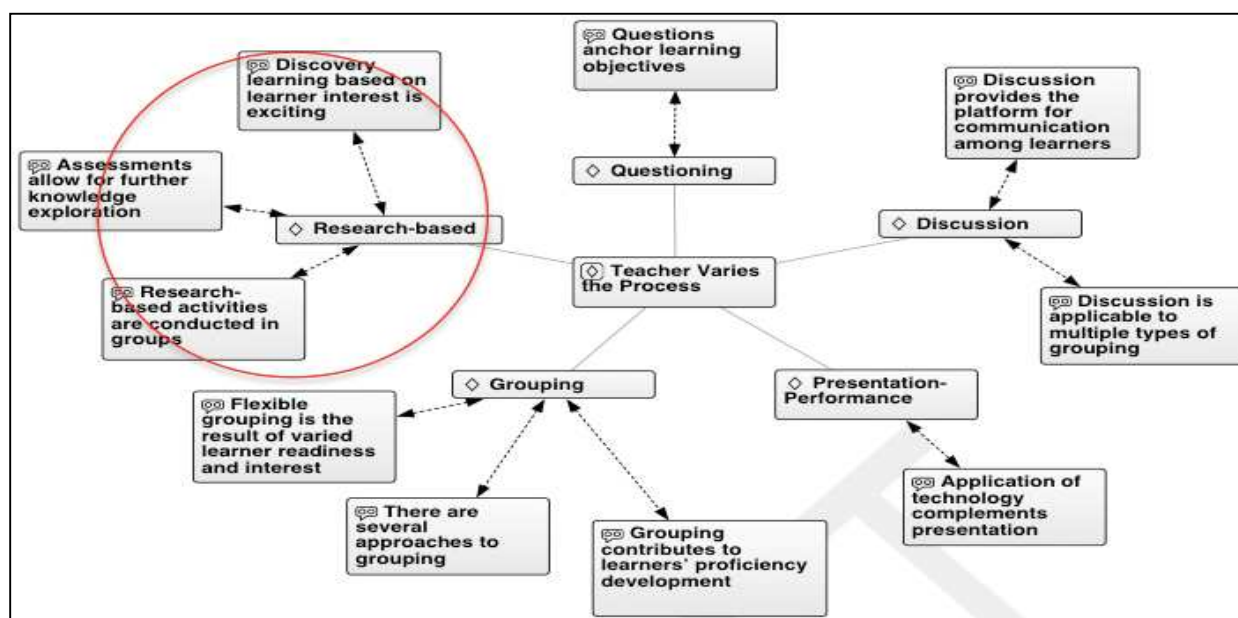


Figure3:Sample of thematic networks

Upon the completion of the analysis, the final differentiated instruction strategies were accumulated. As mentioned above, the data gathered were analysed based on model of differentiated instruction [44]. However, it was found out that only eight categories that are in line with the components of differentiated instruction by [44] (i.e. content, process, product, interest, readiness, learning profile, flexible-grouping, ongoing assessment/adjustment) while other strategies were classified as teacher's roles. Please refer to Figure4 the sample description for thematic network shown in Figure3, discussing the organizing theme-research-based [circled in red].

Organizing Theme: Research-based

The data revealed that this particular process strategy explains that teacher provides activities that involve learners in a knowledge- or information-searching quest. As learners are involved in researches on their own, they are able to determine their learning pace and direction in relation to their levels of readiness/proficiency. Different groups of learners embark on discovering information, or solving issues, with varied learning objectives that is pre-determined earlier. While it allows for knowledge exploration, research-based strategy initiates exciting teaching and learning, and therefore increases learner engagement in the learning:

Nur: I want the students to explore: - Teacher provides activities that let students involve in exploring topics. This initiates students to embark on survey or research activities.

Lesson plan: do the real work: - Teacher reveals that through differentiation students are involved in activities that make them search, read, analyze, discuss, and present what they have gathered. Differentiation thus not only provides different activities and tasks according to students' interests, but also provides the students with knowledge searching adventure that let them discover knowledge on their own.

The aim of research-based strategy is to let students explore knowledge or information, thus gaining their own understanding and form their own interpretation. This promotes development of higher order cognitive processing as they engage in research activities such reading, analyzing, discussing, and presenting their work.

In a research-based activity learners are exposed to advanced learning adventure as they are their own manager of their learning. Therefore, through research-based strategy, learners might find learning as exciting endeavour:

Pink: Students prefer to have varied activities that could let them explore on their own preferred ways.

As teacher allows learners to explore knowledge on their own, this increases their motivation in performing [participating] in the activity. It is important to ensure that learners find the activity interesting to them so that they would voluntarily involve themselves in the whole learning activity:

Nur: The students are quite matured, I noticed that these students, number one, they enjoy, they appreciate discovery learning, they appreciate when I asked them, to seek information on their own.

Since differentiated classroom adheres to learner interest, knowledge discovery via research-based activity is exciting to learners, as they prefer to seek information on their own preferred ways. The ability of teacher to recognize/embrace learner interest maximizes learners' engagement in the activity.

Figure4: Sample description of thematic network

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Differentiated Instruction Strategies in English Language Teaching Among Gifted Students

Even though the analysis revealed nine strategies employed in the differentiated teaching of English language at PERMATApintar, only eight differentiated instruction strategies were matched according to model of differentiated instruction [44] while the new ones were classified as teacher's roles. The strategies present in the teaching of English language at PERMATApintar, as revealed by the teacher participants are i) teacher varies the content based on theme, ii) teacher varies the process, iii) teacher varies the product, iv) teacher bases the lesson on learner readiness, v) teacher bases the lesson on learner interest, vi) teacher prepares the lesson based on learning profile, vii) teacher varies the grouping, viii) on-going assessment/adjustment and ix) generic. For the sake of this discussion, readers can refer to Figure 3. Sample description of thematic network above for the finding of teacher varies the process research-based on the following.

Teacher Varies the Content

The data revealed that teachers differentiate the content based on related English language components and skills, as well as based on particular themes. Content may come from the syllabus provided, however, teachers may provide different content to different groups of students, depending on their interest or readiness. In English language, content may include reading, writing, listening and speaking skills or components such as literature or poem or other specific teaching focusing on e.g. vocabulary or adjectives.

Teacher Varies the Process

The data revealed four different strategies that represent the process. They are discussion, research-based, presentation and questioning. Similarly, according to [45], differentiated instruction consists of the patterns of instruction practiced in the classroom prepared for different student needs at the same time.

In order to initiate communication, discussion serves the function as the platform stimulating the students to interact with one another to be critical and to increase engagement during class activity. Discussion is also applicable to flexible grouping strategy i.e. small group or whole class discussion. Topics of discussion are always based on learners' interests.

The data also revealed that the teachers conducted research-based process in their teaching. Students were exposed to discovery learning that is based on learner's interests, allowing them to discover and explore e.g. through a survey method. Research-based process is applicable because students prefer to seek information on their own, and become more excited in exploring topics related to their interests or current issues. This strategy is conducted in small groups, in order to cater for diverse interests among the students. It was also revealed that teachers would assess the students from time to time for further knowledge exploration where necessary.

Another type of process found in the data is presentation/performance that involves students in acting, role-playing and multimedia presentation. In doing presentation/performance, the application of technology is always apparent as students prefer hands-on learning in making videos or dramatization of short stories. The teachers revealed that the students find doing presentation/performance as enjoying and interesting activity.

Finally, the data also revealed that questioning strategy is used as an anchor guiding a lesson towards achieving the learning objectives set by the teachers.

Teacher Varies the Product

The data revealed that teachers provide varied tasks or assignments to the students. Teacher differentiates the products to suit students' interest or readiness. The products may include verbal, written or creative products. Verbal products can be in the presentation forms of multimedia, role-play or speaking. Written products can include writing, short story or research report. Creative products may include music or poem.

Teacher Bases the Lesson on Readiness

The data also revealed that teachers differentiate their instruction according to student readiness. Student readiness refers to students' proficiency levels. Teachers gather students' proficiency levels through pre-tests that serve as the role to provide information pertaining to the students' current levels of proficiency. Basically, pre-tests provide teacher with the students' current progress and understanding of a topic. In addition to that, it also provides teachers with information to reflect on what has been learned and as the means to plan a lesson. This is in line with [52] zone of proximal development in the way that the student data gathered through pre-tests allows teacher to provide students with slightly higher challenge in the tasks or activities. In [40] acknowledge this as they found out that children learn well if lessons are tailored to their levels of abilities.

Teacher Bases the Lesson on Interest

It was also found out that teachers differentiate their instruction based on the students' interests. Tasks or activities that are based on the students' interests or real life situations ensure their focus and engagement in learning as they become more interested, focused and diligent. As an example, students are interested in performing dramatization or role-play. Such active learning activity arouses curiosity in the students.

The data also revealed that tasks or activities that are appropriate to students' preferences contribute to fun and enjoyable lesson. The suitability of tasks or activities that are student-based such as real life, role-play, hands-on or exploration instils fun and enjoyment in the lesson, as it is interesting (to the students).

In addition, it was found out in the data that differentiating lesson based on learner interest assists teachers to establish learning relevance among the students. As students found out the tasks/activities or topics of discussion familiar, they would find the learning/lesson as meaningful/making sense.

Teacher Prepares Lesson Based on Learning Profile

The data revealed that teacher prepares lesson based on learning profile. This strategy reflects teacher's concern over learners' learning style or learning environment, as well as relating lesson to learner's intelligence preference.

Preparing a lesson by giving consideration on learner's learning style/environment is beneficial in maintaining fun and enjoyable lesson as learners enjoy appropriate task/activity through role-play, hands-on and exploration activities. In addition, it is also useful in maintaining focus and engagement since the types of topic/task/activity are based on learner interest.

Relating a lesson to learner's intelligence preference promotes the development of creativity and critical thinking among learners. The use of technology in teaching and learning allows learners to be creative e.g. in the use of multimedia applications while discussion contributes to critical thinking.

Teacher Varies the Grouping

The data also revealed that teachers vary their instruction in terms of grouping strategy. In the study, the types of grouping are determined by learner readiness levels i.e. proficiency levels and also their interests. Thus, flexible grouping e.g. small group or pair work are allowed due to varied learner readiness. In practice, a differentiated lesson depicts students involved in an activity in different types of grouping, doing different tasks with different levels of difficulty.

The data also revealed that grouping contributes to the development of learner readiness. Appropriate grouping strategy would enhance the students' levels of proficiency. This is because appropriate grouping strategy not only allows knowledge sharing, but also contributes to thinking. Through grouping strategy, everyone is involved and focused on the activity, helping group members to improve.

Teacher Provides on-Going Assessment & Adjustment

The data revealed that teacher provides ongoing assessment and adjustment. This strategy explains that teacher assesses students' progress regularly through pre-tests or on-going assessments. It provides information pertaining to students' current readiness levels and based on this information teacher can make adjustment on the lesson. Providing consistent assessment also encourages students to perform better.

Teacher's Roles in Differentiated Classroom

The strategies revealed above thus far are congruent with model of differentiated instruction [44]. The data however revealed three distinct themes that were present in a differentiated lesson practiced at PERMATApintar, but not prescribed to model of differentiated instruction [44]. Therefore, the researcher decided to classify the three strategies as teacher's roles. Teacher's roles in differentiated classroom include encouraging students, providing choice in learning, and monitoring.

The data revealed that teacher assumes the role of encouraging students by giving rewards and praises. It was revealed that rewarding students is also a significant strategy. Rewards such as praises and gifts serve as the means of appreciation and motivation for the students. Rewards thus encourage the students to perform better.

The data also indicated that there is a presence of freedom in learning provided by the teachers to students. This is because teacher allows choice to the students in making decision about their learning. This strategy motivates learners to be more engaged in learning because they are given choice i.e. the opportunity to choose. In short, students are given options in what they want to do but of course with optimal monitoring as mentioned above.

It was also found that even though students are allowed freedom in their learning, teacher still monitors the learners. Monitoring includes personal approach to individual students or through the assessments. Specifically in the classroom, teacher monitors the flow of the lesson moving from one group to another during the activity phase.

CONCLUSION

In this article, the study reported has provided an insight into the employment of differentiated instruction strategies as a guide to benefit not only the English language teachers at PERMATApintar but also public schools in Malaysia as Differentiated Teaching and Learning in English language program is implemented by the Ministry of Education.

Specifically, the researcher intends to advance the thematic network analysis as introduced by [3] embedded in a mixed method case study exploring differentiated instruction strategies in English language teaching and learning and its impact on the motivation and achievement of gifted students at PERMATApintar. The study itself aims to provide differentiated instruction strategies that could benefit not only the English language teachers at PERMATApintar and other public schools in Malaysia, but also to all practitioners of differentiation in general. Differentiated instruction has been established and well known in the western part of the world, but its implementation is relatively new in the Asia region. This study contributes to the limited scholarly studies of differentiated instruction, especially in English language teaching among the gifted students, in this part of world. Specifically, this study has revealed differentiated instruction strategies that were employed by the PERMATApintar teachers as found by the researcher through employing thematic network analysis procedures. Methodologically, thematic network analysis had proven to be a useful and systematic qualitative data treatment that provides clear depiction of the roots of qualitative data reduction process. [Readers can contact the main author for each

description of the thematic network analysis of all differentiated instruction strategies found in the study, and also for the report on the second phase of this study i.e. the impact of differentiated instruction strategies on gifted student motivation and achievement.]

Nonetheless, this study requires further investigation in other aspects of differentiated instruction strategies. For instance, even though the differentiated instruction strategies revealed here might be significant to the success of teaching and learning of English language among the PERMATApintar students, they may not be appropriate to other students in other schools, in different parts of the country. A similar study conducted on multiple schools with multiple teachers would definitely provide different depiction of differentiated instruction strategies applied in English language teaching and learning. On another angle, the present study could be extended by correlating the differentiated instruction strategies with student motivation as well as student achievement.

Furthermore, a study demonstrating the interplay between the strategies, motivation and achievement in English language teaching and learning shall provide greater insights into which specific differentiated instruction strategies work better with which group of students.

This study thus sheds some light in understanding differentiated instruction strategies employed by teachers. Therefore, it is necessary for future studies to understand its potential impact toward learners such as motivation towards English language teaching and learning as well as their overall achievement, in the effort to enhance both the teaching and also the acquisition of English language among the learners.

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