

Practice of Differentiated Instruction in Language learning Process: a Narrative Inquiry

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Abstract

Teaching is for learning and learning becomes effective when the teachers provide a repertoire of activities that meet learners' needs. It is necessary to study and prepare documents on what sorts of activities are used in English language teaching in classrooms. This research explores the variety of activities English language teachers use in the classrooms. The main objectives of my study are to find secondary English language teachers' experience of providing activities and to find out the role of the ICT to support to differentiation of English language skills and aspects. My study is delimited to only modification of process (one component of differentiated instruction).

I used narrative inquiry as a research method and personal stories of research participants as data. My research participants were one female and four male secondary English teachers who were engaged in teaching for ten to twenty years in government schools. Their teaching stories tell us how they differentiate their instruction in the meaning-making process. I used the Cognitive Load Theory of John Sweller to make the theoretical base of my study. Based on the stories of the participants, the researcher discovered that differentiated instruction is an essential approach to be practiced in our classroom to address classroom diversity. Furthermore, it was found that English teachers in our area modified their instruction through group work, pair work, project work, question methods, no silent, and whole class activities to cater to the diverse needs of all learners and it was easier due to the ICT. Thus, it is concluded that the teachers variously differentiate their instruction with the help of ICT.

Keywords: Classroom diversity, Differentiated instruction, Information communication technology, Language learning process, Language skills,

Introduction

Our classrooms are full of diversity. Students' ages, genders, castes, customs, religion, ethnicity, educational and economic background, and socio-culture are the main sources of diversity. Due to the differences between the students, teachers get differences

in student's readiness, interests and learning profile. A teacher teaching using single content, single methods or techniques, and a single evaluation system cannot give justice to all students. That is because one size does not fit all. Only a handful of students get advantages from the instruction. In that situation, the teachers cannot expect quality education in the absence of equal learning opportunities for all students (Tomlinson et al., 2003). To solve this problem, the stakeholders of education cannot change our students' diversity. It is the beauty of our classroom. Rather, they have to replace our single-size instruction with differentiated instruction.

Differentiated instruction tailors our teaching according to the learners' level, interest, and learning style to cater to the needs of all learners (Jeklin, 2016). This approach "promotes engagement, facilitates motivation, and helps students make the connection with what is being taught in the classroom to the things they value outside of class" (P. 95). It provides options in the subject to be taught in the classroom. The content matches the needs of learners and engages them. When learners are engaged once in any content, they get wider knowledge. They do not get any hesitation to share their ideas about it in the group or with a peer. Ultimately, they become motivated towards the subject matter. Thus, differentiated instruction has been the core of language pedagogy to maintain quality education. It has been used throughout the world.

However, there was no adequate discussion on the practices of DI in Nepal.

Differentiated instruction was first introduced in America in the 1600s. Due to the migrated children from different countries, a one-room schoolhouse concept was in fashion. Later, Carol Ann Tomlinson contributed to it. Nowadays, it is in practice globally where diverted students can learn at their own pace. As a culturally diverse country, the emergence of DI has been increasing day by day. A few scholars from different universities have started to do research in Nepal also. Joshi (2019) studied it but his study was delimited to the case of slow and fast learners.

Differentiated instruction has three components to work on. These issues are the practices of modifying content, process and product. The content insists on subject matter like books that are taught in the classroom. Process is a meaning-making process like group work and product is the evaluation system like field visit report. Each issue is practiced with various methods and techniques globally. These practices are documented and established as a core approach to teaching and learning (Kovtiuh, 2017). In our locality, the teachers do not treat first students and last students of the same class equally. In sitting arrangement, task preparation, allocation of activity, providing role responsibility in group or peer, providing time and effort, and many other contexts, they behave students differently. In other words, the teachers do not teach like robots; in the same way in all contexts. they differentiate their instruction for different purposes like diversity management, ensuring quality education, and student-centered learning.

However, we have not documented our practice of differentiated instruction. If the Nepali English language teachers differentiate their instructions in one or another way, how do they differentiate their instruction in the language learning process? How do we create our documents on the practice of differentiated instruction?

when the researcher creates a document with the practice of differentiated instruction in the language learning process, it reaches among the ELT community as well as among the other researchers. It contributes to the area of research and in the classroom teaching. It happens when every student in a diverged classroom gets an opportunity to foster their ability according to their level, interest and learning profile. We need to let them think about the content themselves. That is impossible in one-size-fits-all teaching (Fox and Hoffman, 2011). We must shift this teaching into differentiated instruction that ensures quality education. Besides, DI has been a milestone in managing learners' diversity and making students responsible for their learning. That is the reason I intend to research the 'practice of differentiated instruction in language learning process'.

This research explores the practices of secondary English language teachers on differentiated instruction in Nepal. The worldwide practice of differentiated instruction deals with mainly on three components: content, process and product. They have a broad range which can be too big topic to explore the practices on them. So I have taken only process component which is the core part of differentiated instruction. Moreover, I examined the experience and practice of five secondary English language teachers from Midwestern part of Nepal.

The purpose of this study is to explore the strategies/ activities to modify the English language learning process in secondary-level classrooms. Based on the above purpose, I posed the following questions in my study: How do English language teachers narrate their experiences of providing activities in teaching language skills and aspects? How does information-communication technology (ICT) support the modification of English language teaching process ?

From my search, I found empirical research done by Smets and Struyven, (2018); Siam and Al Natour, (2016); Koeze, (2007); Pozas et al., (2020); and Joshi (2019) which take issues nearer to my study. Smets and Struyven (2018) raised the issue to present a checklist that scaffolds teachers' professional decision-making about differentiated instruction; Siam and Al-Natour (2016) targeted to identify the differentiated instruction practices.

Koeze (2007) aimed to determine if differentiated instruction affected student achievement; Pozas et al., (2020) studied to explore German (as a native language) and mathematics teachers' use of DI practices and Joshi (2019) chose the issue to explore how English teachers perceive learning differences of learners and how they address these

differences. It shows that the researchers are interested to identify the perception of teachers and students, practices, and challenges on differentiated instruction.

Smets and Struyven (2018) had taken checklist-methodology in which participants were chosen from the list of expertise like Carol Ann Tomlinson. Siam & Al-Natour (2016) had taken mixed-method in which the participants were selected randomly from the target group, data were collected both from close and open-ended questioners and the data had analyzed using means and deviation. Koeze (2007) also used a mixed method where both questioners and interviews were used to collect data. Pozas et al. (2020) applied mixed-method and Joshi (2019) used the narrative inquiry method in his study and his study was delimited to the case of slow and fast learners.

Smets and Struyven (2018) discovered that flexible grouping and the use of learning styles as the main practices of differentiated instruction. Siam & Al-Natour (2016) found that differentiated instruction is not practiced due to the lack of teachers' knowledge on DI components. They further noticed that weak administrative support, low parental support, lack of time, and shortages in learning resources are the challenges for the application of DI. Koeze (2007) observed that DI had a praiseworthy effect on students' achievement due to the Choices. It focuses on tiered lessons as a practice of DI. Pozas et al. (2020) examined tiered assignments, heterogeneous grouping, tutoring systems ability, and project-based learning as tools to practice differentiated instruction. And Joshi (2019) uncovered that learner differences can be addressed by creating a learning conducive environment and providing tasks as per their learning speed.

From the survey of this empirical research, the researcher focuses mainly on issues, methods and findings. It is found that most of the studies are on perceptions and challenges. They prefer mixed methods of research and prescribe different activities for DI practice. These issues, methods and findings have signposted the way for my research vividly.

Methodology

I have chosen interpretive paradigm in my research method because it keeps researchers in the field for a long time. That long-term engagement and effort provide enough opportunities to interact with the target communities. Secondly, qualitative research makes subjective meaning. Taylor and Medina (2011) give importance to the interpretive paradigm by saying interpretive orientation is essential for teachers wishing to adopt more student-centered pedagogies such as constructivist approaches to teaching and learning. It means researchers immerse themselves within the target culture. The researcher writes a report expressing his / her own experiences. As a researcher, I believe that we can construct knowledge interpreting previous literature; participant observed

information and the participants' interviewed opinions in their context along with my understanding.

Narrative Inquiry as a Research Method : I applied narrative inquiry to explain the secondary-level English language teachers' experiences and practices on differentiated instruction through their stories. This method of research helps us to understand and collect experience through “collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with settings”(Clandinin and Rosiek, 2019, p.43). Same as I collaborated with my research participants to narrate their stories regarding my research issue. This method has a rich framework to collect and analyze the information because we need to consider temporality, sociality, and place simultaneously (Yang, 2011). The information we collected compares past to present, communities to communities and one location to another. Here, I use the narrative inquiry with the rich framework to collaborate with the research participants to get lived experiences on differentiated instruction that may be different from the standard DI through their stories.

Research Participants : I have chosen non-random sampling method to select my research participants. Under this, I applied purposive technique in which we do not include everyone who is available to us rather those available are included who meet the defined criteria (Alvi, 2016). To find an appropriate participant to my research, I tried with several secondary level English teachers.

Information Collection Process : I collected information on how secondary English teachers practice differentiated instruction in their classrooms. When I fix the research sites, I called the English teachers and requested time to visit in school. According to his/her time, I reached the school or their home. At first, I communicated with the Headmaster and through the headmaster, I reached up to the English teachers. I discussed the opportunities and challenges that my research participants got from my research. After their permission, I started to collect the information.

The main research tool to collect information was an interview. I designed an interview. I prepared general six questions without direct quote of differentiated instruction. I put one question with some context first and created other supplement questions at the same time. If time favors, I continued the interview for up to two hours. I recorded the interview and transcribed the data into written form on the same day. This interview helped me to find the perception of the teachers of differentiated instruction.

Information Analysis and Interpretation : When I got information in the form of voice or written, I started to analyze and interpret the information. For that, I followed the Six Phases of Thematic Analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) First, of all, I listened or read the voice or draft or table minutely. I transcribed the saturated information into written

form. Then, I coded some interesting features of the information. After that, I kept the coded information into different match-able themes. I rethought to determine the themes. Lastly, I produced findings from the themes.

Theoretical Base

I have planned to apply the Cognitive Load Theory (CLT) of John Sweller. The cognitive load theory advocates that we human being have three types of memories: sensory memory, working memory, and long-term memory (Paas et al., 2010). The sensory memory collects information with the help of sensory organs. The information goes to the long-term memory via working memory. The working memory passes the information from sensory memory to long-term memory only if the learners are able to keep the information enough time in the working memory (Paas et al., 2010). But the capacity of working memory is very limited. If we bombard much information in working memory at a time, it cannot reach up to the long-term memory. It goes to the long-term memory either a single idea comes in the working memory or the information already exists in the long-term memory.

Discussion

This chapter deals with my research question number one. The purpose of the question is to find the practices of differentiating instruction in the language learning process at the secondary level. In other words, the research question designed to seek the answer of how secondary English language teachers are differentiating their instruction while teaching language. I was conscious that there is no full-fledged practice of differentiated instruction in our classroom. But at the same time, I was also aware that the teachers are not treating all the students in the classroom as a robot. My intention is to see how the teachers are leading the transitional period of shifting traditional methods to student-centered methods, how teachers are making their classroom inclusive to bring all level learners into the mainstream of education, and how learners become responsible for their own learning.

To seek the answer to my research question, I spent about one year. Many teachers ignored to give information. Some others were enjoying traditional ways of teaching. Among my research participants Anita, Deep, Rukum and Lalbir gave very little information. They were interested in sharing their experience but they had limited experience. Then I focused mainly on my two research participants Daljit and Damber. While collecting information, I said nothing about differentiated instruction. Rather than considering language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) and language aspects (vocabulary, grammar, language functions) as core parts of language teaching and learning, I asked questions focusing on the skills and aspects.

I found my research participants practicing 'flexible instructional grouping' by different names. My research participants Mr. Daljit and Damber are using the terms like 'heterogeneous grouping in teaching listening', 'think and share with pair in teaching speaking', 'process writing in teaching writing', 'cooperative method in grammar teaching and teaching language functions' in teaching English language in secondary level. This method of teaching skills and aspects has enough space to identify learners' readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles and the teacher can tailor the lesson to cater to the needs of diverse learners. Thus, 'the heart of the differentiated instruction is flexible instructional groupings (Heacox, 2014); (Gartin et al., 2002), effective differentiation employs flexible use of small grouping (Tomlinson, 2003), where differentiated learning tasks are designed in response to learners' needs.

Another hallmark of differentiated instruction is providing student choice within a framework of differentiated activities (Heacox, 2014) or Choice boards, (Gartin et al., 2002). My research participants also told the experience of using methods like 'choice of the topic in writing'. Similarly, they used project work in reading text which allows students for communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity. They are also practicing 'the use of technology, questioning method, no silent method (no one remains silent, they must speak whatsoever they know), whole class discussion, product writing, vocabulary in context, grammar in context and communicative methods in teaching grammar match the concept of (Gartin et al., 2002) as indicators of modification of language learning process like 'whole class discussion, independent projects, community instruction and so on'.

Information and Communication Technologies are crucial to any personal development, empowerment, and institutional framework for inclusive education and development (Ileana and Bucksch, 2015). For a long time, making justice to all students equally in a classroom was problematic. Single teachers had been presenting a single topic using a single method and technique with a single teaching material. Teachers were the main source of knowledge. ICT appears to support more flexible and inclusive instructional practices in the participants' classroom. For that, I have found two main characteristics of ICTs e.g. multiple choice, and ICT interactional design.

As I mentioned above ICTs have the capability to provide varied activities and to facilitate in meaning-making process with different choices (Siragusa and Dixon, 2009). YouTube videos are the main resource to provide multiple choices. I found the students of my research participants watching videos from YouTube Prepared by the CDC. There they found multiple videos about the same topic. Similarly, mobile dictionaries are also found in different choices. The students were free to choose English to Nepali or English to English dictionary. Another choice giving ICT is Google Chrome. Students with access to Google Chrome get enormous choices in content, process, and product. They get

meaning, concept, description, definitions, and so on from word to picture, from basic level to advanced level, from English language to Nepali or Hindi language, and from audio to visual forms. Thus, such a choice can help to manage our classroom diversity and help to make our classroom learning inclusive.

Besides the choices, I found another characteristic of ICT in teaching and learning the English language which is interactional design. These types of interactive features are mainly found in online classes (Leto,2020). The students are found learning the English language sitting in their cozy room. It has been possible to learn worldwide. In the same way, G-mail, WhatsApp, messenger groups, Facebook, and electronic boards are promoting interactive learning. Ultimately, they are supporting to make our classes inclusive and accessible. Thus, when appropriately designed, ICT-based learning can facilitate student learning more deeply through messages composed of words and pictures rather than through traditional means of communication involving words alone (Siragusa and Dixon, 2009) and makes our education inclusive.

KEY INSIGHTS, IMPLICATIONS, CONCLUSION AND REFLECTIONS

As a final chapter, it mainly incorporates what I found from the research. I have presented the findings in four headings; insights, implications, conclusions and reflection. While I was working on differentiated instruction, I travelled through a course with new experience which are presented under the key insights. Then, I have dealt with the implication. This part gives the message to apply differentiated instruction to the stockholders of teaching and learning. The next part is conclusion which answers the research questions in brief. The chapter ends with my reflections as a qualitative researcher. It includes a brief narration from KU joining day one to the present time.

Key Insights

At first, I thought that though differentiated instruction is only one way to maintain quality and is the calling of the time, it is nearly impossible to apply in the secondary level of the government school of our area. I had heard from even great educationists and researchers that this method is applicable at the basic level only and it can be applied in A One boarding schools of the urban areas like Kathmandu. However, I found that differentiated instruction has been accessible in English language teaching and learning at the secondary level of government schools and recent emergent ICT has played a great role in making practical to differentiated instruction. The ICT has mainly supported making our teaching and learning interactive and provided choices of the topic which are the parameters of differentiated instruction.

When I was in the early stage of the research, I thought that it was difficult to make our classroom interactive. I remember our big size classroom without appropriate teaching-learning materials. However, when I reached up to my research participants, I found them modifying their language learning process with the help of ICT. They were making their classroom interactive.

Furthermore, I found that my participants differentiated their instruction while teaching reading and writing. They said that Google and YouTube were collections of tiered activities and reading and writing text from very low level to upper level. These activities and texts could be displayed according to the level, interest, and learning profile of the learners. These things were being practiced in students' homes through their parents' mobile devices. I found students developing their grammar, vocabulary, and language functions using different language Apps, video games, mobile dictionaries, quizzes, short films, and so on.

Implications

When a teacher enters into a classroom, s/he encounters with diverse students. some students are fast learners and slow learners, some are introverts and extroverts, some other students are shy, and so on. At the same time, there is a single teacher with a single book, with a single method and with a single teaching material. The teacher should teach equal justice for all types of students. How is it possible? It is impossible to guarantee justice to every student in one-size-fits-all teaching. Handful students take advantage of the classroom teaching and others just participate without learning. So, this research is a message for all English language teachers to apply differentiated instruction. Without this method, teachers teach just one or two students. Apply the differentiated instruction and become the teacher of all students in the classroom.

likewise, it is a message for curriculum designers and textbook writers. While designing curriculum and textbooks, keep the concept of differentiated instruction in mind. You always talk about quality education. But is it possible to have quality education without equal opportunity for all students in the classroom? Do all students get the opportunity to learn in one-size-fits-all teaching? No, it is not possible. we know, curriculum is the key constitution of teaching and learning. Static curriculum supports traditional methods of teaching and learning. So, design a flexible curriculum to support differentiated instruction. This type of curriculum only meets all learners' readiness levels, interests and learning profiles.

It is a message for the head teachers, language trainers, parents and students. Differentiated instruction is a long-term movement against the one-size-fits-all teaching. It is like a revolution to bring change in teaching and learning. In this long-term movement, teachers are in the front row to lead but s/he is not all in all. without your support, the teachers can do nothing. You need to know the concept of differentiated instruction. so that you will be ready to provide time, effort and required materials. If we do so, I hope this exam-oriented teaching learning changes into knowledge-oriented.

Last, but not least, it is a message for the educational policymakers of Nepal. The main arena for maintaining quality in education is the classroom. The classrooms are dominated by traditional teaching methods. The teachers are spending their time teaching a handful students of in the classroom. Teaching and learning activities are conducted for passing and scoring good marks in examinations. It is done for earning a certificate not for learning. why is this miserable condition taking place in our education system? There may be several reasons but the main reason is the lack of policy on differentiated instruction. It is requested to include differentiated instruction policy in educational acts and laws.

Conclusion

The main purpose of my research was to find out the practice of differentiated instruction in the language learning process. Being a core part of teaching and learning pedagogy, differentiated instruction effectively manages diversity and maintains quality. It modifies content, process, and product according to the learners' choices. The researcher chose the language learning process to see how English language teachers differentiate their instruction. It was found that it's not easy to apply differentiated instruction in full-fledged versions in every school. English teachers from rural areas are not trained in new trends. Teaching resources and materials are not available. However, the teachers from urban areas differentiate their instruction in one way or another. Their classrooms are furnished with ICT-based gadgets. They generally use activities like group work, pair work, project work, and activities with ICT like YouTube, Facebook, messenger and so on.

From my study, I conclude that the traditional language teaching system has been shifted or in the way of shifting into differentiated instruction with the help of different activities. These activities are kept under the parameters of differentiated instruction. It was found that secondary-level English teachers differentiate their instruction through flexible grouping. The students are kept in small groups in pair groups or sometimes in whole class groups considering their readiness level, interests, and learning profiles. It incorporates mixed-up learners in a heterogeneous group. Here, the

learners get an opportunity to enjoy their potential, learn a language at their pace, interact with friends and mentors, and so on.

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