Exploring Challenges in Implementing Differentiated Instruction for Vulnerable Students

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ABSTRACT

The regular class comprises students with various needs, interests and learning capacities. The learning achievement seems to be at different levels due to diverse needs. The lecture method is the choice of almost every teacher due to their unchanged thought in teaching. This study explores the lived experience of a teacher using differentiated instruction in class and the challenges faced in adopting differentiated instruction. The research design employed for this study is qualitative with hermeneutics phenomenology, which depicts the challenges experienced by teachers while teaching in the regular classroom. Four teachers from the community school in Morang district, one of the eastern districts of Koshi province, were purposively selected for the interview with written consent. The interview was transcribed and coded for the thematic process. The transcription was read and reread more times and categorized to generate a basic theme. The themes are further reorganized by searching for commonalities to extract a global theme that was described as the intersection of a theoretical construct. The challenges explored from the perception are inadequacy of training, content modification, excessive workload, resiliency in inner management, lack of time management, the effect of large class size, and inflexibility in time and resource lack of knowledge for instructional planning. The finding contributes to adopting instructional strategies and creating an inclusive environment in the school. This also becomes a milestone for implementing diversity management strategies to address the diverse needs of learners

Keywords: Differentiated instruction, Diverse needs, Hermeneutic phenomenology, Traditional techniques.

Introduction

Our country, Nepal, is diversified in geography, culture, caste and ethnicity. The multicultural community exists in every society. Multi-culture, ethnicity, and topography are the identities of our nation. Every person's norms, values and responsibilities are shaped by social structure (Dreamson, 2018; Sherpa, 2019). The exact difference is deemed in the classroom with the diversity of the above features (Felder & Brent, 2005). Since the teacher is the facilitator of the learning environment in the school, he needs to be a mediator and simplify allocated

content based on student's needs and strengths. If a teacher cannot facilitate the learning pace, the student cannot utilize education as a life carrier.

Students acquire education to modify their lives, making a better future. The paradigm has shifted in teaching and learning to ensure inclusive education in the classroom (Page et al., 2021). This strategy is for including children with disabilities in the regular classroom based on their needs and interests. The intrinsic motivation of the school seems to be predisposed to the inclusive atmosphere in the public school (Bukhari et al., 2023). The global agenda of No Child Left Behind, ratified in 2002 by all the countries in the world, emphasized education for all (Jennings & Rentner, 2006). To fulfil the international plans, every nation has realized that children with disabilities need to be educated by keeping them with non-disabled peers. This type of thought welcomes children of different needs, interests, strengths, and learning capacities along the lines of mainstreaming (Roberts & Simpson, 2016). Since the children are individually different in attitude, thought, background, gender, caste, ethnicity, experience and so forth, in this context, children want to learn in a different situation (Nakkeeran & Nakkeeran, 2018). Some children want to learn using auditory or tactile material, and some use a constructivist approach (Obaid, 2013). The various features in the classroom cannot be addressed by continuing conventional methods. It is unable to protect the dropout rate of children with disabilities from school. Differentiated instruction motivates to remain in the classroom with potential engagement. In delivering effective instruction strategies, 40-50% of students can achieve the expected results (Handley et al., 2022). The teacher must assist at an optimum extent regardless of differences to give students an advantage in classroom teaching (Haque, 2016).

In Nepal, public schools are facing the problem of ensuring inclusion in classroom teaching with the appointment of untrained teachers for inclusive education. Due to these reasons, the students are falling behind the poor achievements and are demotivated in the existing environments. The diverse needs of the students are not practised in the classroom discourse due to the variety of challenges such as time constraints, limited resources, and formal education boundaries. Moreover, lack of effective leadership, ill motivation in teaching and ineffective school management impedes inclusive education (Oguntebi et al., 2012). However, the importance of differentiated instructions in modifying the curricular content to the Nepali classroom is fundamentally challenging and impracticable due to the practices of traditional approaches in teaching. In such situations, teachers are trying to accumulate all the students of different backgrounds with their existing references. Differentiated instruction practices are crucial for bringing changes to

the learning process, and creating effective learning environments. In this concern, this study aims to explore the challenges the teacher faces while adopting differentiated instruction

Human Capital Theory as Theoretical Underpinning

The human capital theory is a framework for understanding the economic values of education and training as an investment in human capital (Tan, 2014). It suggests that individuals can increase their productivity and earning potential by acquiring knowledge, skills and abilities through education and training and that this investment in human capital can lead to higher economic growth and development for society (Jaiyeoba, 2015). This theory is based on the idea that human beings have specific innate abilities and talents but that these abilities can be developed and enhanced through education and training. The more education and training an individual receives, the more productive they can be in the workforce and the more valuable their labour is to employers (Klein & Cook, 2006).

The human capital theory also emphasizes the importance of on-the-job training and learning by doing, as these experiences can enhance an individual's human capital (Tan, 2014). The theory suggests that employers have the incentive to invest in the human capital of their employees as it can lead to higher productivity, reduced turnover, and a more skilled workforce. Overall, human capital theory provides a framework for understanding the role of education and on-the-job training in economic growth and development.

The Principles of Differentiated Instruction

The classroom is diversified with different cultures, behaviours and experiences. Employing differentiated instruction acknowledges the difference and intends to respond to the student's needs (Onyishi & Sefotho, 2020). The prospective teacher creates an inclusive learning environment to ensure the student's progress. The teaching element embraces time, material and student groups to serve students in the classroom. These elements are flexible and adjusted according to students' needs and interests (Siam & Al-Natour, 2016). The intent of differentiated instruction is continuous access to students' progress, ability, needs and interests. For the continuous assessment, the teacher needs to determine students' relation to academic goals and adjust the teaching approach as expected (Turner & Solis, 2017).

The teacher should always think about the mechanism of mitigating challenges in a classroom activity. Differentiated instruction mixes all approaches so that students receive individual, small group and whole-class instruction. Groups need to be varied with students working with peers of similar academic ability (Lefstein, 2002). The excellent teacher always thinks the student should consider the lesson engaging, but difficulties occur when challenging students with different needs. The teacher who regularly accesses students' progress can modify work so that students can engage in favourable content. The teacher incorporates flexible tasks as provided to students.

Methodology

This study was rooted in qualitative research with interpretative phenomenology, which seeks to explore the lived experience of phenomena in a social setting (Dibley et al., 2020). The essence of this design is the tradition informed by a concern to understand the world based on the point of view of people who live in it. The grounded approach in this study was to understand and conceptualize the meaning and interpretation that the professionals dropped while utilizing differentiated instruction. In this prospect, four general education teachers were purposefully selected from the Morang District of Koshi Province general school. The school stands 55 kilometres away from the district headquarters, Biratnagar. Positioned 15 kilometres south of the Mahendra highway, it resides amidst a community rich in diverse cultures. Agriculture serves as the predominant occupation, while many youths seek employment abroad. Comprising 18 staff members, the school boasts a team led by a principal and a coordinator, with two staff members dedicated to early childhood development, ten teachers at the primary level, six at the secondary level, and two non-teaching staff. Enrollment figures at the school tally up to 356 students, with 189 girls and 167 boys in attendance.

This design delved into the meaning of the lived experiences of social settings and the shared meaning of similar experiences (Frechette et al., 2020). In the undergoing study, the adopted design helps to study the students' lived experience in the regular class. The experience and narratives are drawn from the social setting of the general course based on values and beliefs. The teacher who participated in this study has struggled in regular school for more than ten years in their professional tenure. The participant teachers had short-time professional development training. Still, they were not able to implement it in classroom teaching due to poor resource disbursement and the large number of students.

Regarding ethical issues, the participants were informed consent by a preliminary visit to the school. Confidentiality had been maintained by using pseudonyms. Indepth interviews via semi-structured questions were taken to gather vital information. Data analysis revealed the themes of collaboration and interactions with teachers and students. Interviews with the participants were recorded by audio recorder. Recorded interview responses were transcribed verbatim, and codes were developed. Similar codes were organized to generate a theme. Likewise, themes were classified as the central theme of the study. Themes were illustrated based on ground data and compared and contrasted with data to data and literature.

Result and Discussion

In this section, the author has discussed the major themes derived from the participant's information linking with literature and theory which are presented below:

Content Modification

Differentiated preparation is a technique of coaching those targets, fulfilling the unique studying desires of each scholar in a study room. Content modification is one strategy that may be utilized in differentiated guidance to regulate the level or type of content material being offered to college students(Ortega et al., 2018). Content amendment can involve simplifying or breaking down complicated content into smaller, greater portions for college students suffering or imparting extra challenging content for students who want a superior fabric (Pham, 2012). Here are some methods in which differentiated instruction can utilize content modification. Differentiated instruction can utilize content modification uncovers the simplification of content using less complicated language, breaking down complex ideas into smaller components and using an assistive device to help with instruction (Landrum & McDuffie, 2010). In this context, the participant said:

I teach science subjects in the classroom. The science subject requires more figures and drawings. I need to demonstrate by using the picture on the whiteboard, but the children with visual impairment feel problems in the vision-based demonstration. I use less complicated language and break down the ideas into simple components. Sometimes, I use visual aids to explain the principles.

Concerning the above, teaching science is more complicated for children with visual impairment. Visual demonstration is essential for perceptual learning in science teaching, but visually impaired learners cannot understand it due to visual deficits. In such a context, the content needs to be modified into descriptive form and presented using auditory means. In this prespect, P2 asserted:

The students who have a visual disability need more advanced support in content. They feel formal curricular content is complex, and the assignment is challenging. The students struggling with content material and assistive devices include greater practical issues in guided notes. In this context, content material modification is required to be adopted in the classroom for gainful learning. By tailoring the content material to satisfy the special needs of each student, the teacher can assist all students in reaching their full capacity.

Concerning the above, students with visual impairment feel challenged in formal curriculum content without assistive devices. There are challenges in performing practical assignments, particularly in science and mathematics subjects. On behalf of this, contents need to be delivered with verbal description and tactile modelling. The teacher can modify the nature of the assignment as an oral presentation instead of a pictorial demonstration. In this context, the participant said:

The classroom I teach is composed of students with visual impairment and sighted students; some are deaf. I instruct Nepali subjects for the regular class. The children with visual impairment cannot see my demonstration, and I illustrate the subject in a musical melody. The children with visual problems attentively listen to the class and respond at this time.

On behalf of the above argument, the children with visual impairment cannot understand Nepali in the demonstration mode. The teacher likes to present the story in musical melody and present the story in musical melody to students with visual impairment. With this approach, the students enjoy the class patiently and interact with classmates. In this context, the teaching strategies need to be modified with verbal descriptions that explain the features of curricular contents. The visual material content needs to be transformed into explanatory content with an assistive device. Another participant said:

I teach science in the regular class where children with visual impairment are reading. The visual impairment cannot participate in experimenting in the lab due to visual deficit. In such conditions, I describe the procedure and theory of the experiment in place of experimenting.

In the above concern, children with visual impairment cannot participate in science experiments due to visual disability. Some of the experiments are dangerous for touching. The theory of the experiment needs to be explained verbally, and the smell of chemicals should be introduced to detect the properties of gases. The explosive properties of gases can be introduced with the help of listening. Another participant said,

In my class, the students possess different learning needs and competencies and need different types of assistive devices, including audio recordings, movies, and pictures. I assist students in recognizing and interacting with the content through tactile material. The content is split into descriptive fragments and taught by verbal expression.

Concerning the above statement, students' interests and needs vary with competence. The assistive device makes teaching learning content easier according to their needs and interests. The audio recordings, movies and pictures help acquire knowledge in the content areas. The frequent use of tactile material provides doses for the expertise and skill of learners through instruction.

Effects of Large Class Size

A class containing students larger than the standard class size refers to a large class size. The prospective teacher cannot control all students when disseminating the course content and feedback. In a large class size, students with diverse needs cannot get proper benefits from the teacher. Participant T1 asserted:

I teach mathematics in a class containing more than 60 students. In this class, students of diverse backgrounds, such as language, ethnicity, and learning capacity, sit and cannot cross the class due to the narrow space. I do not know who is attentive to my instruction, and I think that not all students understand the mathematical content equally.

Concerning the above, the existing class size scenario is larger than the government standard. In such a context, the teacher cannot accommodate all students in his teaching. The teacher cannot control children's unwanted behaviour in a limited time. The needs and interests of learners are diversified and cannot meet goal achievement. The reciprocal interaction is impossible for every study in terms of individual differences. The participation of every student is mismatched

in a class containing a large number of students. In such a situation, the school administration needs to focus on the government standard class size of 1:40 in Terai, 1:30 in a hilly region, and 1:20 in the Himalayan region. The classroom's physical structure needs to be maintained according to the student's numbers. In favour of the above context, another participant, T2, said:

My focus on teaching is to complete the allocated content in the specified period. I have to instruct respective subjects within the school calendar. Most of the teachers intend to concentrate on how to cover the course content within the allocated time rather than on student performance.

Relating to the above, the teachers focus on the coverage of books but not on knowledge and performance. The teacher is always in a hurry to complete courses instead of understanding. In such conditions, teachers cannot reach the needs and interests of learners since the book is one of the resources for differentiated instruction. The books are the only available material teaching for diverse students. However, the language in the book may differ from the intent of learners since the quality of the information in a book increases with the reading level (Barnes & Puccioni, 2017). The student can learn simple to complex knowledge at different reading levels. The teacher instructs different content to make understanding to varying levels with comprehensive meaning. Another participant T1 stated:

I am the newly appointed science teacher at this school. Before I began the class, I was permitted to submit the course breakdown of the syllabus within a year. I submitted the total content into four quarterly without any activities, preferring lecture methods in every content. The situation of students is ignored with the preference for course breakdown.

Concerning the above, the newly appointed teacher is imposed to perform the course breakdown based upon the formal syllabus but no student-centred activities. The newly appointed teachers do not have inclusive education training for addressing the diverse needs of learners. The course breakdown should not only confine the breaking of contents according to the terminal exam but also include collaborative activities and assignments for every content. The activities need to be clarified with the lesson structure's specified objectives (Boekaerts & Corno, 2005). Since introducing differentiated instruction is a collaborative task between teacher and students, So we need to incorporate views and ideas with combined effort in the course breakdown.

Lack of Flexibility in Time, Space, and Materials

The rigidity of time allocated for period-wise teaching is termed the inflexibility of time. In this situation, the resource time allocation and material are limited in teaching subject content. The time provided for each teacher becomes insufficient for his effective teaching. Without time, the teacher needs to terminate his instruction without completing content objectives. In this context, participant T2 stated:

In my school, there are more students in every class. It is challenging to manage the class for every teacher. The teacher cannot provide feedback after the assignment. The teacher needs to perform many tasks in class, but assignment-checking time is lacking. I cannot go back through the classroom.

Concerning the above, the existing class where the teacher instructs is large and cannot monitor every student at the time of instruction. The teachers need to inspect every student to support him toward better achievement. Regular and step-by-step feedback is essential for continuous progress in school education. However, the teacher cannot manage the class due to the large class size. So, every school needs to manage the class size according to the standards approved by the Education Act. Another participant T3 said:

I teach in class six, which has children with visual impairment. When I start teaching, they murmur and are not attentive to my instruction. Math is bitter for them, and they go to resource classes to learn music. Children with a learning disability are also not intended to read.

Concerning the above, students with visual impairments distract the class when the teacher starts teaching due to difficulty understanding. Generally, math subjects are less of a favourite for most students. The students with visual impairment are unable to take visual input for conceptualization. They are less likely to study mathematics due to the lack of basic knowledge of mathematical content. On the other hand, learning materials such as Braille books on mathematics are also lacking due to the mathematical symbols. In such cases, the government must focus on developing tactile material and Braille books simultaneously.

Lack of Flexibility in Collaborating

Collaborative interaction is an essential factor for gainful learning in the classroom. The learning opportunity needs to be provided for all students to work with various peers. The flexibility of working with homogeneous and heterogeneous groups is the better approach for enriching differentiated instruction. In this concern, participant T2 said:

I have been teaching English for the last five years in this school. The teaching system is entirely traditional, and performing duty is single. The teachers are not collaborating in the aspect of pedagogy and content. The teacher accomplishes their duty individually. Only during the exam do the teachers come to the staff meeting to conduct the examination.

On behalf of the above concern, the teacher intends to use a conventional approach to teaching using traditional techniques. In the teaching aspect, the teacher does not collaborate to discuss better teaching strategies and diagnostic teaching. Since individual effort is not effective for gainful learning. Mutual collaboration and coordination strengthen the inclusion of a student with diverse needs. So, schools need to establish a collaborative environment where various ideas and views from different sections can be inculcated. Another participant T3 asserted:

I teach computer subjects in this school from basic to secondary level and need to engage for a long time in theoretical classes. Due to the limited time, I cannot allow engaging students for sufficient time in the computer lab. There is no updated computer in this school. The coordination of administration with the government office is lacking, and the government's facilities are unavailable.

In the above concern, computer subjects are not taught practically. Teaching computers is preferred as theoretical knowledge. The students do not possess practical skills after obtaining a certain degree in such a context. The present scenario is the school administration is not accountable for updating computers based on diverse needs. In such conditions, schools must coordinate with government offices to manage adequate computers.

Lack of Knowledge for Planning Differentiated Instruction

The knowledge for planning differentiated instruction seeks to succeed in the teaching-learning activity in the classroom with diverse learners. The proper scale

of abilities assists in implementing differentiated instruction parameters in students' classroom engagement. Participant T3 explained:

I have been teaching in this school for the last ten years. I assume a lesson plan is essential daily, but I cannot build it due to the number of daily periods. Without a lesson plan, I cannot think about differentiated planning. I cannot recognize how differentiation takes place in lesson structure.

In the above argument, the teacher enters class without a lesson plan. A lesson plan is a teaching strategy to teach content daily. The daily learning objectives cannot be achieved significantly without a lesson plan. Furthermore, differentiated instruction cannot be ensured without differentiated planning. So, the school administrations need to orient every teacher to instruct with adequate preparation by addressing the diverse needs of learners. Another participant T2 stated:

Having spent several years teaching, I have made a schema for every piece of content. A detailed lesson plan description is unnecessary for experienced teachers and is time-consuming and bound. In place of the lesson plan, the extension of curricular content is appreciated in the pace. Most teachers openly disclose their thoughts on the limited use of differentiated programs.

In the above concern, the teacher who has been teaching for a long time is reluctant to prepare lesson plans for effective teaching. Their mindset is to teach without any preparedness because of their long experience. The lesson plan simultaneously systematizes their teaching behaviour. The classroom environment becomes supportive from the perspective of inclusive education. Every student gets the opportunity to enhance their innate powers with their participation.

Conclusion

In the end, enforcing differentiated instruction in a regular lecture room may be challenging. However, it is also profitable. Teachers face several barriers, including time constraints, loss of assets, and trouble accommodating their students' various getting-to-know varieties. However, teachers can overcome these challenges with proper planning, schooling, and support and provide their students with customized and suitable learning material. To enforce differentiated education efficaciously, teachers need first to investigate their students' desires and abilities and then design classes catering to their wishes and talents. They must additionally offer regular students several activities and substances that

might be appropriate for their mastering styles, interests, and choices. Instructors must communicate with their students frequently and offer feedback on their progress. Teachers must also collaborate with colleagues, directors, and parents to ensure that each class student receives the assistance they need to succeed.

In summary, enforcing differentiated instruction may require more effort and resources, but it is profitable. It could cause stepped-forward pupil mastering results and extra pupil engagement inside the classroom.

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