Soukeina LOMBARKIA, Dr. Radia GUERZA

EFL STUDENTS' AND TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS USING DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

مواقف طلبت وأستاذة اللغت الانجليزيت تجاه انتهاج التعليم المتمايز فحي التعليم العالجي

Soukeina LOMBARKIA*⁽¹⁾

¹ Mustfa Benboulaid Batna-2 University,

s.lombarkia@univ-batna2.dz

Dr. Radia GUERZA⁽²⁾

² Mustfa Benboulaid Batna-2 University, r.guerza@univ-batna2.dz

Submission date:01/04/2021 Acceptance date:24/06/2021 Published date 15/09/2021

Abstract:

The present paper attempts to identify English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' and teachers' attitudes towards using differentiated instruction in higher education, as an alternative teaching approach. It employed a descriptive method in the form of two questionnaires, randomly administered to forty (40) second-year students and fifteen (15) teachers at the department of English, Batna-2 University. Data were organized and analyzed through descriptive statistics. The findings reveal that both teachers and students have, to some extent, a positive tendency towards using differentiated instruction. With regard to learning obstacles, students call for alternative techniques to better understand the lesson. Typically, they prefer to learn within their cognitive capacities to get actively involved during the course. However, teachers accentuate various strategies that can

² - The sending author

¹ - The sending author

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be used in the classroom to achieve a differentiated learning atmosphere. They also support the use of differentiated lesson plans, varied activities, and flexible grouping, which are designed with reference to varied student learning traits.

Key words: Differentiated instruction; EFL students' attitudes; EFL teachers' attitudes; higher education

ملخص باللغة العربية:

يرمي هذا البحث إلى تحديد مواقف طلبة وأساتذة اللغة الانجليزية تجاه استخدام منهج التعليم المتمايز في التعليم العالي، باعتباره مقاربة تعليمية بديلة. حيث تم استخدام خلاله المنهج الوصفي على شكل استبيانين، وزعا اعتباطيا على أربعين طالبا في السنة الثانية، بالإضافة إلى خمسة عشر أستاذا في قسم اللغة الانجليزية، جامعة باتنة-2. من ثم قمنا بتجميع البيانات وتحليلها من خلال إحصاء وصفي، حيث كشفت النتائج بأن لكل من الطلبة والأساتذة مواقف إيجابية، إلى حد ما، تجاه استخدام التدريس المتمايز. وبالأخذ بعين الاعتبار مشاكل التعلم، طالب وقدراتهم الإدراكية حتى يتسنى لهم أفضل للدروس، كما عبروا عن تفضيلهم التعلم ضمن نطاق قدراتهم الإدراكية حتى يتسنى لهم المشاركة بشكل أكثر فعالية في الدروس. أما بالنسبة للأساتذة، فقد تطرقوا إلى العديد من الاستراتيجيات التي يمكن اللجوء إليها في القسم من أجل تحقيق جو إلى مجموعات بحسب سماتهم التعلمية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التدريس المتمايز؛ مواقف طلبة اللغة الانجليزية؛ مواقف أساتذة اللغة الانجليزية؛ التعليم العالي

Introduction:

Recently, teachers take full responsibility for making instructional decisions about a syllabus without being aware of their effect on students' learning. Accordingly, students somewhat think that they have grasped the lesson, yet the simplest question or activity cannot be answered. In this vein, King-Sears (2007) asserts that time is a crucial factor that prevents teachers

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from effectively managing all the instructional procedures of the lesson based on the curriculum designed. Indeed, such an issue has become an education challenge whenever students get low results in classroom achievement. In particular, within the same educational setting, some students feel bored while others get lost in the same lesson, at the point of which variance in students' ways of grasping information can be observed. Typically, the goal of teachers is to facilitate the understanding of information for all students and to ensure that learning standards have been achieved. Murnane and Steele (2007) argue that although teachers are adequately qualified, they are still unable to create an inclusive learning atmosphere. Such a claim is supported by Prince (2011) who contends that "as a result of the criticism of public schools, the educational community needed new ideas and approaches to instruction to foster more effective teachers that addressed a diverse student population" (p. 6). More importantly, since each learner has a specific way of learning, teachers should have full awareness of the essential factors that affect their learning so that they can engage them in the process of teaching using alternative instructional strategies.

Over the last decades, teachers started thinking to improve the educational standards for better student academic achievement. Based on the assumption that students achieve learning objectives at different rates, they cannot understand and perceive information at the same level. Thus, there is an increasing challenge for teachers concerning the adoption of the appropriate teaching methods. Differentiated instruction is a widely accepted teaching approach used by different educational leaders to meet students' varied instructional needs (McLean, 2010). The present study attempts to determine EFL students' and teachers' perceptions of using different instructional strategies in higher education classes. It unveils inner potentials on the way students and teachers wish the learning environment to be. This adaptive model of teaching may raise teachers' awareness of the importance of student diversity. Even though students are in a higher education setting, they still have limited cognitive abilities as well as specific preferences used while learning. Ultimately, differentiated instruction will provide teachers with insights for reconsidering instructional procedures and checking their effectiveness regularly. In this regard, students get motivated and interested to learn via designed materials. This research work seeks to answer the following question: What are the attitudes of EFL students and teachers towards the use of differentiated instruction in

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higher education?

1. Theoretical Framework:

1.1 An overview of differentiated instruction:

This section covers a considerable amount of literature regarding differentiated instruction, which caters for the diverse needs of EFL students. This teaching approach has widely been investigated over the last decades. Differentiation, as an inclusive process of teaching and learning, is based on the premise that since students vary in the way of perceiving and processing information, different instructional practices need to be used to engage all of them in the process of learning (Heacox, 2002). Besides, Tomlinson's framework of differentiation involves three instructional areas: (a) Content "input" refers to what should be taught; (b) process "sensemaking" is how to engage all the students during class through varied instructional practices; and (c) when students demonstrate their understanding through varied strategies (quizzes or oral performance), the teacher can gather information on the mastery of content, this process is called product "output" (Tomlinson, 2001, pp. 3-4). Based on the belief that teachers should have enough knowledge about students' interests, readiness, and learning needs, the most appropriate teaching approaches adopted would facilitate the plan of rigorous instructional practices (Tomlinson, 2001).

It has been demonstrated that students learn differently; each has a unique comprehension level, learning style, and proficiency rate as well as academic skills. Differentiated instruction is a worthy solution that permits teachers to select the most suitable instructional strategies in response to students' diverse needs (Daggett, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2010). Besides, extensive research has revealed that the degree of differentiation in providing support, resources, and varied options of activities helps students to remember, understand, and practice all what is learned, which ultimately affects student achievement (Gregory and Chapman 2002, as cited in Palmer and Maag, 2010).

1.2. Students' and teachers' attitudes towards using differentiated instruction:

Recent developments in the educational system have led to a renewed interest in student diversity. As long as teachers depicted the importance of students' differences, many researchers conducted considerable studies exploring the relationship between students' varied needs and the teaching process. In fact, it is quite difficult for both teachers to move from the

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traditional way of teaching to an innovative one, and students as they always rely on their teachers throughout the academic year. Nicolae (2013) illustrated that, for almost all teachers, the process of differentiation means applying different teaching strategies to realize the best learning setting for all students; this assumption does not reflect the core meaning of this concept, however. In other words, being skillful enough in adopting distinctive teaching methods to create an inclusive learning atmosphere is not adequate; it is rather the way of understanding and managing the flexibility of, for example, learning centers, project-based, tiered activities, and individual practices that help students enhancing their learning actively and consciously.

A study of five teachers' journey was examined; they implemented differentiated instruction courses to meet students' varied needs. At first, they were less convinced and skeptical of the idea of differentiation, and it was not an easy task to shift from "a procedural mindset to a differentiated instruction mindset" (Reilly and Migyanka, 2016, p, 24). The findings suggest that those teachers challenged the flexibility of several instructional aspects including formats, strategies, and practice. In addition, they were not skillful enough in adopting the beneficial strategies; some of them solely used one or two strategies, whereas others tried to compile more than four at once (Reilly and Migyanka, 2016). Therefore, based on a multitude of studies, it has been proved that teachers have an adequate conceptual knowledge related to differentiated instruction, but when it comes to translating it into practice successfully, it would be difficult, for them, to control all the instructional practices (James, 2009).

In addition to the studies conducted on teachers' beliefs, understanding, and level of applicability regarding differentiated instruction, few studies focused on identifying students' perceptions towards using the differentiated method. The literature has demonstrated that there is no solid evidence that determines the relation between the implementation and effectiveness of differentiated instruction in spite of its usefulness on students' achievement. Therefore, such an issue called for tremendous investigations over the last few decades (Anderson, 2007; Subban, 2006; Allan & Tomlinson, 2000). Moreover, during an investigation exploring students' perspectives on tiered assessment, Chen (2007) reported that the differentiated method "tiered assessment" was of great importance as it helped students to improve their skills, motivation, and confidence. Furthermore, another study revealed that differentiated instruction had presumably beneficial effects on developing

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students' skills and interests towards the lessons (Karadag and Yasar, 2010). The same results have been shown by Avcı, Yüksel, Soyer, and Balıkçıoğlu (2009), who concluded that differentiated instruction helped students to increase their interests during the course.

2. Methodology:

2.1. Context:

The process of instructional design is a foremost step that scaffolds underlying principles. Throughout the learning progress, students vary at the level of understanding, practicing, and demonstrating the mastery of content. It is true that, in higher education settings, students are cognitively mature as well as responsible for their learning; nonetheless, students' diversity is an important aspect to be considered by teachers. In this respect, Tomlinson (1999) have supported an adaptive teaching approach, so-called differentiated instruction, based on the premise that all learners can engage in daily classroom practices using different instructional strategies. However, what is frequently observed at universities does not reflect student learning theories and assumptions. Within the actual educational requirements, teachers, most of the time, adopt a one-size-fits-all approach. In other words, since students are taught with no regard to their varied preferences, it is difficult for them to understand the information and to work on different tasks. Besides, teachers more often get the "yes", but when they check its reality, they can figure out the value of individual student differences. The current study focuses on the approach that EFL teachers have to follow even if they teach learners in a higher academic setting. Due to the heterogeneity of the classroom, it is preferable to avoid a single teaching method to teach varied learners. Instead, differentiated instruction provides effective principles for teaching diverse students. Accordingly, EFL teachers as well as students will flourish this work with their opinions, attitudes, and perceptions to draw conclusions on the importance of this teaching assumption within the context under study.

2.2. Participants:

Participants encompass two groups of subjects from the Department of English at Batna-2 University, Algeria. They are selected using a simple random technique to enlarge the scope of the study. The first group is forty (40) second year EFL students, representing 14.92% of the entire population (268 students), who recognize the learning environment they belong to. They could hereby provide their opinions and attitudes about the alternative learning setting. The second group of participants is fifteen (15) teachers

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(22.05%) selected from a population of sixty-eight (68) EFL teachers who have experienced the present teaching-learning setting.

2.3. Instruments:

To identify the perceptions of EFL students and teachers towards using differentiated instruction in higher education classes, the descriptive method is the most convenient strategy. Accordingly, a questionnaire is the appropriate research tool, in the sense that "it affords a good deal of precision and clarity, because the knowledge needed is controlled by the questions" (McDonough and McDonough, 1997, p. 171).

2.3.1 Description of the questionnaire:

Students' questionnaire consists of fifteen (15) items arranged in two parts: (a) questions related to differentiation principles ranged in 3-Point Likert Scale, and (b) closed and open-ended questions. Teachers' questionnaire, on the other hand, includes twelve (12) items organized into three sections. The questions vary in their structure; most of them are closed and open-ended items, while some encompass 4-Point Likert Scale.

3. Results and Discussion:

To achieve the aim of the current study, the two questionnaires are analyzed using SPSS (version 25) to interpret students' and teachers' views, perceptions, and suggestions obtained for the sake of attaining valuable findings. With regard to the participants' responses, several questions, which were closely related to this article's research question, are selected.

3.1. Analysis of students' questionnaire:

Section One: The Application of New Instructional Assumption in the Classroom

As far as this section is concerned, 3-Point Likert Scale addresses new instructional practices that serve current learning requirements, including the materials used and the role of grouping structures. In other words, the scale reveals the relationship between students' differences and teaching strategies. This section aims to unveil some of the constant learning obstacles that call for an alternative instruction design.

Likert	scale	for	Respondents	Expressed in %
agreemen	nt			•
Agree			30	75
Neutral			7	17.5

Disagree	3	7.5
Total	40	100

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It is apparent from Table 01 that the majority of respondents (75%) had a positive attitude towards using varied instructional materials during class, and (17.5%) did not determine their standpoints. However, (7.5%) of the same respondents disagreed with such instructional decision-making. A large proportion of the participants are not satisfied with the actual instruction design, which obviously shows that most of the students are aware of their actual learning and call for alternative learning materials.

Table (2): Being comfortable with pair work

Likert Scale for	Respondents	Expressed in %
agreement		
Agree	23	57.5
Neutral	5	12.5
Disagree	12	30
Total	40	100

Table (3): Being comfortable in group work

Likert Scale for	Respondents	Expressed in %
agreement		
Agree	22	55
Neutral	9	22.5
Disagree	9	22.5
Total	40	100

Table (4): Being comfortable in individual work

Likert	Scale	for	Respondents	Expressed in %
agreemen	t			
Agree			21	52.5
Neutral			6	15
Disagree			13	32.5
Total			40	100

With reference to data from Tables 02, 03, and 04, half of the participants

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(50%) had a positive tendency towards being comfortable in individual, pair, and group work compared with the results (between 22.5% and 32.5%) recorded from those who did not agree with the use of grouping structures during class activities. However, less than 30% of participants did not express their viewpoints regarding this educational procedure. There seems to be a trend towards using this instructional grouping depending on students' learning preferences, yet not all of them can be comfortable in individual work, pair work, and group work. In brief, each student has particular learning preferences; one can do well when s/he is placed in all three types of grouping, while others just choose what entails in the repertoire of their learning profiles.

Section Two: Adaptive Instructional Practices

This section addresses some instructional strategies that teachers can use to facilitate learning for all students.

Table (5): An opportunity for students to choose between different	nt
tasks	

Variable	Respondents	Expressed in %
Yes	38	95
No	2	5
Total	40	100

Table 05 shows an example of adaptive instructional practices. Roughly, all the respondents (95%) accepted the idea of giving a chance for students to choose among different activities. It can be considered as approval for change in daily classroom routines and practices. Besides, (5%) believed that one task-based instruction is an appropriate method that teachers should adopt in the class; they support giving all students the same learning activity. In brief, a substantial number of students reveal that varying instructional practices is a significant instructional thought from which they can have a chance to do well and to use their skills to accomplish varied tasks.

3.2. Analysis of teachers' questionnaire:

Section One: General Information on the Current Teaching Process

This section combines closed and open-ended questions. It is intended to show facts on the actual teaching atmosphere.

Table (6): The status of the actual teaching method

Variable	Respondents	Expressed in %

Yes	13	86
No	2	14
Total	15	100

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From Table 06, a large number of participants (86%) stated that their ways of teaching suited students in the class, whereas (14%) maintained that their teaching strategies were not convenient. In brief, a significant number of teachers shows a positive attitude towards the teaching strategy used. Respondents who answered "yes" were asked to justify their choices. For them, the teaching method adopted might suit almost all learners, without overgeneralizing. Teachers' ways of delivering the content suit learners as "they try, when planning the lessons, to take into account learners' interests, needs, and language proficiency", besides "to students' reactions inside and outside the classroom".

Obst	acles			Respondents	Expressed in %
encou	intered				
On	the	part	of	10	66.6
teach	ers				
On	the	part	of	5	33.3
students					
Total				15	100

 Table (7): Obstacles encountered during teaching

When asked to mention some of the obstacles encountered (Table07) while teaching, the participants demonstrated (a) factors

on the part of teachers covering the appropriate teaching method, materials, time allocated, and overcrowded classes, which rated as (66.6%); and (b) factors on the part of students, wherein the same respondents (33.3%) indicated: lack of motivation, interest, concentration during class, students' readiness, and learning styles. The findings suggest that teachers face tremendous obstacles while teaching, which prevent them from controlling the course effectively. More specifically, ignoring, to some extent, students' attributes, may affect their learning. In sum, it is a challenge for teachers to jeopardize those factors. They endeavor to make pertinent instructional decisions based on students' learning attributes and establish student/ student and teacher/ student relationships. Such interactional patterns lead to achieving differentiated classes when they are grouped in a single learning

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environment.

Section Two: The Principles behind the Implementation of Different Teaching Strategies

Principles of the differentiated approach are translated into the form of attitudes, using 3-Point Likert Scale, aiming at identifying how teachers perceive such a teaching strategy in a higher education setting.

Table (b). Treparing unrerentiated resson plan				
Likert Scale for	Respondents	Expressed in %		
agreement				
Strongly agree	5	33		
Agree	9	60		
Disagree	1	3		
Strongly disagree	00	00		
Total	15	100		

 Table (8): Preparing differentiated lesson plan

The Table above demonstrates that a considerable number of participants (60%) agreed and (33%) strongly agreed that preparing a differentiated lesson plan may engage all the students in the process of learning, whereas solely (3%) showed a negative attitude (disagreement) towards this instructional decision-making. Probably, they consider their teaching method as a convenient strategy that fits all students. These results suggest that a large proportion of teachers shows approval to plan lessons following the principles of differentiation. Such attitudes can be considered, in this case, as a hint towards a change in the current instructional design.

Section Three: The Importance of an Alternative Teaching Approach This section involves a closed-ended question, which highlights the significance of variation in the instructional strategies.

Table (9): The use of different instructional strategies during class

Variable	Respondents	Expressed in %
Yes	11	73.3
No	4	26.6
Total	15	100

This Table shows that the majority of participants (73.3%) accepted using different instructional strategies to facilitate learning for the whole class,

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whereas (26.6%) of them did not find it of great importance to vary in the instruction used.

When they were asked to justify their answers, those who responded with "yes" demonstrated the following justifications:

• Differentiation can be seen when using varied groups to facilitate the evaluation of each student in an effective way;

• When taking into consideration students' interests and matching them with their learning styles.

• When designing the instruction in a way that students can acquire the main content and make sense of ideas, it helps in improving teachers' materials as well as assessment used so that students within the same classroom can learn regardless of their abilities differences; it also helps teachers to achieve their objectives and involve all their students during the learning process. It allows them to enhance their skills and self-reliance.

With respect to such clarifications, we can understand that most of the teachers have a general trend towards varying in the teaching strategies used to stimulate all students to learn with reference to their cognitive abilities and skills. One of the participants said, "In writing, for example, you might teach narrative paragraph or essay by oral explanation/reading aloud (for auditory learners) and then use graphic organizers (for visual learners)", and another respondent added, "the teacher should not be monotonous, instead s/he should vary the way of delivery (explaining, providing examples, assigning activities, playing a game...)". When applying this teaching strategy, students find the atmosphere that permits them to manage time, using dictionaries and the library, taking notes, summarizing, and mapping concepts. Despite the usefulness of differentiation, "it remains a far-reaching goal due to the uncountable number of obstacles facing teachers whose task is restricted in seeking out a minimum level of learning rather than improving learning", it is a reality that is frankly declared by a teacher, who knows what could and should be done. However, respondents who rejected this adaptive teaching approach indicated some obstacles that prevent them from thinking of its application: Number of students, time constraints, as it requires a lot of effort and training.

Conclusion:

The instructional design does not only refer to the ability to organize a set of procedures, but it is also/ but also to being professional in judging the quality of one's teaching plan. Since students are considered the pivot of

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the teaching process, it would not be credible to teach them something beyond their levels. In this regard, enough information on the part of teachers regarding students' learning characteristics would facilitate content delivery.

This research work tends to identify the extent to which EFL students and teachers accept differentiated instruction, as an alternative teaching strategy, in university classes. Different viewpoints were analyzed and interpreted. This latter contributed to enrich the findings that increase the significance of the topic under study.

Most EFL students supported the fact of varying tasks, grouping, and grouping them to meet their interests and cognitive abilities. In higher education context, students are aware of the environment they belong to, and they always look for alternative strategies to get motivated and responsible for their learning. Besides, such an adaptive teaching method would definitely suit all the students who are active and passive, or who have a high, mid, and low level as long as it is effectively implemented in a single classroom.

Conceptually speaking, EFL teachers, on the other hand, accentuated variability in the instructional strategies. Using tiered tasks and delivering the content in more than one way are the paramount strategies of differentiation. Besides, since those teachers found many difficulties while teaching, there should be a refinement in the instruction with reference to students' needs, skills, and readiness so as solid feedback on students' learning can be obtained.

In sum, attitudes, perceptions, and suggestions highlighted in this paper prove that both EFL students' and teachers' positive tendencies regarding the use of differentiated instruction in higher education. Even though teachers are knowledgeable about differentiation, there seems to be a gap between understanding the participles of this approach and applying it in a way that meets students' varied needs. Accordingly, teachers have to be trained enough to achieve an efficient application of this teaching strategy. All these assumptions and thoughts are worth investigating in future research, which would give teachers insights about the theory of differentiation from different perspectives.

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Appendices: Appendix I:

Students' Attitudinal Questionnaire

Dear student,

This questionnaire is used to gather data on an alternative teachinglearning environment that takes into consideration your learning abilities, skills, and interests while designing the instruction of the academic year. It includes two parts; each of which describes the strategies of differentiated instruction (using different ways to facilitate and assess the content of the material). It would be our pleasure to fill in this questionnaire by taking much attention to what you tick ($\sqrt{}$) and what to write to clarify the effectiveness and the value of adopting an adaptive teaching process that permits all of you to engage in the process of learning.

Section One: The Application of New Instructional Assumption in the Classroom

** Determine your views using this scale:		
1 Agree		
2 Disagree		
Neutral		
	1	2
3		
1/ I need to know the syllabus of each material		
2/I think my teacher should use different materials		
and resources during the lesson.		
3/ I learn better when I have prior knowledge related		
to the academic content.		

Journal of Arabic Language Sciences and Literature ISSN 1112-914X V13, N01, 15/09/2021 1542

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4/ I feel challenged when being grouped with		
students who have the same cognitive abilities and		
skills as me.		
5/ My teacher should adopt different ways for		
explaining one idea.		
6/ I can use new information in real-life situations		
when I interpreted it appropriately.		
7/ The teacher provides me with enough time to		
complete a task.		
8/ The teacher takes into account my way of		
learning.		
9/ I feel comfortable when I work individually.		
10/ I feel comfortable when I work with my		
classmate.		
11/ I feel comfortable when I engage in group work.		
12/ During the course, I prefer sharing my ideas and		
asking for better understanding.		

Section Two: Adaptive Instructional Practices

1/ Are you satisfied with your teachers' way of teaching?

Yes No

2/ When the teacher allows to choose between different tasks, do you find it a good strategy that has to be used in the class?

Yes

No Justify.....

.

3/ To ameliorate the actual teaching-learning process, what could you suggest from techniques and materials for better learning improvement.

.....

Thank you for your participation

Appendix II:

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Teachers' Attitudinal Questionnaire

Dear teacher,

This questionnaire centers on teachers' perceptions towards using different instructional strategies so that all students engage in the process of learning. It aims to provide data on an alternative teaching-learning setting that takes into account students' skills, needs, and learning preferences, namely adopting Differentiated Instruction in the classroom. You are kindly asked to take part in this study and fill in this questionnaire. All the clarifications you provide would certainly be of great importance.

Section One: General Information on the Current Teaching Process. 1° How many years have you been teaching?

1_3 3_6 more than 6 years 2° Do you think that your way of teaching suits all the students in the class?

Yes

No

If yes, how do you know?

.....

•••

3° Could you please mention some of the obstacles encountered while teaching?

.....

Section Two: The Principles behind the Implementation of Different

Teaching Strategies
** Determine your views using this scale:
1 strongly agree
2 agree

3 disagree

4 strongly disagree

1* I believe that learning objectives should plainly be	1 2 3 4
stated according to students' readiness, interest, or	
learning styles	

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2* I believe that preparing a differentiated lesson plan may engage all the learners in the process of learning	1	2	3	4
3* Different pre-assessment strategies can be used to identify the student's level of learning.	1	2	3	4
4* It is necessary to evaluate pre-assessment data so that all the areas of the teaching process are prepared depending on the feedback provided.	1	2	3	4
5* It is important to prepare activities at different levels of complexity so as all the students engage in different learning tasks.	1	2	3	4
6* I believe that students should take part in selecting learning activities.	1	2	3	4
7* I have an idea of how my students consciously become responsible for their learning.	1	2	3	4
8* It is not necessary to vary the assessment strategies to realize differentiation in the content.	1	2	3	4

Section Three: The Importance of an Alternative Teaching Approach

Could you use different instructional strategies to facilitate learning for the whole class?

Yes No



Explain your answer, please.

Thank you for your collaboration