

Utilization, Challenges, and Best Practices of Using Differentiated Instruction: Basis for a Pedagogical Model

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Abstract

This study assessed the use of differentiated instruction in normal class settings in selected public secondary schools in the Philippines. Employing a mixed method approach, the study utilized 356 randomly selected public secondary school teachers around the country serving as the respondents of the study. Results revealed that differentiated instruction defeats a traditional notion of one-size-fits all approach as it weaves diverse approaches, strategies, styles and methods of teaching. Further, differentiated instruction in normal classroom settings is highly utilized as it provides consistent and comprehensive delivery of the content, institutes positive learning environment which adheres to quality instruction and offers varied assessment tools that objectively evaluate learners' performance. However, several challenges were encountered by teachers in using differentiated instruction. These include limited time to design diversified lessons, learners' behavioral problems and difficulty in using different assessment methods. Despite this, teachers' use of differentiated instruction creates effective teaching and learning experiences as learners enabled them to experience the use of manipulatives, such as games, plays, and practical exercises. Also, group dynamics is immensely emphasized in using differentiated instruction such as collaboration, team teaching and active participation of learners in the teaching and learning process.

Keywords: differentiated instruction, challenges, best practices, teachers, learners, teaching and learning, classroom, styles



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INTRODUCTION

Teaching and learning process requires diverse forms of instruction which directly address the needs and interests of learners for meaningful learning experiences. The design and development of instructional strategies, teaching methods and styles are one of the difficult tasks of teachers since quality in the delivery of instruction is very crucial in the attainment of quality-based education. The primary focus of teaching is to ensure that retentive learning gearing towards holistic formation takes place. Certain styles and tools are utilized to deliver the content of each subject as anchored on the curriculum. Commonly, teachers are the ones who create,

design and develop their own teaching styles and methods in order to contextualize the subject to the actual teaching and learning conditions of their classes. In a heterogeneous class, as normally practiced in the Philippine educational system, learners in each class are mixed except for advanced classes that are identified by several comprehensive examinations detailing special classes and selections of learners. When the class is heterogeneously arranged, it is perceived that diversity is highly evident in which learners' knowledge, skills and potentials are also diverse in its nature and form. This condition commonly poses great challenge for a teacher who is expected to create effective and efficient learning experiences. Usually, teachers employ

similar methods and styles of teaching even though topics and content are different under a certain subject and fail to consider individual differences of learners. This raises pedagogical concern since learners possess diverse knowledge and skills and topical content contains different degrees of difficulty, teachers still utilize similar teaching styles. Further, with this rising concern, the development and introduction of Differentiated Instruction comes into the realm of pedagogy. As instructional strategy, differentiated instruction is a pedagogical-didactical approach that provides teachers with a starting point for meeting learners' diverse learning needs (Smale-Jacobse et al., 2019). Teachers' utilization of Differentiated Instruction focus on considering development, diverse needs of the learners and classroom size. The growing learners' diversity in classroom calls for appropriate instructional strategies (Cevik, 2023). Differentiated instruction as its best reflects a new pedagogy that promotes practical integration and knowledge transformation (Pham, 2012). In light of using Differentiated Instruction, learners find it more engaging and interesting as they received different teaching approaches that provided them more learning opportunities (Joseph et al., 2013). Forming differentiated instruction in a diverse learning environment directly address differences among learners. Teaching to the diversity of the group often takes place with difficulty (Ruys et al., 2013).

Assessing the use of Differentiated Instruction in diverse learning environment in Philippine classrooms is part of instructional delivery mandated by the government. It considers as significant basis in the provision of scientific input leading to modification, enhancement and further development of Differentiated Instruction's forms and shape. Use of Differentiated Instruction is highly evident in normal classroom settings among public secondary schools across different subjects. The assessment directly points out teachers' use of Differentiated Instruction including their encountered challenges and extracted best practices. Most of the studies conducted only focus on the effectiveness of Differentiated Instruction. This paper fills the gap as it

assessed the actual use of Differentiated Instruction in public school settings based on teachers' perceptions.

This paper is of great significance as it may provide reliable data. Also, it may serve as logical baseline for the modification and enhancement on the use of Differentiated Instruction among public schools in the country.

Statement of the Problem. This study assessed the use of differentiated instruction in normal class settings in the selected public secondary schools in the Philippines. Specifically, the study answered the following questions:

1. How may the use of differentiated instruction be assessed in terms of:
 - 1.1 content delivery;
 - 1.2 learning environment; and,
 - 1.3 assessment?
2. How may the challenges encountered by the respondents in using differentiated instruction be described in terms of:
 - 2.1 instruction;
 - 2.2 classroom management; and,
 - 2.3 assessment methods?
3. What are the best practices extracted by teachers in using differentiated instruction?
4. From the findings, what pedagogical model may be proposed to develop or sustain the use of differentiated instruction?

METHODS

The study utilized exploratory mixed method. Exploratory mixed method was an appropriate research method for this study as it describes the use and challenges of teachers in employing Differentiated Instruction. Also, exploratory mixed method was substantial in order to extract the best practices of teachers in using Differentiated Instruction. Researcher-made survey-questionnaire was utilized as the main instrument (quantitative) of the study while guide questions (qualitative) were used to extract responses relative to the best practices

in using differentiated instruction. A total of 356 randomly selected public secondary school teachers around the country served as the respondents of the study. The study was further conducted among selected public schools located in Northern Mindanao Region. Also, teachers who participated in the study were presently employed among selected public secondary schools in the region. Respondents shared common demographic characteristics as most of them were currently employed as public-school teachers who held Teacher I to Teacher III positions, and consistently use Differentiated Instruction in teaching their handled subjects. In the selection of respondents, simple random sampling was utilized. While criteria for the participants under the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) were the following: (1) currently employed in public secondary school, (2) consistently use Differentiated Instruction in teaching, (3) availability of their time during the scheduled conduct of Focus Group Discussion, and (4) willingness to participate in the study.

The developed survey-questionnaire, with 4-point Likert scale, was validated by experts in the field of education. Reliability testing was also conducted. Items under the use of Differentiated Instruction obtained a Cronbach Alpha result of .824, which signified that the items were acceptable. Further, items under the challenge encountered obtained a Cronbach Alpha result of .917 which signified that the items were also acceptable.

To gather the necessary data, the researchers sent a formal letter of request to the school heads of the selected public secondary schools in the Philippines. Upon receipt of their approval, the researcher formally administered their survey-questionnaire through the use of Google Forms – a digital platform to administer survey-questionnaire.

Thereafter, all data gathered were encoded and organized. Use of appropriate statistical tools such as mean and overall mean were made in order to assess the use of, and the challenges encountered in, using Differentiated Instruction. Meanwhile, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was

implemented using online platform, specifically Google Meet. With this, the researchers invited selected public secondary school teachers, and they were subjected to dialogue and discussions. There were 50 participants who were invited considering their willingness to be subjected to FGD. Before an actual online interview, the researchers notified the respondents to be in Google Meet platform ten (10) minutes prior to the scheduled time. Hence, the researchers maintained close communication among the selected participants where they were provided with an interview guide and rules during the formal interview. All 50 participants were at the Google Meet, but an interviewer called them individually and pinned them on a breakout room so that individual responses were secured and protected.

Further, there was only one interviewer during the Focus Group Discussion. Validated guide questions were used. During informal dialogue and discussion pertaining to the best practices observed using differentiated instructions, selected participants shared their insights. All insights and statements expressed by the participants were recorded and transcribed in verbatim form. Meanwhile, thematic analysis was used to identify the best practices observed and experienced by teachers in using differentiated instruction while weighted mean was applied as statistical procedure in deriving the descriptions pertaining to the use of and challenges encountered in utilizing differentiated instruction.

To comply with ethical protocols in gathering data, the researchers distributed informed consent and administered online orientation attended by the respondents. Here, the researchers discussed the purpose and intent of the study. On the other hand, they were also given an access link to monitor the data in the quantitative aspect of the study. Such access link provided for the respondents contained only the collected raw data. Meanwhile, as to the administration of focus group discussion, the researchers asked permission to the participants on their desire to record their responses for actual coding and decoding

procedure to extract the commonality on their statements. Hence, digital destruction of collected data in quantitative and qualitative forms were made afterwards.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Use of Differentiated Instruction. As shown in Table 1, differentiated instruction in terms of content delivery obtained an overall mean of 3.14 ("Utilized"). This implies that diverse instructional practices are used in the delivery of instruction across the subjects handled by the respondents. Use of diverse instructional materials, provision of learning opportunities for self-paced learning and formation of groups to develop active participation suggest that in using differentiated instruction, teachers significantly establish wide array of learner-based learning process and cater individual differences leading to the promotion of active engagement in the teaching and learning process.

Table 1
Use of differentiated instruction in terms of content delivery, learning environment and assessment

Items	M	Verbal description
Content Delivery		
1.Different instructional materials are used to cater individual differences	3.28	Highly Utilized
2.Learners are given opportunities to do tasks on their own for their self-paced development	3.33	Highly Utilized
3.Content is contextualized to meet the specific needs and interests of learners	3.22	Utilized
4.Groups are formed to increase the level of learners' participation	3.29	Highly Utilized
5.Content is parallel on real-world experiences which emphasize relevance	2.59	Utilized
Overall Mean	3.14	Utilized
Learning Environment		
1.Promotes respect and enthusiasm to learn	3.71	Highly Utilized
2.Inclusion of all learners irrespective of their background, skills and potentials	3.67	Highly Utilized
3.Learning tasks are designed to actively engaged all learner's participation	3.53	Highly Utilized
4.Diverse resources are drawn as major and supplementary materials for teaching and learning	3.39	Highly Utilized
5.Democratic expression of ideas and insights are guaranteed	3.61	Highly Utilized
Overall Mean	3.58	Highly Utilized
Assessment		
1.Multiple types of assessments are used to ensure objective evaluation of learner's performance	3.53	Highly Utilized
2.Academic performance is closely monitored	3.18	Utilized
3.Learners are given privilege to reflect with their accomplished tasks	3.15	Utilized
4.Personalized feedback is given to learners every after activity/task	2.67	Utilized
5.Learners are involved in setting their learning goals based on their individual assessment results	2.51	Utilized
Overall Mean	3.00	Utilized

Meanwhile, contextualization of content and alignment of content using differentiated

instruction indicates that the instructional connections established by the respondents are less practical which need intensive elaboration so that learners can significantly experience meaningful learning.

On the other hand, use of differentiated instruction in terms of learning environment obtained an overall mean of 3.58 ("Highly Utilized"). This signifies that respect and enthusiasm for learning, inclusion of all learners and the design of engaging learning tasks reveal that through the use of differentiated instruction, a positive and supportive learning environment is achieved. Further, learning environment surrounded by the use of differentiated instruction enables learners to actively participate in the class. Consequently, the consistent use of diverse resources and establishment of democratic learning atmosphere significantly enhance active teaching and learning process. The environment which differentiated instruction brings empowers teachers and learners to create meaningful and retentive learning experiences.

Lastly, use of differentiated instruction in terms of assessment obtained an overall mean of 3.00 which is verbally described as "Utilized" which implies that differentiated assessment practices, use of multiple assessment methods and provision of personalized feedback increase the level of objective evaluation to learners' academic performance. In addition, the use of differentiated instruction in assessment reveals that teachers can consistently monitor their learners' academic performance and provide them with deeper sense of reflection.

The results on the use of differentiated instruction in terms of content delivery, learning environment and assessment show that effective utilization practices on learning environment indicate that teachers are on the proper use of differentiated instruction. The results also emphasize pedagogical nature and intent amidst of some indicators or areas needing strong improvement. Differentiated instruction provides diverse learning needs

through creation of different learning aids (Onyishi & Sefotho., 2020). Teachers' use of differentiated instruction offered diverse teaching instructional design that highly engaged learner to participate in the teaching and learning process (Nepal, 2021).

Challenges Encountered in Using Differentiated Instruction. As presented in Table 2, challenges in using differentiated instruction are always encountered. Challenges encountered by teachers in using differentiated instruction in terms of instruction revealed an overall mean of 3.47 which is verbally described as "Always Encountered." This implies that teachers always encountered lack of adequate instructional materials, insufficient training in the proper implementation of differentiated instruction and limited time to design diversified lessons. These challenges reveal that teachers, when using differentiated instruction, feel ill-equipped to effectively and efficiently implement differentiated instruction to their daily teaching processes.

Table 2
Challenges encountered in using differentiated instruction in terms of instruction, classroom management and assessment methods

Items	M	Verbal description
Instruction		
1.Lack of adequate instructional material to effectively employ differentiated instruction	3.32	Always Encountered
2.Insufficient training on the proper implementation of differentiated instruction	3.41	Always Encountered
3.Limited time to design diversified lesson	3.79	Always Encountered
4.Curriculum content may not align with the use of differentiated instruction	3.18	Encountered
5.Learner's resist or struggle to do tasks and activities under differentiated instruction	3.67	Always Encountered
Overall Mean	3.47	Always Encountered
Classroom Management		
1.Varied imposition of class rules which makes learners confuse	2.17	Often Encountered
2.Differentiated tasks and activities lead to increased disruptions	2.21	Often Encountered
3.Fair distribution of learner's participation to different activities is difficult to monitor	3.29	Encountered
4.Learners exhibit behavioral problems when engaged to different activities and tasks	3.61	Always Encountered
5.Group work is difficult to manage	3.56	Always Encountered
Overall Mean	2.96	Encountered
Assessment Methods		
1.Difficulty in maintaining consistency in evaluating varied tasks and activities	3.27	Always Encountered
2.Difficulty in grading diverse activities	3.49	Always Encountered
3. Difficulty in using different assessment methods in one topical content	3.55	Always Encountered
4.Delays in providing timely and individualized feedback	3.39	Always Encountered
5.Alignment of assessment methods to diversified instruction is time consuming and highly complex	3.12	Encountered
Overall Mean	3.36	Always Encountered

In addition, alignment of curriculum content with differentiated instruction and learners' strong resistance to different tasks and activities also added to the challenges encountered by teachers which caused difficulty to employ and measure the significance of differentiated instruction. Hence, the occurrence of challenges and other perplexities encountered by teachers in using differentiated instruction in terms of instruction is always encountered.

On the other hand, in terms of classroom management, it obtains an overall mean of 2.96 which is verbally described as "Encountered." This reveals that difficulties in monitoring fair participation, managing behavioral problems and overseeing group work are highly evident. In these conditions, teachers find differentiated instruction difficult to implement and manage. Hence, such complexity in using differentiated instruction potentially leads to behavioral issues of the learners as they are to perform varied tasks and activities with different forms and intent even if being delivered under a certain topic. Lastly, in terms of assessment method which obtains an overall mean of 3.36 which is verbally described as "Always Encountered." The result signifies those difficulties in maintaining consistency in assessing learners' performance, grading their diverse activities and using different assessment methods are strongly evident in the teaching and learning process when differentiated instruction is used by the teachers.

The results on the challenges encountered by teachers in using differentiated instruction show that instructional and assessment challenges are always encountered which hamper the effective and efficient teaching and learning process. With the use of differentiated instruction in a normal class setting, associated problems and challenges are always present because of the complexity and multiple forms of styles, approaches, methods, activities and tasks fused into one confined teaching and learning process. The challenges faced by teachers in implementing differentiated

instruction are time and effort in preparing and designing the learning process and lack of support from another teacher (Suryati et al., 2023). In addition, lack of time, shortages in learning resources, administrative support and low parental support are major challenges encountered by teachers in using differentiated instruction (Siam & Al-Natour, 2016).

Best Practices in Using Differentiated Instruction. Differentiated instruction caters manipulative and group dynamics as revealed in the subthemes presented in Table 3. On manipulatives, teachers find differentiated instruction as relevant method and style to highlight the use of hands-on tools and resources which can effectively facilitate learning through physical interactions. As manipulatives are integrated in the use of differentiated instruction, guided instruction is also vital as teachers can be able to extend clarification of concepts which ascertain learners' comprehensive learning.

Table 3
Major themes and subthemes on the best practices in using Differentiated Instruction

Major Themes	Subthemes
Manipulatives	• Guided instruction
	• Games and plays
	• Practical activities and exercises
Group Dynamics	• Collaboration
	• Team teaching
	• Active participation

In addition, games and plays are also an integral part of differentiated instruction where teachers create fun and enjoyable games and plays that simplify complex concepts. While games and plays are also significant in the use of differentiated instruction, an immense number of practical exercises also form differentiated instruction as teachers commonly deal with activities and tasks that reflect real-based situations where learners can practically apply their acquired knowledge and skills.

One of the participants articulated: *"I always use manipulatives in order to arouse my learners' motivation and engagement."*

Meanwhile, another participant shared that: *"I love using practical activities because it really engages my learners to listen and participate actively."*

Meanwhile, on group dynamics, one of the substantial elements of differentiated instruction is the active involvement and consistent interactions among learners as they collaborate to work with the given activity. Collaboration develops learners' social skills, communication and teamwork. Further, active participation is also produced when using differentiated instruction in which learners' engagement and motivation are embraced so as to proceed with retentive learning. Learners are deeply involved in discussion and activities because they are motivated to participate in the process.

One of the participants articulated: *"Teamwork and collaboration really is the good side of Differentiated Instruction."*

Another participant mentioned that: *"There are students who acted like teachers when I use Differentiated Instruction."*

Differentiated instruction practices help develop teachers' pedagogical exposure as they create interesting yet challenging activities (Cha & Ahn, 2014). In addition, differentiated instruction tailors diverse teaching strategies based on individual needs. It is beneficial as it makes learners' independent, enthusiastic, involved and ultimately better achievers in examinations (Ferdousy, 2017).

Proposed Pedagogical Model in Using Differentiated Instruction. Figure 1 shows the proposed pedagogical model. Differentiated instruction emphasizes the significance of weaving teaching methods and strategies to meet the diverse needs of the learners. As Curriculum is positioned on top, it signifies that in the use of Differentiated Instruction, strong emphasis to teaching standards and learning competencies should be drawn. Meanwhile, instructional alignment suggests that in using Differentiated Instruction, it should comprehensively emphasize topics' learning

objectives, relevant activities and assessments to be used. Further, on the design and development component, teachers should continuously refine their teaching approaches based on the current trends in education specifically within their subject areas.

Further, to address the challenges encountered by teachers in using Differentiated Instruction, comprehensive training should be consistently implemented. In this line, teachers should broadly apply their acquired learnings to the trainings and workshops they have attended.

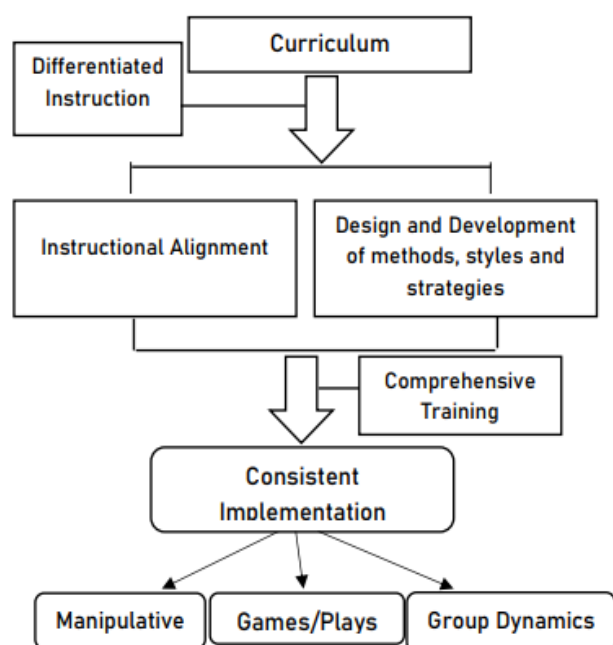


Figure 1
Proposed pedagogical model in using differentiated instruction

Also, as to the consistent implementation, there is really a need for a systematic and reliable approach. Employment of games, such as manipulatives and group dynamics, are integral as these teaching and learning approaches were common characteristics of Differentiated Instruction, hence, shall be practically applied by teachers.

Conclusion. Differentiated instruction defeats a traditional notion of one-size-fits all approach as it weaves diverse approaches, strategies, styles and methods of teaching. Further, differentiated instruction in a normal classroom setting under the learning environment is highly

utilized as it provides consistent and comprehensive delivery of content, institutes a positive learning environment which adheres to quality instruction and offers varied assessment tools that objectively evaluate learners' performance. However, several challenges were encountered in using differentiated instruction, such as limited time to design diversified lessons, learners' behavioral problems and difficulty in using different assessment methods. On the other hand, teachers' use of differentiated instruction creates effective teaching and learning experiences as learners enable them to experience the use of manipulative things such as games, plays, and practical exercises. With this, group dynamics is immensely emphasized in using differentiated instruction such as collaboration, team teaching and active participation of learners in the teaching and learning process.

Recommendation. This study recommends the consistent use of differentiated instruction in the teaching and learning process. The adoption and modification of proposed pedagogical model are also recommended in order to contextualize the use of differentiated instruction on the diverse teaching and learning conditions of public secondary schools in the Philippines. Apparently, future studies assessing the effectiveness of differentiated instruction are also recommended.

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