

# Perceptions of Teachers about Differentiated Instruction for English Language Teaching at the Tertiary Level in Bangladesh

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## **Abstract**

*Differentiated Instruction (DI) has become a very influential approach for the last few decades in the various arenas of education where teachers, instead of lecturing students or instructing in a one-size-fits-all approach, tailor their teaching strategies based on individual learner needs. This unique approach seems to be immensely beneficial as it makes learners independent, confident, enthusiastic, involved, and ultimately better achievers in examinations. The present paper explores the perceptions of tertiary level teachers of Bangladesh regarding DI and the use of this approach in teaching English. Data were collected from 33 English teachers from three private universities using a Likert-scale questionnaire followed by a semi-structured interview with 10 participants. The findings reveal that teachers are aware of DI and its benefits, but their classroom strategies are not congruent with the DI principles to a great extent. Although they create a friendly and non-threatening environment and allow students to choose classroom activities, they cannot differentiate the learning goals, the content, assessment tools, and evaluation for each learner. The paper ends with suggestions for creating a more conducive environment for learning by implementing Differentiated Instruction strategies in higher education in Bangladesh.*

Contemporary classrooms are becoming more culturally and academically diversified. Even in cases of “shared culture or roughly compatible age ranges,” there remains “a series of differences between the individual learners” with respect to their gender, experiences, aptitudes, and interests (Burke & Ray, 2008, p.7). Therefore, teachers face challenges now more than ever before to accommodate “diverse learners” and “meeting their unique educational aspiration” (Dosch & Zidon, 2014, p. 343). Traditionally, learners at tertiary level are more diverse due to their varied experiences and educational backgrounds. Unfortunately, it is a common scenario in universities that teachers are standing in front of the whole class and delivering lectures and learners are listening silently, sitting in rows. In fact, learners, even in higher education, are taught in a one-size-fits-all (McBride, 2004), “teacher centred, traditional model of lecture style teaching” system (Dosch & Zidon, 2014, p. 343) where “programmatically feeding learners quantities of knowledge” (Brown, 1994, p. 77) becomes the main motto of teaching. The diversity of learners is ignored and the same curriculum and teaching methods are applied to all learners, which ultimately lead to learners’ failure (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007).

Children and “adults” (who are “above 18,” Knowels, 1970, p. 46) acquire languages in different capacities (Ellis, 1986). There are many additional factors that pertain to adult learners than children, such as age, intelligence, motivation, attitudes, learning styles and strategies, and personality. Therefore a lot of researchers have emphasized different teaching strategies for adult learners and children. Otherwise, teaching in a single instructional method will bring nothing

but learner dissatisfaction, frustration and poor performance (Forsten, Grant, and Hollas, 2002; McBride, 2004; McCoy and Ketterlin-Geller, 2004; Tomlinson, 2002; Fischer and Rose, 2001).

Considering the diversity among tertiary level learners and their unique individual needs, Differentiated Instruction (henceforth to be abbreviated as DI) has become an influential educational approach in higher education for the last few decades. Here “three diagnostic formative components” are utilized to understand each “learner’s personal characteristics and academic skills: readiness, interest and learning profile” (Dosch & Zidon, 2014, p. 344). Readiness signifies learners’ zone of proximal development, where, with necessary help and supervision, a learner becomes able to learn new material (Vygotsky, 1977). Next, learners’ interest about the study is vitally important as it ensures the awakening of their intrinsic motivation which results in better performance of learners. Lastly, DI considers learner profile as a critical component of instructional planning which creates options for learners to express their acquired learning in their preferred way.

In fact, the DI model proposes a rethinking of the structure, management, and content of the classroom and different avenues to acquiring content, processing, constructing, or making sense of ideas has been proposed based on learner ability, intelligence, and learner profile (Tomlinson and Imbeau, 2010). Here, in this unique teaching theory, teachers, instead of following one teaching method, vary instructional approaches, provide multiple options for learners for taking in information and making sense of ideas, and modify their curriculum to the learners rather than expecting learners to adjust themselves to the curriculum.

In Bangladesh, after independence, a lot of measures have been taken to improve English language teaching and learning. Nevertheless, various problems inherent in the primary and secondary level education, e.g., the lack of qualified and trained English language teachers, the practice of using communicative language teaching (CLT) based books in grammar-translation method, and the dominance of teacher-centered learning methods fail to provide learners with sufficient English language skills (Mondal, 2012; Begum, 2011; Islam, 2011; Alam & Sinha, 2009). The problems are aggravated when learners move to college and university level. At the tertiary level, though specialized courses are offered to improve learners’ English language skills, the courses are taught without any “need analysis” (Rahman, 2008, p. 43). Therefore, learners face challenges in adjusting to the system and their four years in undergraduate studies fail to equip them with adequate knowledge. Their knowledge remains insufficient and the extensive English language courses of private universities fail to provide learners with the ability to write correctly, let alone develop the skill of speaking (Ferdousy, 2013, p. 53).

In order to bring a change in the current scenario, the present study wishes to promote critical thinking among teachers about DI and want to understand their teaching strategies to investigate whether their strategies are consistent with DI or not. DI, as it has been proven by various researchers, can improve learners’ performance; learners can connect better in when taught with the DI strategy as their readiness level, interests, and learning profiles are respected and valued. Again, DI ensures learners’ personal growth and development (Anderson, 2007) and learning becomes interesting, pleasant, and more effective (Subban, 2006; Rose & Meyer, 2002).

It is universally acknowledged that the use of the correct method spurs learner motivation and facilitates effective learning. On the other hand, lack of correct teaching methods serves as an impediment to learning, creates expectation failure in the minds of learners, and undermines the entire process of learner motivation (Bain, 2004). Therefore, the present study wants to encourage the use of DI strategy in Bangladesh, which will pave the way for a better teaching and learning environment in tertiary level English language classes.

In Bangladesh, there is a significant lack of research on the use of DI strategies at the tertiary level English language classes. Therefore, the present research explores the following questions:

1. Are Bangladeshi English language teachers at the tertiary level aware of the DI approach?
2. If they are aware, to what extent do they use it in the five areas: content, process, product, environment, and evaluation?

The present study will fill an important gap in the literature on the use of DI in the ESL context of Bangladesh. Again, the study may encourage ELT teachers to examine their teaching practices, to find out whether the methods and materials they are using are suitable for tertiary level learners, and can give an important guideline for future implementation of DI in teaching English language in Bangladesh. The newly gained insights will inspire teachers to adopt a more suitable method and plan their lessons accordingly.

### **Literature Review**

The approach to differentiation has been formed by the growing research on learning, drawing on the best practices from special education, gifted education, and multi-age classrooms as well as recent research on the brain and multiple intelligences. DI is, in fact, a challenge against the age-old traditional way of teaching by instructors who, standing up in front of the classroom, provide only lectures and students, in spite of their diversified cultural and academic backgrounds (Blake, 2007; Pham, 2012) listen passively, sitting passively in their chairs (Burke & Ray, 2008). With this kind of teaching strategy, though a handful of students achieve good grades, the majority fails or performs very poorly in the examinations. But, ironically, it is the learners who are held responsible for their poor performance.

DI is an organized, yet flexible way of proactively adjusting teaching and learning methods to accommodate each learner's learning needs and preferences in order to achieve his or her maximum growth as a learner. In the DI approach, no learner is considered as weak; rather, each learner is valued for his or her unique strengths, and everyone is offered opportunities to demonstrate skills through a variety of assessment techniques. DI is, in fact, a unique approach where avenues are created for learners to learn in their preferred learning styles, in their convenient environment, and they get the opportunity to decide their content, assignment topics, and other classroom activities.

DI has been criticized as it seems to be impossible to adjust teaching strategy to each and every learner in a large class within the limited time constraints. But the criticism against differentiated learning is based on the misunderstanding of the concept itself. In fact, in this strategy, teachers do not individualize everything for each learner but rather strive to have

several learning options, knowing that doing so will keep learners more engaged and feel motivated towards their learning.

There are various steps through which DI is implemented by the teachers with their learners:

1. Firstly, teachers have to take diagnostic tests to determine the level of readiness of learners. Determining readiness of learners is important as it reveals learners' zone of proximal development, which indicates the amount of help or supervision they need to understand new concepts or material (Vygotsky, 1977). By taking quizzes and interviews about their background knowledge, teachers can determine how much help the learners need.
2. In addition, teachers have to understand learners' interests. By conducting interviews with learners or by asking to write about their interests and preferences, teachers can gain knowledge about the learners.
3. Teachers have to identify learners' preferred learning styles and environments. Not all learners learn in the same way or they do not prefer the same environment. Teachers should identify each learner's learning style and the environment which will make him/her more productive.

### **Areas of Differentiated Instruction**

Tomlinson (2000) has proposed four areas of differentiation: content, process, product and environment. Again, Gregory & Chapman (2007) and Chapman & King (2005) proposed for differentiation of assessment or evaluation that has been proved to be another important aspect of DI.

**Content:** In a differentiated classroom, teachers, rather than using one "fixed" textbook, must use multiple texts and modified materials to meet the needs of different learner groups of the classes. Again, teachers should vary the level of complexity of the content for learners and give them options to choose their learning materials. Teachers should also provide more direct instructions, and more concrete examples and opportunities for practice to the weak learners (Berger, 1991). Finally, teachers should present ideas through both auditory and visual means.

**Process:** In a differentiated classroom, firstly, teachers must provide options for learners to work alone or in groups. Sometimes teachers should divide tasks according to learners' common interests, abilities, or learning styles. Secondly, in the classroom, learners must get the opportunity to take part in various tasks like role play, simulation, and debates. Thirdly, teachers must encourage learners to share their experiences with others, actively involve them in activities, and help them to learn from each other. And finally, if learners face problems, teachers would provide additional hours.

**Products:** Teachers must give learners options of how to express the required learning (e.g., create a puppet show, write a letter, develop a mural with labels, or write an assignment). Teachers should also vary assignment topics and the length of time a learner may take to complete a task. They should provide additional support for struggling learners.

**Environment:** Classrooms should be made interesting to all learners. In his affective filter hypothesis, Krashen (1982) mentioned that learners' boredom works as a barrier to learning. Therefore, teachers must use humor and create a friendly, supportive, and relaxed classroom

to reduce language anxiety and so facilitate learning (Hermer, 2001). Teachers should provide materials that replicate a variety of cultures (Tomlinson, 2000), and references must be used from current issues.

**Evaluation:** Differentiated assessment is an ongoing process based on learners' gradual development through which teachers gather data before, during, and after instruction through multiple sources (Chapman & King, 2005). Teachers should grade students for their continual development, not only for the final product. Teachers should not grade one learner against others; one is graded against oneself, i.e., against one's own previous performances. With respect to providing feedback, teachers must always find the positive in learners and allow them to choose their assignment topics. The time allowed for learners to complete their assignments should also be varied.

### **Successful Implementation of DI in Higher Education**

In a lot of higher education institutions, the DI approach has been used successfully and brought significant improvement in learners' quality of learning. Joseph et al. (2013) conducted a research among four hundred and thirty-four learners in two campuses through the span of one semester. Half of the learners were taught using the DI method and the rest experienced the traditional approach. The research revealed a major improvement in learners' performance, understanding, and learners' involvement with learning. 90% of participants reported higher levels of intellectual growth and interest in the subject.

Chamberlin & Powers (2010) conducted a quasi-experimental pre-test and post-test control group research design using DI in an undergraduate first-year mathematics course at two universities. The control group, who were taught with the DI approach, enjoyed their learning more and performed better than the group taught in the traditional method. Santangelo & Tomlinson (2009) conducted a research using a self-study qualitative approach in an introductory graduate education course to test the outcome of DI in higher education. They found that the DI approach can be utilized in a higher education course and it made a significant difference to learners' performance.

Livingston (2006) found success whenever he applied DI in his undergraduate courses and took feedback from 33 students. The students responded positively, became highly enthusiastic and involved in learning, and produced better work as options were given to them. The teachers also enjoyed and became more satisfied while teaching. Ernst & Ernst (2005) conducted an exploratory qualitative research study in an undergraduate political science course in which 35 learners were enrolled based on student and faculty feedback in an undergraduate public policy course. Learners performed better as their readiness level, interest, and learning preferences were taken as the key to instructional planning.

Canadian scholars researched the application and result of DI and found that it consistently produced positive results across a broad range of targeted groups (McQuarrie, McRae, & Stack-Cutler, 2008 cited by Huebner, 2010). Tieso (2005) examined 31 math teachers and 645 learners and found that DI was effective for keeping high-ability learners challenged. She opined that if teachers differentiate the curriculum, learners' achievement increases

significantly. Lawrence-Brown (2004) confirmed that DI spurs learner motivation and learning irrespective of their ability and intelligence.

Therefore, a lot of positive feedback can be traced to the use of DI strategies which motivated the present research to explore the scenario in Bangladesh. The DI approach makes learners independent where they can “set personal goals and can assess their progress according to those goals by themselves” (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 100). Again, DI makes people engaged with their learning and become enthusiastic so that learning becomes an enjoyable journey (Painter, 2009). Overall, the use of DI improves learner performance, satisfaction, and confidence.

In Bangladesh, there is a significant lack of investigation regarding the use of DI in classrooms in higher education. Again, no specific research has been found where teachers’ perception and knowledge of DI have been sought. Only a few researchers have been found (Ferdousy, 2013; Ismail, 2010; Chaudhury, 2009; Jahan, 2008) who recorded teachers’ information about their teaching strategies. Those researchers reveal that the teachers still teach students mainly through lectures, use similar content for all students, and evaluate learners in the same way. They do not think of varying the product or assignments for learners or allowing extra time for any learner.

The current poor status of learners’ knowledge of English language, their inability to produce correct sentences, or the inability to speak English fluently even at tertiary level ((Mondal, 2012; Begum, 2011; Islam, 2011; Alam & Sinha, 2009), needs attention and demand a change in the current approaches that are adopted by teachers in universities. Therefore, the present research is conducted to raise awareness among teachers about the DI approach.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Tomlinson’s work has shown that the proposed four areas of differentiation is immensely beneficial for making learning more effective and interesting. Therefore, Tomlinson’s proposed four areas of differentiation, content, process, product, and environment (2000), have been taken as the theoretical framework for the study. One more item is added: differentiation of assessment or evaluation (Gregory & Chapman, 2007; Chapman & King, 2005), which is another important proposition of DI.

### **Methodology**

The study is an exploratory one based on the mixed method model. Considering the problem related to a questionnaire survey that it sometimes produces inaccurate data due to limited options available for the respondents, in the study, qualitative data have also been collected through interviews. The interview with some respondents gave opportunity to the researcher to explain vague or unclear questions to the interviewee, to ask leading questions, and to control and supervise easily (Wilkinson and Birmingham, 2003).

**Instruments:** The questionnaire used in the study to collect data has 38 questions with a Likert scale. Teachers chose their answers using the scale: always-sometimes-rarely-never. Among the 38 questions, the first thirteen questions were about teachers’ teaching strategies and knowledge about their learners. The rest 25 questions were divided into five sections: content, process, product, environment, and assessment.



Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured telephone interviews with ten selected participants. In the interview, semi-structured questions were intended to solicit the information about teachers' use of DI strategies.

**Subject/Samples:** The subjects in this study were 33 English language teachers teaching English language courses at three private universities of Bangladesh. The subjects were selected purposely so that there was a good representation of both male (20) and female (13) teachers.

**Procedure:** The questionnaire was finally administered after modifying it several times according to the feedback from a pilot survey. The pilot survey was conducted among 5 teachers of Bangladesh who were excluded from the main study.

### Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

All the quantitative data in this survey is analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 16.0). For descriptive statistics frequencies, means and standard deviations are calculated for each item.

The qualitative data generated from telephone semi-structured interviews are analyzed by using strategies of coding and identifying common themes.

### Discussion of the Findings of the Quantitative Data

**Awareness of DI Strategies:** The results in Table 1 shows that all the respondents (100%) are well aware that learners vary significantly in their level of intelligence and ability (item no. 1, M = 3) and they plan and vary their teaching methods accordingly. Again, nearly all the respondents (90.9%) believe that they should help learners to develop positive self-image (Item 6). Still, respondents seem to differ in their opinions regarding setting different objectives for different learners or adjusting curriculum to learners' ability. Yet, the majority of the respondents (72.6%) seem to be respectful about their learners and determined to build "positive self-image" (90.9%) and do not prefer to criticize them in front of their peers. Most of them believe that it is important to provide learners with a friendly, non-competitive environment in the class where, rather than completion, cooperation exists, and nobody faces criticism. The findings indicate that teachers are well aware about the principles of differentiated instruction and know the way of applying those strategies in the classes. The finding is quite consistent with the DI strategies propounded by Tomlinson (1999, 2000).

S/L No.	Statements	Always (3)	Sometimes (2)	Rarely (1)	Never (0)	Mean
1	I am aware that all learners are not of same level or same intelligence.	100	0	0	0	3.00
2	I should vary my teaching methods depending on the variety of learner learning styles, ability, and intelligence.	72.7	27.3	0	0	2.73
3	I should set different goals for different learners.	18.2	54.3	18.2	9.1	1.82

4	I should modify my curriculum to learners' needs rather than expect learners to adjust themselves to fit the curriculum.	36.4	54.5	9.1	0	2.24
5	I respect every learner's opinion, feelings, and emotion.	72.7	27.3	0	0	2.73
6	I should help each of my learners to develop positive self-image.	90.9	9.1	0	0	2.91
7	I should not criticize learners in front of the class.	72.7	0	9.1	18.2	2.27
8	I should develop a feeling of cooperation, not competition among learners.	72.7	27.3	0	0	2.73

Table 1. Questionnaire results: Teachers classroom strategies and awareness of differentiated learning

**Teachers Awareness of Differentiated Learning (special focus on teachers knowledge about their learners):** Table 2 shows that a large percentage (81.8%) of the respondents have good knowledge about their learners' backgrounds, interests, and preferred learning styles. Yet, most of the teachers do not conduct any pre-assessment quiz or test (Item 11). The finding is quite consistent with the finding of Ferdousy (2013) and Chaudhury (2009) who found that, at the university level, curriculum is designed without any "Need Analysis" of learners. The learners of Ismail's (2010) study were also found to be taught without any need analysis, which, according to the learners, is extremely necessary. Therefore, though teachers in the present study claim to have knowledge about learners, their teaching without needs analysis proves their inadequate knowledge and makes the application of DI strategies in their classrooms questionable.

S/L No.	Statements	Always (4)	Sometimes (3)	Rarely (2)	Never (1)	Mean
9	I know the level of competence of my learners.	81.8	18.2	0	0	2.82
10	I know about my learners' social, economic, and family background.	18.2	63.6	18.2	0	2.00
11	I take pre-assessment quizzes and tests to identify the slow and advanced learners of my class.	0	36.4	63.6	0	1.36
12	I know about the interests (inside and outside the classroom) of each of my learners.	0	90.9	9.1	0	1.91
13	I know about my learners' preferred learning styles.	9.1	63.6	27.3	0	1.82

Table 2. Questionnaire Results: Knowledge about Learners

**Content:** According to DI strategy, a teacher should use various types of materials and methods for teaching to show sensitivity to the diversity of the learners. Again, learners' diversity of experience can be used by the instructor as a rich resource for learning (Knowles, 1970). The results in Table 3



show that the majority of respondents do not always vary reading materials, they do it “sometimes” (81.8%). Regarding the use of audio-visuals, a considerable number of teachers use them as private universities provide that technical support. But it is striking to note that respondents do not always vary the complexity of reading materials according to various learners’ ability. Classes are mostly teacher-centered where learners are taught mostly through lectures.

Islam (2011), in his study on tertiary level learners, found that learners are taught by a fixed textbook in the class. Ferdousy (2013) found that the practice of asking learners for selection of materials in the classroom is quite unusual in Bangladesh. Therefore, this study also complements the previous studies and reveals the lack of a proper teaching strategy in tertiary level classrooms.

S/L No.	Statements	Always (3)	Sometimes (2)	Rarely (1)	Never (0)	Mean
14	I mainly use a fixed textbook in the class.	0	81.8	0	18.2	2.82
15	I vary the sophistication, complexity, and difficulty of reading materials according to my learners’ ability.	36.4	27.3	9.1	27.3	1.73
16	I teach various topics by delivering lectures only.	9.1	63.6	9.1	18.2	1.64
17	I use both audio tapes and visuals (video, multimedia) in my class.	9.1	90.9	0	0	0.09
18	I solicit learners’ advice about what to teach in my course.	18.2	63.6	9.1	9.1	1.91

Table 3. Questionnaire Results: Content

**Process:** Table 4 shows that most of the respondents (81.1%, Item 19) arrange flexible groups according to learners’ ability, interests, or intelligence. Again, nearly all teachers (90.9%, Item 21) encourage learners to share their ideas with their peers. In addition, a great number of teachers meet with small groups to re-teach ideas and even counsel individual learners about their personal problems. The findings contradict the findings of Ferdousy (2013) and Ismail (2011) who found that in the language classes, learners, rather than engaging in various activities, have to listen to the lectures of the teachers. But surprisingly, learners generally prefer teacher dominant information-transmission approach as they are used to this approach from their early school days.

S/L No.	Statements	Always (4)	Sometimes (3)	Rarely (2)	Never (1)	Mean
19	I divide learners into different groups according to their ability and interests.	0	81.8	9.1	9.1	1.73
20	Learners of my class learn by themselves through various activities organized by me.	27.3	63.6	0	9.1	2.09
21	I encourage learners to discuss and share their opinions in the class.	90.9	9.1	0	0	2.91

22	I provide additional hours to help the slow learners of my classes.	18.2	81.8	0	0	2.18
23	I deal with learners personal problems that may be hindering their study	27.3	63.6	9.1	0	2.18

Table 4. Questionnaire Results: Process

**Product:** The data in Table 5 show that only some of the respondents (18.2%) “always” vary their materials. Only a few of them give options to the learners to choose their assignment topics. Only a few of them (27.3%) seem to vary the complexity of tasks of their learners on a regular basis. Again, only a few respondents (27.3%, Item 27) vary the length of time given to learners according to learner ability. The finding contradicts the previous finding (Item 2) where respondents (72.7%) opined that they “should vary” “teaching methods depending on the variety of learners’ learning styles, ability and intelligence.” Therefore, the present finding seems to indicate a gap between the belief and practice of differentiation in tertiary level classes by teachers.

Differentiated learning demands that teachers should vary “products” and must give learners tasks which they are able to do to save them from humiliation (Hermer, 2001). But in Bangladesh, teachers mostly give the same assignments, the same deadline, and similar support to every learner (Ferdousy, 2013). In fact, traditionally, in Bangladesh, the concept of varying the complexity of tasks among the learners of the same class or allowing somebody extra time for completion of the same task is unimaginable and unacceptable to institutions, learners, and parents (Jahan, 2008). This kind of behavior from any teacher can even lead to disasters in his/her (teacher’s) professional life. So the problem is deeply rooted in the education policy of Bangladesh and teachers’ responses bring forth this issue. The finding supports the finding of Ferdousy (2013) and Jahan (2008) who found that teachers rarely vary their tests or tasks and do not tailor their instruction strategies according to the proposition of DI. This disregard for learners’ individuality will bring dissatisfaction and disappointment in learners (Knowles, 1970).

S/L No.	Statements	Always (4)	Sometimes (3)	Rarely (2)	Never (1)	Mean
24	Learners can choose their assignment topics according to their interest from various options provided by me.	18.2	54.5	18.2	9.1	1.82
25	I vary the complexity and difficulty of homework depending on learners’ ability.	27.3	63.6	0	9.1	2.09
26	I provide different levels of hands-on-support for different learners of my class.	0	72.2	9.1	18.2	1.55

27	I vary the length of time a learner may take to complete a task in order to provide additional support for a slow learner or to encourage an advanced learner to pursue a topic in greater depth.	27.3	54.5	18.2	0	2.09
28	I allow learners to do activities of their own interest.	36.4	36.4	27.3	0	2.09

Table 5. Questionnaire Results: Product

**Environment:** Merriam and Brockett (2007) have divided the environment into three categories: physical, psychological, and social. In fact, adult learners deserve to get a class environment where they will find comfort, acceptance, and psychological stimulation. The data reveals that all teachers (100%) make their class enjoyable and encourage learners to talk in the class. The majority of the respondents (63%), however, do not select materials related to their culture and society, and they do not use materials related to the current issues either.

The finding is somewhat contradictory with the study of Moriam (2008) and Jahan (2008) where they found that learners feel frightened and anxious about English language learning in their classes. Jahan (2008) found in her study that a competitive environment exists in the language classes and this environment raises learners' anxiety levels and lessen their self-confidence.

S/L No.	Statements	Always (4)	Sometimes (3)	Rarely (2)	Never (1)	Mean
29	I make the class enjoyable for each and every learner.	81.8	18.2	0	0	2.82
30	I encourage my learners to talk in the class.	54.5	36.4	0	9.1	2.36
31	I use materials related to learners' culture and society.	18.2	18.2	45.5	18.2	1.36
32	I use references from current issues.	27.3	72.7	0	0	2.27
33	I help learners understand that some learners need to move around to learn, while others do better sitting quietly.	36.4	54.5	0	9.1	2.18

Table 6. Questionnaire Results: Environment

**Evaluation:** The teachers' responses regarding their assessment strategy are confusing and puzzling. Though the majority of the respondents revealed that they follow the same strategy to assess every learner (Item 34), in response to the next statement (Item 35) they answered that they vary the strategy of assessment. Again, a great number of teachers (81.2%) are found to be grading learners only on factual knowledge. Only a few of the teachers (27.3%) always grade learners based on their improvement.

In differentiated teaching, mistakes are tolerated and positively valued (Tomlinson, 2000; Heacox, 2002). The teacher does not criticize learners for their mistakes and evaluate learners

according to their personal growth. A majority of the teachers (63.6%), however, do not always find positive outcomes in learners' performance and adopt the traditional method of grading, which is frustrating for learners.

S/L No.	Statements	Always (4)	Sometimes (3)	Rarely (2)	Never (1)	Mean
34	I follow the same strategy to assess every learner's performance.	54.5	27.3	0	18.2	2.18
35	I vary the strategy of assessment depending on learners' ability.	45.5	45.5	0	9.1	2.27
36	I find the positive in every learners' performance.	36.4	0	0	63.6	2.36
37	I judge a learner considering his personal growth and success.	27.3	63.6	0	9.1	2.09
38	I grade learners only on factual knowledge.	36.4	55.5	81.2	0	2.18

Table 7. Questionnaire Results: Evaluation

### ***Discussion of the Findings of the Qualitative Data***

This part of the study will evaluate the data found from the interviews and these findings will be compared with teachers' beliefs about differentiation strategies as found in Items 1-13.

Teacher responses of the semi-structured telephone interview: As mentioned in the methodology section, a semi-structured telephone interview was conducted with ten respondents. Here, in order to maintain confidentiality, the teachers are identified simply as T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7, T8, T9, and T10.

Awareness of Differentiated Instruction strategies: The interview data (Q-1) conform to the survey finding that teachers know about DI strategies. Almost all the teachers informed the researcher that they are aware about the differences among learners in their level of intelligence and interest. One of the respondents said, "My class is filled with amazingly different learners in their nature and interest. Therefore, I have to apply various techniques in order to make them interested. Class environment is mostly friendly and approachable for my learners, and I know most of my learners know their family background and interests also"(T4).

Knowledge about learners: In response to the second part of Q-1, whether they are aware about the background and learning profile of their learners, almost all of the teachers answered positively. One of the respondents has said, "Though it is very tough within limited time span but I try my best to pay attention to them individually. As I am working here for last 4 years, I know almost all of them and aware about their family background, intelligence level, and skill" (T2). Therefore the survey finding and interview finding seem to be congruent and inform that teachers have sufficient knowledge about their learners.

Content: Again, in response to their use of learning material in the class (Q-2), the interview finding corroborates the survey finding. All of the teachers said that they use the same material for every learner. The reason behind this becomes clear through the response of one

respondent: “We use mainly the same text for every learner. I can’t think of using different materials for my learners who belong to the same class. And this difference will not be accepted by my institutions and learners also” (T6).

In response to a question on their use of multimedia in the class (Q-4), all teachers unanimously said that they use it but sometimes they feel it is more convenient to teach through lectures or make students practice from the book.

Process: In response to their use of different strategies (Q-3) of teaching for different learners, teachers’ interview finding seems to be similar with the survey finding. Teachers use the same materials in the class and ask learners to do classwork. They have revealed that they never thought of using different strategies for the different learners as there is no practice of doing that in the institution.

Product: Again, all teachers agreed that assignments are the same for all and learners get the same amount of time to accomplish their tasks. One teacher respondent said, “If I differ assignments, that means if we give somebody easy topics for assignment and others get difficult tasks, or if I give more time to somebody for doing their tasks, I will be in great trouble. Learners will evaluate me as unfair and they can complain to the authority that I am biased towards some of the learners and the authority may take action against me” (T6).

Environment: Questions related to class environment reveal that classes are mostly relaxing but teachers have to be strict also in order to maintain discipline. Learners remain in their seats for the whole class and complete their tasks following the same instructions.

Evaluation: About evaluation (Q-4), the interview data are consistent with the survey finding that teachers evaluate all learners in the same way. They sometimes scold learners as one of the respondents said, “The evaluation process is the same for all and we do it through class tests, mid-term examination, and final examination. There is no scope to use a different evaluation system for any particular learner. Again, we scold learners who are disobedient and inattentive” (T7).

The interviews revealed the various obstacles teachers face to implement DI in English language classrooms. They are afraid of being claimed as “unfair,” and therefore they follow the same rules and regulations for every learner as well as the same evaluation method. The rules set by the institution/department restrict teachers’ ability to think otherwise. Again, teachers, as they have gone through the traditional method of learning where teachers’ duty was only to serve up the curriculum, they are unconsciously following that path and unable to do something different.

### **Suggestions for implementing DI in classrooms**

During the final stage of the interviews, teachers were asked to give at least two suggestions regarding the process of implementing DI in place of the traditional teaching method. The majority of the teachers suggested that classes should be “small” in size, i.e., they suggested learners in a class should not be more than 25, which will pave the way for more effective teaching. Again, a number of teachers talked about the necessity for more workshops/seminars/training for sharing ideas among teachers and practical knowledge about

implementation of DI in classes. Teachers believe it is necessary to give them “more freedom” from the institution, and not be bound by a set syllabus or a single textbook or by the uniform examination and assessment policy.

### **Implications**

The current study brings out some significant issues regarding the present picture of English language teaching in higher education in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, at private universities, learners pay a lot of money in tuition fees, and yet, they do not attain the target skills in English language. But no approach will work if significant care is not taken of each individual learner and teaching strategies are not tailored to their needs. So teaching methods need to be altered and must be carefully designed keeping each individual learner in mind. Again, teachers should be provided with more freedom to work, and should be allowed to receive training related to effective teaching methods. Teachers should be given the opportunity to use the Internet in the classroom as teaching materials are quickly, cheaply, and readily available there.

The study may have good implications for all, including learners, teachers, and institutions involved in English language teaching in Bangladesh. Teachers of higher education, dealing with adult learners should take this investigation seriously and try to modify materials, teaching methods, activities, and above all, their roles in the classroom to reach every individual learner. Again, all English language teachers of a particular university can devise a unified lesson plan, incorporating differentiated learning into the five major areas. Teachers should maintain a good rapport with their learners as learners’ perspectives about the teacher and the courses affect their success (Cook, 1991). Education policy makers and educational institutions can take this investigation sincerely and think about giving teachers freedom to devise their own evaluation strategies. Traditional attitudes towards evaluation and testing should be changed. Learners should take this investigation seriously and take initiatives to let teachers know their needs or learning preferences. They should fully co-operate with the teacher in activities organized for their benefit.

### **Conclusion**

The present study indicates that teachers are aware of differentiated learning. To some extent, they also seem to be implementing some core propositions of it in their classrooms. The study reveals that teachers maintain a good relationship with their learners, but they fall short in applying some of the strategies in areas like content, process, product, environment, and assessment. In the content areas, most teachers follow a fixed textbook for all and mostly use the traditional lecture method. In the product and assessment areas, problems exist mainly due to traditional attitudes. In fact, teachers have to abide by rules set by the authority; they have to use the same content for all learners and the same evaluation method. For example, all students must take the sit-down examination on the same date, complete the same assignments and the same syllabus, which makes teachers unable to apply DI in their classrooms. It is, however, difficult to generalize that this is the common scenario in all private universities of Bangladesh. To verify this, a large scale survey including more universities of Bangladesh needs to be done. Another limitation of the current study is that only teachers’ responses have been taken in account. If learners’ responses were taken, then it would give a



more valid picture of the teaching strategies used in the classroom. Still, what is found from the research may provide some theoretical and practical guidance to language teachers and help them develop more efficient classroom strategies to improve the learning of learners. It may also provide some insight into the subject matter and, despite the limitations, may serve as a basis for further research.

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## Appendix 1

### The Questionnaire

**Instructions:** Respond to the following statements by using the rating scale: **Always—Sometimes—Rarely—Never**. Please put a tick mark in one box only for each answer. Remember, this is not a test; there is no trick question, no “right” or “wrong” answers. Some of the factors may be beyond your control; nevertheless, please let your answers reflect the ACTUAL situation in your class.

Gender:  Male  Female

#### SECTION – A

S/LNo.	Statements	Always (4)	Sometimes (3)	Rarely (2)	Never (1)
1	I am aware that all learners are not of same level or same intelligence.				
2	I vary my teaching methods depending on the variety of learner learning styles, ability and intelligence.				
3	I should set different goals for different learners.				
4	I should adjust my curriculum to learners’ needs rather than expect learners to modify themselves to fit the curriculum.				
5	I respect every learner’s opinion, feelings and emotion.				
6	I should help each of my learners to develop positive self-image.				
7	I should not criticize learners negatively in front of the class.				
8	I should develop a feeling of cooperation not competition among learners				
9	I know the level of competence of my learners.				
10	I know about my learners’ social, economic, and family background.				
11	I take pre-assessment quizzes and tests to identify the slow and advanced learners of my class.				
12	I know about the interests (inside and outside the classroom) of each and every learner.				

13	I know about my learners' preferred learning styles.				
14	I use a fixed textbook in the class.				
15	I vary the sophistication, complexity and difficulty of reading materials according to my learners' ability.				
16	I teach various topics by delivering lectures only.				
17	I use both audio tapes and visuals (video, multimedia) in my class.				
18	I solicit learners' advice about what to teach in this course.				
19	I divide learners into different groups according to their ability and interests.				
20	Learners of my class learn by themselves through various activities organized by me.				
21	I encourage learners to discuss and share their opinions in the class.				
22	I provide additional hours to help the slow learners of my classes.				
23	I deal with learners' personal problems which hinder their study.				
24	Learners can choose their topics from various options provided by me.				
25	I vary the complexity and difficulty of homework depending on learners' ability.				
26	I provide different level of support for my learners.				
27	I vary the length of time a learner may take to complete a task in order to provide additional support for a slow learner or to encourage an advanced learner to pursue a topic in greater depth.				
28	I allow learners to do activities of their own interest.				
29	I make the class enjoyable for each and every learner.				
30	I encourage my learners to talk in the class.				
31	I use materials related to their culture and society.				
32	I use references from current issues.				
33	I help learners understand that some learners need to move around to learn, while others do better sitting quietly.				
34	I follow the same strategy to asses every learner's performance.				
35	I vary the strategy of assessment depending on learners' ability.				
36	I always find positive in every learners performance.				
37	I judge a learner considering his personal growth and success.				
38	I grade learners only on factual knowledge.				

## Appendix 2

### Semi-structured interview questions for teachers:

Teaching Practice		
S/L No.	Area of investigation	Questions
1	Teachers' knowledge of differentiated instruction strategy	Are you aware that learners differ vastly in their ability and intelligence? Do you know about that diversity of your learners?
2	Materials	Do you use the same materials for each and every learner of your class? If you do so, give reasons for doing that. Do you use multimedia in the classroom?
3	Method	Do you use the same method for teaching all learners? Why?
4	Product	Do you assign the same task for each learner? Do you vary time span provided for each learner for doing their activities? Give reasons behind your activities.
5	Evaluation	Do you follow the same process to evaluate your learners' acquired learning? Do you criticize or scold the learners?
6	Environment	Do you create a friendly environment in the class?
7	Suggestion	Provide at least two suggestions how differentiated environment can be applied in the English language teaching classes.

