



Available online at:
<http://dergipark.ulakbim.gov.tr/eltri/>
*International Association of Research
in Foreign Language Education and Applied Linguistics*
ELT Research Journal
2018, 7(1), 42-56
ISSN: 2146-9814

A Phenomenological Study Concerning Turkish EFL Teachers' Views on Differentiated Instruction

Erhan Gülşen¹

Bahçeşehir University, Turkey

Abstract

When implemented efficaciously, differentiated instruction (DI) is likely to provide scrupulous outcomes in its own right both for the language teacher and English language learners. However, it is also prone to presenting some obstacles, especially in countries like Turkey, where the common instruction is mostly given in mainstream classrooms. The purpose of this study was to ascertain Turkish EFL teachers' views upon the rewarding sides of DI and the hindrances in its implementation. To achieve this goal, perceptions of ten Turkish EFL teachers, who had been applying DI in the same school for a certain time, were collected through written interviews. Data were analysed using phenomenological study techniques. Six major themes were derived from the analysis: heeding learners' needs, boosting learner confidence, establishing better rapport, promoting involvement and interaction, experiencing difficulties in implementation and confronting mandatory interventions. These were quite relevant to understanding the contextual issues faced in the implementation of DI.

Keywords: Differentiated instruction, teacher views, phenomenological study, Turkish EFL teachers

¹ Bahçeşehir University. **Email:** erhan.gulsen@stu.bahcesehir.edu.tr

Introduction

Differentiated instruction (DI) is an instructional design that embraces each individual's learning map and dismisses the traditional instruction as inadequate since it is constructed around "one size fits all" curriculum (Loeser, 2015). It also provides varied routes for teachers to achieve their teaching targets, which in turn – inevitably – helps learners to proceed to the highest level possible (Tomlinson, 2005). Differentiating instruction provides educators with an opportunity to consider learners' different minds and intelligent levels (Lunsford & Treadwell, 2015). Teachers might always need to adapt their instruction in order for it to appeal to every single learner in their classroom(s), bearing various aspects like readiness levels and learning preferences in mind (Butt & Kausar, 2010). Having been acknowledged by a number of teachers and educators around the world since the late 1980s, DI has been addressing a common issue of seeking a means of appealing to each learner type and has been around in teachers' professional language for decades (Hart, 1996).

In terms of mechanics and dynamics of a classroom, DI creates challenges for learners as they learn through instrumental/functional activities. They wield their main skills and develop flexibility (Heacox, 2002). DI involves proactivity, clarity, interconnected tasks, continual assessment, adaptability & flexibility (Tomlinson, 2006). This shows that a teacher should be able to

- anticipate the unexpected classroom situations,
- adapt the learning environment accordingly,
- have full understanding of the teaching content along with its concepts and facts,
- allow learners to combine their background knowledge with their skills,
- develop self-respect and self-confidence,
- include more collaborative activities,
- helps learners to form a sense of community thanks to myriad interactions (Tomlinson, 2005)

Additionally, since DI is an adaptive and volatile process, the teacher must assess their learners' processes through formative assessments to learn about their teaching effectiveness and give proper feedback. The last tenet, adaptability and flexibility, is an absolute must as it is composed of the core element of differentiation. As the needs and levels of learners are subject to variation in time, a teacher is to possess the capability of adapting the materials and the learning atmosphere by keeping a regular track of the achievements and assessments with the sole aim of flexing the process of learning for each individual (Heacox, 2002 & Tomlinson, 2006)

So, what are the components that should be differentiated in a classroom? Tomlinson (1999) identified them as content (materials, teaching principles, skills), process (teaching style, group tasks, unfixed groups, group discussions) and product (final assessments that can provide learners with different ways for expression, tasks with varying levels and different evaluation methods). These three key components are differentiated to assess learners' readiness levels, interest levels and learning profiles (Langa & Yost, 2007).

Hence, it is not difficult to deduce that differentiation begins with the teachers and it requires deep implementation. By “deep” implementation, Hewitt and Weckstein (2012) refers to a kind of implementation that will bring together ground-breaking, rooted changes to any teaching context and that is surely what DI is supposed to be reinforced by. However, that might be problematic because some innate barriers may emerge along the way. In teachers’ part, these barriers are lack of time as they are supposed to differentiate the instruction all the time, lack of professional development resources and institutional support (Carolan & Guinn, 2007). In institutions’ part, some teachers might resist to change being afraid of losing their basic skills, see the change as a faddism or develop a fear of not being able to manage a classroom with a number of activities performed at once, as Tomlinson (1995) suggests. And, in countries such as Turkey, where a national common curriculum is abided by, external problems regarding the nation-wide examinations may appear. Therefore, as Karadağ and Yaşar (2010) state, this approach cannot be applied properly and effectively for various contextual reasons, which is supported by Anderson (2007), Tomlinson and Allan (2000). Although more than a decade has passed since the latest one of these studies have been published, the opinion still holds true. Some teachers, however, reported to perform DI relentlessly in Turkish EFL context as their schools’ common curriculum are structured around this instruction, even though the relevant obstacles are likely to emerge in their context as well. Gathering the teachers’ experiences and perceptions regarding the phenomenon of differentiated instruction can provide us with the real scenario.

Most studies regarding the applicability of DI in the literature are descriptive case studies generating a common theory. Some discuss the difficulties and come up with the same kinds of obstacles while others only touch upon the benefits. Few others gather their data from perceptions in a qualitative way. For instance, Pilten (2016) ascertains the applicability of DI Reading Instruction in Turkey by analysing the perceptions of 17 class teachers in a phenomenological study after they were given practical and theoretical information regarding DI in a conference and asked to prepare differentiated curriculums. The study is significantly relevant both in terms of its design as it implemented a phenomenological approach with its participants having been selected from different parts of the country and in terms of its findings which revealed that the current instruction in Turkey does not conform to the basic principles of DI and that most teachers hold a negative view as to its implementation due to such reasons as limited time, inadequacies in teacher education and inconvenient classroom structures. Additionally, the study found that the curricula designed by the participants complied with the theoretical premises of DI.

Robinson, Maldonado and Whaley (2014) investigated, in their qualitative case study, how nine teacher participants with different years of experience and working at different levels of schools perform DI. It made use of open-ended surveys, interviews and documents. During the interviews, the teachers talked about the theoretical foundations of DI, how and why the approach was implemented, the obstacles and solutions for them along with respective assessment and planning techniques. Analysed through hand-coding, the findings of the study revealed that differentiated instruction is necessary for learners as each student possesses a different learning style and that it is not easy to implement DI due to challenging classroom management issues but teaching can be facilitated by maximizing the interaction and

collaboration among students. Lockley, Jackson, Downing and Roberts (2017) aimed to learn how 130 university instructors model DI in their program in their study by using a mixed method research design. The quantitative findings of the online survey analysing the instructors' use and knowledge of DI revealed that few lecturers made use of assessment, almost all of them differentiated the content and process but half differentiated the product. As for the qualitative findings, they showed that instructors found DI beneficial and thought it would increase the students' success but they had difficulties implementing it thoughtfully and fully because of their lack of background knowledge, limited time for research, nature of classrooms and institutional input.

In her qualitative study, Logan (2010) tried to examine what the key components of DI were according to 141 teacher participants working at ten different middle schools during summer break through a survey that had questions regarding the essential principles, components and common myths surrounding DI. The study found that the responses by the teachers complied with the vital principles of DI (Tomlinson, 1999) and components of DI (Langa & Yost, 2007) and that teachers needed a methodological background to implement DI effectively. Likewise, the case study by Chien (2015) found after analysing 33 elementary English teachers' perceptions through surveys, documents, videos and interviews that they were reluctant to perform DI because they believed they lacked competence in it.

In Turkey, all schools follow a central EFL curriculum which is not differentiated and prepared by Ministry of National Education (MONE). However, some private schools prepare their own curriculum besides applying the common one stipulated by MONE. They select minimum two course books for one academic year and there are significant differences between among private schools in terms of teaching approaches and curriculum. As for DI, there is currently only one private school that is trying to implement it, and the teachers cannot choose any other teaching approach because they have to stick with the lesson plans, which are prepared on the basis of DI, and no campus uses streaming techniques to form classes. Therefore, all the lessons are implemented on the same basis. For a qualitative study, it is important to gather qualitative data out of the perceptions or views of those who are truly making sense of, dealing with or experiencing a phenomenon (Stake, 2010). So, the researcher of this study aimed to receive the perceptions of 10 teachers who had been actively implementing DI for at least 1 year. Besides, they had different experience levels and so they could give the most useful and varying ideas about the benefits of DI and the hindrances experienced while implementing it. This study focused on teachers' perceptions of DI. The aim was to identify their views regarding the benefits of DI and the difficulties they encountered while implementing it. The following sub-purposes were targeted:

- (1) What aids does differentiated instruction provide according to Turkish EFL teachers?
- (2) What are the obstacles in applying DI in Turkish EFL teachers' views?

Only one phenomenological study in Turkey (Pilten, 2016) has investigated teachers' perceptions regarding DI. However, the teachers were not applying DI at the time of the research. Their views regarding the instruction were collected after they had been given a conference on how to implement DI. To the authors' knowledge, no previous study has been

conducted on the subject in the same context. The present study seems to be significant and unique.

Methodology

This qualitative study adopted the phenomenological approach because it holds the notion that participants' perspectives are what led to multiple realities (Ary et al., 2010, p. 50). Multiple realities are individual meanings the participants make about a phenomenon. This method was selected because the study was intended to be contingent upon each teacher's interpretation of differentiated instruction regarding their experience. The researcher's ultimate goal was to analyse, express and evaluate their perceptions, which were constructed out of their own understanding. Qualitative data was collected through written interviews.

Context and Participants

Four primary school and six secondary school teachers participated in this study. All of them were working at the same private college in Istanbul, Turkey, where DI was actively implemented. The school was located in an urban area in the city and it has got more than fifty campuses all over the country. The participants were all Turkish and female, aged between 27 to 42, as there were not any male EFL teacher working for the institution at the time of the study. Convenient and purposive sampling methods were followed in recruiting participants for the study. Participants were selected from this particular campus for three reasons. Firstly, this campus was inspected more regularly by the national coordinators coming from the headquarters of the institution to check whether DI was performed appropriately. The basic principle of a phenomenological study stipulates that participants be chosen among those who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Secondly, the teachers there had participated in many different action research studies performed by the researcher of this study before and they were willing to share their ideas and teaching processes with their colleagues. Lastly, the researcher of this study had been working as a coordinator of fifth graders at the very same school. So, it was easy for the volunteer teachers to access the researcher if there were any unclear points regarding the written interview question, which were emailed to all of the teachers in the foreign language department and only those who volunteered replied back. The power relation between the researcher and the participants was kept at minimum level by setting a cordial atmosphere through mediation during telephone conversations and face-to-face talks at the campus. The researcher initially told all the volunteers that they could feel free to abort the interview if they were unable to complete it for one reason or another and that they could express their views – both positive and negative – freely as they would help improve the existing instruction. The participants were also reminded that a coordinator would not have the right to disclose their names along with their views to any official in the institution. The teachers had at least 1 year of teaching experience in teaching through DI. Table 1 gives details of their experience and academic background.

Table 1*Details of the participants*

Participant Number	Teaching experience in DI (years)	Qualifications
T1	3	MA
T2	2	BA
T3	4	BA
T4	1	BA + CELTA
T5	4	BA + CELTA
T6	1	BA
T7	4	BA
T8	4	MA
T9	3	BA + CELTA
T10	1	MA

Data Collection Process

The data were collected through written interviews because the present study was initiated just before summer break and so the researcher could not have accessed all the teachers as they were in different parts of the country during data collection process. The process started with the researcher consulting with the department head to get an official permission to conduct the research. The content of the email was shared with her and she gratefully coordinated and the emails were sent to all the teachers in the department in BCC format. In the email, it was explained to the teachers that their names and the data gathered through their responses were going to be kept confidential in any published format of the study by the researcher.

The purposes of the written interviews were to (1) investigate the teacher's views on the benefits of implementing DI in their classrooms and (2) ascertain the obstacles they encountered while implementing DI. The written interview protocol was composed of one broad question: "Now that you have been implementing differentiated instruction in your school for at least one year, can you please share your experience with us along with your views as to the overall implementation?"

The interview data were collected in one month as email replies. Each reply was written in English and filed and stored in a secure, personal computer and smart phone. Even though both the researcher and the teachers were native Turkish, the replies were received in English both because they had been teaching only in English at the school and in order that the publication of results in English could be eased.

Verification methods

As they confirm the trustworthiness of a study, verification methods are of significant importance. The researcher made use of two verification methods in the present study, which are (1) expert approval and (2) participants' feedback on responses. The interview question(s) pertaining to a qualitative study are to be appropriate for the purpose of that particular study besides being valid (Ary et al., 2010, p. 497). The researcher was able to make claims thanks to the verification of the participants' answers. Firstly, the department head (who has completed her MA in English Language Studies (ELT) established the validity of the written interview question. She scaled the question from 0 to 100 according to its appropriateness. As the score is higher than 75, the questions were considered valid. Secondly, the researcher made a phone call with all of the participants to receive their feedback on their statements. They all gave positive feedback on their statements, which contributed to the overall validity of the study providing a firm basis for data analysis.

Data analysis

According to Creswell (2007, p. 55), phenomenological data analysis requires reducing the data and analysing the certain statements and themes with the aim of meaning making. In other words, the researcher should choose the redundant data and then dismiss them as unnecessary to reach the core meaning out of the remaining data. Next, the significant statements are used to construct themes so that it can be easier to induce what the phenomenon means to the participants. The researcher of the present study constructed some specific themes out of the statements made by the participants. First, the topic of each email reply was determined and the statements significant for this topic were extracted. Then, some *vivo* codes and lean codes were written and sub-themes were established. Next, each significant statement was compared and contrasted and common ones were clustered together along with the sub-themes they pertain to. And, ultimately, the following main themes were identified by the researcher:

- (1) Heeding learners' needs,
- (2) Boosting learner confidence,
- (3) Establishing better rapport,
- (4) Promoting involvement and interaction,
- (5) Experiencing difficulties in implementation,
- (6) Confronting mandatory interventions.

Findings

The first four themes extracted out of the statements have been classified by the researchers as *Benefits of DI* since they treat of the teachers' views regarding developing language learning skills and the effectiveness of differentiated teaching, along with the reasons they believe to have played roles in overall teaching and learning performance. As it can be understood from the last two themes, two important issues hindering the process of differentiating the instruction were mentioned by the teacher: Experiencing Difficulties in Implementation (5) and Confronting Mandatory Interventions (6). Thus, the category *Benefits of DI* include the answers

for the first research question of the present study while *Obstacles in Functioning* provides answers for the second one.

1. Benefits of DI

a. Heeding Learners' Needs

Half of the teachers feel that applying DI in their classrooms help them consider their learners' needs more regardless of the grade they are teaching and it provides them with easiness to determine their learners' level and track individual processes. For instance, Teacher 2 stated *I am able to organize several types of activities that can truly respond to the needs of all students. I prepare challenging activities for the most capable students while the weaker ones enjoy doing the easier ones.* Teacher 5 said, *This way, you become more focused on the way your students learn. You can observe the process easily and plan accordingly.* Teacher 7 also highlighted, *Since the material are appropriate for each level, we can respond to their needs easily and it affects the learning process in a positive way.* Teacher 4 also added, *As a teacher, I have found the chance to study my students; what is difficult and what is easy for them.* Therefore, DI enables teachers to concentrate on the needs of their learners and recognize them better because they are able to adapt their materials and plans according to each individual and achieve their goals, as Teacher 4 put forward in her last line, *What I felt was, I was teaching the class, not one student.*

b. Boosting Learner Confidence

Interestingly enough, three of the teachers mentioned that learners build self-confidence and believe they can succeed learning the language thanks to DI mainly because every single one of them is active during the lesson. Teacher 7 emphasized, *Student who have some difficulties about learning a topic, trust themselves and try to do their bests when differentiated instruction is practiced.* Likewise, Teacher 4 typed *So, the lessons were planned to give opportunities for the students to practice and the confidence was built in this way.* And, Teacher 2 added, *Even the weakest student felt self-confident and the joy of success.* One of the main principles of DI is to build self-respect and self-confidence of the learners through respectful tasks in which they can fully make use of their skills (Tomlinson, 2006). Our teachers related the increased self-confidence in their classrooms to adaptability and flexibility, one of the other tenets of DI. Thus, as the materials and teaching atmosphere is easy to adapt in varied ways according to each learner's needs, they are really able to perform the differentiated tasks successfully and this increases their self-confidence on the way to acquire their FL.

c. Establishing Better Rapport

Written interviews also divulged that maintaining a good rapport is one of the good sides of DI. Two of the teachers explained that forming a good rapport inside their classrooms also help them to manage the classroom related issues better. For example, Teacher 3 stated, *Students are happier in the classroom when they are able to perform something, especially with their friends, and they consequently form a better relationship with me.* Teacher 2 also pointed out, *I like cooking. If you put proper amounts of ingredients in proper order, you will have an excellent food. Like cooking, if you organize proper amount of teaching materials for every single need*

in proper time, you will have a delightful teaching atmosphere. To conclude, teaching in a flexible atmosphere makes both the teachers and learners happy and comfortable. And, DI gives the language teachers the opportunity to create a learning atmosphere where the learners can interact with their peers joyfully and the teacher can recognize the classroom dynamics better and build a more intimate relationship with the learners to teach at a personal level. Amounts can be altered in accordance with the learner types to reach the teaching target flawlessly.

d. Promoting Involvement and Interaction

A grounded language teaching theory is one that is aimed to increase the interaction between peers (Tomlinson, 1999) and help them to get involved in the lessons by cooperating with an above-level peer (Vygotsky, 1978) and that's what the participants of the present study believes DI does. Teacher 10, for instance, typed, *By the help of differentiated instruction, the teacher can provide the balance and the below level students can catch up with the others quickly. As far as I have experienced, in two months, most of the students can communicate with each other with simple short phrases.* Teacher 8 similarly added to her statements, *by means of differentiated instruction, even the weakest students have the opportunity to involve in learning process.* And, Teacher 4 emphasized the point by typing, *Generally, when not applying DI, for the weak learners, when things start getting difficult, it is difficult for them to follow the lesson. However, in DI, the amount of their participation and involvement helps them to improve their language skills.* Thus, by levelling-up the differences regarding the language levels in their classrooms through peer interactions, language teachers can increase overall involvement as well. And, this helps below-level learners interact with the language and gain more self-confidence.

2. Obstacles in Functioning

a. Experiencing Difficulties in Implementation

As far as the negative sides of DI are concerned, nearly half of the teachers mentioned how demanding and time-consuming they found it to teach in DI. While mentioning this obstacle, they did not only refer to the classroom issues but also to the material preparation and planning processes. Teacher 7, for instance, added, *However, preparing different kinds of materials for different levels can be challenging during very busy weeks. We have to plan the course content in a very detailed way. As the students' ages lower, it becomes harder to implement it in Turkey.* Teacher 8, likewise, mentioned, *However, depending on my own experiences, I must admit that it may become even harder than expected to apply DI. The reasons why it turns into a great challenge for me are limited lesson hours.* And, Teacher 1 also mentioned the necessity of background knowledge and related teacher education: *Implementing DI is a challenging job for language teachers. Having students who learn in different ways means that the teacher should be equipped with the necessary academic knowledge and experience. I believe teacher education in this sense is crucial.* As for hindrances regarding the dynamics of DI, Teacher 6 highlighted, *To enforce DI and finish the yearly plan at the same time is not possible and most of the time high achiever students get bored or low achiever students cannot keep up with the instructions. I believe the best way to teach any language to anyone is to divide them into groups after evaluating their levels meticulously.* Teachers find it demanding or impossible to implement DI because it requires a lot of time both to plan the lessons and arrange the materials

in accordance with the principles of the approach and to adapt it to a classroom environment during the nationally approved lesson hours. What is more, as it is a complicated process and composed of certain processes to follow, DI can only be applied by those who have the certain background knowledge and years of experience. And, it might be difficult to manage a classroom where high and low achievers are present because while one group is busy dealing with some task or understanding something through cognitive skills, the other group may have to wait patiently for a certain time so that their peers can absorb what is being instructed before or after themselves.

b. Confronting Mandatory Interventions

If there are other curricula that should be embedded into the one structured around DI or those that should go parallel with it because of the practices to be commonly performed in compliance with the laws of a central education system, it is indispensable that there will be some mandatory interventions from time to time and this will hinder the DI process being implemented. Two of the teachers are of this opinion as they have to prepare their students for a nationwide TEOG (Transition from Primary to Secondary Education) examination and follow some institutional procedures. To begin with, Teacher 8 mentioned, *[It turns into a great challenge for me] because of the requirements of the system, such as written or oral tests applied.* Correspondingly, Teacher 9 complains about the inapplicability of DI just because of the central education and private school regulations: *I have always tried to implement DI in my classrooms and regularly been to some conferences to learn much about its mechanics. However, every time I believed I had successfully started applying it and had gone well, my lessons were interrupted or I had to cancel them because of examinations, unexpected bureaucratic tasks, etc. I believe it is a utopia to implement DI in Turkey to a full extent. So, I sometimes have to skip certain guidelines in lesson plans.* Few of the teachers are of the opinion that certain outside interventions and the works they have to complete bereave them from achieving success in differentiated education. Even when you are adequately equipped with the necessary knowledge and experienced enough, it might sometimes be impossible for you to differentiate your instruction or even keep up with the prepared curriculum. Thus, the second obstacle the interview questions have divulged is related to the outside interventions that cause teachers to stop differentiating unavoidably.

Discussion

The present study aimed to gain insight into Turkish EFL teachers' perceptions regarding the implementation of DI. The analysis of the findings provides insights into the aids of DI and what kind of obstacles may emerge while applying it in a certain setting.

As far as the context of the present study is concerned, there is only one existing qualitative study in the literature regarding the perceptions of teachers on DI (Pilten, 2016). However, the teachers were not implementing DI in their schools; their perceptions were gathered after they had been exposed to some educational conferences on the principles of DI. To the author's knowledge, no previous qualitative study has been conducted on the same subject, within the same context and setting in Turkey yet. Thus, the present study aims to contribute to the

conceptualization of DI in Turkey. It is of great importance for the research field due to its relevance and uniqueness.

One study carried out in Taiwan has got similar sub-purposes to those of this study and it can be considered to provide more in-depth data regarding the phenomenon as it achieves triangulation (Chien, 2015). The study's findings are in parallel with one of the themes extracted by the researcher of the present study, which is 'Experiencing Difficulties in Implementation'. Chien's participants mostly thought that they were not able to implement DI because they lacked the necessary background knowledge. Similar qualitative studies by Robinson et al., 2014, Logan, 2010 and Lockey et al., 2017 respectively found teachers had problems of applying DI due to time constraints and not having professional development, teachers had to learn the methodology behind DI for a full effect; instructors could not implement DI efficiently because they did not have enough time, the required background knowledge and nature of their classrooms and institutional pressure did not allow them. And, the quantitative study by Aftab (2015) drew the same conclusion as well; that the teachers did not have the time for planning and instruction. These aspects matched the fifth theme, 'Experiencing Difficulties in Implementation', of this study. It can be deduced from here that DI instruction could be hard to implement in other contexts because of the complicated instructional process it was contingent upon. In Turkey, inconvenient classroom structures (Piltten, 2016), can be an additional hindrance in its implementation. Just like the present study, all the other ones in the literature mentioned the time constraints and lack of background knowledge as obstacles. As far as our context is concerned, mandatory interventions related to the central education system and institutional tasks can be added to those impediments as most of the participants of the present study consider them to be factors that obstruct their instruction.

Similarly, aiming to gauge the impact of DI on learner motivation, behaviour and reading skills, Aras (2018) supported the quantitative findings in his mixed method study by conducting unstructured interviews with the participant teacher. The quantitative results showed that DI could enhance motivation by increasing reading achievement and structuring positive learner behaviours. As for qualitative ones, the teacher considered DI to be quite beneficial for learner interaction as well as motivation and to be challenging as it requires anticipatory planning and careful timing.

No other study in the literature aimed to induce the aids DI provides for teachers, either qualitatively or quantitatively. The first four themes of the present study were what contributed to its uniqueness and relevance. These aids or themes together with their sub-themes can actually be considered to parallel with the principles of DI stated by Tomlinson (1999) and its components put forward by (Langa & Yost, 2007), as Logan's study found about its participants' responses (2010). However, these were not selected as categories that could be pre-determined as typologies for the analysis of the current study's findings. When analysed comparatively, for instance, 'Heeding learner needs' is an aid provided through DI thanks to its adaptability and flexibility principles. Likewise, 'Promoting Involvement and Interaction' has its roots in 'community' principle as it stipulates that learners form peer interaction so that they can feel they are in a community. And, it can easily be understood that these four aids are direct results of the fact that the teachers have been able to differentiate content, process and product

(Tomlinson, 1999). So, this demonstrates that the findings related to the aids of DI can support the literature both theoretically and qualitatively.

The inadequate amount of research conducted within the same context shows that it was necessary to perform studies to gain a full understanding of perceptions of the teachers who are actively trying to implement DI. The present study divulged that DI can be very beneficial for English language learners if it can be implemented relentlessly and that some obstacles still hinder its implementation in varying degrees in Turkish education system. For instance, some teachers still need theoretical knowledge and unexpected interventions may intercept the ongoing instruction or cause it to terminate. In all schools around Turkey, teachers try to apply the EFL curriculum and the related tests designed by MONE and so they cannot implement the instruction they find useful. In private schools, a teacher also has to perform the instruction suggested by institution along with these central ones. Only one private school has been trying to implement DI for quite a while. It is good that a few studies try to test and evaluate the effectiveness of this instruction through their own interventions. However, it is obvious that researchers should focus on the ideas of the teachers who are actively teaching through DI and even more in-depth studies are needed for the field and literature.

Limitations

Despite gathering perceptions contributory to intellectualization of a phenomenon, the present study might be considered to have some limitations regarding its implementation. Initially, in addition to use of written reflections, some other qualitative tools such as teacher interviews, reflective diaries or simulated recalls could have been integrated to reach triangulation on qualitative bases. Or, alternatively, quantitative tools such as check lists could have been assembled to give the study a statistical aspect which can then be supported qualitatively. Secondly, the gathered data gives insight solely on the implementation of DI. Teachers' views on how to prepare and use differentiated materials as well as the ways to overcome extracurricular challenges could have also been obtained to reach more far-reaching qualitative findings. In addition, the researchers of this study acknowledge the fact that the reliability of the themes and sub-themes derived out of the created domains could be limited to the present context though the content was analysed in uniform and careful negotiation, which gave a high inter-rater reliability.

Suggestions for Further Research

In line with the above-mentioned limitations, some suggestions for further educational research can be made out of the gathered results of the present study. To begin with, the participants can join in face-to-face interviews initially with the researcher and subsequently alone with another person equally or more experienced in the field to increase saturation and interrater reliability. In addition, the study can be spread over a longer time period and teachers' views can be gathered through periodically written journals. To increase the reliability, the findings from two-three qualitative tools can be merged or they can be used to support some statistical data from a quantitative tool such as a likert-scale questionnaire on the benefits and obstacles of DI. Thirdly, the teachers' views on the process of material adaptation or the ways

to negotiate the obstacles can also be gathered particularly. All these suggestions can be considered with the aim of extending the existing literature on DI or giving it a more thorough aspect.

Pedagogical Implications

For language teachers, educational researchers, practitioners and material/course designers, the analysed perceptions of the teachers can offer some implications regarding a proper implementation of DI. The findings revealed that implementation of DI could provide numerous benefits in refining classroom instruction and considering personal language learning skills. Therefore, those aiming to update their curricula or enhance institutional teaching practices so that all the student needs and profiles are equally considered can integrate DI into their course designs by analysing its tenets and components pointed out in the literature. In addition, the practical difficulty and unforeseen interventions faced by the participants on the path of differentiated teaching can help formulate solutions for seamless instruction in any given context or setting. For instance, the teachers can be provided with more time for material preparation or materials can be prepared by a special department. As for mandatory interventions, separate or additional lesson hours can be allocated for state curricula so that DI cannot be intervened.

It is our hope that the analysis of study findings will contribute to the efforts to implement DI in Turkish education system. Doing so will help the teachers to boost learners' confidence regarding learning a language and track individual learners' process by responding to their needs. And, this in turn will provide students with a learning environment where they can acquire a language or skill more interactively, confidently and easily.

References

- Aftab, J. (2015). Teachers' beliefs about differentiated instructions in mixed ability classrooms: A case of time limitation. *Journal of Education and Educational Development*, 2(2), 94-114.
- Anderson, K., M. (2007). Differentiating instruction to include all students. *Preventing School Failure*, 51 (3), 49-54.
- Aras, İ. (2018). *The impact of differentiated instruction on learners in reading classes of a middle school: motivation, behaviour and achievement* (Unpublished master's thesis). Bahçeşehir University, Istanbul, Turkey.
- Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., Sorensen C. & Razavieh A. (2010). Introduction to research in education. CA: Nelson Education LTD.

- Butt, M & Kausar S. (2010). A Comparative study of using differentiated instructions of public and private school teachers. *Malaysian Journal of Distance Education*, 12(1), 105-124.
- Chien, C. (2015). Analysis of Taiwanese elementary school English teachers' perceptions of, designs of, and knowledge constructed about differentiated instruction in content. *Cogent Education*, 2, 1-16.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks. CA: Sage
- Hart, S. (1996). *Differentiation and equal opportunities*. London: Routledge.
- Heacox, D. (2002). *Differentiating instruction in a regular classroom: How to reach and teach*. Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing Inc.
- Hewitt, K. K. & Weckstein, D. K. (2012). Differentiated instruction: Begin with teachers! *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, 48(1), 35-40.
- Jesus, O. N. D. (2012). Differentiated instruction: Can differentiated instruction provide success for all learners? *National Teacher Education Journal*, 5(3), 5-11.
- Karadağ, R. & Yaşar, S. (2010). Effects of differentiated instruction on students' attitudes towards Turkish courses: an action research. *Procedia Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 9 1394-1399
- Langa, M. A., & Yost, J. L. (2007). *Curriculum mapping for differentiated instruction, k-8*. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press.
- Lockley, J., Jackson, N., Downing, A. & Roberts, J. (2017). University instructors' responses on implementation of differentiated instruction in teacher education programs. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED572728)
- Loeser, John W. (2015). Differentiated instruction. *Research Starters: Education*, (Online Edition).
- Logan, B. (2010). Examining differentiated instruction: Teachers respond. *Research in Higher Education Journal*, 1-14.
- Lunsford, H. & Treadwell G. (2015). Implementing differentiated instruction for online college writing courses. *Distance Learning*, 13(3), 11-22.
- Pilten, G. (2016). A phenomenological study of teacher perceptions of the applicability of differentiated reading instruction designs in Turkey. *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice*, 16(4), 1419-1451.
- Robinson L., Maldonado N. & Whaley, J. (2014). Perceptions about implementation of differentiated instruction. Paper presented at the Annual Mid-South Educational Research (MSERA) conference.

- Stake, R. E. (2010). *Qualitative research: Studying how things work*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Tomlinson, C. A. (1995). Deciding to differentiate instruction in middle school: One school's journey. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 39 (2), 77-87.
- Tomlinson, C. A. (1999). *The differentiated classroom: Responding to the needs of all learners*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Tomlinson, C. & Allan, S. (2000). *Leadership for differentiating schools and classrooms*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Tomlinson, C. A. (2005). Differentiated instruction. *Theory into Practice*, 44(3), 183–184.
- Tomlinson, C. A. (2006). *Differentiated instructions for academic diversity*. U.S.A: J.M. Kooper.
- Vygotsky, L. S. 1978. *Mind in society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.