



## The Effect of Differentiated Instruction in Teaching English Language for Second Intermediate Class Students

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**ملخص.** تستكشف الدراسة تأثير التعليم المتميز (DI) على مهارات اللغة الإنكليزية لطلاب الصف الثاني المتوسط في العراق. التعليم المتميز هو نهج تعليمي يقوم بتعديل التعليم لاستيعاب مستويات الاستعداد المختلفة لدى الطلاب واهتماماتهم وملفات التعلم الخاصة بهم من خلال تعديل المحتوى والعملية والمنتج. تم استخدام طريقة شبه تجريبية تضمنت مجموعتين: مجموعة تجريبية تم تعليمها باستخدام استراتيجيات التعليم المتميز، ومجموعة ضابطة تم تعليمها باستخدام الطرق التقليدية. شملت العينة 70 طالبًا من مدرسة ثانوية في بغداد. تم جمع البيانات باستخدام اختبارات قَبْلِيَّة وبعْدِيَّة لقياس تحصيل اللغة الإنكليزية، ومن خلال استبيان لتحديد مواقف الطلاب تجاه عملية التعلم. أظهرت النتائج تقدمًا ذا دلالة إحصائية في المجموعة التجريبية مقارنة بالمجموعة الضابطة ( $p < 0.01$ ). بالإضافة إلى ذلك، أظهر الطلاب في ظل التعليم المتميز مزيدًا من التفاعل والدافعية. تثبتت هذه النتائج فعالية التعليم المتميز في تحسين أداء تعلم اللغة الإنكليزية في سياقات تعلم اللغة كلفة أجنبية.

**Abstract.** The study explores the effect of Differentiated Instruction (DI) on English language skills for second intermediate class students. DI is an instructional approach that modulates instruction to





accommodate students' varying readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles by modifying content, process, and product. A quasi-experimental method was used that involved two groups: an experimental group taught using DI strategies and a control group taught using traditional methods. The sample included 70 students of a secondary school in Baghdad. Data were collected using pre- and post-tests to measure English language achievement and through a questionnaire to identify students' attitudes toward the learning process. Results were found to reflect statistically significant progress in the experiment group compared to the control group ( $p < 0.01$ ). Additionally, students under DI exhibited more engagement and motivation. These results prove the effectiveness of DI to enhance English language learning performance in EFL contexts.

**Keywords:** Differentiated Instruction (DI), English Language, Second Intermediate Class Students.

### First Section:

#### 1. Background of the study

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching in Iraq faces ongoing challenges, particularly in addressing the diverse needs of students. Classrooms are often overcrowded and lack sufficient resources, while teaching methods remain largely traditional and teacher-centered (Al-Jarf, 2008; Yousif & Abid, 2021). These conventional approaches do not account for differences in students' language proficiency, learning styles, or motivation, resulting in unequal language development and academic achievement (Rahim, 2019).

To address these issues, educators have increasingly turned to learner-centered strategies. One widely supported method is Differentiated Instruction (DI), which emphasizes adapting teaching elements—content, process, product, and learning environment—according to students' readiness, interests, and learning preferences (Tomlinson, 2001, 2014). DI is based on the belief that all students can succeed when instruction is personalized (Gregory & Chapman, 2013).

In EFL settings, where student backgrounds and prior exposure to English vary greatly, DI has proven especially effective. Research shows that DI enhances language skills, increases motivation, and promotes greater student





participation (Çelik & Karaca, 2014; Hall, 2002). It provides a more equitable learning experience by addressing individual needs and bridging achievement gaps.

This study investigates the use of DI in teaching English to second-year intermediate students in Iraq. It evaluates the impact of DI on student performance and explores how applying DI principles can lead to more inclusive and effective learning. The findings aim to guide EFL teachers and policymakers in improving language instruction, particularly in low-resource, post-conflict educational environments.

## 2. Problem of the study

The problem of the study centers on the ongoing struggles of second intermediate students in Iraq to learn English, despite efforts to improve EFL education. This difficulty is largely due to the continued use of traditional teaching methods that fail to consider students' individual differences in ability, learning style, and motivation. As a result, many students experience low language proficiency and unequal academic achievement. Given these challenges, there is a need to explore alternative teaching approaches. Differentiated Instruction (DI), which adapts teaching to meet diverse student needs, has shown success in other contexts but remains underused and under-researched in Iraqi EFL classrooms. This study aims to investigate the potential of DI to improve English learning outcomes for Iraqi students at the second intermediate level.

## 3. Significant of the study

This research is significant because it examines how Differentiated Instruction (DI) can improve English language teaching for second intermediate students in Iraq. By addressing differences in students' proficiency, learning styles, and interests, the study offers practical strategies to boost student engagement and performance. The findings aim to support more effective and inclusive teaching methods, inform curriculum development, and enhance teacher training. Ultimately, the research seeks to improve the overall quality of English instruction for diverse learners in Iraq and similar contexts.

## 4. Research Hypotheses





1.  $H_0$  (Null Hypothesis): Students learning English language using Differentiated Instruction and those using traditional instruction have no statistically significant difference in English language achievement.
2.  $H_1$  (Alternative Hypothesis): Students taught using Differentiated Instruction will show a statistically significant increase in English language achievement compared to students taught using conventional teaching methods.

### 5. Research Questions

1. How does Differentiated Instruction affect the English language performance of students in second intermediate class?
2. How does Differentiated Instruction influence students with varying levels of English proficiency (e.g., low, medium, high)?
3. In what ways does Differentiated Instruction influence students' motivation and interest towards learning English?
4. Are performance differences between students taught with Differentiated Instruction and students taught with traditional methods perceptible?

### 6. Limits of the Research

1. Population Limit: The study is limited to second intermediate class students in the sample schools of Iraq during 2024–2025 academic year.
2. Geographical Limit: The research is confined to a specific region or district in Iraq, and therefore the results cannot be applied to all schools in Iraq.
3. Subject Matter Limit: The study is confined to the English language subject only, i.e., to reading comprehension, grammar, and vocabulary.
4. Time Limit: The research is limited to a one-semester time frame, which may be insufficient to observe longer-term effects of Differentiated Instruction.
5. Instructional Strategy Limit: Differentiated Instruction alone is the instructional strategy that the research has analyzed and not been compared to other instruction strategies thoroughly.

### 7. Definition of Key Terms

1. **Differentiated Instruction (DI):** An instructional approach that involves modifying instruction methods, materials, content, and







evaluation to meet the diverse learning needs, interests, and readiness levels of students in the classroom.

2. **English Language:** Refers to the subject that is taught in Iraqi intermediate schools and consists of reading, writing, speaking, listening, grammar, and vocabulary components.
3. **Second Intermediate Class Students:** Students of the second year of intermediate level education in Iraq, between the ages of 13 and 14 years.

## Second Section

### 1. Literature Review

It explores DI's theoretical foundations, instructional strategies, and research evidence, focusing on how DI addresses diverse student needs, learning styles, and readiness levels. Introduced by Tomlinson (2001), DI involves adapting key teaching elements—content, process, product, and learning environment—to support varied learning paths within a single classroom. Tomlinson (2014) emphasizes that DI is a flexible, responsive approach based on ongoing assessment and planning. Research supports DI's effectiveness in inclusive, diverse classrooms, particularly in Western contexts (Tomlinson, 2001; Çelik & Karaca, 2014). However, there is limited research on its application in Iraq. This study aims to address that gap by evaluating DI's impact on English proficiency among second intermediate students, contributing to the broader discourse on inclusive education in developing contexts.

#### 1.1. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in several influential learning theories that collectively support the principles and practical implementation of Differentiated Instruction (DI) in English language teaching. These theories highlight the importance of individualized learning, student engagement, and the responsiveness of instruction to diverse student needs. Together, they provide a comprehensive theoretical foundation for the study's investigation into the use of DI in Iraqi intermediate schools.

#### • Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and Zone of Proximal Development(ZPD):

Lev Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory emphasizes the social nature of learning and introduces the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development





(ZPD), which is the range between what a learner can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance. Vygotsky argued that learning is most effective when instruction targets this zone, allowing students to build on their existing knowledge with appropriate support. Differentiated Instruction reflects this approach by offering scaffolding based on individual readiness levels. Educators such as Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976), and later Tharp and Gallimore (1988), expanded on this idea, stressing the value of guided interaction and tailored support to foster student growth within their ZPD. DI, by providing tiered tasks and varying support, ensures that each student operates within their optimal learning zone.

- **Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences:**

Howard Gardner (1983) proposed that intelligence is not a single, fixed ability but a set of multiple intelligences, including linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic intelligences. According to Gardner (1999), students learn in different ways depending on their dominant intelligences. Differentiated Instruction aligns with this theory by employing diverse teaching strategies to appeal to these varied intelligences, thus allowing each learner to access and engage with the material more effectively. Armstrong (2009) supports the use of this model in education, advocating for instructional practices that are responsive to students' unique cognitive strengths.

- **Constructivism and Active Learning:**

Constructivist theories, as articulated by Piaget (1972) and Bruner (1960), propose that learners construct knowledge through interaction with their environment and by connecting new information with prior experiences. In this view, learning is an active, student-centered process. Differentiated Instruction reflects constructivist ideals by promoting inquiry-based, hands-on, and problem-solving tasks tailored to students' current understanding. Mayer (2004) and Jonassen (1999) argue that such approaches foster deeper learning and enhance knowledge retention. DI thus supports constructivist learning by allowing students to engage in meaningful and personalized educational experiences.

- **Tomlinson's Model of Differentiated Instruction:**

Carol Ann Tomlinson (2001, 2014) developed a practical framework for Differentiated Instruction specifically aimed at addressing learner diversity. Her model focuses on modifying three key elements of instruction—content (what students learn), process (how they learn), and product (how they





demonstrate learning)—according to students' readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles. This model is especially relevant in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, where students' language skills and learning backgrounds often vary significantly. Tomlinson emphasizes that effective differentiation requires ongoing assessment, flexible grouping, and responsive planning to meet the needs of all learners.

• **Integrated Theoretical Perspective:**

The combination of these theories provides a strong foundation for implementing DI in Iraqi EFL classrooms. Each theory contributes uniquely: Vygotsky's ZPD underscores the importance of scaffolding; Gardner's theory highlights the need to cater to diverse intelligences; constructivism advocates for active, meaningful learning; and Tomlinson offers a practical model for applying these theories in classrooms. Together, they advocate for inclusive, student-centered instruction that can better serve the diverse needs of second intermediate students in Iraq (Tomlinson, 2014; Hamdan, 2017).

In summary, this theoretical framework supports the view that Differentiated Instruction, rooted in well-established educational theories, can be an effective strategy for enhancing English language learning in varied and diverse classroom contexts.

## 1.2. Empirical studies of Differentiated Instruction (DI):

### 1. Alavinia, P., & Farhady, S. (2012)

Title: An investigation into the impact of differentiated instruction on Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension.

Journal: Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 2(7), 1471–1478.

Summary: The research contrasted experimentally DI methods (e.g., tiered reading practice and flexible grouping) with Iranian EFL learners. Results included significant enhancement in reading comprehension as well as motivation compared to traditional instruction patterns.

Relevance: Presents empirical evidence for the efficacy of DI in improving English language skills in intermediate-level EFL learners.

### 2. Suprayogi, M. N., Valcke, M., & Godwin, R. (2017)

Title: Teachers and their use of differentiated instruction in the classroom

Journal: Teaching and Teacher Education, 67, 291–301.

Summary: The study explored how Indonesian teachers utilized DI and its impact on students' language learning. Teachers who utilized DI more frequently indicated higher student engagement and performance improvement in English.





Relevance: Illustrates how DI strategies in a non-English speaking context influence learners' academic performance and interest in a positive way.

### 1.3. Gaps in the Literature

The current literature on Differentiated Instruction (DI) reveals several key gaps that limit its applicability and effectiveness in contexts like Iraq:

- **Context-Specific Research:** Most existing DI studies are based in Western educational systems, with limited focus on the unique challenges faced by Iraqi students. Research tailored to the Iraqi and broader Middle Eastern context is needed, particularly regarding language proficiency levels and cultural factors.
- **Long-Term Impact:** Much of the current research on DI focuses on short-term outcomes. There is a lack of longitudinal studies examining the sustained impact of DI on students' English language proficiency over time.
- **Teacher Training:** There is insufficient literature on how teachers are trained to implement DI, especially in low-resource environments like Iraq. More research is needed on the role of teacher preparation in the successful application of DI strategies.
- **Student Attitudes:** Few studies explore how students perceive DI and its effects on their motivation, engagement, and achievement. Understanding student attitudes can help improve DI practices to better meet learner needs.
- **Effects on Specific Language Skills:** Most research addresses overall language proficiency, but there is limited investigation into how DI influences individual skills such as speaking, listening, writing, and vocabulary acquisition.
- **Technology Integration:** While technology is occasionally mentioned, little research explores how digital tools can effectively support DI, particularly in settings with inconsistent or limited access to technology.

## 2. Methodology:

The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data to offer a comprehensive understanding of DI's effectiveness.

### 2.1. Research Design







The research follows a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test control group design, a model commonly used in educational settings where random assignment is impractical due to ethical or administrative limitations (Creswell, 2014). Two groups were formed: an experimental group taught using DI strategies and a control group taught using traditional methods. This design allows for a comparative analysis of the groups' academic performance before and after the intervention, while also minimizing sampling bias (Campbell & Stanley, 1963).

## 2.2. Population and Sampling

The target population includes second intermediate students (aged 13–14) from a public secondary school in Baghdad during the 2024–2025 academic year. The total sample size consists of **70 students**, equally divided into experimental and control groups (35 students each). **Purposive sampling** was employed to select two demographically similar classes based on gender distribution, prior English proficiency, and age (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The selected school reflects typical urban classroom conditions in Iraq, aligning with national educational practices (Hamdan, 2017).

## 2.3. Participant Characteristics

The participants varied in English language proficiency, socioeconomic status, academic ability, and learning styles. These differences underscore the relevance of DI, which is designed to meet diverse learner needs. The age range was predominantly 14–15 years, and students came from low to middle-income families with differing levels of prior English exposure and preferred learning modalities (e.g., visual, auditory, kinesthetic).

## 2.4. Research Instruments

To collect data, three instruments were used:

- **English Language Achievement Test** – A teacher-developed tool assessing vocabulary, grammar, reading, and writing. Reviewed for content validity and reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.84$ ), the test provided baseline and outcome data.
- **Student Questionnaire** – A Likert-scale questionnaire completed post-intervention to assess student perceptions, engagement, and motivation toward DI (Likert, 1932).



- **Classroom Observation Checklist** – Used throughout the study to monitor implementation fidelity and classroom dynamics (Cohen et al., 2017).

## 2.5. Instructional Materials

A wide range of materials supported DI implementation:

- Textbooks and workbooks as core resources.
- Visual aids like charts and flashcards for visual learners.
- Multimedia resources such as videos and audio recordings to cater to auditory and digital learners.
- Online tools including games and quizzes for additional practice.
- Peer interaction materials like group activities and role-plays.
- Differentiated handouts tailored to students' readiness and interests, offering multiple levels of complexity to encourage motivation and engagement.

These materials aimed to create an inclusive, dynamic learning environment in line with DI principles (Tomlinson, 2001).

## 2.6. Procedures

The research lasted eight weeks. Initially, both groups took a pre-test. The control group received traditional textbook-based instruction, while the experimental group experienced DI-based teaching involving tiered tasks, flexible grouping, and multiple instructional methods. Teachers in the experimental group attended a brief training workshop on DI strategies. At the end, a post-test was administered to both groups to evaluate learning gains, followed by the student questionnaire and ongoing classroom observation to gather qualitative insights (Patton, 2015).

## 2.7. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics:

- Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) summarized student performance pre- and post-intervention.
- Inferential statistics, including independent and paired t-tests, assessed whether significant differences existed between and within groups.
- Effect size (Cohen's d) was calculated to measure the magnitude of the DI impact. An effect size above 0.5 would indicate meaningful educational gains.



- Reliability and validity of instruments were confirmed using Cronbach's alpha, ensuring consistency in measurement.

### Third Section: Results, discussions and conclusion.

#### 1. Results:

(taught with DI) and the control group (taught traditionally), using both **descriptive** and **inferential** statistics.

#### Key Findings:

##### Descriptive Statistics:

##### Experimental Group:

Pre-test mean = 52.34

Post-test mean = 78.45

##### Control Group:

Pre-test mean = 51.23

Post-test mean = 64.37

Students in the DI group showed greater improvement in English achievement compared to the control group.

##### Inferential Statistics:

##### T-Test Results:

$t = 7.52$ ,  $df = 58$ ,  $p = 0.000$

A statistically significant difference in post-test scores favoring the experimental group.

##### Effect Size:

**Cohen's  $d = 1.50$** , indicating a **very strong positive effect** of DI on student performance.

The results clearly show that DI significantly improved students' English language performance compared to traditional teaching. The large effect size suggests DI is especially effective in classrooms with diverse student needs and abilities as well as Differentiated Instruction led to **significantly higher achievement** in English for the experimental group. These findings support the use of DI as an effective educational strategy in Iraqi second intermediate classrooms.

#### 2. Discussions

- Effectiveness of DI:

The experimental group taught with DI significantly outperformed the control group. This supports the study's hypothesis that DI





improves English proficiency by tailoring instruction to student needs.

- Theoretical Alignment:
  - Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (Zone of Proximal Development) supports the idea that guided, personalized learning maximizes student progress.
  - Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory explains DI's success through its accommodation of diverse learning styles.
  - Constructivist Learning Theory underlines DI's promotion of active, cooperative learning, encouraging deeper understanding and critical thinking.
  - Tomlinson's DI Model proved effective by using tiered assignments and flexible grouping that allowed students to learn at their own pace.

### 3. Conclusions:

- DI positively impacts English language achievement by addressing individual student readiness, interests, and learning profiles.
- The study reinforces the value of flexible, student-centered teaching in diverse classrooms like those in Iraq.

### 4. Recommendations:

- **Adopt DI in Iraqi classrooms:**  
Train teachers in DI strategies to boost student engagement and achievement.
- **Further Research:**  
Conduct long-term and subject-diverse studies on DI's effects and implementation challenges.
- **Policy Support:**  
Iraqi educational policymakers should integrate DI into curricula, provide resources, and support teacher training.
- **Teacher Collaboration:**  
Establish professional networks for sharing DI best practices and ensuring ongoing support.

### 5. Limitations:

- Limited generalizability due to sample size and location.





- Focus on short-term impact; long-term effects need investigation.
- Teacher experience with DI can influence outcomes; future research should control this variable.

## 6. Final Remarks:

The study provides strong evidence that Differentiated Instruction is an effective approach for improving English proficiency in Iraqi intermediate students. DI's tailored, flexible teaching methods offer a promising way to elevate educational standards in Iraq and similar contexts.

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