A STUDY ON STRATEGIES FOR DIFFERENTIATION IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Cristina Sánchez Fernández
Universidad de Granada

Abstract

Differentiation as a classroom practice requires teachers to understand the nature of each one of the students to meet their individual differences. This study examines differentiation strategies used by English teachers in a secondary school in their classrooms. The literature review points out that there is no one method which guarantees every student's development but it can be easier if teachers use differentiated instruction. Qualitative data was collected by means of classroom observations and the teachers' self-report. Findings of this study show that teachers sometimes make use of differentiation strategies, but its feasibility decreases because of the time and workload involved.

Key words: diversity, differentated instruction, differentiation strategies, classroom observation, teachers' self-report.

Resumen

«Estudio de estrategias de diferenciación en la enseñanza de inglés como lengua extranjera». La diferenciación como práctica en el aula requiere que los profesores comprendan la naturaleza de cada uno de los alumnos para conocer sus diferencias individuales. Este estudio analiza las estrategias de diferenciación utilizadas por profesores de inglés en un instituto de secundaria en sus aulas. La revisión de la literatura señala que no existe un método único que garantice el desarrollo de cada alumno, pero puede ser más fácil si los profesores usan la instrucción diferenciada. Los datos cualitativos fueron recogidos a través de observaciones de aula y del autoinforme de cada profesor. Los resultados muestran que los profesores algunas veces hacen uso de estrategias de diferenciación pero su viabilidad disminuye a causa del tiempo y la consecuente carga de trabajo.

Palabras clave: diversidad, instrucción diferenciada, estrategias de diferenciación, observación en el aula, autoinforme de los profesores.

1. AN OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

1.1. Introduction: Background

Diversity is an inherent condition for the human development where students have their own different individual characteristics which affect their learning process, that is, they are all different. According to Burns and Shadoian-Gersing (2010: 21), diversity has been framed as «characteristics that can affect the specific ways in which developmental potential and learning are realised, including cultural, linguistic, ethnic, religious and socio-economic differences».

Students populating Spanish classrooms are diverse. Meeting the needs of students is one of the most persistent challenges facing teachers in schools. Students come from different cultures, have different learning styles, have different levels of emotional and social maturity and have different individual learning preferences. Although students' differ and reflect different levels of academic readiness, they develop, together with the intellectual and emotional capabilities appropriate to their age, a peculiar cognitive style, different interests and different characterists from the rest of the students in the group (Jiménez Raya, 2009).

Thus, the term differentiation is central and relevant in the educational system. In fact, many educational researchers have explored individual differences in learning, creating theories of thinking, learning, and teaching in the last century (Dörnyei, 2005). The Multiple Intelligence theory and the theory of Self-Government describe ways to organize and understand the individual differences in our classrooms (Sternberg, 1988; Gardner, 1995, 1999). In short, these two theories share with differentiated instruction a central theme where students learn in different ways and schools that differentiate will increase student success.

Despite the fact that the theories mentioned above work to explain why there are differences, there are several definitions provided by different researchers. One is the theory of differentiated instruction proposed by Carol Ann Tomlinson (1999, 2001), based on the premise that teachers should adapt instruction taking into account students' differences. In most schools, students are grouped heterogeneously, so teachers need to implement differentiated instructional strategies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

Spanish Education is on the verge of a process of reform which has undergone a series of legislative changes that have been crucial in the history. One of these changes occurred in the early 1990s when the system introduced the extension of the age of schooling to the age of 16.

The literature review presents different research insights that support influential theories on the attention of diverse students. Furthermore, in this review the origin and evolution of differentiation and how researchers define the term differ-

entiation will be useful in the development of this study. Dealing with diversity is one of the central challenges of 21ˢᵗ century education. Teachers need to find ways to deal with students' individual needs, which may include anything from cultural differences to ability level. This is currently called differentiated instruction. It is based on the assertion that instructional approaches should be adapted to students' diverse academic skill levels and individual differences in the classroom.

2.2. Origin And Background Of Attention To Diversity: Individual Differences

> The biggest mistake of past centuries in teaching has been to treat all children as if they were variants of the same individual, and thus to feel justified in teaching them the same subjects in the same ways.

> (Gardner, in Tomlinson 1999:9)

In Spain, initial experiments in the attention to diversity date back to the sixteenth century and were intended for students with sensory handicaps. As Jiménez Raya (2009) states, attention to diversity is based on the following premises: the society and specially the students are diverse due to the large arrival of immigrants, the increasing visibility of disabled students and the construction of schools that also receive students with some type of specific need educational support. Students learn more when instruction deals with the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky (1978:86) defines this notion «as the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers».

Considering that differentiation is a main concern, the following theories proposed by some researchers help teachers and educators to better understand how to meet the students' diverse needs. These theories of learning differences are Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences theory (1983) and Robert Sternberg's Self-Government theory. Gardner describes learning differences through his which has also shown that differentiated instruction based on student intelligences can increase student achievement. According to his theory, humans have at least eight ways of being intelligent or talented about the world: verbal/linguistic, logical/mathematical, visual/spatial, musical, naturalistic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and body/kinesthetic. Robert Sternberg (1997) proposed the theory of Thinking Styles which is more rigorously defined than in Gardner's research. The theory of mental Self-Government indicates the presence of styles of thinking that form psychological bridges between individuals's intelligence and personalities. These two theories show the need for the methodology which contemplates attention to student diversity and recognize that students have individual differences. Thus, the main task of education and teachers is to promote the maximum development of each student's capabilities.

2.3. Differentiation

> What we have in common makes us human. How we differ, makes us individuals
>
> (Tomlinson, 2001:1)

The origins of differentiated instruction date back to the 1600s when one room school houses were the staple in education. In these early schools, one teacher was responsible for educating students in a wide range of grades and ability levels without technology, and it was assumed that students could learn the same materials at the same pace (Gundlach, 2011).

As we have seen in the introduction, the amount of research devoted to the attention to differentiation is growing. There are several definitions for differentation which state that differentiated instruction tries to provide students with different teaching strategies in order to acquire content or to process useful information. Differentiation is a complex concept, so, different researchers define differentiation from their individual points of view.

Convery (1999:4) defines differentiation as «a process by which teachers provide opportunities for pupils to achieve their potential, working at their own pace through a variety of relevant learning activities».

Others agree that differentiated instruction is simply a philosophy which enables and encourage teachers to plan and to adapt instruction to deal with students' differences (Tomlinson, 2005). Additionally, Carol Ann Tomlinson (2001) states that differentiated instruction is regarded as accommodating learning differences by identifying students' strengths and using appropriate ways to address a variety of abilities, preferences and styles. She (2001:1) defines differentiation as «a shaking up what goes on in the classroom so that students have multiple options for taking in information, making sense of ideas, and expressing what they learn».

A differentiated classroom offers a range of learning options designed according to different readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles through different instructional strategies. Therefore, differentiated instruction is a response to students guided by principles, such as flexible grouping, respectful tasks and ongoing assessments where the teacher uses a variety of ways for students to explore content, a variety of comprehension activities or processes through which students can come to understand, the acquisition of information and ideas, and a variety of options through which students can demonstrate what they have learned.

2.4.1. *Differentiation at the School and Classroom Level*

Spain opted for a comprehensive schooling system, for that reason, the options available to accommodate teaching to students' differences is to group students by ability using *ability grouping, streaming, setting, banding and mixed-ability.*

Furthermore, differentiation is evident at the classroom level when appropriate challenges are available for all students. Differentiation is possible if one bears in mind some methodological strategies which can be summarized as differentiation by resource/text, task, support, and response/outcome.

Differentiation by resource or text is based upon the fact that some students are capable of working with more advanced resources than others. *Differentiation by task is based on* a variety of tasks provided that cover the main content area and relate to the same activity. *Differentiation by support* is linked to differentiation by dialogue, and is based upon the notion that some students need more help than others from the teacher or other effective students to complete the work set. *Differentiation by outcome or response* is perhaps the most widely used of all forms of differentiation. The same material or stimulus is used for all students or, alternatively, the same tasks are set for everybody in the group.

Moreover, Tomlinson and Strickland (2005:15) identify the elements which need to be differentiated. They identify three basic elements of the curriculum which may be differentiated (Hall, Strangman & Meyer, 2003). The first of these is content (elements and materials used in reaching learning goals and in teaching concepts, principles, and skills that students will learn), that is, what teachers will teach. Within content, Convery and Coyle (1999) propose differentiating by task, by difficulty and by text. The second of these is process (how you will teach the content, flexible groups or whole-group discussion of content or small groups or paired groups; groups are not fixed). Regarding process, Convery and Coyle (1999:10) suggest that by varying the way in which new material is presented the teacher provides opportunities for learners to respond in different ways. The final element they identify is products (students are allowed choices in products or final assessments which should offer a variety of ways for expression, degree of difficulty, and types of evaluation), that is, what teachers use as evidence of learning.

Differentiated instruction requires a departure from traditional methods of teaching and the belief that learners vary according to readiness, ability, motivation, and interest. Tomlinson & McTighe (2006) proposed three main categories of students that are the basis for differentiation in the classroom; readiness, learning profile and interest. These categories represent the factors that make our students different from one another and that should be carefully considered when teachers have to plan and to implement teaching strategies in differentiated instruction. Teachers in a differentiated classroom also have to attend to these categories, in order to meet the learning potential of each student in that classroom.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose of this case study is to identify differentiation strategies used by teachers in heterogeneously grouped secondary school classrooms.

3.1. Objectives

The study has three main objectives. These are:

– To develop an understanding of differentiation.
– To identify teachers' differentation strategies in order to address diversity challenges.
– To know what kind of strategies teachers use to adapt teaching to weaker, and effective students.

3.2. Research Questions

I have proposed the following research questions:

1. How do teachers cater to students' differences in the classroom?
2. What teaching strategies do teachers use to adapt teaching to weaker students?
3. What teaching strategies do teachers use to adapt teaching to good/effective students?

3.3. Research Methodology
3.3.1. *Introduction: The Methodological Process*

This section outlines the methods, the procedures used in gathering and analyzing the data, the setting and the participants, the instruments used to do this research and the data analysis that have been used in this study.

I chose to observe a secondary-level English teacher, the reason being that I believed it could be of importance to know what teaching strategies these teachers used when working with weaker and good students. The vast majority of students that these teachers had in their classes were weaker students and teachers should encourage and motivate them for their progress and advance.

The observation phase of this study took place over a period of three weeks from the 8th of May to the 28th of May 2013 at a secondary state school in La Zubia. The duration was three complete weeks because it was necessary observing a complete teaching unit of each one of the participants. I observed three English teachers in their different classes during the instructional time. Depending on the length of the units, the observation was completed in six or seven lessons.

Regarding instrumentation, the main concern is observing in order to out-line the the data collection procedure and analysis. This observation constitutes the first step of the data collection. Therefore, this study adopted a qualitative research approach which enabled me to employ observation as my primary data collection method. I used a Teacher's Observation Guide which has 19 items related to diffe-rentiation as the main instrument in the research to look into the strategies used by these three teachers from the English department. Moreover, teachers had to fill a self-report with the same items from the observation guide.

3.3.2. *Setting and Participants*

The secondary school where the study was conducted is located in La Zubia (Granada). This state school is considered by the Junta de Andalucía as an inclusive school. Students here are heterogeneously grouped for most of the subjects. Furthermore, learning disabled and Down syndrome students are in an inclusion setting for all of their subjects. Good and effective students are not grouped according to their area of giftedness.

The teachers observed were two female English teachers, one with 20 years of experience, another with 30 years of experience, and one male English teacher with 25 years of experience: 12 years in primary education, teaching the English subject and other subjects and 13 years in secondary education, teaching English.

At the beginning of the observation, I presented the objectives of the research study to these English teachers. These observations took place with a particular focus on the classes selected which were *1º, 3º* and *4º ESO* using the observation guide for collecting the necessary information. I also needed this teachers' participation to complete the self-report.

While observing, I took notes of the strategies used by these three English language teachers. The two female teachers followed the traditional way of teaching. The male teacher, on the other hand, used a different way which allowed students to work more independently, that is, at their own pace.

3.3.4. *Instrumentation*

Listening, observing experienced teachers and analyzing the different ways they approach the mixed-ability classroom have been the fundamental tools on which I have based my study. As I said in the introduction, the main data collection instruments are the *Teachers' Observation Guide of Differentiation Strategies* which consists of 19 items and is provided in the Appendix 7.1. Additionally, I used a *Teachers' Self-Report* which was completed by the teachers at the end of the teaching unit and is provided in the Appendix 7.2. The 19 items related to differentiation strategies were taken from Carol Ann Tomlinson (1999: 61; 2001: 32-38) and from Deschenes, C., Ebeling, D., and Sprague, J. (1994).

When I refer to the strategies themselves, in the observation, I have to take into consideration the structure of a language lesson. Lessons proceed through a series of teaching and learning activities, and they reach a conclusion (Richards & Lockhart, 1996). Teachers try to provide an effective teaching and are able to use effective teaching materials as for instance «presenting new material in small steps» (Rosenshine and Stevens, 1986: 377, in Richards & Lockhart, 1996: 114). Effective materials are those which support the lesson and help students through tasks to reach outcomes.

The teachers' observation guide has allowed me to describe the strategies used, and to comment on differences between my observations and the teachers' self-report.

4.1. Results
A. *Classroom Observation*

Table 1, 2 and 3 show the results collected from the first, second and third teachers observed in the group of *1º ESO A, 3º ESO D* and 4º ESO B. There were between 23 - 27 students in each class. They were distributed in pairs according to their learning levels, though there are some days in which the teacher distributes them in groups to do different activities. At the beginning of the year the English teacher gave an Initial Placement test and the class was distributed into 3 different levels: 1, 2, 3. Level 1 corresponded to all those average students, level 2 was composed of the weaker students and level 3 was usually those students who had Down Syndrome or those who had another special educational need. The vast majority of students were at level 1, there were 9 students at level 2, only two students at level 3, and 1 student who was considered gifted.

I observed as each teacher taught the last units, unit 9 «Travel» in *ESO 1*, unit 8 «Urban Living» in *ESO 3*, and unit 12 «Adverstisement» in *ESO 4*, from the books Build Up 1, 3 and 4 (Burlington Books). Table 1 represents differentiation strategies observed in the six different lessons.

TABLE 1. CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

DIFFERENTIATION STRATEGY USED	LESSON 1	LESSON 2	LESSON 3	LESSON 4	LESSON 5	LESSON 6
1. The teacher caters for different learning styles.	✓ Beginning the lesson showing a photograph about 4 means of transport, introducing new vocabulary by listening related to means of transportation and matching different means of transportation with different pictures.	✗	✗	✗	✓ Listening to the conversation to learn new vocabulary related to means of transportation, filling a table after reading the text using true or false and performing a role play similar to the listening using expressions from act. 5.	✗
2. The teacher uses different activities to accommodate students' levels.	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓ Average students: means of transport ation wordsearch. Weaker students match different verbs related to means of transportation with some pictures. Gifted students write 10 means of transportation and they have to classify them in a box; if they belong to earth, air and sea.	✗
3. The teacher provides effective materials to develop students' interest.	✗	✓ The teacher provides cards about different types of aeroplanes and students have to look for information about them.	✓ Students read a text taken from internet about taxis in London.	✗	✗	✓ Students use the computer and look for different types of transport

4. The teacher provides effective materials to develop and cater for students' needs.	✓ The teacher uses a visual chart to introduce the topic and displays on a chart, then students have to label their own copy of the visual.	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓ The teacher presents an example of the kind of writing in a PowerPoint presentation. Then students use the computer for all stages of the writing process.
5. The teacher provides appropriate activities for linguistically and culturally diverse learners.	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓ Role play: Culturally and linguistically diverse students: Storytelling using pictures and they create the story.	✗
6. The teacher adapts the same tasks to suit different levels of proficiency.	✓ Vocabulary activity: Level 1: Matching words with pictures Level 2: matching English words with Spanish ones. Level 3: students translate the vocabulary into Spanish.	✓ Listening: Listening to the same text: Level 1: finding out what means of transportation they are talking about. Level 2: students choose the correct option a, b or c and Level 3: Students choose true or false.	✓ Grammar: Looking at the pictures: Level 1: students complete the sentence using future «be going to», Level 2: students circle the correct answer using be going to Level 3: students translate sentences about «be going to» tense into Spanish.	✓ Reading: Level 1: answering with a complete sentence. Level 2: students choose the correct option a, b or c. Level 3: students choose true or false.	✓ Speaking: Level 1: role play: the teacher gives them some pictures and they create the story using expressions given. Level 2: the teacher gives the conversation and they have to learn it and to add 2 more expressions and Level 3: read the conversation and try to memorize it.	✓ Writing: Level 1: students write about Susan's timetable. Level 2: students complete Susan's timetable according to the box given. Level 3: students correct mistakes in Susan's timetable, looking at the table.
7. The teacher maintains a productive work environment where all the students have the chance to develop and achieve success in their learning.	✓ Providing frequent feedback when students give a good answer: praising all his students when teacher asked them.	✓ Providing support for students' different needs in the vocabulary activity.	✓ Spending time with students individually when they do the reading activity.	✗	✗	✓ Providing motivating activities to students' interests: wordsearch etc.

Item	Col 1	Col 2	Col 3	Col 4	Col 5	Col 6
8. The teacher encourages self-correction/self-assessment.	✗	✗	✓ In pairs, students identify errors and mistakes while reading aloud to practise pronunciation.	✗	✓ At the end of the unit, students fill in a self-evaluation sheet.	✓ The teacher encourages to self-correction in the irregular verb exam.
9. The teacher creates, delivers and gives directions and instructions carefully so that all students can understand.	✗	✓ Gives instructions about the cards given in the activity about the types of aeroplanes.	✓ Once that students read the text, the teacher explains how they have to use short answers (auxiliary verbs) to do the reading comprehension activity.	✓ Students listen to the teacher's instructions before the listening activity.	✓ Explains the main objectives of the role play.	✓ Explains to students how they can fill the irregular verbs exam
10. The teacher uses strategies to integrate weaker learners.	✗	✓ Weaker students: groupwork when doing the activity about aeroplanes; the activity consists of making a Power point presentation choosing one type of aeroplane: there are 4 students in the group: 2 weaker students who look for information and design the Power point presentation and two good students who write and present orally to the rest of the class.	✗	✓ Groupwork: while listening, students have to find out 8 means of transport.	✓ Partnering: with a good/effective student do the Role play.	✗
11. The teacher implements a plan for gifted students.	✓ APPENDIX 7.4	✓ APPENDIX 7.4	✓ APPENDIX 7.4	✓ APPENDIX 7.4	✓ APPENDIX 7.4	✓ APPENDIX 7.4
12. The teacher uses time flexibly in a mixed ability group.	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗

13. The teacher adapts the number of items that the learner is expected to learn or complete.	✓ Level 1: students have to learn 15 means of transportation Level 2: 10. Level 3: 8.	✓ Grammar: level 1: «be going to» in affirmative, negative and interrogative. Level 2 and 3: only affirmative and negative.	✓ Vocabulary: level 1: students have to learn 10 verbs related to transport. Level 2: 8, level 3: 5.	✓ Reading: students have to read the same text but level 1: comprehension reading questions. Level 2: answering questions with different options and level 3: choosing true or false.	✗	✓ The teacher adapts the irregular verb exam: level 1: 20 verbs, level 2: 15 and 3: 10 verbs.
14. The teacher adapts the time for testing.	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓ Irregular verb exam: Level 1: 30 min. Level 2: 35 min. Level 3: 40 min.
15. The teacher adapts the time allowed and allotted for task completion.	✓ 5 minutes more for students with level 2 and 10 minutes more for students with level 3. The rest of the class read their readers chosen at the beginning of the term while the rest of students were finishing.	✓ 5 minutes more for students with level 2 and 10 minutes more for students with level 3. The rest of the class read their readers chosen at the beginning of the term while the rest of students were finishing.	✓ 5 minutes more for students with level 2 and 10 minutes more for students with level 3. The rest of the class read their readers chosen at the beginning of the term while the rest of students were finishing.	✓ 5 minutes more for students with level 2 and 10 minutes more for students with level 3. The rest of the class read their readers chosen at the beginning of the term while the rest of students were finishing.	✓ 5 minutes more for students with level 2 and 10 minutes more for students with level 3. The rest of the class read their readers chosen at the beginning of the term while the rest of students were finishing.	✓ 5 minutes more for students with level 2 and 10 minutes more for students with level 3. The rest of the class read their readers chosen at the beginning of the term while the rest of students were finishing.
16. The teacher caters to different needs by varying the degree of support given to individual learners.	✗	✗	✓ Grammar explanation of «be going to» tense: (form and use), giving more examples individually to students with level 2 or 3 or to some average students that require support.	✗	✗	✗

Table (continued) — Differentiation strategy items

Differentiation strategy used							
17. The teacher adapts how the student can respond to instruction.	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
18. The teacher incorporates cooperative learning (heterogeneous grouping).	✗	✗	✓ Students read the story about the taxis in London. Then in groups, students have to share their thoughts about this.	✓ Students' face to face interaction role play.	✗	✗	✗
19. The teacher encourages students to move ahead in differentiated instruction.	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗

TABLE 2. CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

DIFFERENTIATION STRATEGY USED	LESSON 1	LESSON 2	LESSON 3	LESSON 4	LESSON 5	LESSON 6	LESSON 7
1. The teacher caters for different learning styles.	✗ Beginning the lesson showing a photograph about an old stadium where Greek people practise sports. Introducing new vocabulary by listening related to places learnt in the first lesson.	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓ Reading the story and answering the questions. Listening some expressions which appear in the text and say who says them. Groupwork: students prepare a role play similar to the listening and using similar expressions from the previous activity.	✗

Criteria							
2. The teacher uses different activities to accommodate students' levels.	✓ Average students: Different places crossword. Weaker students: matching words with pictures, (page 1 dossier).	✗	✓ Average students complete the sentences with the Present perfect simple tense. Weaker students complete the tables using negative, affirmative and interrogative forms of the Present perfect simple. (page 8 in the dossier).	✓ Average students read the text and answer questions. Weaker students read the text and match the first part (1-5) with the second part of the text (a-e).(Page 6 in the dossier).	✗	✓ Average students use some expressions and directions to go to the supermarket. Weaker students practise the dialogue proposed in page 5 in the dossier.	✓ Average students write about their summer holidays. Weaker students complete what Laura did in her holidays on Monday and Thursday. (Page 20 in the dossier).
3. The teacher provides effective materials to develop students' interest.	✗	✓ The teacher provides different cards about different places and students have to look for information about them.	✗	✗	✓ Students read a text taken from internet about Dog sleds. Students use computer to look for Dog sleds origin.	✗	✗
4. The teacher provides effective materials to develop and cater for students' needs.	✓ Uses a visual chart to introduce the topic. Displays on a chart and then students have to label their own copy of the visual.	✗	✗	✓ Presents an example of different uses of present simple tense in a PowerPoint presentation. Then students complete sentences provided in the digital board.	✗	✗	✗
5. The teacher provides appropriate activities for linguistically and culturally diverse learners.	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗

	Vocabulary activity	Listening	Grammar	Reading	Speaking	Writing	Irregular verbs exam
6. The teacher adapts the same tasks to suit different levels of proficiency.	✓ Vocabulary activity: Level 1: matching words with pictures. Level 2: matching English words with Spanish ones. Level 3: students translate the English vocabulary into Spanish.	✓ Listening: Listening to the same text: Level 1: finding out what places Sally visits. Level 2: students choose the correct option: a, b, c. Level 3: students choose true or false.	✓ Grammar: Looking at the pictures Level 1: students complete the sentence using Present perfect simple tense. Level 2: students circle the correct answer using Present perfect simple. Level 3: students translate sentences about Present perfect simple into Spanish.	✓ Reading: Level 1: students choose the correct option a,b, c. Level 2: students choose true or false statements. Level 3: students match the first part of the sentence with the second part.	✓ Speaking: Level 1: role play: the teacher gives them some pictures and they create the story using expressions learnt in the unit. Level 2: the teacher gives students the converstion and they have to learn it and add 2 more expressions and Level 3: students read the conversation and try to memorize it.	✓ Writing: Level 1: students write about their holidays. Level 2 students make 5 sentences with the highlighted words. level 3: students complete the table with the highlighted words by looking at the writing.	✓ Irregular verbs exam: Level 1: students have to complete 20 verbs. Level 2: 15 verbs Level 3: 10 verbs.
7. The teacher maintains a productive work environment where all the students have the chance to develop and achieve success in their learning.	✓ Providing support for students' different needs in the vocabulary activity.	✓ Providing frequent feedback when students give a good answer, praising all her students in the listening activity.	✓ Spending time with students while they are practising the role play.	✓ Providing frequent feedback when students give a good answer, praising all her students in the reading of the text.	✓ Providing frequent feedback when students give a good answer, praising all her students in the role play interaction.	✓ Providing motivating activities, such as the creation of a portfolio.	✓ Managing the time available for each one of the tasks when students do the writing task.
8. The teacher encourages self-correction/self-assessment.	✓ In vocabulary session, the teacher provides options/answers allowing to students think about the correct answer, without stopping the flow of the lesson.	✗	✗	✓ In pairs, students identify errors and mistakes while reading aloud to practise pronunciation.	✗	✗	✓ Self- correction in the irregular verb exam. At the end of the unit, students fill in a self-evaluation sheet.

9. The teacher creates, delivers and gives directions and instructions carefully so that all students can understand.	✗	✓ Students listen to the teacher's instructions before the listening activity.	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓ The teacher explains students how they can fill the irregular verbs exam.
10. The teacher uses strategies to integrate weaker learners.	✓ Vocabulary: in pairs weaker students' use of technology (computers)to do the vocabulary activity about matching places with the pictures.	✓ Communication: in pairs, weaker students do an activity about asking for directions. Weaker students ask good students how can he/she go to..? (some places).	✗	✗	✓ Partnering; with a good student to do the Role play. Page 87 from the student's book and page 5 from the dossier.	✗	✓ Groupwork. while writing, with one effective student, weaker students have to complete with the correct prepositions.
11. The teacher implements a plan for gifted students.	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
12. The teacher uses time flexibly in a mixed ability group.	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
13. The teacher adapts the number of items that the learner is expected to learn or complete.	✓ Vocabulary: Level 1: students have to learn 15 places Level 2: 10. Level 3: 8.	✓	✓ Grammar: level 1: present perfect simple in affirmative, negative and interrogative. Level 2: affirmative and negative Level and 3: only affirmative.	✓ Reading: students have to read the same text. Level 1: answering questions choosing between different options. Level 2: choosing true or false Level 3: yes/no questions about the reading.	✗	✗	✓ The teacher adapts the irregular verb exam: Level 1: 20 verbs, Level 2: 15 verbs Level 3: 10 verbs.
14. The teacher adapts the time for testing.	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗

15. The teacher adapts the time allowed and alloted for task completion.	✓ 5 minutes more for students with level 2 and 10 minutes more for students with level 3. The rest of the class read their readers chosen at the beginning of the term while the rest of students were finishing.	✓ 5 minutes more for students with level 2 and 10 minutes more for students with level 3. The rest of the class read their readers chosen at the beginning of the term while the rest of students were finishing.	✓ 5 minutes more for students with level 2 and 10 minutes more for students with level 3. The rest of the class read their readers chosen at the beginning of the term while the rest of students were finishing.	✓ 5 minutes more for students with level 2 and 10 minutes more for students with level 3. The rest of the class read their readers chosen at the beginning of the term while the rest of students were finishing.	✗	✗
16. The teacher caters to different needs by varying the degree of support given to individual learners.	✓ Vocabulary: handouts with the translation in Spanish about places and verbs of support related to transport.	✗	✓ Grammar explanation of «present simple»: form, use and examples to individually to students with level 2 or 3 or to some average students that require support.	✗	✗	✓ Role play: handouts with translation in Spanish: asking for directions.
17. The teacher adapts how the student can respond to instruction.	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
18. The teacher incorporates cooperative learning (heterogeneous grouping).	✓ In pairs: vocabulary lesson: division of labour to match the word with their translation into Spanish. The teacher assigns each student what he/she has to do.	✓ Groupwork in listening: division of labour to complete the table. The teacher assigns each student what he/she has to do.	✓ Groupwork in grammar: using present perfect simple students complete the table of what things Simon has done and what has to do.	✓ Read the story about *Learning from ants*. Then in groups, students have to share their thoughts about this.	✓ Face to face interaction role play.	✗
19. The teacher encourages students to move ahead in differentiated instruction.	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗

TABLE 3. CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

DIFFERENTIATION STRATEGY USED	LESSON 1	LESSON 2	LESSON 3	LESSON 4	LESSON 5	LESSON 6	LESSON 7
1. The teacher caters for different learning styles.	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓ Reading the story and answering the questions. Listening some expressions which appear in the text and say who says them. Groupwork: students are going to prepare a quiz about the story.	✗	✗
2. The teacher uses different activities to accommodate students' levels.	✗	✓ Average students complete the following sentences from active to passive and viceversa. Weaker students say if the sentences are passive or active.	✗	✓ Average students read the text and answer the questions. Weaker students read the text and match the first part (1-5) with the second part of the text (a-e).	✗	✓ Average students look at three ads and use the words in the box to describe them. Weaker students match the slogans with the ads.¡	✓ Average students write an ads following the prompts given by the teacher. Weaker students translate and match the slogans with the 4 ads.
3. The teacher provides effective materials to develop students' interest.	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
4. The teacher provides effective materials to develop and cater for students' needs.	✓ The teacher displays a visual chart with different types of ads to introduce the topic, and then students have to label their own copy of the visual.	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗

	Reading	Grammar	Vocabulary activity	Listening	Communication	Writing	Irregular verbs exam
5. The teacher provides appropriate activities for linguistically and culturally diverse learners.	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
6. The teacher adapts the same tasks to suit different levels of proficiency.	✓ Reading: Level 1: students choose the correct option. Level 2: students choose true or false	✓ Grammar: Looking at the pictures Level 1: students complete the sentence using passive voice. Level 2: students circle the correct answer using passive voice	✓ Vocabulary activity: Level 1: matching English words with Spanish. Level 2: tranlating English words related to ads into Spanish.	✓ Listening: Students listen to the same text: Level 1: students choose the correct option. Level 2: students choose true or false.	✓ Communication: Level 1: students discuss each one of the four ads looking at the pictures. Level 2: students match the slogans to the ads.	✓ Writing: Level 1: students write about an advertising product Level 2: students complete the table with the highlighted words by looking at the writing	✓ Irregular verbs exam: level 1: they have to complete 20 verbs. Level 2:10 verbs.
7. The teacher maintains a productive work environment where all the students have the chance to develop and achieve success in their learning.	✓ Providing motivating activities in the reading when each student represents a character.	✓ Providing frequent feedback when students give a good answer and the teacher praises all her students.	✓ Managing the time available for each one of the tasks when they do the reading main task.	✓ Providing frequent feedback when students give a good answer, the teacher praises all her students.	✓ Providing support for students' different needs in the vocabulary activity	✓ Spending time with students while they are practising the role play.	✓ Managing the time available for each one of the tasks when they do the writing task.
8. The teacher encourages self-correction/self-assessment.	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓ Self-correction in the irregular verb exam. At the end of the unit, students fill in a self-evaluation sheet.
9. The teacher creates, delivers and gives directions and instructions carefully so that all students can understand.	✓ Anticipates students' problems and doubts when stating the outcomes.	✗	✗	✗	✓ Explains the main objectives of the role play.	✗	✓ Explains students how they can fill the irregular verbs exam.

10. The teacher uses strategies to integrate weaker learners.	✗	✗	✗	✓ Partnering: with a good student to do the Role play. Page 103 from the student's book and page 14 in the dossier.	✗	✗	✗
11. The teacher implements a plan for gifted students.	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓ At the end of the unit the teacher gives 3 activities as an extra material: students rewrite the following sentences into passive voice, making a sentence with words related to ads and write an slogan using prompts given by the teacher.
12. The teacher uses time flexibly in a mixed ability group.	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
13. The teacher adapts the number of items that the learner is expected to learn or complete.	✗	✓ Level 1: students rewrite passive voice sentences in active voice and viceversa, using all passive voice tenses. Level 2: students rewrite passive voice in active using present and past simple tense.	✓ Vocabulary: Level 1: students have to learn 8 adjectives related to advertising. Level 2: students only learn 5 adjectives.	✓ Reading: students have to read the same text: level 1: students answer questions choosing between different options Level 2: choosing true or false.	✗	✗	✓ The teacher adapts the irregular verb exam: Level 1: 20 verbs Level 2: 10 verbs.

Item								
14. The teacher adapts the time for testing.	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
15. The teacher adapts the time allowed and alloted for task completion.	✓	5 minutes more for students with level 2. While level 2 students were finishing, the teacher provided level 1 students additional activities in photocopies.	5 minutes more for students with level 2. While level 2 students were finishing, the teacher provided level 1 students additional activities in photocopies.	5 minutes more for students with level 2. While level 2 students were finishing, the teacher provided level 1 students additional activities in photocopies.	5 minutes more for students with level 2. While level 2 students were finishing, the teacher provided level 1 students additional activities in photocopies.	5 minutes more for students with level 2. While level 2 students were finishing, the teacher provided level 1 students additional activities in photocopies.	✓	✓
16. The teacher caters to different needs by varying the degree of support given to individual learners.	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
17. The teacher adapts how the student can respond to instruction.	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
18. The teacher incorporates cooperative learning (heterogeneous grouping).	✓ Students read the story about an advertising. Then in groups, students have to perform the 4 characters of the story.	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
19. The teacher encourages students to move ahead in differentiated instruction.	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗

4.2. Findings Summary and Discussion

Before discussing the results, I considered it relevant to point out the teaching programme of this particular secondary school. According to this particular programme, in the teaching-learning process it is important that teachers give an individualized attention to students. They should use reinforcement activities to achieve those objectives and implementing a plan for gifted, good and effective students by providing them with extra supporting material whenever possible. This attention will be the regular pattern which serves to support, reinforces learning difficulties, and also helps to detect as soon as they occur. Such plans also help to foster the intellectual development of students with high intellectual capacities.

It is important to point out that the use of differentiation strategies presented in the researcher's observation is different from the teacher indicated in the self-report. The three participants had three different views and different positions on the management of diversity. They sometimes tried to provide answers to students' needs in order to satisfy them. Despite the fact that teachers reported that they always and often use differentiation strategies proposed by the researcher, in general, items 3, 5, 9, 12, 14, 16, 17 and 19 of the Observation guide have not been observed.

Therefore, the results show that these three teachers cannot be considered frequent users of differentiation strategies. Nevertheless, I believe that teachers did not use many differentiation strategies presented in the table due to several factors, such as motivation or contextual factors. These differences probably determine that teachers perceived the use of differentiation strategies positively in theory and negatively in classroom practice because they did not remember exactly if they use them or not.

As far as the first research question is concerned, I discovered that these three teachers observed, sometimes knew about how to differentiate. The sample of teachers, particularly for the classroom observation component of data collection was very small. Though the class duration was about 60 minutes, the observation itself was about 45 minutes, due to the fact that students began the lesson reading and there were sometimes factors which prevented the normal development of the class. Hence, the short duration of the observations (about 45 minutes) was also limiting to the findings. It has been observed that almost all teachers tried to cater to different students' interests and needs with different activities and materials which enhanced the quality of these teachers' lessons to accommodate students' levels. In doing so, teachers also tried to create or to maintain a productive classroom environment to help students to achieve success. As for the second question, it has been observed that teachers sometimes adapted the same activities or tasks to meet students' different levels of proficiency. There was only one teacher who adapted the time for testing in the irregular verbs exam. Nevertheless, these three teachers adapted the time allowed for task completion in order to encourage students to achieve their goals. Moreover, the teachers used the teaching strategy of cooperative learning which has many factors in the classroom that can determine success or failure. In some activities, students worked together (groupwork) to achieve a common goal. As I

have observed, this was a very useful strategy because it increased weaker students' academic achievement and social acceptance.

The third question deals with strategies that teachers use to adapt teaching to good and effective students. It has been observed that there was only one student diagnosed as gifted in *1º ESO* but there were good and effective students in *4º ESO*. Only one of the teachers implemented a plan for this gifted student (Appendix 7.4), the other two did not implement any plan but one of them gave students extra supporting material at the end of the unit. In my view, teachers have to take into consideration those good and effective students in order to understand how they think and learn. When the tasks presented in the classroom were too easy for them, teachers had to provide students with more difficult ones.

5. CONCLUSION AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Diversity is a reality in schools. As it was pointed out throughout this study, differentiation has become increasingly important over the past few years. Research has demonstrated that differentiated instruction is a valuable tool to increase engagement while accommodating for students' differences (Tomlinson et al., 2003, Heacox, 2009). Everyday, teachers face with a very complex reality. Their main role is to try to respect all of these differences and adjust the teaching and learning to benefit each student. Therefore, the main goal of differentiated instruction is to maximise students' growth and their individual success by meeting students where they are and designing instruction that matches learners' needs (Jiménez Raya, 2013).

From my point of view, this continued research on the topic of attention to diversity and teachers' use of strategies to meet the needs of students should show some improvements in the field of education. Teachers must understand and manage the differentiated instruction approach for successful achievement. The aim of this thesis has been to discover to what extent some teachers at a secondary school in English lessons employ differentiation strategies in dealing with students' diverse learning progress in a mixed-ability classroom and how they implement them. Concerning observation, in general, the results indicated that the three teachers had a limited understanding of how to differentiate. Teachers understand the approach in general or in parts, but in items 3, 5, 12, 14, 16, 17, 19, they fail to use teaching strategies as a conscious, systematic way to address learning difficulties associated with students who come from diverse backgrounds. Additionally, classroom observation sometimes differs from teachers' use of differentiation strategies reported. The results of this study will provide the reader with some relevant insights into differentiation and raise awareness about what it actually means to differentiate in classrooms.

Further research is needed to better understand how successfully teachers can implement differentiated instruction and try to encourage students to accept responsibility for their own learning. In future it will be important to raise awareness of differentiation. Some suggestions and recommentations are the following: in the

first place, this study might be replicated in other secondary schools, for example in non-inclusive schools or private secondary schools in order to determine if the use of differentiation strategies is similar or not to this secondary school selected for the study. This will determine if the type of school chosen could influence the final results of the study. In the second place, it may be useful to do the same study at the beginning of the course, due to the fact that some teachers' contextual, environmental or personal factors could affect the frequent use of strategies.

Finally, an interesting topic for further research could definitely be identifying the causes of teachers' non-use of differentiation, that is, resistance to implement it at schools in English classes. (Hall & Hord, 2001; Moss & Osborn, 2010; http://penningtonpublishing.com/blog/reading/10-reasons-why-teachers-resistdifferentiated -instruction/).

REFERENCES

Burns, T. y Shadoian-Gersing, V. (2010). «The importance of effective teacher education for diversity», in OECD, *Educating Teachers for Diversity: Meeting the Challenge*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

Convery, A. y Coyle, D. (1999). *Differentiation and Individual Learners: A Guide for Classroom Practice.* London: Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research.

Deschenes, C., Ebeling, D. y Sprague, J. (1994). *Adapting Curriculum and Instruction in Inclusive Classrooms: A Teacher's Desk Reference.* Bloomington, Indiana: Institute for the Study of Developmental Disabilities, Indiana University.

Dörnyei, Z. (2005). *The Psychology of the Language Learner: Individual Differences in Second Language Acquisition*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Gardner, H. (1995). «Reflections on multiple intelligences: myths and messages». *Phi Delta Kappan* 76: 200-209.

—— (1999). *Intelligence reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st century*. New York: Basic Books.

Gundlach, M. (2011). *The Roots for Differentiated Instruction in Teaching*. [*online*]. Avaliable at: http://www.brighthubeducation.com/teaching-methods-tips/106939_history-of-differentiated-instruction. [Retrieved 24th June 2013].

Jiménez Raya, M. (2009). «Hacia una pedagogía de la diversidad en el aprendizaje integrado de contenidos y lengua extranjera». En A. Bueno González, J.M. Nieto García y D. Cobo López (eds.), *Atención a la diversidad en la enseñanza plurilingüe*. Universidad de Jaén: Jaén.

—— (2013). «Exploring pedagogy for autonomy in language education at university: possibilities and impossibilities». In M. Pérez Cañado (ed.), *Competency-Based Language Teaching in the European Higher Education Area.* Nueva York: Springer, pp. 119-138.

Moss, D.M. y Osborn, T.A. (2010). *Critical Essays on Resistance in Education.* New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

O'Brien, T. y Guiney, D. (2001). *Differentiation in Teaching and Learning*. London: Continuum Books.

Pennington, M. «12 Reasons Why Teachers Resist Differentiated Instruction». Pennington Publishing Blog. October 11th, 2009. Web. September 21st, 2013.

Richards, J.C. y Lockhart, C. (1996). *Reflective Teaching in Second Language Classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sternberg, R.J. (1988). «Mental Self-Government: a theory of intellectual styles and their development». *Human Development*, 31, 197- 224.

—— (1997). *Thinking Styles.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tomlinson, C.A. (1999). *The Differentiated Classroom: responding to the Needs of all Learners*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

—— (2001). *How to Differentiate Instruction in Mixed-Ability Classrooms, 2nd ed*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Tomlinson, C.A. y Eidson, C. (2003). *Differentiation in Practice. A Resource Guide for Differentiating Curriculum (Grades K-5/5-9).* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Tomlinson, C.A, *et al*. (2003). «Differenting instruction in response to student readiness, interest, and learning profile in academically diverse classrooms: a review of the literature». *Journal of the Education of the Gifted*, 27(2/3), 119-145.

Tomlinson, C.A. y Mctigue, J. (2006). *Integrated Differentiated Instruction and Understanding by Design*. Alexander, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Tomlinson, C.A. y Strickland, C.A. (2005). *Differentiation in Practice. A Resource Guide for Differentiating Curriculum (Grades 9-12).* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Vygotsky, L.S (1978). *Mind in society: the Development of Higher Psychological Processes.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.