



"DIFFERENTIATED TEACHING IN THE PRODUCTION OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AT THE LEVEL OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE AT THE PRIMARY LEVEL"

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Abstract

The objective of this research was to provide theoretical bases that confirm that the application of differentiated instruction can solve the problems of heterogeneity in English classes. In the first instance, the theoretical background corresponding to differentiated instruction was reviewed. The standardized Cambridge Pre-A1 Starters test was applied to evaluate the communicative competence of a sample of 26 elementary students of the Juan León Mera "La Salle" Educational Unit, who formed the experimental group subjected to the educational intervention; as well as another sample of 24 students from the same institution, who formed a control group. Once the Pre-A1 Starters test was applied prior to the application of the proposal, it was found that the students had deficiencies in communicative competence expressed through speaking, reading and writing skills. Next, the XIV proposal was designed and implemented, which consisted of a booklet of eight differentiated instruction activities, such as creation of workstations, task cards, addressing the different senses, staggering, wall gallery, cube, tic-tac-toe and think-couple-share. The final results reflected a significant improvement in the communicative competence of the students of the experimental group in all the dimensions evaluated, such as reading, writing and speaking. Meanwhile, students in the control group also improved, but not to the same extent as those in the experimental group. Therefore, the application of differentiated instruction is very effective for the learning of elementary level students.

DESCRIPTORS:

Keywords: Didactics, Communicative Competence, Differentiated Instruction, English Production, Beginner a1 Exam.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, teachers in charge of preparing children learners in different schools must be concerned with applying teaching methods that are differentiated and adapted to each individual. Referring to the reforms that have taken place in recent years in Ecuador, it can mention the government's intention to make improvements in education and specifically in the teaching of a second language. The National Plan for Good Living mentions that it is important "to guarantee the preservation of traditional languages, multilingualism, and the support of intercultural education systems and knowledge of diversities." (Plan Nacional para el Buen Vivir, 2017).

It is very common to find students with different levels of comprehension in classrooms. For this reason, it is a challenge to find the adaptations that will work best to solve this problem. This research project aims to determine whether Differentiated Instruction is applicable to the teaching and learning of English as a second language and whether it is really advantageous for the oral production of English. Most teachers have recognized the effectiveness of the differentiated instruction model in different areas of teaching and its benefits, however few studies have been carried out to determine the effects on teaching and learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in primary school. This is why the study is innovative in this area.

In this way, it will be of interest to teachers in this area to know guidelines to follow in order to inquire more about the application of this teaching-learning model, encouraging teachers to go beyond the use of texts in the classroom. The teacher should generate new ideas and practices that focus on optimizing learning, and in this sense Differentiated Instruction activities help the student to learn more easily. Achieving a new didactic within the classroom.

The purpose and contribution of this research is to respond to the needs, interests and motivations of the students at Juan León Mera "La Salle" Educational Unit in elementary level, and at the same time to avoid educational improvisation. In this sense, the beneficiaries are the primary school students who are initializing in the EFL learning.

Furthermore, the present work will constitute an orientation towards meaningful learning through the implementation of Differentiated Instruction activities in EFL. The results presented will be made public and available in the university repository. Therefore, any teacher could use it

as a reference in English language teaching to improve the students' communicative competence. In this way, this research will have social relevance.

This study is important because the existing demands in the field of education, it is necessary to have professionals who can solve the problems of the complex reality that surrounds society. One of the most significant purposes of this research is to guide English teachers to discover a mode of teaching that encourages students to learn in a way that allows them to develop in scenarios such as the current ones. The impact of this study is focused on the teaching-learning process of the English language because the benefits of good English language management are many, including good performance in different areas such as social, professional, and personal (Karshibaev, 2022).

The present research project with the topic “Differentiated instruction in the production of the English language at the level of communicative competence at the elementary level” seeks to apply an innovative approach to develop the communicative skills on learners. During the English teaching process to primary school learners at different levels, they often have difficulties communicating with their partners (Hardi&Marleni, 2020). For this reason, the Differentiated Instruction seeks to invert the traditional classroom instruction and become it more interactive and motivating, following a learner-centered teaching (Senturk& Sari, 2018). In this study, the author applied a quantitative methodology following a quasi-experimental design by using a pre-test and a post-test to evaluate the development of each student’s communicative competence, and a survey to know their perceptions about the Differentiated Instruction.

Therefore, the main objective of this research is investigate if the Differentiated instruction develops the production of the English language at the level of communicative competence at the Elementary Level, through the explanation of the theoretical foundation of the Differentiated Instruction in the production of the English language and the scope of the production standards of the foreign language at the level of elementary communicative competence; application of teaching activities based on differentiated instruction to develop the communicative competence of the elementary level learners and the determination the impact of Differentiated Instruction (DI) method on the development of students’ communicative competence at the Elementary Level.

Finally, it is important to mention several studies that provide relevant information on the subject of differentiated instruction. Thus, it is known that the effective integration of Multiple Intelligences and Differentiated Instruction in the classroom increases the motivation and commitment of students (Suson et al., 2020). Likewise, the application of various strategies focused on the subject and that were the result of the collection of quantitative data

in the form of scores before and after a test, contributed to the application of visual aids and clean teaching to obtain success with the students of low achievers, increasing the scope of learning by giving students exposure to a variety of languages (Siddiqui & Alghamdi, 2017).

On the other hand, differentiated instruction also presents an effective means to address the variety of interests and abilities of students by diversifying the development of the class according to the abilities of each individual (Angilan, 2021). Learning English as a second language requires the development of differentiated instruction as a strategy that allows structuring the classroom and student tasks, which facilitates learning (Chumaña et al., 2018). To meet the needs of students, their interests and needs must be known (Galora-Moya & Salazar-Tobar, 2017). One of the proposed strategies is The Gallery Walk that enhances students' active participation, critical thinking skills, and peer collaboration (Makmun et al., 2020). On the other hand, there are difficulties in differentiating instruction based on skill levels, available time, and assessment of student needs (Brentnall, 2018).

METHODS

Location

The research was implemented in the Unidad Educativa Juan León Mera “La Salle” in the city of Ambato, located in the avenue Los Chasquis and the street Río Guayllabamba.

Equipment and materials

Several materials such as a computer, a blackboard, sheets of paper, cards, a cardboard, coloured pencils, pens, markers, an adhesive tape, and a rubber, among others were used for the development of this research.

Type of research

The research had a quantitative approach since the communicative competence of elementary level students is assessed through a test. The modality is bibliographic and field research. The study was prospective and longitudinal because two measurements are made, a pre-test and a post-test through the application of the Cambridge Pre-A1 Starters exam, before and after the application of the teaching strategies, respectively.

According to the level or scope, the present research was descriptive and relational. An analysis is made of the situation of both variables (differentiated instruction and communicative competence in English) individually. Subsequently, an analysis of the relationship between the two variables is carried out through statistical hypothesis tests application.

The research design was quasi-experimental, given that the researcher establishes two groups of students at the elementary level, one called experimental, in which the teacher uses the differentiated instruction strategies; and the other called control, in which the teacher uses a traditional methodology. At the end, the results of the communicative competence of both groups are compared.

Hypothesis testing

Differentiated instruction positively impacts English language production at the elementary level of communicative competence.

Population or sample

The population was formed by students in the third year of General Basic Education (GBE) at the Unidad Educativa “La Salle”, who had an elementary level of knowledge in the subject of English. A sample of two groups of students was selected, corresponding to two classes at the aforementioned level of education, as follows:

Table 1

Sample of students

Course	Parallel	Group	Number
Third	C	Control	24
Third	D	Experimental	26
-	-	-	50

Data collection

Firstly, a Cambridge Pre-A1 Starters exam was applied to evaluate the communicative competence of the students for the development of the research process, focusing on reading, writing, and speaking skills. Subsequently, the instructional strategies were applied to the experimental group to differentiate between English language production and the control group, while the control group was taught using the traditional teaching methodology. Finally, the communicative competence assessment test (post-test) was applied again, with the aim of finding out the improvement of the students. In this sense, it was expected that the students in the experimental group will show a better progress in their communicative competence.

Reading and writing section of the test

The reading and writing section were divided in five parts of five questions each. The first part was about vocabulary recognition, the second part was about reading comprehension based on a picture, the third part was about spelling, the fourth part was about multiple-choice answers, and the last part was about the answers to questions based on a picture story. Twenty (20) minutes were allotted for the reading and writing section of the Pre-A1 Starters exam.

Speaking section of the test

The questions were of personal topics such as school, holidays, birthdays, family, and hobbies and other topics related to their everyday lives. The following questions were asked: What time do you get up on Saturday? What do you do on Saturday afternoon? What did you do on your last vacation? Where did you go? Did you like your last vacation? Basic vocabulary about names of animals, parts of the human body, family, clothes, health, home, names, numbers, addresses, sports, school places were used in the Speaking section. Besides, a rubric for the Speaking section of the Pre-A1 Starters oral exam was used.

Data processing and statistical analysis

Once the information was compiled, tables of descriptive statistics of the results of the grades obtained by the students are presented, highlighting the average, maximum and minimum values and the standard deviation. Boxplot graphs are also used to represent these results. Additionally, the Student's t-test for related samples is applied to identify if there are significant differences between the grades obtained by the students before and after the application of the teaching strategies based on differentiated instruction. This fact implies that the alternative hypothesis of the research is accepted.

Response variables or results achieved

The educational intervention was aimed at the application of differentiated instruction to improve the children's ability to produce communication in the English language. Therefore, the response variable is the production of the English language at the level of communicative competence at the elementary level, taking into account reading, writing, and speaking skills. The expected result was that the grades of those evaluated were better in the post-test than in the pre-test, which implied that the educational intervention was successful. Based on the information above, it can be concluded students who were part of the experimental group empowered their communicative competence better than the control group.

Teaching activities based on differentiated instruction

Differentiated instruction offers a new model that takes into consideration the background students bring to the classroom, their skill levels, learning styles, and interests in order to integrate them into language learning and make the delivery of content, process, and end product of student learning more interesting and meaningful. Differentiated instruction is based on constructivism, multiple intelligences, and other theoretical approaches. These strategies presented in this booklet allow students to develop the production of the English language at the level of communicative competence at the elementary level.

This study proposes a guide for teachers to apply differentiated instruction in English language teaching at the elementary level to strengthen the communicative competence of English language learners, especially for children receiving English in the classroom. In that sense, each of eight lessons includes the next components:

- A decryption of each lesson and differentiated instruction.
- The learning objectives.
- The resources to be used (book and materials).
- The activities of each lesson.
- The expected results.
- The complementary homework activities.

The author suggests that beginning English teachers apply the strategies in this booklet and evaluate the effectiveness of their use with students.

RESULTS

Pre-test results of the Cambridge Pre-A1 Starters pre-test application

The results obtained once the pre-test was applied to the sample of students before the implementation of the proposal of educational activities based on differentiated instruction in the production of the English language at the level of communicative competence at the elementary level, are summarised in the Table 2:

Table 2.

Results of the Cambridge Pre-A1 Starters pre-test application

Group	Parallel	n	Section	Minimum	Mean	Standard deviation	Maximum
Control	C	24	General1	18	28.29	3.92	33
			Reading and Writing2	8	16.96	3.50	21
			Speaking3	10	11.33	0.76	12
Experimental	D	26	General1	17	28.81	3.74	35
			Reading and Writing2	6	17.15	3.68	23
			Speaking3	10	11.65	0.63	12

Note. ¹General grade was evaluated out of 40. ² Reading & Writing section was evaluated out of 25. ³ Speaking section was evaluated out of 15.

Figure 1

Results of the Cambridge Pre-A1 Starters pre-test application, general.

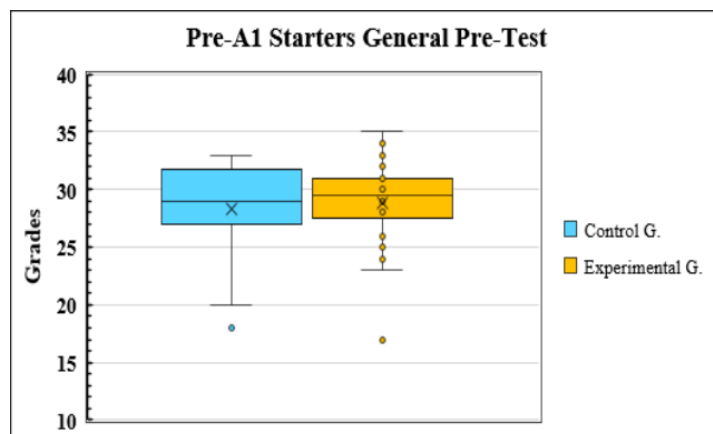


Figure 1 shows the boxplot of the general grades achieved by the children in the sample in the Cambridge A1 Starters exam in the pre-test. In addition, the next figure shows the boxplot of the reading and writing section grades achieved by the children in the sample in the Cambridge A1 Starters exam in the pre-test:

Figure 2

Results of the Cambridge Pre-A1 Starters pre-test application, reading and writing section.

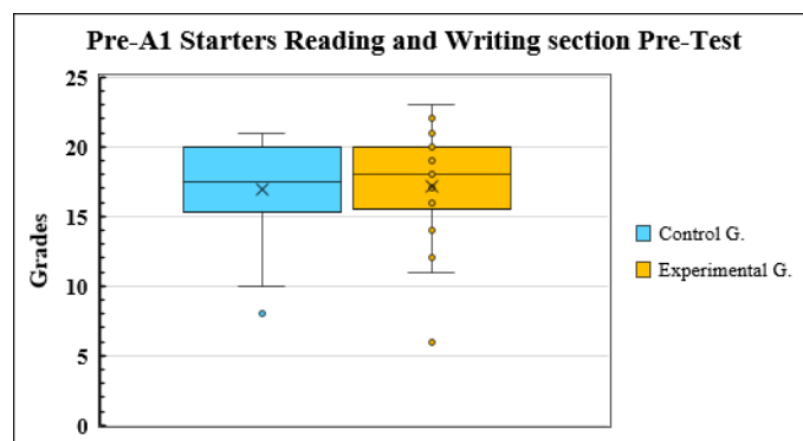
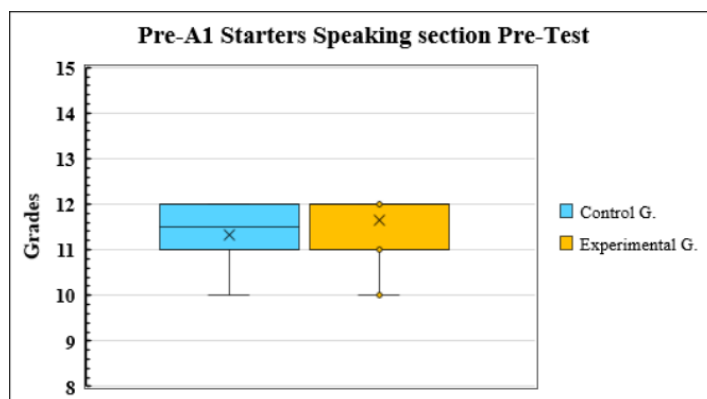


Figure 3 shows the boxplot of the speaking section grades achieved by the children in the sample in the Cambridge A1 Starters exam in the pre-test:

Figure 3

Results of the Cambridge Pre-A1 Starters post-test application, speaking section.



According to the information shown in Table 1 and Figures 1, 2, and 3, the grades in the experimental group after the proposal application were higher than the grades in the control group. After the implementation of the proposal based on the use of differentiated instruction, students improved their communicative competence in English language at the elementary level, which allowed them to have more self-confidence and security to perform the activities requested in the Pre-A1 Starters exam. Therefore, the use of differentiated instruction allowed improving the communicative competence of the third-year students at the Unidad Educativa "La Salle".

Hypothesis verification

The statistical test of the research hypothesis was conducted to identify whether the differences between the results of the post-test and the pre-test were significant.

Hypothesis approach

Null Hypothesis H0: Differentiated instruction does not influence in the production of the English language at the level of communicative competence at the elementary level.

Alternative Hypothesis H1: Differentiated instruction influences in the production of the English language at the level of communicative competence at the elementary level.

Variables

Independent: Differentiated instruction.

Dependent: Production of the English language at the level of communicative competence.

Description of the population

A sample of two groups of students in the third year of General Basic Education (GBE) at the Unidad Educativa "La Salle" was selected, one called control group and the other experimental.

Mathematical model

According to the sample information (Table 1), an experimental group of 26 and a control group of 24 students at the Unidad Educativa “La Salle” were selected. The mathematical model of the paired Student’s t-test is the next:

$$H_0: \mu_2 \leq \mu_1$$

$$H_1: \mu_2 > \mu_1$$

Where:

μ_1 = population mean in the pre-test.

μ_2 = population mean in the post-test.

Data collection and calculation of statistics

A single-tailed statistical test of hypothesis was applied because the researcher aims to show whether the differentiated instruction enables students to score better in the Cambridge Pre-A1 Starters exam. It means that the average of the post-test was higher than the pre-test means in the experimental group of students. The Student’s t-test formula is:

$$t = \frac{\bar{x}_d}{\frac{S_d}{\sqrt{n}}}$$

Where:

t = Student’s t-test from the data.

\bar{x}_d = differences average in the sample.

n = pre-test and post-test data number (26 and 24 data, in the experimental and control groups, respectively).

Sd = standard deviation of the differences.

Specification of the regions of acceptance and rejection

In the Student’s t-test distribution, the rejection region of the null hypothesis is located to the right of the t-value of the tables with (n - 1) degrees of freedom.

Decision making

If the calculated Student t-value is in the null rejected region, it means that the alternative hypothesis (H1) should be accepted.

Selection of the level of significance

The value of the significance level is $\alpha = 0.05$ (5%) to verify the hypothesis.

Degrees of freedom

The formula to determine the degrees of freedom (df) is as follows: $df=n-1$

Control group: $df=24-1=23$

Experimental group: $df=26-1=25$

Student T-test results

The Student t-value in the control group is equal to 1.7139 according to the level of significance of 0.05 and the degrees of freedom of 23, while it is equal to 1.7081 in the experimental group with the degrees of freedom of 25.

The calculated t-values are summarized in the Table 4, also with the degrees of freedom and p-values:

Table 4.

Summary of paired sample statistics

Group	Section	Test	Tabulated t-value	Calculated t-value	df	Significance (unilateral)
Control	General	Post-test - Pre-test	1.7139	2.6597	23	0.007**
	Reading and Writing	Post-test - Pre-test	1.7139	2.0117	23	0.028*
	Speaking	Post-test - Pre-test	1.7139	1.7811	23	0.044*
Experimental	General	Post-test - Pre-test	1.7081	7.00	25	1.2 x10 ⁻⁷ ***
	Reading and Writing	Post-test - Pre-test	1.7081	6.3853	25	5.5 x10 ⁻⁷ ***
	Speaking	Post-test - Pre-test	1.7081	3.6823	25	0.00056***

Note. Significance codes: Significance 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1.

The unilateral significance level for the experimental group $p = 1.2 \times 10^{-7}$ was lower than $\alpha = 0.05$ (5 %) with 25 degrees of freedom. The calculated Student t-value is 7.00 which was upper than the critical t-value of 1.7081. Therefore, it was located in the null rejection region. It means the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative one was accepted: "Differentiated instruction positively impacts English language production at the elementary level of communicative competence".

DISCUSSION

The purpose of current study is to investigate if the Differentiated instruction develops the production of the English language at the level of communicative competence at the Elementary Level. Based on the literature review, Differentiated Instruction facilitates the adaptation of teaching methodology to the individual needs of each student by employing effective classroom management procedures, grouping students for instruction, and especially helping students with severe learning disabilities.

In addition, the application of differentiated instruction activities such as: create learning stations, task cards, target different senses, tiering, gallery wall, cubing, tic-tac-toe,

and think-pair-share were helpful. In fact, the students themselves said that they had group participation, support from their peers and added that they felt comfortable with the teaching methodology applied in the classroom.

This study also stipulates the evaluation of the communicative competence of elementary level students of Juan León Mera "La Salle" school. There was a significant improvement in the communicative competence of the students in the experimental group in all the dimensions evaluated, such as reading, writing, and speaking. Meanwhile, students in the control group also improved, but not to the same extent as those in the experimental group. As a general conclusion, the application of Differentiated Instruction is very effective for fostering the English learning of elementary level students at Juan León Mera "La Salle" school.

The need for teachers of English as a foreign language in Ecuador to innovate their teaching practices in order to help students develop communicative competencies and meet the curriculum standards. It suggests that teachers should focus on providing content that students need to communicate, rather than just focusing on grammar. Teachers should also guide students in making connections between new information and the grammar and content presented in textbooks. Additionally, teachers should use supplementary materials such as short reading texts and listening comprehension exercises to help students understand the language. This will help students of all levels, from those with low performance to those with high language and competitive skills, to understand the vocabulary and complex expressions.

The importance of teachers taking into account the theory of multiple intelligences when planning lessons and selecting appropriate teaching tactics. This is in order to accommodate students according to their unique learning styles, while also meeting the standards set out in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) at level A1. The students should be developing strong receptive skills and beginning to produce basic expressions of the language orally and in writing. Teachers should expose students to a variety of simple and complex sources of information to help them build a solid foundation in reading and listening comprehension. The paper's abstract states that the goal is to provide Ecuadorian English teachers with educational tools to improve their professional practice, through the application of differentiated education and strategies involving tasks based on multiple intelligences. This will help teachers modify their curriculum, teaching strategies, and assessment dynamics in order to support all students in developing the

necessary competencies to construct their own learning models, leading to academic success and a high level of language proficiency in English.

It is considered that the teaching of English as a second language should be more focused on the contents that students really need to communicate, and not so focused on the correct use of the structures grammatical. Teachers should encourage students to acquire phrases, vocabulary, synonyms and idiomatic expressions, which allow them to understand the language and at the same time have a fluent communication. Teachers need to guide their students, allowing them to do connections between new information and grammatical structures and contents presented in the books used in Ecuador to teach English as a foreign language. It should be done in a collaborative environment through of complementary material, such as: short reading texts and exercises for listening comprehension. Students with low levels performance can easily understand the content and students with high levels of language and competitive skills could reinforce their knowledge, providing support to their peers to understand certain vocabulary and complex expressions.

For lesson planning and selecting instructional tactics appropriate, teachers should take into account the theory of intelligences multiple, in order to accommodate students according to their styles learning unique. Taking into account the standards set out in the level A.1 of the common framework of reference for languages. Students during this stage must develop receptive skills solid and begin to produce basic expressions of the language orally and written. Teachers need to expose students to a variety of sources of simple and complex information, which allow them to develop a solid foundation in reading and listening comprehension.

The importance of applying cooperative learning in the classroom to improve students' academic, sociolinguistic, and cognitive performance. This is accomplished by allowing students to work in small groups, which helps them become better learners. The main objective of this work is to provide Ecuadorian English teachers with educational tools to improve their professional practice, through the application of differentiated education and strategies that involve tasks based on multiple intelligences. These strategies will help teachers to modify their curriculum, teaching strategies, and model assessment dynamics, in order to support all students developing relevant competencies to build their own learning, which will contribute to academic success. and a high level of proficiency in the English language.

One of the principles of teaching established in the new English programs is that students learn better when they are motivated. According to Guido (2021), motivation has a great effect on learning because it increases students' effort, persistence in learning activities, and has a positive impact on cognitive processes such as directed attention. Motivation can be achieved by varying the presentation of language points by the teacher using different modalities so that the class does not always have the same predictable structure. One way to achieve this is through the use of strategies based on the methodology of differentiated teaching, which, according to the students who participated in this research, increased their interest and motivation for learning the language. The research paper discusses how this approach can be used to improve English learning. It includes equations, tables, and other data to support its findings.

The text is discussing the principle of differentiated teaching, which is a method of teaching that takes into account the different needs and interests of each group of students. This is done by diagnosing the student profile, which provide useful results for the development and implementation of the didactic planning. The text also mentions taking into account the student's previous experiences in learning English, their preferred learning styles, and their interests.

This research has a few limitations that could be high-lighted in future studies. First, the participants were from elementary level so the intervention should be planned carefully so the findings would be more varied if differentiated instruction activities were implemented in other educational levels. Next, the differentiated instruction activities were done in paper. It would be great if the future researchers combine the use of differentiated instruction activities with technological resources such as mobile applications and web platforms in the learning process.

Apply surveys to measure the students' satisfaction with the use of differentiated instructional strategies. In this way, it will be possible to know the receptivity and the effect that the strategies have on the students' motivation to learn the language. Develop new differentiated instruction activities aimed also at students from other educational levels to diversify the available options. However, the design of teaching strategies based on differentiated instruction aimed at intermediate or advanced levels should be approached individually for each of the four English language skills (speaking, listening, writing, and reading). Lastly, measure the effect that differentiated instruction has on the students' learning

from other academic levels, with the purpose of assessing the effect it has on the improvement of communicative competencies and skills.

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