

EFL Teachers' Beliefs on and Practices of Differentiated Instruction in Oman

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the beliefs that EFL teachers in public schools in Oman hold about differentiated instruction and the extent to which they practise DI as perceived by them. Two tools were used to collect data on these dynamics: a questionnaire distributed to 338 English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers and semi-structured interviews with 10 English language teachers. After analysing both quantitative and qualitative data, the findings indicated that Differentiated Instruction is not yet a common practice among English language teachers in Oman but that EFL teachers held high beliefs about it also revealed that teachers practised environment differentiation more than content, process, or product differentiation. However, teachers' views on their differentiated instruction practices in interviews did not match their reported practices in the questionnaire. Moreover, there were significant differences in DI according to teaching experience and according to gender – female teachers seemed to differentiate instruction more than male teachers in all four elements. The findings of the present study gave the opportunity to provide recommendations for future research into the Differentiated Instruction approach.

Keywords: Differentiated Instruction, EFL teachers, DI Beliefs, DI Implementation, DI Practices

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Although students in a classroom are roughly of the same age, they have different learning styles, levels of readiness, interests, and learning profiles (Tomlinson, 2001; Subban, 2006). As change agents, teachers have the potential to implement new teaching methodologies if they have confidence in their capabilities. It is possible that many educators are already employing differentiated instruction (DI) techniques unconsciously to improve student performance (Santangelo & Tomlinson, 2012). Understanding teachers' beliefs is vital as they influence students' academic success and proficiency in language skills (Johnson & Golombek, 2011). Identifying these beliefs can aid in implementing DI effectively.

In Oman, the education system is structured into 12 years and comprises two phases: basic education and post-basic education. Basic education covers the first 10 years of study, followed by 2 years of post-basic education (grades 11 and 12). Basic education is further divided into two cycles. Cycle one encompasses grades 1 to 4, and cycle two includes grades 5 to 10. The Omani Ministry of Education (MOE) describes the system as 'a unified education for all, as members in one community with common aspirations, shared objectives, the same education and culture to ensure societal cohesion according to Islamic and Arab cultural identity' (MOE Portal, 2021). While the MOE appears to treat students uniformly, it acknowledges individual differences in its mission statement, expressing its aim 'to provide distinguished human resources, curricula, buildings, and assessment tools for different students' (MOE Portal, 2021). Despite these efforts, many students still graduate with inadequate English language proficiency, necessitating attendance in a foundation year at higher education institutions (MOE, 2012).

The Ministry of Education (2012) also emphasised the need to develop both teaching methods and teaching and learning processes in general. However, the curriculum provided by MOE includes too much content for students to complete in the time available, and it excessively prescribes what teachers must deliver and how (MOE, 2012). According to Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi (2012), some teachers' practices were deficient because they religiously follow the MOE's set curriculum. The authors added that teachers adhere to the textbook because they face time restrictions and thus teach only for the final exam, a factor that MOE (2012) itself pointed to. To overcome these problems, MOE established the Specialized Institute for Professional Training of Teachers (SIPTT) in 2014 (Al-Shabibi & Silvennoinen, 2018). Despite the MOE's initiatives to offer effective professional development for teachers, Omani English teachers encounter several challenges related to their school-based professional development (Al-Bulushi, 2016; Al Balushi, 2017). In addition, students come into an English language classroom with different needs, backgrounds, abilities, interests, and expectations. Moreover, DI aligns with Oman's National Strategy for Education 2040, which outlines the vision of education in Oman. The strategy encompasses six components, one of which focuses on diversifying teaching paths, and calls for doing the following:

'equip human resources with the values, knowledge and skills to enable them to be productive in the world of the knowledge economy, keep pace with the continual changes in the world, maintain their national identity and intrinsic values, and contribute to the

advancement of human civilisation.' (p. 20)

Consequently, introducing and applying the DI approach would help cater to students' differences in Omani schools and would probably enhance the quality of teaching. This study therefore investigates English language teachers' beliefs on and practices of using DI in Oman and examines the possible challenges in doing so.

1.2 Problem Statement

Differentiated Instruction is a teaching philosophy that permits teachers to cater for students' varied interests, readiness levels, and learning profiles creating an effective and engaging learning experience (Tomlinson, 2014). Research has demonstrated DI's effectiveness across various student groups, debunking the myth that it only benefits gifted students or those with learning difficulties. (Magableh & Abdullah, 2020; Aranda & Zamora, 2016; Granas, 2019; Ismail, 2019; Karadag & Yasser, 2010; McQuarrie et al., 2008; Mbugua & Muthami, 2014; Valiandes, 2015).

Despite its proven benefits, there is a notable lack of research on DI's implementation in Oman, particularly at the school level. The researchers identified only one study by Ali (2015) that addresses the use of DI in Oman, but this study focuses solely on higher education students and differentiated assessment. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, no study in Oman has investigated the application of DI at the school level. The MOE in Oman has shifted towards a more student-centered teaching approach, yet teachers struggle to meet students' diverse needs and enhance higher-order thinking skills (MOE, 2012). This gap in practice is further compounded by a rigid curriculum that limits teachers' ability to differentiate instruction (Al-Shabibi & Silvennoinen, 2018). Consequently, many students graduate with inadequate English skills, necessitating additional language support in higher education. As Al-Mahrooqi et al. (2016) stated students have always been leaving school with poor English skills – around 90% of all school graduates join English language foundation programmes upon entering university. Given DI's potential to address these issues, this study aims to explore EFL teachers' beliefs about DI and its prevalence in Omani schools, as well as the challenges they face in implementing this approach.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to investigate EFL teachers' beliefs on and practices of DI. The study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What beliefs do EFL teachers hold about DI?
2. To what extent do EFL teachers perceive that they use DI in their classrooms?
3. Is there a relationship between English language teachers' beliefs and their practices of DI as perceived by them?
4. Are there any significant differences in EFL teachers' practices of DI with respect to their levels of experience and gender?

1.4 Definition of Terms

- Differentiated Instruction: a teaching approach in which a teacher is aware of their students' needs, interests, and learning profiles and modifies instruction to create the best learning experience for each student (Khan & Jahan, 2017)
- Belief: 'the information, attitudes, values, expectations, theories, and assumptions about teaching and learning that teachers build up over time and bring with them to the classroom' (Richards, 1998, p. 66)
- Intelligence: 'a neural mechanism or computational system that is genetically programmed to be activated or "triggered" by certain kinds of internally or externally presented information' (Garnder, 2011)
- Learning styles: an 'internally based characteristic, often not perceived or consciously used by learners, for intake and comprehension of new information (Granas, 2019; Reid, 1995)

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Differentiated Instruction Approach

Any teacher who tries to reach out to their students and varies their teaching to bring out the best in them can be said to be practising DI. Tomlinson (2017), a prominent advocate of DI, stated that differentiating instruction does not mean individualized instruction. Although DI views students as individuals, it does not demand a separate activity for each learner. Instead, it is a blend of whole-classroom, group, and individual instruction. For example, whole-class instruction can be effective in discussions and debates that create a sense of community. However, DI does not aim to create a homogeneous group because learners vary in their learning pace. As a result, it is better for students to choose their own working groups or choose to work individually

Tomlinson (2017) further added that DI focuses on quality rather than quantity. Giving advanced students more work to do, such as writing two book reports instead of one, would make students feel punished rather than accepted for their ability. Similarly, struggling students may have to complete a simple assignment that does not promote any learning for them. DI thus focuses on the quality of assignments, matching them to students' needs rather than increasing the quantity. DI is therefore "a philosophy of teaching that is based on the premise that students learn best when their teachers accommodate the differences in their readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles" (Subban, 2006, p. 940)

Readiness to learn involves a student's knowledge, their learning brain, and the skills they need in a certain part of learning (Magableh &

Abdullah, 2020). Magableh and Abdullah (2020) added that a learner's attitude towards subjects and schools, as well as their previous learning experiences, might affect their readiness. Furthermore, in Granas's (2019) study, a teacher looked at students' physical and mental readiness. She reported that because teachers force learners to concentrate for up to an hour, they should ensure that activities align with students' levels of readiness. She used a 'pause activity' in her lessons, in which a video served as a wake-up call to students, preparing them for a coming challenge. Her actions relate to differentiating learning environment by creating an encouraging and supportive classroom setting.

Students become interested when teachers provide them with relevant content, and DI promotes differentiating content to arouse students' interest. Granas (2019) interviewed a teacher who recognised that one of his students enjoyed computers and thus let him use one. By doing so, the teacher noticed that the student worked harder and became more motivated. Interestingly, this circumstance could relate to Gardner's (2011) theory of multiple intelligences – this student had a better opportunity to learn by using different learning styles and intelligences to gain information.

Regarding learning profiles, Granas (2019) defined a *learning style* as an 'internally based characteristic, often not perceived or consciously used by learners, for intake and comprehension of new information (Reid, 1995)'. Subban (2006) indicated a significant increase in students test scores when their preferred learning style was incorporated. Their attitudes towards learning improved, and they felt that their teachers cared about their individual strengths. Waterman (2005) viewed learning styles as an individual's preference for a certain method by which they learn something and then recall what they have learnt. The three well-known learning styles are visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic: visual learners learn best by seeing, auditory learners learn best by hearing, and kinaesthetic learners learn best by doing and experiencing things. The way in which students receive information makes up a crucial element for teachers, who must design instruction to meet students' needs. Visual and auditory learners align somewhat with traditional teaching methods, but kinaesthetic learners often feel excluded and hardly have chances to exercise their preferred learning style.

As Tomlinson (2017) suggested, there are four areas for teachers to differentiate instruction to meet their students' readiness, interest, and learning profile. Teachers can vary the *content*, the *processes*, the *products*, and the *learning environment* in various ways.

2.1.1 Content Differentiation

This element focuses on what students need to learn. Teachers should supplement their lessons with materials that interest students and are relevant to their backgrounds. If students lack interest, they will not be motivated to learn (Smit & Humpert, 2012). DI encourages teachers to avoid the one-size-fits-all curriculum and shift their thinking from trying to finish the curriculum to aiming to fulfil students' needs (Tomlinson, 2014). According to Subban (2006), research advocates the importance of designing a curriculum that combines students' interests, needs, and backgrounds fostering students' engagement. Magableh and Abdullah (2020) stated that teachers could use the same content but should differentiate activities or alter the content complexity. Moreover, teachers must understand and cater to their students because knowing their students would allow them to discover each other's strengths and weaknesses. As a result, teachers can help students improve their strengths and overcome their weaknesses.

2.1.2 Process Differentiation

After assessing the diversity levels within their classrooms, teachers must go beyond merely creating and modifying activities to address all learning styles (Naka, 2017). Naka further emphasized that educators cannot facilitate effective learning unless they recognize their students' passion and aptitude for learning, ensuring opportunities for self-expression and progress. Teachers who comprehend their students' needs are able to prioritize activities that enhance the learning experience. For students facing difficulties, educators should design tasks that help them acquire essential skills, while simultaneously assigning challenging tasks or research projects to advanced learners (Lawrence-Brown, 2004). It is important for teachers to consider students' readiness levels and adjust tasks accordingly to achieve an optimal balance, avoiding assignments that are excessively challenging or overly simplistic. Subban (2006) also recommended that teachers allow students to work at their own pace without any constraints.

2.1.3 Product Differentiation

The product refers to the outcome of students' learning in any shape – it is what students create at the end of a lesson that demonstrates their learning. These products can take many forms, such as reports, tests, and projects. The key point of differentiating product lies in the choice of how to show mastery that teachers give to their students (Magableh & Abdullah, 2020). Teachers should work with students' learning styles and intelligences: for example, assigning visual students to create a poster, auditory learners to record a tape or do an oral presentation, and kinaesthetic learners to build something related to the content (Khan & Jahan, 2017). Assessment does not always happen at the end of a unit or a textbook; it is an ongoing process that takes place throughout the year. Teachers can diversify ways to assess students' development in readiness, interest, and learning preference (Tomlinson, 2017).

2.1.4 Environment Differentiation

Environment means both the physical and the psychological setting. Teachers control the classroom, so they should arrange and furnish the learners' environment flexibly, while constantly paying attention to individual differences in intelligence. Teachers show empathy, care for students, and use classroom management techniques to create a supportive, productive learning environment (Khan & Jahan, 2017). Although all students need nurturing, acceptance, and respect, meeting students' differences can help them experience a sense of success (Subban, 2006). In addition, teachers should not stick to the usual classroom but should teach both inside and outside. Doing so

helps draw students' interests and appeal to their learning profiles (Magableh & Abdullah, 2020).

While it might be methodologically useful to make a distinction between varied types of differentiation, in actual practice it may be very hard to do so. It will therefore be the responsibility of individual teachers to work towards harmonizing those possibilities of differentiation advanced by Tomlinson and other researchers. For instance, teachers can adapt the kind of content they offer for different types of learners to the processes employed for the presentation of that content. This will in turn be closely related to the specific environment in which the activities take place, and obviously to the results that ensue.

2.2 Teachers' Beliefs

For teachers to effectively implement differentiated instruction (DI), they must first *believe* in its merits and effectiveness. As Pajares (1992) stated, belief is defined as an "individual's judgement of the truth or falsity of a proposition, a judgement that can only be inferred from a collective understanding of what human beings say, intend, and do" (p. 316). In an educational context, teachers' beliefs encompass the information, attitudes, values, expectations, theories, and assumptions about teaching and learning that they develop over time and bring into the classroom (Richards, 1998, p. 66). These beliefs are pivotal because they influence both teaching and learning processes. The World Bank (2019) highlighted that many learning challenges are actually attributable to teaching issues, suggesting that student improvement fundamentally requires effective teachers. Along similar lines, Santangelo and Tomlinson (2012) conducted a survey on teacher educators' perceptions and utilization of differentiated instruction strategies. Their findings indicated a recognition of differentiation's importance, with a considerable gap between beliefs and actual practices. Similarly, Joseph (2013) surveyed and interviewed pre-service and in-service teachers regarding their perceptions and practices of differentiated instruction. The results showed that while the concept was well understood, practical application mainly focused on differentiating the learning environment and process. Teachers' beliefs on DI may provide insights into their reluctance to implement it (Graf-Sharabi, 2009). Transitioning from traditional methods to DI presents challenges, as it often involves moving away from established comfort zones (Edwards et al., 2006). Despite possessing adequate knowledge and strong beliefs in DI, teachers rarely apply it in their classrooms due to the convenience and familiarity of traditional methods (Tzanni, 2018). Additionally, resistance to DI implementation is frequently rooted in ingrained behavioural patterns (Batumo, 2006). This situation is also observed in Oman, where the Ministry of Education provides EFL teachers with the curriculum and assessment plans to follow.

2.3 Effectiveness of Differentiated Instruction

Many researchers have highlighted the effectiveness of implementing high quality DI in education. Valiandes (2015) demonstrated DI's effectiveness through literacy tests. His grade 4 sample that used DI showed better progress than the group that did not use DI. Aranda and Zamora (2016), similarly, investigated DI's effect on grade 10 students' academic performance in the Filipino language. The authors found that differentiating instructions according to students' learning styles over 2 months resulted in higher academic performance for the subjects who received DI than those who had not received DI. McQuarrie et al. (2008) added that when students had the choice and worked with various groups, they enjoyed learning—92% of students were satisfied with the DI approach compared to 65% in the beginning of the year. He added that DI not only contributed to students' overall achievement but also led students to start approaching challenging tasks and problems on their own. Although the target of McQuarrie et al.'s (2008) study lay in employing DI for students' language arts improvement, they found substantial improvements in other subjects. This phenomenon indicates that all teachers can benefit from using this approach with their students. Mbugua and Muthami (2014) highlighted this point by showing a significant improvement in the mathematics achievements of students who received DI compared to those students who did not. Karadag and Yasser (2010) confirmed this notion in their study about students' attitudes towards Turkish courses, where they discovered that DI's positive influence overtook Turkish language classes and expanded to other courses. Magableh and Abdullah (2020) conducted a study in Jordan and showed a significant difference between grade 8 students' overall achievements when teachers provided them with DI compared to others who did not learn through the approach. DI's influence reached teachers as well; Aranda and Zamora (2016) noticed that DI has increased teachers' creativity, self-efficiency, and ability to try new teaching approaches.

3. Research Design

This is an exploratory study conducted to explore teachers' beliefs about and practices of DI. According to Bourini (2015), exploratory studies do not adhere to a single best method to answer the research questions; instead, the method depends on the nature of the questions. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2011) argued that a skilled researcher can effectively address their questions using a blend of approaches. A combination of quantitative and qualitative research designs gives a more comprehensive understanding of the researched issue (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, this study employs a mixed-method approach to investigate EFL teachers' beliefs on and practices of the DI approach. Questionnaires and interviews are used to describe teachers' beliefs, evaluate the relationships between teachers' beliefs and their practices, track the prevalence of DI in EFL classrooms across different regions of Oman, and determine the differences in the use of DI based on teachers' gender and experience.

3.1 Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of EFL teachers who teach grades 5–10 in public schools across the Sultanate of Oman. Based on the latest Annual Educational Statistics Book (2020/2021), 1526 EFL teachers (830 males and 696 females) teach in Omani public schools. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the representative sample of this population ranged from 306 to 310. Thus, using random sampling, a total of 338 EFL teachers responded to the questionnaire. The sample includes 180 female and 158 male English

language teachers from the entire Sultanate. The participants consisted of 73 teachers from Al-Batinah North, 69 from Muscat, 64 from Al-Batinah South, 31 from Al-Dakhiliya, 25 from Al-Dahirah, 20 from Musandam, 19 from Al-Sharqiyah North, 10 from Al-Buraimi, 10 from Al-Wusta, 10 from Dhofar, and 7 from Al-Sharqiyah South.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Questionnaire Respondents

| <i>Characteristic</i> | <i>N</i> | <i>%</i> |
|-----------------------|----------|----------|
| Gender | | |
| Female | 180 | 46.7 |
| Male | 158 | 53.3 |
| Experience | | |
| Less than 5 | 74 | 21.9 |
| 5–10 | 145 | 42.9 |
| More than 10 | 119 | 35.2 |

As Table 1 shows, there were more female than male respondents. The participants' experience ranged from 1 year to more than 10 years of experience, and the majority had 5 to 10 years of experience.

3.2 Research Instruments

Two types of instruments were used to collect data: a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews were used to further investigate teachers' use of DI – emphasizing differentiation of content, process, product, and environment – because using interviews as a data collection method enhances the quality of the data gathered.

3.2.1 The Questionnaires

The questionnaires were developed after reviewing the literature, including works by Santangelo and Tomlinson, (2012), Bourini (2015), Ferdousy (2017), Khan and Jahan (2017), and Shareefa et al. (2019). The first questionnaire includes two sections:

Section 1 requests demographic data of the participants: (a) years of experience, (b) gender, (c) qualifications, and (d) region of work.

Section 2 includes 31 items related to teachers' beliefs about the concept of DI (5 questions) and its main elements – content (7 questions), process (9 questions), product (4 questions) and environment (6 questions) – based on a 5-point Likert scale of agreement (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*).

The second questionnaire consists of 25 items connected to teachers' practices focusing on differentiation of content (7 questions), process (9 questions), product (4 questions) and environment (5 questions). Respondents respond based on a frequency scale ranging from 1 = *never* to 5 = *always*.

Questionnaires Validity. A panel that included area experts and practitioners validated the study's questionnaires. The panel included two qualified instructors from the College of Arts and Social Sciences at Sultan Qaboos University and four instructors from the University of Technology of Applied Sciences. The other members comprised one English language supervisor from North Al-Batinah, two English senior teachers who have more than 15 years of experience, and four teachers. The panel members were requested to check the instruments clarity and relevance to the purpose of the study. Then, the questionnaires were modified and revised based upon the panel suggestions and comments leading to the addition, deletion and modification of some items.

Questionnaire Reliability.

The questionnaire was piloted among 22 English language teachers who were not involved in the actual study sample. Five males and 17 female English language teachers formed the piloting sample. The data collected from piloting the study was then analyzed using SPSS version 21 Program. To ensure internal consistency, Cronbach Alpha was computed for each section of the questionnaire resulting in .861 for the first questionnaire and .974 for the second questionnaire indicating a high-level internal consistency.

3.2.2 The Semi-structured Interviews

After analyzing quantitative data, semi-structured interview questions were developed to further investigate teachers' DI practice. Semi-structured interviews were selected because the interviewee presence can clear up any misunderstanding or enquiries. Moreover, semi-structured interviews create flexibility, allowing the interviewer to follow up on interesting responses and gather more thorough data sets than fixed interview questions can provide (Robson, 2002; Cohen et al, 2007; Patton, 2002; Kvale, 1996). The semi-structured interview questions were divided into four themes related to the four elements of differentiated instruction approach. The same panel that validated the questionnaires validated the questions of semi-structured interviews. After validation, some questions were refined and there was some addition of questions as suggested by the panel. The semi-structured interview questions were piloted to ensure their reliability. The researchers and another researcher attended the piloted interview to make sure that the sequence of the questions is smooth and logical and that the questions were clear to the targeted teachers. The researchers coded and analysed the data from the same interview separately to ensure inter-rater-reliability. The data sets from the researchers were compared and 94% agreement was found. After approving the questions, ten EFL teachers were interviewed through Google Meet application and content analysis was applied to analyse the data collected from semi-structured interviews.

3.3 Procedures

For data collection, the present study followed these procedures. The researcher ensured the validity and reliability of each one of the research instruments that were designed to answer the research questions. To start the actual data collection phase, a consent letter was obtained from Ministry of Education. Then, the Technical Office for Studies and Development sent an online version of the questionnaire to the Directorates General of Education, which in turn distributed it to EFL teachers in public schools. After obtaining the suitable number of responses, the data was analyzed via SPSS Version 21. The findings of the questionnaire were utilized to create modifications in the semi-structured interview questions that were conducted with ten English language teachers selected purposely through Google Meet application and phone calls. The data gathered from the semi-structured interviews then were analyzed in order to explain and elaborate on the quantitative results of the questionnaire.

4. Results

4.1 EFL Teachers' Beliefs on the Differentiated Instruction Approach

The scale in Table 2 was applied to interpret English teachers' beliefs on DI and provide a clear view on their beliefs on the four elements of DI (content, process, product, and environment).

Table 2. Scale for Interpreting Means of Beliefs on of DI

| Scale Value | Interpretation |
|-------------|----------------|
| 1–1.79 | very weak |
| 1.8–2.59 | weak |
| 2.6–3.39 | moderate |
| 3.4–4.19 | strong |
| 4.2–5 | very strong |

To answer the first research question, means and standard deviations of teachers' beliefs on DI were calculated.

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations of Teachers' Beliefs on DI

| Component | M | SD | Level |
|-------------------------------------|------|------|-------------|
| 1. DI environment | 4.51 | 0.65 | very strong |
| 2. DI nature | 4.31 | 0.70 | very strong |
| 3. DI content | 4.28 | 0.64 | very strong |
| 4. DI product | 4.23 | 0.67 | very strong |
| 5. DI process | 4.09 | 0.79 | strong |
| Overall mean and standard deviation | 4.29 | 0.69 | very strong |

As Table 3 reveals, participants overall held very strong beliefs in the DI approach ($M = 4.285$). EFL teachers had the strongest beliefs in environment differentiation, followed by nature differentiation, then content differentiation, whereas in process differentiation teachers had the weakest beliefs. This means that EFL teachers strongly believe in DI effectiveness regarding the English language subject.

Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations of Teachers' Beliefs on DI's Nature

| Statement | M | SD | Level |
|--|------|------|-------------|
| 1. 'The teacher should teach at the student's level not at the level of the grade.' | 4.50 | 0.81 | very strong |
| 2. 'The teacher should be aware that not all learners are of same level or same intelligence.' | 4.47 | 0.57 | very strong |
| 3. 'The teacher should know the level of competence of his/her learners.' | 4.44 | 0.58 | very strong |
| 4. 'The teacher should know about his/her learners' social, economic, and family background.' | 4.06 | 0.68 | strong |
| 5. 'The teacher should take pre-assessment quizzes and tests to identify the slow and advanced learners of his/her class.' | 4.06 | 0.88 | strong |
| DI nature overall | 4.31 | 0.70 | very strong |

As with DI's nature, EFL teachers had a very strong belief where teachers strongly believed that "a teacher should teach to the student level not the grade level" because they believe that each student is different and with different needs and learning styles. The lowest mean scores were on 'taking pre-assessment quizzes and tests to identify the slow and advanced learners of his/her class and 'knowing about learners' social, economic, and family background'. This may be due to the fact that these two actions require more efforts from the teachers to dig deeper into students' academic and social life.

Table 5. Means and Standard Deviations of Teachers' Beliefs on Content Differentiation

| Statement | M | SD | Level |
|--|------|------|-------------|
| 1. 'The teacher should use materials that present new content in a variety of formats (e.g., video, audio, web-based, text).' | 4.47 | 0.57 | very strong |
| 2. 'The teacher should present new content in various teaching modes (e.g., demonstration, display, oral explanation).' | 4.39 | 0.59 | very strong |
| 3. 'The teacher should use materials that present new content in a variety of ways (e.g., through graphs, explanation of theory, examples).' | 4.34 | 0.59 | very strong |
| 4. 'The teacher should use materials that reflect his/her students' experiences or interests.' | 4.28 | 0.64 | very strong |

| | | | |
|--|------|------|-------------|
| 5. 'The teacher should use strategies to support comprehension and retention of content presented in text materials (e.g., chapter outlines, guided reading questions).' | 4.23 | 0.63 | very strong |
| 6. 'The teacher should provide optional/supplemental material to students who have difficulty in understanding or master new content with ease.' | 4.20 | 0.70 | very strong |
| 7. 'The teacher should use materials that present new content at varied levels of complexity (e.g., different complexity versions of same text).' | 4.07 | 0.78 | strong |
| DI content overall | 4.28 | 0.64 | very strong |

Table 5 shows that EFL teachers had a very strong belief in content differentiation. Participants strongly believed in 'using materials that present new content in a variety of formats. On the other hand, 'using materials that present new content at varied levels of complexity' had the lowest mean scores. This may be due to the teachers being used to teaching the same materials for all students as prescribed by MOE. Also, varying complexity seems to be unfair and unacceptable for parents.

Table 6. Means and Standard Deviations of Teachers' Beliefs on Process Differentiation

| Statement | M | SD | Level |
|--|------|------|-------------|
| 1. 'The teacher should use different types of assessment tools according to students' needs.' | 4.39 | 0.59 | very strong |
| 2. 'The teacher should use materials that promote interaction among students.' | 4.36 | 0.59 | very strong |
| 3. 'The teacher should ask students to choose among a collection of activities/tasks.' | 4.15 | 0.68 | strong |
| 4. 'Depending on the student, the teacher should give explanations in English and/or Arabic.' | 4.14 | 0.67 | strong |
| 5. 'The teacher should use tasks that offer format options (e.g., write a paragraph or create a visual).' | 4.12 | 0.64 | strong |
| 6. 'The teacher should group students according to their interests.' | 4.07 | 0.79 | strong |
| 7. 'The teacher should allow different time for a given task to each student.' | 4.00 | 0.79 | strong |
| 8. 'The teacher should group students according to their English language competence.' | 3.89 | 0.90 | strong |
| 9. 'The teacher should allow his/her students to choose how they will work (e.g., individually, with a partner, in groups).' | 3.75 | 0.84 | strong |
| DI process overall | 4.09 | 0.79 | strong |

With process differentiation, as Table 6 shows, English language teachers had the strongest beliefs in 'using different types of assessment tools according to students' needs' and 'using materials that promote interaction among students. In addition, they believed that 'the teacher should allow students to choose how they will work' was the least important in process differentiation. Some teachers believe that they know what is better for their students and some teachers prefer selecting what is appropriate for the task being taught.

Table 7. Means and Standard Deviations of Teachers' Beliefs on Product Differentiation

| Statements | Mean | SD | Level |
|---|------|------|-------------|
| 1. The teacher should evaluate each student based on his/her improvement during the semester. | 4.53 | 0.66 | very strong |
| 2. The teacher should create assignments that offer format options (e.g., write a paper, create a visual, design a web page, or give a presentation). | 4.30 | 0.56 | very strong |
| 3. The teacher should use multiple types of final assessment (e.g., a test and/or an assignment and/or classroom performance). | 4.24 | 0.63 | very strong |
| 4. The teacher should adjust assignment deadlines in response to individual students' needs and/or circumstances. | 3.85 | 0.82 | strong |
| DI Product overall | 4.23 | .67 | very strong |

As Table 7 illustrates, participants reported a very strong belief in product differentiation overall and reported the strongest belief in 'evaluating each student based on his/her improvement during the semester. They indicated that 'adjusting assignment deadlines in response to individual students' needs and circumstances' was the least important. Teachers feel that there is no need to vary deadlines because they give adequate time for their students to finish the assignments.

Table 8. Means and Standard Deviations of Teachers' Beliefs on Environment Differentiation

| Statements | Mean | SD | Level |
|--|------|------|-------------|
| 1. The teacher should use activities that develop a sense of community among students. | 4.70 | 0.55 | very strong |
| 2. The teacher should take deliberate efforts to ensure that every student is engaged in my lesson. | 4.61 | 0.62 | very strong |
| 3. The teacher should arrange his/her classroom (e.g. displays, seating) according to his/her students' preferences. | 4.52 | 0.78 | very strong |
| 4. The teacher should take deliberate efforts to make himself/herself approachable/available to his/her students. | 4.52 | 0.72 | very strong |
| 5. The teacher should take deliberate efforts to ensure that every student feels safe, welcome and respected in the classroom. | 4.38 | 0.57 | very strong |

| | | | |
|--|------|------|-------------|
| 6. The teacher should take deliberate efforts to enhance his/her students' positive attitude/motivation towards English. | 4.32 | 0.65 | very strong |
| DI Environment overall | 4.51 | .65 | very strong |

All EFL teachers had a very high belief in environment differentiation, as Table 8 demonstrates. EFL teachers strongly believed in 'using activities that develop a sense of community among students' and 'ensuring that every student is engaged in my lesson'.

4.1.1 Discussion of Teachers' Beliefs on Differentiated Instruction Approach

Bourini (2015), Driskill (2010), and Grafi-Sharabi (2009) found that teachers are somewhat familiar with the definition and nature of Differentiated Instruction (DI). Numerous studies have demonstrated that teachers hold strong beliefs regarding the DI approach, its components, and strategies for its implementation (Bourini, 2015; Santangelo & Tomlinson, 2012; Sougari & Mavroudi, 2019; Tzanni, 2018). The findings from this study align with those of Driskill (2010), as most of his subjects believed that DI involves tailoring teaching instruction to meet students' individual needs. He provided examples of teachers utilizing instruction based on students' prior knowledge, learning styles, multiple intelligences, and managing instruction according to students' levels and needs. Similarly, teachers perceived DI as shaping instruction with respect to students' readiness levels and learning styles (Santangelo & Tomlinson, 2012).

Regarding the four elements of DI, similar results were observed by Driskill (2010), where teachers understood that DI entails modifying the curriculum to suit students' levels, adapting grade levels to students' needs, and teaching various strategies based on students' abilities and backgrounds. Bourini (2015), Driskill (2010), and Grafi-Sharabi (2009) supported process differentiation, with teachers believing that DI includes changing teaching methods and using learning centres to address students' diverse needs and learning styles. Additionally, most of Bourini's participants believed that students learn differently and rejected the idea of teaching all students in the same way to achieve the same outcome.

For product differentiation, the study findings concur with Driskill (2010), who reported that teachers believed in providing students with different work according to their needs and assessing students' needs prior to teaching for effective DI implementation. In the same vein, teachers in Santangelo and Tomlinson's (2012) study believed that ongoing and alternative assessments are crucial for DI implementation. Contrarily, Bourini's (2015) findings on the question of 'providing students with choices in assignments leads to students' confusion' contradict the results of this study. Bourini also found that teachers held misconceptions regarding the four elements of DI and believed that DI is not applicable to all language skills. Most of his teachers believed that differentiating based on standards is easier than differentiating according to students' interests and needs.

Regarding environmental differentiation, the findings of Santangelo and Tomlinson (2012) and Grafi-Sharabi (2009) align with this study's results, showing that teachers prioritize and strongly believe in establishing a positive learning environment. They also believed that applying DI would make learning more engaging and interesting for students, facilitate teacher-student interactions, and enhance students' self-esteem. However, creating a motivating learning environment while differentiating instruction is considered challenging (Bourini, 2015).

4.2 EFL Teachers' Practices of the Differentiated Instruction Approach

To analyse the data gathered for teachers' practice of differentiated instruction, the scale outlined in Table 9 was applied.

Table 9. Scale for Interpreting Means of Practices of DI

| Scale Value | Interpretation |
|-------------|-----------------|
| 1-1.79 | very low level |
| 1.8-2.59 | low level |
| 2.6-3.39 | moderate level |
| 3.4-4.19 | high level |
| 4.2-5 | very high level |

To answer the second research question and provide a clear view on English teachers' practices of the four elements of DI (content, process, product, and environment), means and standard deviation were calculated and interview results were discussed.

Table 10. Means and Standard Deviations of Teachers' Practices of DI

| Component | M | SD | Level |
|----------------------|------|------|-------|
| 1. DI environment | 4.12 | 0.83 | high |
| 2. DI content | 3.92 | 0.91 | high |
| 3. DI process | 3.58 | 1.09 | high |
| 4. DI product | 3.44 | 1.33 | high |
| DI practices overall | 3.77 | 1.04 | high |

As Table 10 presents, EFL teachers' practices overall of DI was high ($M = 3.766$). The results showed that participants practised environment differentiation most frequently, followed by content differentiation; then process differentiation; and last, product differentiation.

Table 11. Means and Standard Deviations of Teachers' Practices of Content Differentiation

| Statement | M | SD | Level |
|---|------|------|-------|
| 1. 'I use materials that present new content in a variety of ways (e.g., through graphs, explanation of theory, examples).' | 4.12 | 0.73 | high |
| 2. 'I use strategies to support comprehension and retention of content presented in text materials (e.g., chapter outlines, guided reading questions).' | 4.12 | 0.74 | high |
| 3. 'I use materials that present new content at varied levels of complexity (e.g., different complexity versions of same text).' | 3.96 | 0.85 | high |
| 4. 'I use materials that present new content in a variety of formats (e.g., video, audio, web-based, text).' | 3.94 | 0.97 | high |
| 5. 'I present new content in various teaching modes (e.g., demonstration, display, oral explanation).' | 3.93 | 0.89 | high |
| 6. 'I use materials that reflect my students' experiences or interests.' | 3.86 | 0.95 | high |
| 7. 'I provide optional/supplemental material to students who have difficulty in understanding or master new content with ease.' | 3.54 | 1.23 | high |
| DI content overall | 3.92 | 0.91 | high |

As Table 11 illustrates, EFL teachers mostly practised content differentiation. The highest reported practices were 'using materials that present new content in a variety of ways' and 'using strategies to support comprehension and retention of content presented in text materials', whereas the least practice was 'providing supplemental material to students who have difficulty in understanding or mastering new content with ease'. One might argue that providing supplementary materials could put yet another burden on teachers' workloads.

However, during the interviews, all teachers stated they use the same materials for all students due to obligations. Participant T2 said, 'We use the same material because we are committed to a certain assessment,' referring to the MOE's final examination required for public schools. Participant T4 also acknowledged this approach.

I don't use different materials. That is because the curriculum is overloaded and we are bound to a certain schedule that we should stick to, the time limit pushes teachers to prioritise following the scheme of work over students mastering the skills.

Most teachers (8 out of 10) use various teaching materials like flash cards, charts, videos, games, and software. Also, 9 out of 10 sometimes provide different task versions, such as simpler ones for struggling students and challenging ones for high achievers. Participant T10 noted that high achievers need more advanced tasks, like writing short stories using pictures while low achievers write sentences describing a photo.

However, some teachers cannot differentiate tasks due to MOE guidelines. Participant T1 explained:

I don't use different versions at the same time, but rather do it gradually, starting from easy-to-grasp to more difficult. As teachers, we are always judged on the work we give for students, and they make it clear that we must give students the same worksheets.

All teachers frequently use extra materials like games, worksheets, presentations, books, websites, and active learning strategies for teaching grammar and vocabulary. However, EFL teachers only partially differentiate content, despite high-level practice of differentiation reported in the questionnaire.

Table 12. Means and Standard Deviations of Teachers' Practices of Process Differentiation

| Statement | M | SD | Level |
|--|------|------|-----------|
| 1. 'I use materials that promote interaction among students.' | 4.21 | 0.73 | very high |
| 2. 'Depending on the student, I give explanations in English and/or Arabic.' | 4.03 | 0.74 | high |
| 3. 'I use different types of assessment tools according to students' needs.' | 3.86 | 0.98 | high |
| 4. 'I group students according to their English language competence.' | 3.62 | 1.01 | high |
| 5. 'I use tasks that offer format options (e.g., write a paragraph or create a visual).' | 3.36 | 1.17 | high |
| 6. 'My students are allowed to choose how they will work (e.g., individually, with a partner, in groups).' | 3.36 | 1.17 | high |
| 7. 'I allow different time for a given task to each student.' | 3.32 | 1.24 | high |
| 8. 'I ask students to choose among a collection of activities/tasks.' | 3.32 | 1.22 | high |
| 9. 'I group students according to their interests.' | 3.09 | 1.57 | high |
| DI process overall | 3.58 | 1.09 | high |

Table 12 shows that English language teachers practised process differentiation with high frequency ($M = 3.58$) and that they mostly practised 'using materials that promote interaction among students'. The least frequent element of process differentiation was 'grouping students according to their interests'. One might assume that grouping students according to their interests could cause chaos in the classroom and consume a lot of time.

Similarly, in interviews, 9 out of 10 teachers stated they use different teaching methods to accommodate various learning styles. For example, T3 emphasized the need to vary methods for kinaesthetic, visual, and auditory learners, while T9 mentioned adapting teaching methods across lessons to keep students engaged. T2 highlighted using illustrations and videos for low achievers. One teacher admitted using the same method but provided extra help to struggling students.

All teachers reported incorporating multimedia in their teaching. Despite this, most rarely allow students to choose how they work, citing time constraints and workload. Teachers also stated they often use Arabic with low achievers to save time and ensure understanding.

Additionally, 7 out of 10 teachers group students by ability, either mixing or isolating low achievers, though they did not distribute them based on interests or learning styles as noted in the questionnaire.

Table 13. Means and Standard Deviations of Teachers’ Practices of Product Differentiation

| Statement | M | SD | Level |
|--|------|------|-------|
| 1. ‘I create assignments that offer format options (e.g., write a paper, create a visual, design a web page, or give a presentation).’ | 3.54 | 1.28 | high |
| 2. ‘I use multiple types of final assessment (e.g. a test and/or an assignment and/or classroom performance).’ | 3.52 | 1.22 | high |
| 3. ‘I adjust assignment deadlines in response to individual students’ needs and/or circumstances.’ | 3.47 | 1.19 | high |
| 4. ‘I evaluate each student based on his/her improvement during the semester.’ | 3.25 | 1.64 | high |
| DI product overall | 3.44 | 1.33 | high |

Regarding product differentiation, as Table 13 demonstrates, English language teachers seem to practise it with high frequency ($M = 3.44$). They mostly employ “creating assignments that offer format options”, whereas the least practised items were “evaluating each student based on his/her improvement during the semester” and ‘I adjust assignment deadlines in response to individual students’ needs and/or circumstances.’ This aspect could stem from the framework that the MOE provides for teachers to follow because it commits teachers to a certain assessment plan.

In the interviews, almost all teachers indicated that they assign their students identical tasks due to adherence to the Ministry of Education’s (MOE) scheme of work, contrary to what was reported in the questionnaires. Participant T7 stated:

‘We are asked to follow the guidelines of MOE... when the headmaster come and see our tasks he says, Your business is to stick to the course book because we follow certain objectives and outcomes from MOE to administration and to the school... Some parents come to school to complain’.

Another teacher, T6, mentioned, ‘I use the same task if it is graded, and different tasks if it is not graded’. Moreover, 6 out of 10 teachers reported not designing assignments in different formats as they must comply with the MOE’s assessment plan. Participant T8 pointed out, *‘We do not have a choice... I mean the assessment rubric is clear’, and Participant T9 added, *‘I use the same worksheets because I am obliged to by the MOE, as they send a committee to check our assessments’.

Nevertheless, 2 out of 10 teachers mentioned independent reading as an assignment where students have the freedom to either read or listen to stories to answer reading questions. These two indicated that they do provide students with assignments in different formats. Furthermore, contradicting the questionnaire results, all interviewed teachers stated they set a fixed deadline for all students but are flexible with low achievers and those with valid excuses. Participant T5 remarked, *‘I think all students deserve the same chance regarding time’.

Additionally, all interviewed teachers admitted they do not use multiple types of assessments to evaluate their students, which conflicts with the findings of the questionnaires. They noted that they must administer the same tests for all students. Participant T9 explained ‘I use the ones specified by the MOE... I do not believe that supervisors would approve any changes.’ In the same vein, Participant T1 clarified:

‘I use the same assessment, and sometimes the MOE provides us with the tests and exams, so our hands are tied by a document called the Students Assessment Handout (SAH), which details every aspect of how and what to assess students.’

Table 14. Means and Standard Deviations of Teachers’ Practices of Environment Differentiation

| Statement | M | SD | Level |
|---|------|------|-----------|
| 1. ‘I take deliberate efforts to ensure that every student is engaged in my lesson.’ | 4.36 | 0.63 | very high |
| 2. ‘I take deliberate efforts to enhance my students’ positive attitude/motivation towards English.’ | 4.29 | 0.66 | very high |
| 3. ‘I take deliberate efforts to ensure that every student feels safe, welcome and respected in the classroom.’ | 4.26 | 0.69 | very high |
| 4. ‘I use activities that develop a sense of community among students.’ | 3.99 | 0.92 | high |
| 5. ‘I arrange my classroom (e.g., displays, seating) according to my students’ preferences.’ | 3.66 | 1.23 | high |
| DI environment overall | 4.12 | 0.83 | high |

As Table 14 shows, EFL teachers highly practised environment differentiation ($M = 4.12$), putting emphasis on ‘ensuring that every student feels safe, welcome and respected in the classroom’, ‘ensuring that every student is engaged in the lesson’ and ‘enhancing students’ positive attitude towards English’. The least practised environment differentiation way was ‘arranging classrooms according to the students’ preferences. This dynamic could derive from teachers’ authority in the classroom – they might think that they know what is best for their students without asking them or properly analysing their wants and needs.

Participants emphasized creating a positive environment using active learning, interactive games, humour, and encouraging student expression. Six out of ten teachers occasionally rearrange classrooms based on student preferences to create comfort and refresh the space. However, four teachers noted that large class sizes make this process time-consuming and noisy.

4.2.1 Discussion of Teachers’ Practices of Differentiated Instruction Approach

The findings of Ferdousy (2017) support this study’s conclusions on differentiated instruction practices. Both studies noted that varying task complexity was common, but additional time for some students was often viewed negatively by institutions and parents. Ferdousy also

observed that it was rare for teachers to provide material choices or assignment options. Similarly, Islam (2011) found teachers relied on a single textbook. Ferdousy (2017) and Jahan (2011) both reported that teachers seldom differentiated tests or tasks according to the DI approach. Regarding environment differentiation, Ferdousy noted that teachers created comfortable learning spaces, whereas Jahan found such environments increased student anxiety and lowered confidence. Tzanni (2018) also reported prioritizing environment differentiation over content, process, or product due to less need for extensive preparation. Factors like classroom facilities and training can limit teachers' pedagogical choices (Gregory & Chapman, 2013), possibly preventing differentiation in these areas.

4.3 The Relationship between EFL Teachers' Beliefs on and Practices of the Differentiated Instruction Approach

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed to explore the relationships between EFL teachers' beliefs and practices regarding differentiating content, process, product, and environment.

Table 15. Means, Standard Deviation, and Correlation Coefficient for Teachers' Beliefs on and Practices of Differentiated Instruction

| DI element | M | SD | r ^a | r ² |
|----------------------|-------|------|----------------|----------------|
| Total practice | 3.76 | 0.80 | | |
| Total beliefs | 4.27 | 0.33 | .57 | 32.83% |
| Content practice | 27.46 | 5.04 | | |
| Content beliefs | 29.98 | 3.00 | .55 | 29.92% |
| Process practice | 32.25 | 8.16 | | |
| Process beliefs | 36.89 | 4.07 | .52 | 27.04% |
| Product practice | 13.77 | 4.97 | | |
| Product beliefs | 16.92 | 1.63 | .47 | 21.62% |
| Environment practice | 20.58 | 3.38 | | |
| Environment beliefs | 27.04 | 2.66 | .23 | 5.19% |

^aCorrelation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

To answer the third question, as Table 15 indicates, the results showed a large, positive, statistically significant relationship between beliefs and practices of DI ($r = 0.57$). Concerning the elements of DI, there was a large, positive, statistically significant relationship between beliefs and practices in content differentiation ($r = 0.55$, $r^2 = 29.92%$), and process differentiation ($r = 0.52$, $r^2 = 27.04%$). There was a moderate relationship between EFL teachers' beliefs and practices in product differentiation ($r = 0.47$, $r^2 = 21.62%$). In addition, there were small, positive, statistically significant relationships between beliefs and practices in environment differentiation ($r = 0.23$, $r^2 = 5.19%$).

Although the study showed a link between teachers' beliefs and practices, interview data contradicted this. Teachers' views on differentiated instruction (DI) did not align with their questionnaire responses. For content differentiation, they believed in using varied materials but reported using a standard curriculum from the MOE. In process differentiation, they supported giving students choices but indicated otherwise in interviews, and they thought allowing student choice led to chaos. For product differentiation, despite valuing individual progress assessment, they followed MOE's plan and never adjusted assignment deadlines. In environment differentiation, while believing in arranging classrooms based on student preferences, most did not involve students in these decisions.

Other researchers found similar results—teachers differentiated instruction less in practice than their beliefs suggest (Bourini, 2015; Santangelo & Tomlinson, 2012; Sougari & Mavroudi, 2019; Tzanni, 2018).

4.4 Effects of Gender on Differentiated Instruction

To answer the fourth question with respect to gender, an independent-samples *t*-test compared the use of DI among male and female teachers.

Table 17. Independent-Samples t-Test Results for Differences between Male and Female Teachers in Differentiated Instruction

| DI's element | Male (n = 158) | | Female (n = 180) | | T | p |
|--------------------------------|----------------|------|------------------|------|--------|------|
| | M | SD | M | SD | | |
| 1. Product differentiation | 3.18 | 1.32 | 3.67 | 1.12 | -3.600 | .000 |
| 2. Content differentiation | 3.79 | .72 | 4.03 | .70 | -3.064 | .002 |
| 3. Process differentiation | 3.46 | .92 | 3.69 | .88 | -2.446 | .015 |
| 4. Environment differentiation | 4.02 | .67 | 4.19 | .67 | -2.375 | .018 |
| Total practice | 3.62 | 0.83 | 3.89 | 0.75 | -3.077 | .002 |

The results showed significant differences between males and females regarding content, process, product, and environment differentiation as Table 17 illustrates. The results showed a significant difference between male and female teachers in using DI favouring female teachers. The highest points of differentiation lay in product ($p < .001$) and content ($p < .01$), followed by process ($p < .05$), then environment ($p < .05$); all these factors favoured females. All four elements had small effect size – content ($\eta^2 = 0.027$), process ($\eta^2 = 0.018$), product ($\eta^2 = 0.04$), and environment ($\eta^2 = 0.017$). This result is in line with Melesse's (2015) findings that female teachers were better at practicing DI than males. He explained this dynamic by arguing that females are better at handling students' diversified needs than males because they are mothers. However, further research is needed to validate this conclusion.

4.5 Effects of Experience on Differentiated Instruction

To answer the fourth question regarding teaching experience, a one-way analysis of variance was conducted to examine differences in DI practice with respect to teachers' experience.

Table 18. Results of One-Way ANOVA Test for the Differences in the Four Elements of DI According to Teaching Experience

| Teachers' practice | SS | Df | MS | F | Σ |
|--------------------|--------|-----|-------|--------|------|
| 1. Content | | | | | |
| Between Groups | 3.81 | 2 | 1.91 | 3.730 | .025 |
| Within Groups | 171.04 | 335 | 0.51 | | |
| Total | 174.85 | 337 | | | |
| 2. Process | | | | | |
| Between Groups | 13.16 | 2 | 6.58 | 8.353 | .000 |
| Within Groups | 263.84 | 335 | 0.79 | | |
| Total | 277.00 | 337 | | | |
| 3. Product | | | | | |
| Between Groups | 31.42 | 2 | 15.71 | 10.753 | .000 |
| Within Groups | 489.37 | 335 | 1.46 | | |
| Total | 520.78 | 337 | | | |
| 4. Environment | | | | | |
| Between Groups | 6.73 | 2 | 3.36 | 7.656 | .001 |
| Within Groups | 147.12 | 335 | .44 | | |
| Total | 153.85 | 337 | | | |

The results showed statistically significant differences in all DI elements as they relate to experience. It is clear from Table 18 that teaching experience had moderate effects on product and process differentiation, with $p < 0.001$ ($\eta^2 = 0.06$) and $p < 0.001$ ($\eta^2 = 0.047$), respectively. In addition, teaching experience had a small effect on both environment differentiation ($p < 0.01$, $\eta^2 = 0.04$) and content differentiation ($p < 0.05$, $\eta^2 = 0.02$).

Table 19. Means and Standard Deviations of Participants' Experience Regarding the Four Elements of Differentiated Instruction, along with Tukey's Test Results

| DI's elements and amount of experience | M | SD | Tukey's test results with respect to amount of experience | | |
|--|----------|----|---|---------|--------------|
| | | | Less than 5 | 5-10 | More than 10 |
| 1. Content | | | | | |
| Less than 5 | 4.050.81 | | | .244* | .055 |
| 5-10 | 3.800.68 | | | | -.189 |
| More than 10 | 3.990.69 | | | | |
| 2. Process | | | | | |
| Less than 5 | 3.910.78 | | | .516*** | .304 |
| 5-10 | 3.390.93 | | | | -.212 |
| more than 10 | 3.610.89 | | | | |
| 3. Product | | | | | |
| Less than 5 | 3.940.89 | | | .794*** | .445* |
| 5-10 | 3.151.31 | | | | -.349 |
| More than 10 | 3.491.24 | | | | |
| 4. Environment | | | | | |
| Less than 5 | 4.260.73 | | | .305** | .034 |
| 5-10 | 3.960.63 | | | | -.271** |
| More than 10 | 4.230.64 | | | | |

Note. DI = differentiated instruction. Amount of experience measured in years.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 19 presents means and standard deviations of DI practice for participants with less than 5 years of experience, 5 to 10 years of experience, and more than 10 years of experience, along with the results of Tukey's test. Post hoc comparisons using Tukey's test indicated a statistically significant difference in content differentiation between teachers with less than 5 years of experience and those with 5 to 10 years of experience ($p < .05$), favouring teachers with less than 5 years of experience. There were also statistically significant differences in process differentiation between participants with less than 5 years of experience and those with 5 to 10 years of experience ($p < .001$), favouring participants with less than 5 years of experience. In product differentiation, there were statistically significant differences between participants with less than 5 years of experience and those with 5 to 10 years of experience ($p < .001$), favouring teachers with less than 5 years of experience. There were also statistically significant differences between participants with less than 5 years of experience and those with more than 10 years of experience ($p < .05$), favouring those with less than 5 years of experience. In environment differentiation, there were statistically significant differences between teachers with less than 5 years of experience and those with 5 to 10 years of experience ($p < .01$), favouring teachers with less than 5 years of experience. There were also statistically significant differences between teachers with 5 to 10 years of experience and those with more than 10 years of experience ($p < .01$), favouring those

with more than 10 years of experience. The contradictions in the results between less and more years of experience effects on DI may derive from another factor as discussed in the following discussion.

4.5.1 Discussion of Teaching Experience Effects on Differentiated Instruction

The influence of teaching experience on differentiated instruction (DI) aligns with Gurrett's (2017) study, which showed a significant impact. However, it contradicts Moosa & Shareefa (2019) and Paraskeva (2020), who found no relation between experience and DI implementation. Hobson (2008) also found no statistically significant relationship between teachers' experience and their use of DI after workshops. Qualifications may affect DI use, as Paraskeva (2020) reported that less experienced participants with master's degrees practiced DI more frequently than their experienced peers. Similarly, Suprayogi and Godwin (2017) noted differences in DI implementation based on experience and gender. Thus, the variation in previous studies may stem from a combination of experience, qualifications, or other factors. Moosa and Shareefa (2019) emphasized that innovative strategies like DI require purposeful effort, appropriate knowledge, and determination, rather than happening naturally from daily work.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the beliefs that EFL teachers in public schools in Oman hold about Differentiated Instruction (DI) and the extent to which they practice DI as perceived by them. The findings indicate that while DI is not yet a common practice among English language teachers in Oman, EFL teachers hold strong beliefs about its effectiveness and its various elements. This positive attitude towards DI is encouraging for its future implementation. The study revealed that teachers practiced environment differentiation more frequently than content, process, or product differentiation. However, there was a discrepancy between teachers' reported practices in the questionnaire and their views expressed during interviews. This suggests that while teachers believe in the principles of DI, there may be challenges in its practical application. Significant differences were observed in DI practices based on teaching experience and gender, with female teachers differentiating instruction more than their male counterparts in all four elements. These findings highlight the need for targeted professional development and support to help teachers effectively implement DI in their classrooms. Overall, this study provides valuable insights into the current state of DI in Omani public schools and underscores the importance of addressing the challenges teachers face in its implementation. Future research should focus on developing strategies to support teachers in overcoming these challenges and enhancing the quality of teaching through DI.

5.1 Study Limitations

The study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. Firstly, the study focuses on teachers' beliefs and self-reported practices of differentiated instruction (DI) without including direct classroom observations, which limits the ability to verify actual DI implementation. Additionally, the study does not account for potential regional differences in educational practices, resources, and support for DI. Furthermore, the study was conducted within a specific timeframe, which may not capture the long-term effects and sustainability of DI practices. Lastly, external factors such as policy changes, administrative support, and professional development opportunities that may influence teachers' beliefs and practices of DI were not considered.

5.2 Recommendations for Future Research

This study serves as a foundation for future research on the DI approach and gives an overview of the status of its use in the Omani context. The topic requires further research to investigate the benefits of implementing DI more deeply. Researchers could examine the following topics:

- Teachers' practices of DI through classroom observation and an analysis of students' work to have a solid conclusion
- DI's effects on students' overall achievements in English language
- DI's effects on specific skills such as writing, reading, listening, and speaking
- The impact of other variables such as age, qualification, place of graduation, and knowledge of DI
- Challenges related to students' interests, readiness, and learning profiles
- DI's impact on other subjects and other educational phases such as cycle one, post-basic, and higher education
- Ways to make DI more feasible for teachers – for example, by using technology
- English language teachers' practices of DI in private schools, comparing findings from private and public schools
- English language supervisors' and school administrators' perceptions of or contribution to DI implementation
- The role of pre-service and in-service teacher-training programmes in promoting DI implementation

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