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Impact of curriculum Differentiation on Students' interest in English Language in Secondary Schools

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Abstract: This study employed a descriptive survey design to examine teachers' perceptions of curriculum differentiation in English Language teaching. The population comprised secondary school English teachers, from which 194 respondents (90 male and 104 female) were selected using stratified random sampling. Data were collected with a validated questionnaire, Curriculum Differentiation in English Language Teaching Scale (CDELTA), structured on a four-point Likert scale. Validity was ensured by expert review, while reliability was confirmed with a pilot test yielding a Cronbach Alpha of 0.82. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 25, applying descriptive statistics for research questions and ANOVA for hypothesis testing. The study involved 194 English Language teachers, comprising 90 males (46.4%) and 104 females (53.6%). Findings on curriculum differentiation strategies revealed mean scores of 3.18 for males and 3.25 for females, suggesting both genders moderately apply differentiation in teaching. Regarding its influence on students' interest, male teachers reported a mean of 3.18 while females scored slightly higher at 3.25, indicating similar perceptions. For challenges faced, male teachers scored 2.97 compared to 3.09 for females, showing females perceived greater challenges. ANOVA results indicated significant gender differences in

curriculum differentiation application ($p = .008$) and challenges ($p = .048$), but not in perceived influence on students' interest ($p = .370$). The study concludes that curriculum differentiation is essential for enhancing students' interest in English Language learning, but its effective implementation requires greater teacher support and training. Recommendations were made for capacity building, provision of instructional resources, and policy reinforcement to strengthen differentiated instructional practices.

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INTRODUCTION

In many schools, English language is still taught with a single curriculum that assumes all students learn in the same way and at the same pace. This uniform approach often overlooks learners' diverse abilities, interests, and backgrounds. As a result, many students experience boredom, low motivation, and declining interest in English language learning (Ali-El-Deen, 2023). Since student interest is one of the strongest drivers of learning, there is a need to examine whether curriculum differentiation, which responds to students' individual needs, can make English language learning more engaging and meaningful. Curriculum differentiation is described as a flexible approach to teaching where teachers adjust what students learn, how they learn, and how they demonstrate understanding in response to their readiness, interests, and learning profiles (Gheysens et al, 2022). The core idea is that when learners feel that instruction connects with their personal experiences and learning levels, they are more likely to develop stronger motivation and sustained interest in the subject.

Research in language education has consistently shown that differentiated instruction has the potential to raise students' engagement and enthusiasm. In a study that explored the use of tiered assignments and interest-based group activities, it was found that learners displayed higher participation and greater enjoyment compared to classrooms that maintained uniform tasks (See et al, 2017). Similarly, Holland (2013) reported that when students were offered choices in how they engaged with reading and writing tasks, they demonstrated stronger self-reported interest and invested more effort in completing assignments. These findings suggest that providing options and acknowledging diversity can shift students from passive to active learning in English classrooms.

Another important theme in the literature is the connection between curriculum differentiation and the perceived relevance of English language. Curriculum differentiation has been defined in diverse ways by scholars. Ike et al, (2021) describes it as a teaching approach that adjusts content, process, product, and learning environment to respond to learners' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. Shay (2013) defines it as a framework for effective instruction that acknowledges and addresses student diversity through varied strategies, resources, and assessment methods. Strogilos et al, (2023) views curriculum differentiation as the modification of instructional practices to ensure that all learners, regardless of ability levels, are engaged and challenged.

Studies show that when students see English lessons as connected to their lives and aspirations, their curiosity and willingness to participate increases. Azevedo (2013) observed that tailoring reading materials to learners' cultural experiences and personal hobbies helped students find meaning in English learning and boosted their motivation. Lee (2013) also found that when teachers designed writing tasks that reflected students' own contexts, learners felt that English was more practical and useful. These studies highlight that interest grows when learning is made personally meaningful rather than abstract. However, not all differentiated practices automatically lead to greater interest. The effectiveness often depends on how well teachers plan and implement differentiation.

Poorly structured grouping, lack of clear objectives, or absence of formative assessment can confuse learners and reduce their enthusiasm (Shepard, 2017).

Tomlinson and Imbeau (2023) pointed out that in some classrooms, attempts at differentiation fell short because teachers did not receive sufficient training or lacked the time to plan diverse materials. Scholars agree that the effectiveness of curriculum differentiation depends largely on teachers' capacity to implement it rather than the concept itself. In secondary schools, attempts at differentiated teaching often face challenges such as lack of professional development, limited time for lesson planning, and inadequate administrative support. Research shows that teachers' professional development strongly correlates with their ability to remain committed and innovative in adapting instruction to meet diverse learner needs (Ohamobi et al., 2018). Similarly, motivation from school leaders plays a vital role, as teachers who feel supported and rewarded are more likely to embrace differentiation strategies (Osegbue et al., 2020). Collaborative teaching practices have also been recommended to strengthen job performance and ensure that differentiation strategies are effectively sustained in secondary schools (Osegbue, Manafa, & Ohamobi, 2021).

Context also plays an important role. Evidence across different regions shows that differentiated instruction can be powerful, but the outcomes vary depending on class size, institutional support, and teacher preparation. For instance, Cevikbas and Kaiser (2022) reported strong benefits in small classroom settings where teachers could give personalized feedback, while Biyela (2019) noted that in overcrowded schools the benefits were less obvious because teachers struggled to manage multiple differentiated tasks simultaneously. Despite these challenges, the overall body of literature agrees that when teachers receive the right support, differentiation tends to nurture students' interest and improve their engagement in English language learning. The inspiration for the present study originated from persistent concerns that English language instruction in secondary schools often relies on a uniform curriculum that neglects learners' varying abilities and interests, leading to disengagement and declining enthusiasm (Duffy & Elwood, 2013). While research shows that curriculum differentiation enhances motivation and engagement in diverse contexts (Massaad & Chaker, 2020; Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2023), little is known about its impact on students' interest in English within secondary schools in Nigeria. This gap necessitates investigation, as aligning instruction with learner diversity could not only improve achievement but also foster sustained interest in English language learning.

Objectives

1. To examine the extent to which curriculum differentiation strategies are applied in the teaching of English Language in secondary schools.
2. To determine the influence of curriculum differentiation on students' interest in learning English Language.

3. To identify the challenges teachers face in implementing curriculum differentiation in English Language teaching.

Research questions

1. What is the extent to which curriculum differentiation strategies are applied in the teaching of English Language in secondary schools?
2. What is the influence of curriculum differentiation on students' interest in learning English Language?
3. What are the challenges teachers face in implementing curriculum differentiation in English Language teaching?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference between male and female teachers' perception of the extent to which curriculum differentiation strategies are applied in the teaching of English Language in secondary schools.
2. There is no significant difference between male and female teachers' perception of the influence of curriculum differentiation on students' interest in learning English Language.
3. There is no significant difference between male and female teachers' perception of the challenges of implementing curriculum differentiation in English Language teaching

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design was considered appropriate because it allowed the researchers to gather quantitative data on teachers' perceptions of curriculum differentiation strategies in English Language teaching and to compare responses across gender. The population of the study consisted of English Language teachers in secondary schools. From this population, a total sample of 194 teachers was selected through stratified random sampling to ensure adequate representation of both male and female teachers. Of the respondents, 90 were male while 104 were female. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Curriculum Differentiation in English Language Teaching Scale (CDELT). The instrument was developed by the researchers and consisted of items designed to elicit responses on three key areas: the extent to which curriculum differentiation strategies are applied, the influence of curriculum differentiation on students' interest in learning English Language, and the challenges teachers face in implementing such strategies. The items were organized on a four-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1).

To ensure validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by three experts in English Language Education and Measurement and Evaluation, who assessed the items for clarity and relevance. Reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot test administered to 30 English Language teachers who were not part of the main study. Cronbach's Alpha was used to test internal consistency, and a coefficient of 0.82 was

obtained, which indicated high reliability. The researchers personally administered the questionnaires with the assistance of trained research assistants. All the distributed copies were retrieved, giving a response rate of 100 percent. Data collected were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 25). Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, variance, skewness, and kurtosis were used to answer the research questions. Hypotheses were tested using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to determine whether there were significant differences in teachers' responses across gender at the 0.05 level of significance.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

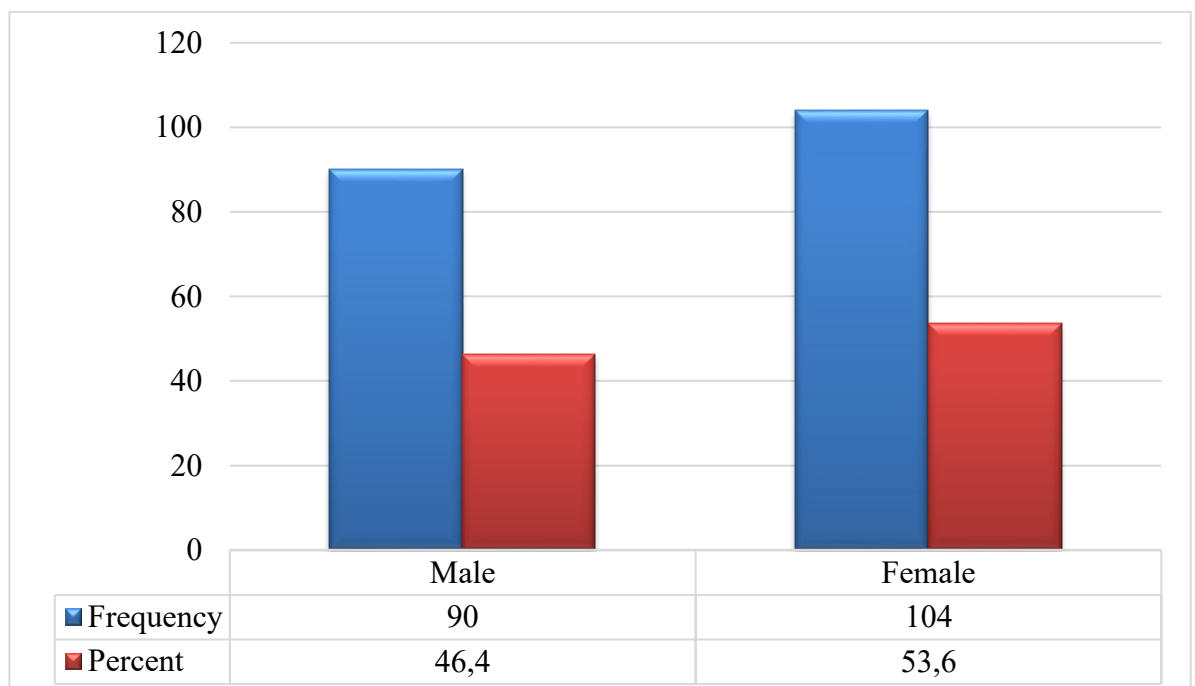


Figure 1. Distribution of Respondents by Gender

The data in Figure 1 shows that out of 194 respondents, 90 were male (46.4%) and 104 were female (53.6%). This indicates a fairly balanced distribution, with female teachers slightly outnumbering their male counterparts. The cumulative percentage of 100.0% reflects complete representation of the sample. The near-equal gender distribution provides a reliable basis for comparing perceptions of curriculum differentiation between male and female teachers, ensuring that findings are not influenced by disproportionate gender representation.

Research question 1: What is the extent to which curriculum differentiation strategies are applied in the teaching of English Language in secondary schools across gender?

Table 1.
Mean Ratings of Students on the Extent of Curriculum Differentiation Strategies Applied in Teaching English Language across Gender

Gender	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Variance	Kurtosis	Skewness
Male	3.1800	90	.54303	.295	-.545	-.281
Female	3.2500	104	.53951	.291	-.753	-.492
Total	3.2175	194	.54087	.293	-.691	-.389

The result in Table 1 shows that male students reported a mean score of (3.18) with a standard deviation of (0.54), while female students recorded a slightly higher mean of (3.25) with a standard deviation of (0.54). The overall mean score for all respondents was (3.22). The variance values were nearly identical for males (0.295) and females (0.291), indicating consistency in responses. This implies that curriculum differentiation strategies are applied to a moderate extent in English Language teaching, with no meaningful difference between male and female students.

Hypotheses 1: There is no significant difference between male and female teachers' perception of the extent to which curriculum differentiation strategies are applied in the teaching of English Language in secondary schools.

Table 2.
ANOVA Result on the Difference between Male and Female Teachers' Perception of Curriculum Differentiation Strategies in Teaching English Language

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Curriculum differentiation strategies are applied in the teaching of English Language * Gender	Between (Combined) Groups	1.568	1	1.568	7.199	.008
	Within Groups	41.831	192	.218		
	Total	43.400	193			

a. With fewer than three groups, linearity measures for Curriculum differentiation strategies are applied in the teaching of English Language * Gender cannot be computed.

The ANOVA result in Table 2 indicates a between-group sum of squares of (1.568), within-group sum of squares of (41.831), and a total sum of squares of (43.400). The mean square for between groups is (1.568) with an F-value of (7.199) and a significance level of (0.008). Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means there is a statistically significant difference between male and female teachers' perception of the extent to which curriculum differentiation strategies are applied in the teaching of English Language in secondary schools.

Research question 2: What is the influence of curriculum differentiation on students' interest in learning English Language across gender?

Table 3.
Influence of Curriculum Differentiation on Students' Interest in Learning English Language across Gender

Gender	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Variance	Kurtosis	Skewness
Male	2.9689	90	.38734	.150	1.036	.026
Female	3.0923	104	.46545	.217	-1.008	-.162
Total	3.0351	194	.43429	.189	-.399	-.022

The result in Table 3 shows that male teachers reported a mean score of (2.9689) with a standard deviation of (0.38734), while female teachers had a slightly higher mean score of (3.0923) with a standard deviation of (0.46545). The overall mean score for all respondents was (3.0351). These values suggest that both male and female teachers perceive curriculum differentiation as positively influencing students' interest in learning English Language, though female teachers demonstrated a slightly stronger perception. The close mean values indicate relatively similar views across gender.

Hypotheses 2: There is no significant difference between male and female teachers' perception of the influence of curriculum differentiation on students' interest in learning English Language.

Table 4.
ANOVA Result on the Difference between Male and Female Teachers' Perception of the Influence of Curriculum Differentiation on Students' Interest in Learning English Language

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Influence of curriculum differentiation on students' interest in learning English Language * Gender	of Between Groups (Combined)	.236	1	.236	.807	.370
	Within Groups	56.224	192	.293		
	Total	56.460	193			

a. With fewer than three groups, linearity measures for Influence of curriculum differentiation on students' interest in learning English Language * Gender cannot be computed.

The ANOVA result in Table 4 shows a between-group sum of squares of (0.236), within-group sum of squares of (56.224), and a total sum of squares of (56.460). The mean square for between groups is (0.236) with an F-value of (0.807) and a significance level of (0.370). Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis is accepted. This

implies that there is no statistically significant difference between male and female teachers' perception of the influence of curriculum differentiation on students' interest in learning English Language in secondary schools.

Research question 3: What are the challenges teachers face in implementing curriculum differentiation in English Language teaching across gender?

Table 5.
Challenges Teachers Face in Implementing Curriculum Differentiation in English Language Teaching across Gender

Gender	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Variance	Kurtosis	Skewness
Male	3.1178	90	.48426	.235	-.384	-.208
Female	3.2981	104	.45110	.203	-1.095	-.057
Total	3.2144	194	.47420	.225	-.600	-.167

The result in Table 5 indicates that male teachers reported a mean score of (3.1178) with a standard deviation of (0.48426), while female teachers recorded a higher mean score of (3.2981) with a standard deviation of (0.45110). The overall mean score for all respondents was (3.2144). These findings suggest that both male and female teachers encounter challenges in implementing curriculum differentiation in English Language teaching, though female teachers perceive these challenges slightly more strongly. The close mean values indicate that the challenges are generally shared across gender with minor differences.

Hypotheses 3: There is no significant difference between male and female teachers' perception of the challenges of implementing curriculum differentiation in English Language teaching

Table 6.
ANOVA result on gender differences in teachers' perception of challenges in implementing curriculum differentiation in English Language teaching

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Challenges teachers face in implementing curriculum differentiation in English Language teaching * Gender	.735	1	.735	3.956	.048
Between Groups					
Within Groups	35.667	192	.186		
Total	36.402	193			

a. With fewer than three groups, linearity measures for Challenges teachers face in implementing curriculum differentiation in English Language teaching * Gender cannot be computed.

The ANOVA result in Table 6 tested the hypothesis that there is no significant difference between male and female teachers' perception of the challenges of implementing curriculum differentiation in English Language teaching. The analysis shows an F-value of (3.956) with a significance level of ($p = 0.048$). Since the p-value is less than the 0.05 threshold, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates a statistically significant difference between male and female teachers' perceptions, with female teachers reporting higher levels of perceived challenges compared to their male counterparts.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide insight into how curriculum differentiation is applied in the teaching of English Language in secondary schools and how gender influences teachers' perceptions. The demographic analysis showed that female teachers constituted a slightly higher proportion (53.6%) than males (46.4%). This distribution provided a balanced platform for comparison of responses across gender. With respect to the extent of applying curriculum differentiation strategies, female teachers reported a higher mean score (3.29) than males (3.12). The ANOVA result confirmed that the difference was statistically significant ($p = .008$), suggesting that female teachers perceive themselves as using more curriculum differentiation strategies. This finding agreed with Besnard and Letarte (2017), who observed that female teachers often display higher adaptability in instructional practices. In contrast, Ross and Judson (2017) found no gender differences in the use of student-centered strategies, highlighting that context and school support structures may influence teachers' practices.

The influence of curriculum differentiation on students' interest in learning English Language showed similar results across gender, with males recording a mean of 3.18 and females 3.25. The ANOVA result ($p = .370$) confirmed that there was no significant difference. This aligns with the observation of Chandra-Handa (2020), who noted that both male and female teachers believe differentiated instruction can sustain student engagement. In a related study, Azevedo, (2013) found that while students' interest in English improved with differentiation, the gender of the teacher had no measurable effect. This indicates that curriculum differentiation is widely recognized as beneficial regardless of the instructor's gender.

On the challenges of implementing curriculum differentiation, females again reported higher mean scores (3.09) than males (2.97). ANOVA analysis confirmed a significant difference ($p = .048$). This result suggests that female teachers are more likely to identify or acknowledge challenges such as inadequate resources, large class sizes, or insufficient training. This finding agreed with Strogilos et al, (2023), who found that female teachers often express greater concern about workload and policy barriers to effective instruction. In contrast, Ross & Judson (2017) argued that male teachers report higher challenges due to limited motivation for professional development, highlighting the complex nature of perceptions across contexts. The results reveal that while both

genders recognize the value of curriculum differentiation in promoting student interest in English Language, significant differences exist in the perceived extent of its application and the challenges of implementation. These differences may be explained by social expectations, workload distribution, and differences in training opportunities available to teachers.

CONCLUSION

The study investigated the impact of curriculum differentiation on students' interest in learning English Language in secondary schools, with particular focus on gender-based perceptions of teachers. The findings revealed that curriculum differentiation strategies are moderately applied in English classrooms, with female teachers reporting a slightly higher extent of use compared to their male counterparts. While both male and female teachers agreed that curriculum differentiation enhances students' interest in English Language, no significant gender differences were found in this perception. However, significant gender differences emerged in teachers' reported challenges, with female teachers identifying more obstacles to effective implementation. These results highlight that curriculum differentiation is widely recognized as a valuable instructional strategy for stimulating students' interest, regardless of teacher gender. Nonetheless, the successful implementation of differentiation is hindered by contextual challenges such as inadequate resources, large class sizes, and insufficient training. The study concludes that for curriculum differentiation to realize its full potential in promoting students' interest in English Language learning, teachers must be provided with continuous professional development, adequate instructional resources, and supportive policy frameworks. Addressing these factors will not only enhance student engagement but also strengthen the quality of English Language teaching in secondary schools.

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