

Effectiveness of differentiated instruction in English for Specific classroom in Hong Kong

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Abstract

The academic benefits of differentiated instruction are supported in western culture, although to date the majority of research done has concentrated in the Middle East and in Greece, and in primary and secondary instruction. Despite its relative novelty in Hong Kong, and the fact that it is under-researched its effectiveness, a pilot study has been conducted at Caritas Institute of Higher Education (CIHE) to explore implementing differentiated instruction in the ESL/EFL Classroom for learners from different educational backgrounds. To examine and determine its effectiveness, all Year 2 Nursing and Social Work students (N = 319) were included in the research study, and the students' English skills were assessed by classifying them by a screening test into 3 ability groups, for each of whom three tiered tasks were assigned for completion at three different points of the semester. At the end of the semester the findings were analysed with t-tests and a post-course student survey to determine the change in comprehension skills, learning motivation, classwork preferences, and study approaches. The relationship between each factor and English skill was assessed using correlation coefficients. The study suggests that differentiated instruction enhances students' English ability in tertiary education in Hong Kong. A significant improvement is observed in both low and mid-level ability students in grammatical and inference-making skills, while the student survey responses reveal students' learning preferences and other related aspects of differentiated instruction in tertiary education to warrant further research.

Keywords: comprehension skills enhancement, differentiated instruction, ELP, ESP, higher education