

Israeli English Teachers' Perspectives on Differentiation and Digital Differentiation in Teaching and Learning (Poster)

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עמדות מורי אנגלית בישראל על בידול ובידול דיגיטלי בהוראה ולמידה (פוסטר)

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Abstract

The Coronavirus enforced worldwide school closures and compulsory move to remote online learning has highlighted the necessity of using technology in schools (Bushweller, 2020) in ways which address individual student's needs (Blau & Barak, 2012) and enable new forms of literacy and communication relevant to the Digital Age (Wadmany, 2017). As schools attempt to prepare students with 21st century skills, student-centered learning strategies, such as differentiation, are gaining momentum. Differentiation is the practice of modifying the subject content, teaching and learning process, learning product or learning environment to better cater to each student's diverse needs (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010). However, to best incorporate technology for differentiation and to advance student learning, professional development is necessary to support teachers in making these changes and to improve their practice (Oddone, Hughes & Lupton, 2019).

This mixed methods study addressed these changes by exploring: (a) the variation among Israeli secondary school English teachers' attitudes towards differentiation and their implementation of differentiation practices; (b) how professional development about differentiation can affect teachers' attitudes; (c) the mapping of teachers' current use of technology for differentiation; and (d) the factors easing and hindering the use of technology for differentiation in teaching and learning.

43 secondary school English teachers from across Israel answered an online questionnaire, with an additional 3 English teachers participating in interviews during March 2020. The data analysis reveals that:

- (a) Despite participants' overwhelmingly positive perspective of differentiation, most teachers implemented differentiation less in practice, often due to external factors and institutional decisions.

- (b) Similar to previous research (Cirocki & Farrel, 2019; Sprott, 2019), professional development can influence teachers' perspectives in addition to giving them tools to change their practice.
- (c) Teachers mostly use technology in substituting (Puentedura, 2010) for non-digital technology rather than transforming (Puentedura, 2010) their educational practice.
- (d) Two key factors in teachers' use of technology in implementing differentiation strategies are: the access (or lack thereof) to functioning technology and teacher knowledge.

The findings of this study suggest that teachers require further training, not just in their content area or in technology, but rather in how to combine innovative pedagogy using technology to teach their content area, thus improving teacher practice (Puentedura, 2010) and transforming our educational institutions for the Digital Age.

Keywords: Differentiation, Student-Centered Learning, Educational Technology, Professional Development.

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