

Teachers' Experiences with Differentiated Instruction in History Learning in Dodoma Secondary Schools, Tanzania.

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Abstract

While inclusive classrooms require flexible teaching approaches, implementation remains inconsistent across Tanzanian secondary schools. This study examined the role of differentiated instructional techniques (DIs) in teaching Ordinary Level History in Dodoma City. Employing a qualitative explorative case study design, data were gathered through focus group discussions, interviews, and classroom observations involving teachers and students across three secondary schools. Findings highlight both pedagogical efficacy and systemic challenges, including curricular rigidity, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient professional development. Although teachers averaged 8.5 years of experience, formal DI training was critically low. Nevertheless, educators demonstrated adaptability through strategies such as peer teaching, simplified reading materials, and advanced primary sources, with Process Differentiation (32.5%) and Content Differentiation (30%) being most common. Overall, structural constraints hindered the full realization of these practices. The study recommends revising the History syllabus to reduce content volume, creating time for tiered assignments and cognitive scaffolding. Additionally, establishing weekly "Differentiation Planning Hours" is proposed to enable teachers to collaborate and co-plan tiered lessons.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Differentiated Instruction, History Teaching, Pedagogy, Student Engagement, Tanzania

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1. Introduction

Education is a vital tool for both personal and societal growth, providing individuals with the knowledge, skills, and values needed to actively participate in social, economic, and political life (Attahakul, P. (2025). In Tanzania, secondary education strives to develop students' cognitive, social, and cultural skills, with subjects like History playing a key role in shaping understanding of societal development, governance, and civic responsibilities (Ndomondo, 2024). Inclusive education, which integrates students with diverse abilities including those with disabilities or learning difficulties presents unique challenges for effective teaching and learning (Al Shoura., & Ahmad, 2020). Teachers must employ instructional methods that accommodate different learning needs to guarantee all students have equal access to quality education (Hermanto., & Pamungkas, 2023).

Differentiated instruction has become a crucial teaching method in inclusive classrooms (Mambetakunov, 2025). This approach involves customizing teaching strategies, content, and assessment techniques to meet students' diverse learning styles, abilities, and interests (Nayak, 2025). In History education, differentiated instructional techniques might include differing ways to present historical material, offering alternative methods for students to show understanding, and creating tasks that align with students' readiness levels (Fachrurozi et al, 2025). By using these techniques, teachers can boost students' engagement, participation, and learning results, ensuring learners of all abilities benefit from the educational experience.

Globally, differentiated instructional techniques (DI) have been shown to enhance learning outcomes in diverse classrooms. Recent studies (McLaughlin, 2025; Shareefa and Magu, 2025; Manzoor et al., 2022) indicate that adapting lessons to meet individual student needs improves comprehension, critical thinking, and retention. For example, McLaughlin (2025) found that the application of DI in international private schools positively influenced student engagement and academic performance. Similarly, Shareefa and Magu (2025) noted that although DI is widely supported globally, empirical investigations in specific subjects, particularly History, remain scarce. Manzoor et al. (2022) further observed that prospective teachers in Pakistan viewed DI favourably, but practical application was limited due to insufficient training and institutional support.

In the African context, differentiated instruction is gaining prominence as a strategy to meet diverse learner needs. De Jager (2023) reported that in South African secondary schools, DI implementation was uneven, largely due to structural challenges and scarce resources. Likewise, Sitabkhan et al. (2022) found that teachers in Kenyan multigrade classrooms attempted to apply differentiated strategies, yet resource constraints and limited professional development hindered full effectiveness. These studies underscore the fact that while DI is recognized as beneficial, practical barriers often restrict its consistent application across African schools (Botha, 2023).

In Tanzania, inclusive education policies such as the Education and Training Policy (2014) and the National Inclusive Education Framework (2017) formally promote the integration of students with

diverse learning abilities, alongside guidance for teacher training, curriculum adaptation, and provision of resources (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, 2014; Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2017). Nonetheless, recent studies reveal that although teachers are aware of DI and its potential benefits, actual classroom implementation is constrained by large class sizes, inadequate professional development, and limited instructional materials (Nguvava & Meremo, 2021).

Moreover, despite the mentioned developments through responsible ministries cited in the paragraph above, there is a distinct lack of empirical research exploring the use of differentiated instructional techniques specifically in History classrooms within Tanzanian inclusive secondary schools. Most existing studies focus on general education or other subjects, leaving gaps in understanding the practical application of DI and teachers' lived experiences both of which are essential for guiding policy and improving teaching practices.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

Inclusive education has increasingly been recognized as a key priority in ensuring equitable access to quality education for all learners, regardless of their abilities or learning needs (Qureshi et al, 2020; Charles & Otieno, 2023; Otieno, 2025). The adoption of differentiated instructional techniques has been widely acknowledged as one of the most effective approaches to supporting diverse learners, particularly in subjects such as History, which demand critical thinking, engagement, and contextual understanding (Qureshi et al, 2020). By tailoring content, teaching methods, and assessments, differentiated instruction can enhance participation and learning outcomes in inclusive classrooms (Rajak & Dey, 2025).

In recognition of this, the Government of Tanzania has taken several initiatives to promote inclusive education. The Education and Training Policy (2014) and the National Inclusive Education Framework (2017) emphasize integration of learners with special needs into mainstream schools, provision of teacher training, curriculum adaptation, and resource allocation to support diverse learners (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, 2014; Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2017). These policies are aligned with international commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goal 4, which advocates for inclusive and equitable quality education for all (Rad et al, 2022).

Despite these initiatives, studies have shown that many teachers lack adequate training and resources to implement differentiated techniques effectively (Lavania & Nor, 2020; Otieno, 2025). Large class sizes, limited instructional materials, and insufficient professional development further constrain teachers' ability to cater for the diverse learning needs of students (Kapinga et al, 2024). As a result, learners with different abilities, particularly those with learning difficulties, often experience exclusion, disengagement, and poor academic outcomes in History classrooms. The magnitude of this problem is evident in Tanzanian classrooms, where inclusive education policies exist in theory but are poorly implemented in practice (Samwel, 2023). Reports indicate that

teachers continue to rely heavily on traditional, teacher-centred techniques that fail to address diverse learning styles, leading to marginalization of some students and limiting their ability to fully participate in History lessons (Adewale et al, 2024).

The significant gap, therefore, lies in the limited empirical evidence on how differentiated instructional techniques are practically applied, perceived, and evaluated for effectiveness within inclusive secondary school History classrooms in Tanzania (Mtweve et al., 2025). This gap between inclusive education policy and its classroom implementation not only undermines the goals of inclusive education but also impedes the achievement of broader educational development outcomes in the History subject. Accordingly, this study seeks to assess how differentiated instructional techniques are being applied in the teaching and learning of History in inclusive secondary schools in Dodoma City. The assessment established the extent of teachers' practices, their effectiveness in enhancing student engagement and achievement, and the key challenges hindering effective implementation through the following research questions: **i)** What differentiated instructional techniques are used by History teachers in inclusive secondary school classrooms? And **ii)** how do differentiated instructional techniques influence student engagement in the History subject among diverse learners in inclusive secondary school classrooms in Dodoma city?

2. Literature review

2.1. The Instructional Techniques Used by History Teachers in Inclusive Secondary School Classrooms

A study by Tiantian Wang and Guoxiu Tian (2023) titled "Linking Distributed Leadership with Differentiated Instruction in Inclusive Schools: The Mediating Roles of Teacher Leadership and Professional Competence" was conducted in inclusive secondary schools in Beijing, China. The methodology involved a large-scale survey of 780 in-service educators, examining how principals' distributed leadership practices impacted teachers' use of differentiated instruction (DI), with teacher leadership and professional competence as mediators. Findings revealed that stronger distributed leadership by principals was directly associated with greater use of differentiated instructional techniques by teachers; moreover, teacher leadership and professional competence sequentially mediated this relationship. The authors concluded that leadership structures play a pivotal role in enabling DI in inclusive classrooms and recommended ongoing professional development and structural support for teacher leadership in inclusive settings. However, the study did not focus specifically on History teaching, leaving a gap regarding how DI techniques are applied in subject-specific contexts like History.

Moreover, a study by Meijie et al, (2024) titled "Differentiated Instruction in Chinese Primary and Secondary Schools: A Systematic Literature Review" investigated differentiated instruction practices across primary and secondary schools in mainland China. The authors reviewed 45 empirical articles published between 2000 and 2022, and identified recurring strategies such as flexible grouping, tiered instruction, and multiple forms of evaluation. They also found major

barriers: large class sizes and examination-oriented culture. Their conclusion was that although DI is recognized, its practical implementation remains incomplete and subject-specific studies are scarce. They recommend reducing class sizes and investing in teacher training. The gap here is the lack of focused empirical research into DI within individual subjects (such as History) and in inclusive secondary school contexts specifically.

In an African context, a study by Monica Gakii Ituma (2025) titled ‘The Use of Differentiated Instruction to Achieve Culturally Responsive Teaching’ was carried out in Kenyan junior schools. The methodology employed a descriptive survey design (questionnaires) of teachers, supplemented by literature review and qualitative data. It found that flexible grouping was used by 81.6% of teachers, presentation of information in varied formats by 79.6%, but fewer teachers (54.4%) allowed students to choose their learning activities. The study concluded that although DI is somewhat practiced, cultural responsiveness and full differentiation remain limited. The authors recommended the development of a framework for culturally responsive differentiated instruction (CRDI) and advanced teacher training. The gap is that this study took place in junior schools rather than secondary inclusive classrooms, and did not focus on History teaching specifically.

Furthermore, a study by Thelma de Jager (2023) titled ‘Evaluating Effective Differentiated Instruction in Multicultural South African Secondary Schools’ focused on 25 public secondary schools in Gauteng Province, South Africa. Using quantitative data from 4,510 students and 424 teachers via questionnaires, the study examined the extent to which DI is applied in multicultural inclusive classrooms. Findings showed that teachers often failed to gauge student understanding or recognise learning difficulties, largely due to inadequate training, large classes, and limited resources. The conclusion emphasised that DI implementation was inconsistent. They recommended targeted professional development, resource allocation, and smaller classes. The gap lies in the focus on general teaching rather than specific to History, and the study did not deeply explore techniques used by History teachers in inclusive settings.

A Tanzanian study by Mercy Nguvava & Meremo (2021) titled ‘Implementation of the Differentiated Instructional Approach among Public Secondary Schools in Mwanza District, Tanzania’ used a mixed-methods convergent parallel design with 98 participants (73 students, 20 teachers, 4 heads of schools, 1 district officer) from 25 secondary schools. The results indicated that although teachers were aware of DI, they did not implement it effectively due to work-related constraints. The study recommended that adequate teaching/learning facilities be provided, and teachers be kept up to date on inclusive instructional approaches. The gap here is that the study did not focus on History teaching, nor did it delve deep into the differentiated techniques utilised in inclusive History classrooms in Tanzania.

Lastly, a more recent Tanzanian study by Milinga et al, (2022) ‘Teachers’ Perceptions of Differentiated Instruction for Academically High-Achieving Secondary School Students in Tanzania’ adopted a multiple case study design to explore how teachers perceive DI. The

researchers found that while teachers valued DI, practical implementation especially for high-achievers was limited and largely focused on ability grouping rather than full differentiation. They concluded that more teacher training in subject-specific DI and better resource support was needed. The gap: this study focused on high-achieving students rather than inclusive classrooms with diverse learners or learners with special needs in History teaching within Tanzania.

These six empirical studies show clear evidence of differentiated instructional techniques being recognized and partly used across global, African, and Tanzanian contexts. However, the key gap for this study is the lack of empirical research specifically addressing the differentiated instructional techniques employed by History teachers in inclusive secondary school classrooms, particularly in Tanzania (and more precisely in Dodoma City). There is limited subject-specific focus (History), limited data on inclusive settings with diverse learners (including those with special needs), and limited research in the Tanzanian inclusive secondary school context focusing on teacher techniques rather than just perceptions or general practice. This gap underpins the significance of the current study.

2.2 The differentiated instructional techniques on students' engagement in History subject within inclusive secondary school classrooms

Groenewald et al. (2024) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis examining the effectiveness of differentiated instruction (DI) in enhancing student learning outcomes across diverse educational settings. The study revealed significant positive impacts of DI on various cognitive abilities, including academic achievement, critical thinking skills, and subject-specific competencies. Analysis also highlighted variability in DI effectiveness across different subjects and grade levels, with high school seniors benefiting the most. The findings underscore the importance of DI in promoting inclusive and effective educational practices. This study is relevant to the current research as it demonstrates the potential benefits of DI in engaging students in History classrooms.

Ardiawan et al. (2024) investigated the impact of differentiated learning materials on students' understanding of nationalism and global diversity in Indonesian secondary schools. The study found that students who used varied learning resources had a greater comprehension of nationalism and global diversity. Furthermore, the independent t-test result confirmed that the differences in understanding were significant. The effect size confirmed that differentiated instruction greatly affects students' understanding of nationalism and global diversity. These findings suggest that differentiated learning materials can enhance student engagement by catering to diverse learning needs. This research is pertinent to the current study as it highlights the role of differentiated materials in engaging students in social studies subjects.

Ramilo and Ting (2025) explored the effectiveness of DI, student engagement, and academic performance in inclusive classrooms within SDO Calamba City, Philippines. The study showed strong support for DI's effectiveness and very high engagement levels. Most students performed

satisfactorily, yet few excelled. While no significant correlation was found between DI and academic performance, moderate and statistically significant correlations emerged between DI and student engagement. These findings suggest that DI can enhance student engagement, even if its impact on academic performance is less pronounced. This study is relevant to the current research as it provides insights into the relationship between DI and student engagement.

Hall (2024) examined how differentiated instruction could help improve student engagement in secondary education. The study found that DI strategies, such as providing choices in learning activities and adjusting content to meet individual needs, led to increased student engagement. Students reported higher levels of motivation and participation when instruction was tailored to their learning preferences. The study concluded that DI can be an effective approach to enhance student engagement in secondary classrooms. This research is pertinent to the current study as it demonstrates the impact of DI on student engagement.

Lester (2023) investigated the effects of DI on student engagement in secondary education. The study found that DI strategies, including flexible grouping and varied instructional methods, led to increased student engagement. Students reported higher levels of interest and participation when instruction was differentiated to meet their individual needs. The study concluded that DI can effectively enhance student engagement in secondary classrooms. This research is relevant to the current study as it provides evidence of the positive impact of DI on student engagement.

Smets (2024) conducted a subject-specific analysis of DI in history education in the Netherlands. The study found that pre-service history teachers employed various instructional strategies, including collaborative learning and scaffolding, to address student heterogeneity. Students reported increased engagement when lessons were adapted to their learning needs and preferences. The study concluded that DI can enhance student engagement in history education, provided that teachers are adequately prepared to implement these strategies. This research is significant for the current study as it provides insights into the application of DI in history classrooms.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This study anchors its bases into two theories: Tomlinson's Differentiated Instruction Model (2001) and Complementary Theory and Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as described below.

2.3.1 Tomlinson's Differentiated Instruction Model (2001)

This study is guided by Carol Ann Tomlinson's (2001) Differentiated Instruction Model, which provides a systematic and flexible framework for addressing the diverse learning needs of students within inclusive classrooms. According to Tomlinson (2001), effective differentiation involves modifying four essential elements of teaching—content, process, product, and learning environment—to align with learners' readiness levels, interests, and preferred learning styles.

In the context of History teaching, this model provides a lens through which teachers' practices can be examined (Objective One) and how their perceptions of their role as facilitators influence implementation (Objective Two). For Objective Three, the model posits that adjusting these four elements fosters greater learner motivation and achievement. However, as noted by Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010), the model's effectiveness is often dependent on the teacher's ability to manage classroom routines and resources effectively.

2.3.2 Complementary Theory: Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

[mo1] While Tomlinson's model offers the 'how' of differentiation, it assumes a level of resource flexibility that is often constrained in Tanzanian government classrooms by large class sizes and inadequate materials. To remedy this during the interpretation of findings, the study complements Tomlinson's model with Lev Vygotsky's (1978) Social Constructivist Theory, specifically the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

The ZPD is crucial for the Tanzanian context because it emphasizes scaffolding and peer-mediated learning. In a large History classroom in Dodoma City where a teacher may struggle to reach every student individually, the ZPD explains how differentiation can still occur through strategic peer-grouping and the use of more knowledgeable others (MKOs). This ensures that even in resource-constrained settings, instructional adaptation remains effective by leveraging the social diversity of the classroom to foster engagement.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Approach

The study employed a qualitative research design to examine how History teachers implement differentiated instructional techniques (DI) within inclusive secondary school classrooms. A qualitative approach was particularly appropriate as it facilitates the generation of insights and explanations directly from participants' experiences, rather than testing predetermined hypotheses (Haque, 2022). Through interviews and classroom observations, the study elicited patterns, themes, and relationships that illuminated teachers' instructional strategies and the challenges they encounter (Bonner et al., 2021). This methodological orientation enabled the research to capture the complexities and contextual realities of teaching History in inclusive settings, thereby providing a nuanced and in-depth understanding of the factors shaping the adoption and application of DI.

3.2 Research Design

This study employed a case study research design. This design is appropriate when the researcher seeks to gain a deep, contextual understanding of a phenomenon within its real-life setting (Yin, 2018). In this case, the focus is on how differentiated instruction is implemented and experienced in inclusive classrooms, and how it shapes student engagement. As Merriam and Tisdell (2015) argue, qualitative case studies are particularly effective in educational research where the

boundaries between the phenomenon and context are blurred. This design allows for the collection of rich, descriptive data through interviews with teachers and students, classroom observations, and document analysis. It also enables the researcher to capture the complexity of inclusive teaching practices and the nuanced ways in which they affect learner participation and motivation. The study is further grounded in the theoretical framework of differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 2014), which emphasizes the need to tailor teaching strategies to diverse learner needs.

3.3 Study Area

The research was conducted in Dodoma City, the capital of Tanzania, which hosts several ordinary-level inclusive secondary schools. The city was selected due to its diverse population and the adoption of inclusive education policies, making it a suitable setting for investigating DI practices in History classrooms (URT, 2016). The selected schools provided access to both teachers and students, who are directly involved in the implementation and reception of differentiated instructional strategies.

3.4 Target population

The population for this study consisted of ordinary-level History teachers in selected three secondary schools in Dodoma City. These teachers are directly involved in planning, implementing, and adapting differentiated instructional techniques (DI) to accommodate students with diverse learning needs. According to preliminary school records, there are approximately 35 History teachers across the selected schools. These teachers form the complete population from which the researcher drew the sample for the study.

3.4.1 Sampling Technique

The researcher employed a purposive sampling technique to select participants. Purposive sampling ensures that the selected participants can provide rich, relevant, and insightful information about instructional practices, challenges, and strategies in the context of inclusive secondary school classrooms (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach is suitable because it allows the researcher to intentionally choose History teachers who have experience teaching in inclusive classrooms and are familiar with differentiated instructional techniques (DI).

3.4.2 Sample Size

The target population consists of approximately 35 History teachers in the selected inclusive secondary schools. From this population, a sample of 20 teachers were selected for the study. This sample size is sufficient for in-depth exploration of the research objectives and is consistent with qualitative research standards, which prioritize depth and richness of data over statistical representation (Creswell, 2024). The selected sample provided detailed insights into the planning, implementation, and challenges of DI in inclusive History classrooms.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

3.5.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews designed to explore History teachers' experiences, perceptions, and strategies in implementing differentiated instructional techniques (DI). The interviews involve open-ended questions and were conducted with 20–25 purposively selected History teachers in inclusive secondary schools in Dodoma City. The selection was based on three primary criteria: (i) a minimum of three years of teaching experience in inclusive settings to ensure depth of pedagogical insight; (ii) current involvement in teaching History at the secondary level; and (iii) previous participation in professional development or training related to special needs education

Purposive sampling is appropriate because it allows teachers to provide detailed and contextualized explanations of how they plan, implement, and overcome challenges in using DI. The flexibility of semi-structured interviews also enables the researcher to probe further based on participants' responses, providing richer insights into complex instructional practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.5.2 Classroom Observations

In addition, classroom observations were conducted to examine the actual implementation of differentiated instructional techniques during History lessons. The same sample of teachers were observed, focusing on instructional strategies, teacher-student interactions, and adaptations for learners with diverse abilities. Observations provide direct evidence of teaching practices, complementing the information obtained from interviews. This method allows the researcher to capture behaviours and classroom dynamics that may not be fully reported during interviews, thereby enhancing the credibility and accuracy of the study's findings (Fraenkel et al., 2020).

3.5.3 Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted to gather collective insights from History teachers on their shared experiences, perceptions, and challenges in applying differentiated instructional techniques in inclusive secondary school classrooms. Each group comprised 6–8 teachers drawn from different schools to encourage diverse viewpoints. This method fosters interactive dialogue among participants, enabling them to reflect on and build upon each other's ideas. FGDs are particularly useful in identifying common themes, beliefs, and professional practices that may not emerge during individual interviews (Kitzinger, 1995). The discussions were guided by the FGD checklist and lasted approximately 60–90 minutes.

3.6 Research Trustworthiness

To ensure validity, the research tools, including interview guides and observation checklists, were carefully designed based on the study objectives and reviewed by experts in education and inclusive teaching. Pilot testing was conducted with a small group of History teachers outside the

selected schools to refine questions for clarity and relevance, ensuring that the instruments measure what they are intended to capture (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Creswell, 2014).

The study ensured trustworthiness by addressing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement with participants, member checking, and triangulation of interviews and observations. Transferability was achieved by providing rich, detailed descriptions of the context, participants, and instructional practices. Dependability was strengthened by keeping a clear audit trail of data collection and analysis processes, while confirmability was ensured by maintaining neutrality and minimizing researcher bias throughout the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). These measures collectively enhance the integrity and reliability of the study's findings.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

The research process began with securing formal ethical compliance at the university level, where the study's proposal, instruments, and participant protection measures were reviewed and approved by the Institutional Research Ethics Committee (IREC/IRB) under the Directorate of Research, Innovation, and Consultancy (DRIC). Following the issuance of the Ethical Clearance Certificate, the researcher obtained necessary government authorization by presenting the university's credentials to the Regional Administrative Secretary and the Regional Education Officer for Dodoma. This top-down authorization continued through the District Executive Director and District Secondary Education Officer, ultimately culminating in final site access granted by the Heads of Schools at the selected inclusive secondary institutions.

To uphold the integrity and dignity of the participants, the study strictly adhered to core ethical principles throughout the data collection process. Every teacher was provided with a clear explanation of the research purpose and signed an Informed Consent Form, ensuring their participation was entirely voluntary and free from pressure, with the right to withdraw at any time. Furthermore, the researcher guaranteed anonymity by utilizing pseudonyms and coding for all subjects and institutions, while ensuring the principle of beneficence by confirming the study posed no risks. These measures were designed to protect the privacy of the educators while ensuring the research contributes positively to the development of inclusive education practices in Tanzania.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1. Differentiated Instructional Techniques in Inclusive History Classrooms

The findings highlight both the pedagogical efficacy and the curricular rigidity experienced by History teachers in inclusive secondary schools. Eleven teachers across three schools reported adopting differentiated instructional techniques (DI) to address diverse learner needs, despite limited curricular guidance.

Teacher Perspectives

Peer-teaching supports learners with disabilities, yet current curricula fail to recognize it as an effective strategy. This aligns with Tomlinson's (2001) model, which emphasizes adapting content, process, product, and environment to learner readiness and styles as cited below.

"I define differentiation as giving every child a different door to the same room. In my History class, I use peer-teaching where faster learners help those with learning disabilities during the TANU topic." (Teacher A1, Feb 2026)

While peer teaching is positively perceived, there is also evidence of increased engagement demonstrated by the value of flexible grouping and varied instructional methods as noted by (Teacher B1, Feb 2026) below:

"DI is the only way to survive an inclusive class. I've seen a 40% increase in student engagement since I stopped using the 'one-size-fits-all' lecture method."

In line with the above view, the teachers also noted the benefits of tiered instructions to simultaneous engagement across readiness levels, echoing findings by Meijie et al. (2024) in Wang & Tian (2023), which identified recurring strategies such as flexible grouping, tiered tasks, and varied evaluation as cited below.

"I use tiered assignments. I provide simplified reading materials for students with lower reading readiness while giving advanced primary sources to the high-achievers. It keeps everyone engaged simultaneously." (Teacher A4, Jan 2026).

The above cited findings align with Tomlinson's Differentiated Instruction Model (2001): Effective differentiation modifies four elements — content, process, product, and environment — to match learner readiness, interests, and styles. The same is supported by empirical evidenced by Meijie et al.,'s (2024) review of 45 studies that confirm the efficacy of flexible grouping, tiered instruction, and multiple evaluation methods in inclusive classrooms. This implies that the current History curricula remain rigid, offering minimal guidance on differentiation. However, the teachers are bridging this gap by innovating with peer teaching, tiered assignments, and flexible grouping. Evidence suggests these practices enhance engagement and inclusivity, warranting formal integration into curriculum design.

5.2 History teachers' views on the implementation of the differentiated instructional techniques within inclusive secondary school classrooms

The findings reveal a profound paradox between pedagogical ideals and systemic constraints, highlighting a critical tension between the intrinsic value of differentiation and the rigidity of an examination-oriented curriculum. While a majority of History teachers (11 out of 20) recognize the benefits of DI, they remain tethered to traditional structures that prioritize syllabus coverage over inclusive depth.

5.2.1 Pedagogical Efficacy and Curricular Rigidity

Findings indicate that while a majority of History teachers (11 out of 20) recognize the intrinsic value of differentiation, they are simultaneously tethered to a rigid, examination-oriented curriculum. For example, teachers A1 and A4 noted that DI directly correlates with student engagement and performance. Findings indicate that 11 out of 20 History teachers recognize the benefits of DI for student engagement and performance. However, a critical tension persists between "inclusive teaching" and "exam readiness." This aligns with the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory, as teachers attempt to meet students at specific cognitive levels to reduce frustration.

"...I focus on student readiness. If a student struggles with the language of instruction, I differentiate the content by providing summaries in simpler Swahili-English blends to ensure they grasp the historical concepts." (Teacher A7, Feb 2026)

"I observe that students who used to sleep in the back are now the first to raise their hands because I've adjusted the tasks to match their specific ability levels." (Teacher A9, Feb 2026)

This could imply that there is a 'Policy-Practice Gap.' While teachers acknowledge the benefits of DI for inclusion, the high-stakes national assessment system (NECTA) acts as a deterrent. To make DI sustainable, assessment structures must become as flexible as the instructional methods. This tension creates a professional tug-of-war where the desire to be inclusive is often sacrificed at the altar of 'covering the syllabus.' The implementation of Differentiated Instructional Techniques (DI) Dodoma City secondary schools reveals a profound paradox between pedagogical ideals and systemic constraints.

Academically, the positive correlation between DI and student engagement reported by Teachers A1 and A4 aligns with the 'Zone of Proximal Development' theory. When teachers differentiate content and process, they meet students at their specific cognitive levels, thereby reducing the 'frustration level' common in inclusive History classrooms. Evidence suggests that by allowing varied 'entry points' into complex historical topics like the rise of TANU, teachers can stimulate higher-order thinking even among students with diverse learning needs.

However, the 'Policy-Practice Gap' identified in the current study is a significant hurdle. As Teacher A7 aptly noted, the weight of the curriculum acts as a pedagogical anchor. This reflects a broader global challenge where inclusive education policies are often 'bolted on' to existing traditional structures rather than integrated into them. The curriculum remains a linear path that does not account for the non-linear learning trajectories of students in an inclusive setting.

Again, during DI implementation, it was revealed that teachers provide support through larger fonts papers to assist students with low vision, as teacher A9 noted

“Working with the coordinator has helped me modify my History exams. Giving a student with low vision a larger print paper is a form of differentiation that has improved their performance.” (Feb, 2026).

The ‘exam readiness’ concern raised by Teacher A9 highlights a systemic deterrent. In Tanzania, the National Examinations Council (NECTA) employs a standardized assessment model that rarely accommodates differentiated outputs. Consequently, teachers perceive a risk in using DI; they fear that by ‘slowing down’ to ensure deep, differentiated understanding, they might jeopardize their students’ performance on standardized tests which prize breadth over inclusive depth. This reflects what scholars’ term ‘teaching to the test’, a phenomenon that effectively stifles pedagogical innovation. According to Suprayogi et al. (2017), teachers’ implementation of differentiation is heavily influenced by the perceived pressure of high-stakes testing. When the assessment system is rigid, the teacher’s pedagogical flexibility shrinks, leading to a return to traditional, teacher-centred lectures despite the known benefits of DI.

Furthermore, the ‘content scope’ of the History syllabus is perceived as inherently inflexible. Teachers feel that the chronological nature of History education requires a rapid pace to meet national milestones. This creates a ‘utility gap’ where DI is viewed as a luxury for affluent or low-enrolment schools, rather than a fundamental right for students in public inclusive schools in Dodoma. In summary, for DI to move from a ‘special project’ to a standard classroom reality, there must be a shift in how we define ‘academic success.’ If the goal of History education in Tanzania is to foster critical citizenship and inclusive participation, then the assessment must reward the *process* of learning as much as the *product* of a final examination score.

Ultimately, the sustainability of DI in Dodoma depends on ‘Assessment for Learning’ rather than just ‘Assessment of Learning.’ As long as the NECTA results remain the sole metric of school and teacher efficacy, DI will likely remain a peripheral practice used only by the most daring or resourceful educators, leaving the most vulnerable students behind in the rush toward the final exam.

5.2.1 The Infrastructure and Training

Findings reveal inadequacy of a supportive physical and professional development. In this regard even the most motivated History teachers find their inclusive efforts thwarted by systemic ‘bottlenecks.’ For example, Teacher A6 (class size of 90 students) and Teacher A8:

“My administration supports us by providing extra teaching aids. Using these resources to differentiate makes the lesson more of a dialogue than a monologue.”,
(Feb, 2026),

The above represents a significant portion of the barriers. Differentiation, by definition (Tomlinson, 2023, requires a degree of individualization and small-group interaction. In a high-enrolment urban school like those in the current study, the sheer volume of students creates a

‘crowding out’ effect where the teacher is forced into ‘crisis management’ rather than ‘instructional differentiation.’ This could mean that DI cannot succeed through teacher will alone. Without a reduction in teacher-student ratios and targeted Continuous Professional Development (CPD) specifically for History teachers in inclusive settings, DI could remain a ‘tokenistic’ practice rather than a systemic one.

Westbrook supports this finding et al. (2013), who argue that in Sub-Saharan African contexts, the pedagogical space is often dictated by the teacher-to-student ratio. In large classes, the cognitive load on the teacher becomes so high that the specialized monitoring required for DI becomes unsustainable. My study suggests that overcrowding is perhaps the single greatest environmental barrier to the Net Benefits of an inclusive History classroom.

Regarding the training gap, Teacher A8’s admission of lacking specialized skills highlights a critical deficiency in initial teacher education and ongoing professional development. Many History teachers are subject-matter experts but lack specialized pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) for inclusive settings. Without knowing *how* to adapt a History text for a student with a specific learning disability, the teacher’s effort remains a trial and error.

Current literature confirms that ‘one-off’ workshops are ineffective for long-term change. According to Komba and Mwandangi (2015), Continuous Professional Development (CPD) in Tanzania often lacks the subject-specific focus needed for teachers to apply general inclusive theories to their specific disciplines, such as History. This lack of situated training leaves teachers feeling ill-equipped to handle the complexities of a diverse classroom.

The lack of resources, as mentioned by several respondents, creates a material barrier. DI often requires varied reading levels, visual aids, and digital tools—all of which are in short supply in many Dodoma schools. When the only resource is a single textbook and a chalkboard, the teacher’s ability to differentiate the content is practically neutralized. This turns DI into a tokenistic practice rather than a systemic one. It appears that teachers are asked to perform pedagogical miracles without the necessary tools. To expect a teacher to differentiate for 90 students without assistant teachers or adequate resources is to set the policy of Inclusive Education up for failure. The Glass Ceiling is not just about a lack of gadgets; it is about a lack of institutional leadership and resource allocation.

In conclusion, the transition from data entry or syllabus coverage to inclusive evaluation requires a holistic investment. Without a reduction in class sizes and a move toward embedded CPD where History teachers collaborate directly with special education needs coordinators, the implementation of DI in Dodoma Secondary Schools will remain fragmented. Systemic change requires addressing these structural bottlenecks to allow the pedagogical potential of our educators to truly break through the ceiling.

5.3 Exploration of how differentiated instructional techniques influence students' engagement in the History subject within inclusive secondary school classrooms

Based on observations across 10 History lesson periods (40–80 minutes each) in three Secondary Schools, the frequency of specific DI usage was tracked at 10-minute intervals. It was found that Process Differentiation (32.5%) and Content Differentiation (30%) are the most frequently used techniques. However, Environment Differentiation (10%) is largely neglected after the initial lesson setup, often due to rigid classroom furniture and high student density.

Table 5.1: Frequency of DI Implementation (n=40 intervals)

Time Interval	Content (Materials/Sources)	Process (Grouping/Scaffolding)	Product (Output Options)	Environment (Seating/Tools)	None (Traditional)
0-10 mins	2	1	0	4	3
11-20 mins	6	3	0	0	1
21-30 mins	3	7	2	0	0
31-40 mins	1	2	5	0	2
Total	12	13	7	4	6
Intervals					
Percentage %	30%	32.5%	17.5%	10%	15%

Moreover, Table 5.2 provides anecdotal evidence of how teachers adapted their History lessons for diverse learners. It was revealed that content adaptation is primarily linguistic or visual. There is a lack of high-tech assistive devices, meaning teachers rely heavily on manual scaffolding (For example., simplified handouts) to bridge the gap for secondary school students.

Table 5.2: Teachers' Adaptations in History Lessons for Diverse Learners

Construct	Observed Indicator & Notes
I. Content	Teachers used Swahili/English interchangeably to explain complex political terms during the TANU topic. At School A, 'Teacher 2' provided large-print summaries for two students with low vision.
II. Process	'Teacher 5' utilized Think-Pair-Share. One student with a physical disability was paired with a high-achiever to act as a 'scribe,' ensuring the student could participate in the brainstorming process.
III. Product	During a lesson on the Berlin Conference, 'Teacher 1' allowed three students with lower literacy to submit hand-drawn maps with labels instead of the standard 500-word essay.

V. Environment	Classrooms were generally arranged in traditional rows, but ‘Teacher 3’ moved desks into a U-shape during the role-play session to facilitate eye contact and inclusivity.
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The findings presented in Table 5.2 demonstrate that History teachers in Dodoma are engaging in low-tech yet highly resourceful forms of differentiation to bridge pedagogical gaps. The adaptation of content, primarily through linguistic and visual means, highlights a strategic reliance on Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK). By using Swahili and English interchangeably (code-switching) to explain complex political movements like the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), teachers are effectively lowering the language barrier that often excludes students with lower English proficiency from high-level historical discourse. This practice aligns with Multimodal Learning Theory, which suggests that presenting information through multiple channels—linguistic, visual, and social—increases the likelihood of information retention among students with diverse cognitive profiles (Mayer, 2014).

The use of Process Scaffolding, as observed in Teacher 5’s use of the Think-Pair-Share technique, illustrates the importance of social mediation in the inclusive classroom. By pairing a student with a physical disability with a high-achiever to act as a scribe, the teacher shifted the focus from the physical act of writing to the cognitive act of brainstorming. This adjustment ensures that physical limitations do not become intellectual barriers. Such human-centred scaffolding is a direct response to the lack of high-tech assistive devices, such as speech-to-text software, which are often absent in Tanzanian public schools. It confirms that in the absence of digital infrastructure, the peer-tutor model becomes a primary engine of inclusivity (Westbrook et al., 2013).

Furthermore, the differentiation of Product/Assessment observed in Teacher 1’s lesson on the Berlin Conference represents a significant departure from ‘one-size-fits-all’ evaluation. Allowing students with lower literacy to submit labelled hand-drawn maps instead of a standard 500-word essay acknowledges that historical understanding can be demonstrated through various media. This aligns with the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which advocates for multiple means of action and expression (Rose & Meyer, 2002). By providing these alternative output paths, the teacher ensures that a student’s grade reflects their grasp of historical concepts such as the spatial division of Africa rather than their struggle with written syntax.

However, the findings regarding Environment Differentiation reveal a persistent challenge. While Teacher 3’s transition to a U-shaped seating arrangement facilitated inclusivity during role-play, the majority of lessons remained trapped in traditional rows due to overcrowded classrooms. This ‘spatial rigidity’ is a by-product of high teacher-student ratios which make physical movement nearly impossible. While teachers are excelling at Instructional Adaptation (Content, Process, Product), they are severely limited by Infrastructural Stagnation. To move beyond manual scaffolding, there is an urgent need for the Dodoma City Council to invest in basic assistive tools to complement the creative pedagogical efforts observed (Komba, 2020)

5.3.1 Student Engagement Coding

To explore the influence of DI on engagement, four focal students representing different ability levels were tracked using a scale of 1 (Low) to 3 (High). The results reveal that S2 (Struggling Reader): Showed High Behavioural (3) and High Emotional (3) engagement when provided with simplified Swahili summaries. ‘Smiled and raised hand for the first time in the term’ (Field Note, 22 mins). Moreover, S4 (Student): In a lesson on the Maji Maji Rebellion, S4 was given a role in a role-play activity. This led to High Behavioural Engagement, though Cognitive Engagement remained at 2 as they focused more on the performance than the deeper historical causes. In addition, S1 (High Achiever): Engagement remained consistently high when provided with ‘challenge questions,’ preventing the boredom often observed in traditional teacher-led lectures (see Table 5.3).

Table 5.3: Student Engagement

Focal Student ID	Differentiation Activity		Behavioural (BE)	Emotional (EE)	Cognitive (CE)
S1 (High Achiever)	Advanced Source Analysis		3	2	3
S2 (Struggling Reader)	Simplified Handout/Visuals		3	3	2
S3 (Mid-Level)	Peer-Group Discussion		2	2	2
S4 (SEN/Disability)	Tiered Presentation	Oral	3	3	2

In summary, DI acts as a catalyst for emotional and behavioural engagement, particularly for special needs students and struggling students. When the History content was made accessible through role-play or visual aids, participation rates (hand-raising and volunteering) increased by an estimated 50% compared to the introduction phase where traditional lecture methods were used. Again, while Behavioural Engagement was high, Cognitive Engagement (CE) often plateaued at Level 2 for SEN and mid-level students. This suggests that while teachers are successful at making students *active*, they struggle to move them toward *deep critical thinking* within the constraints of an inclusive urban classroom.

The tracking of focal students (S1 through S4) reveals that Differentiated Instructional Techniques (DI) serve as a powerful ‘engagement trigger,’ particularly for learners who are traditionally marginalized in the History classroom. The observed shift in S2 (Struggling Reader), who moved from passivity to high behavioural (3) and emotional (3) engagement upon receiving simplified Swahili summaries, underscores the importance of linguistic accessibility. By reducing the ‘extrinsic cognitive load’ associated with the language of instruction, the teacher allowed the student to redirect mental resources toward historical content. This finding aligns with Self-Determination Theory, which posits that when students perceive a task as achievable

(competence), their intrinsic motivation and emotional investment increase significantly (Mshana, 2021). Comparable studies in East Africa, such as those by Mshana (2021), confirm that inclusive strategies like code-switching and simplified texts are essential for fostering a sense of belonging among struggling readers in overcrowded urban schools.

The high behavioural engagement observed in S4 (Student) during the Maji Rebellion role-play activity highlights the efficacy of Kinesthetic Learning and Dramatization in inclusive settings. By assigning S4 a specific role, the teacher successfully transformed a passive recipient of information into an active participant. However, the plateauing of Cognitive Engagement (CE) at Level 2 suggests a ‘performance-pedagogy gap.’ While the student was physically and emotionally present, the deep critical analysis of historical causality was secondary to the excitement of the performance. This phenomenon is supported by research from Gay (2018) on culturally responsive teaching, which argues that while active participation is a prerequisite for learning, moving from ‘activity’ to ‘intellectual depth’ requires specific scaffolds that connect the performance back to higher-order historical thinking.

For S1 (the High Achiever), the use of ‘challenge questions and advanced source analysis successfully mitigated the boredom typically associated with standardized, teacher-led lectures. By providing a ‘ceiling-less’ learning environment, the teacher maintained S1’s cognitive engagement at a maximum level (3). This finding supports the Schoolwide Enrichment Model, which suggests that high-ability students require differentiated depth and complexity to remain cognitively stimulated. Without such differentiation, gifted students in inclusive classrooms often experience academic stagnation. This finding implies that DI is not merely a remedial tool for struggling students but a necessary mechanism for ensuring that high achievers are pushed toward their full potential within the same classroom space (Tomlinson, 2014).

In summary, while DI resulted in an estimated 50% increase in participation rates compared to traditional methods, the Cognitive Ceiling (CE Level 2) for S2, S3, and S4 remains a significant pedagogical challenge. This suggests that while teachers in Dodoma are proficient in fostering Behavioural and Emotional engagement, they face systemic hurdles—such as large class sizes and limited time—that prevent them from facilitating deep Cognitive Engagement. This finding is consistent with Suprayogi et al. (2017), who found that teachers often prioritize accessible tasks over cognitively demanding tasks when managing diverse ability levels simultaneously. Consequently, for DI to truly transform learning outcomes in Dodoma City, professional development must focus on shifting from active participation to rigorous critical inquiry for all learners regardless of their initial readiness levels.

5.3.2 The influence of Teacher and Specialized Training on DI implementation

A significant finding regarding the teacher profile is the ‘training-experience gap.’ While the average teaching experience was 8.5 years, formal training in DI was critically low. Only 2 out of 10 teachers (20%) had received specific pre-service or in-service training on Differentiated

Instruction. Most teachers (T1, T3, T4, T7, T8, T10) reported that they ‘learned on the job’ or used ‘common sense’ to manage diverse learners rather than evidence-based pedagogical frameworks. However, T2 and T5, who attended a recent NGO-led workshop in Dodoma, demonstrated a much higher vocabulary of DI (For example, scaffolding, "tiered assignments") compared to their peers.

The training-experience gap identified in this study reveals a critical systemic disconnect where professional longevity does not equate to inclusive pedagogical mastery. While the participants averaged 8.5 years of experience, the fact that only 20% possessed formal training in Differentiated Instructional Techniques (DI) suggest that History teachers in Dodoma are operating within a trial-and-error framework. This reliance on common sense and on-the-job learning (as reported by T1, T3, and T7) indicates that without theoretical grounding, differentiation remains reactive rather than proactive. This finding mirrors the expertise paradox described by Komba and Mwandangi (2015), where veteran Tanzanian teachers often rely on traditional, teacher-centred routines because their initial training did not account for the complexities of modern inclusive classrooms. When teachers lack a formal vocabulary—such as scaffolding or tiered assignments—their ability to deliberately design lessons for diversity is replaced by a survivalist approach to classroom management.

Critically, the disparity between the majority and the two teachers (T2 and T5) who attended NGO-led workshops highlights the transformative impact of targeted professional development. The higher vocabulary and strategic implementation observed in these two respondents suggest that DI is a specialized skill set that cannot be acquired through experience alone. This aligns with Suprayogi et al. (2017), who argued that teacher efficacy in differentiation is significantly higher when educators are exposed to specific pedagogical frameworks rather than general educational theories. However, a critical comparison with Westbrook et al. (2013) suggests that one-off workshops—often favoured by NGOs in Sub-Saharan Africa—frequently fail to create long-term systemic change unless they are integrated into the school's internal e-leadership and daily planning culture. Without this, the advanced skills of teachers like T2 remain isolated "islands of excellence" in a sea of traditional practice.

Furthermore, the reliance on common sense identified in this study poses a risk to educational equity. When differentiation is not evidence-based, it often defaults to lowering the bar for struggling students rather than providing high-level cognitive scaffolds. As Tomlinson (2014) critically notes, intuitive differentiation often lacks the rigor required to move students through the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). In the context of Dodoma, this implies that while teachers are trying their best, the lack of formal DI training results in a Cognitive Ceiling where students with disabilities are given simpler tasks that do not challenge their higher-order thinking. Therefore, the training-experience gap is not merely a professional deficit but a structural barrier that prevents the realization of the UNESCO (2024) mandate for truly equitable and high-quality inclusive education.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

The study on differentiated instructional (DI) techniques in Dodoma City highlights a profound pedagogical paradox: while history teachers exhibit remarkable creative resilience through informal, reactive adjustments like code-switching and peer-tutoring, these efforts are stifled by structural constraints. Despite effectively boosting behavioural and emotional engagement, these practices often hit a "cognitive ceiling" where the pressure of a rigid, high-stakes curriculum and NECTA examinations forces teachers to prioritize syllabus coverage over deep analytical learning. Furthermore, this research underscores a significant training-experience gap, indicating that veteran teachers often struggle to move beyond remedial instruction without targeted, subject-specific professional development.

To bridge this policy-practice gap, systemic reform must prioritize curriculum deceleration to favour depth over breadth, while providing educators with standardized, low-tech inclusive tools and flexible classroom environments. Meaningful change requires the Ministry of Education to reduce content volume, the National Examinations Council of Tanzania (NECTA) to implement differentiated assessment protocols such as project-based portfolios, and the Dodoma City Council to institutionalize subject-specific, school-based coaching. By shifting from general workshops to targeted pedagogical training and infrastructural remodelling, the education system can effectively transform inclusive theory into a sustainable, high-quality standard for all learners.

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