



Teachers' Perceptions of Differentiated Instruction in Inclusive Secondary Classrooms in Dodoma, Tanzania

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Abstract: While educators value Differentiated Instruction (DI) for classroom equity, its execution in Tanzanian public secondary schools remains sporadic. This qualitative exploratory case study investigated how teachers perceive and apply DI strategies in inclusive secondary schools within Dodoma City. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, student focus groups, and lesson observations across three inclusive institutions. Findings indicate that despite averaging 8.5 years of experience, educators lacked formal DI training and faced systemic bottlenecks, including rigid syllabi, scarce adaptive aids, and crowded classrooms. Nevertheless, teachers demonstrated resourcefulness through peer-led learning, tiered inquiry, simplified guides, and extension tasks. Process Differentiation (32.5%) and Content Differentiation (30.0%) were most prevalent, whereas Product and Environmental Differentiation were largely neglected. Ultimately, positive teacher attitudes cannot overcome structural barriers without administrative support. The study recommends that the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) trim curriculum content to allow time for tiered learning. Additionally, school administrations should establish mandatory weekly hours for differentiation planning to foster peer coaching and collaborative lesson preparation.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Differentiated Instruction, History Subject, Tanzanian Secondary Schools, Pedagogical Adaptability, Classroom Equity, Curriculum Rigidity

How to cite this work (APA):

Komba, M. E. & Otieno, M. (2026). Teachers' Perceptions of Differentiated Instruction in Inclusive Secondary Classrooms in Dodoma, Tanzania. *Journal of Research Innovation and Implications in Education*, 10(4), 388 – 399. <https://doi.org/10.59765/mlu6k>

1. Introduction

Education serves as a fundamental driver of personal empowerment and socio-economic transformation, equipping citizens with the competencies required for meaningful civic, political, and economic engagement (Attahakul, 2025). Within Tanzanian secondary education, humanities disciplines—particularly History—play a pivotal role in cultivating critical thinking, civic responsibility, and an understanding of historical governance and societal evolution (Ndomondo, 2024). However, the implementation of inclusive education, which mandates the integration of learners with diverse

physical, sensory, and cognitive abilities, introduces complex pedagogical challenges (Al Shoura & Ahmad, 2020). To ensure equitable access to quality education, teachers must adopt flexible instructional strategies tailored to accommodate heterogeneous classroom profiles (Hermanto & Pamungkas, 2023).

In response to learner diversity, Differentiated Instruction (DI) has emerged as an essential pedagogical framework within inclusive settings (Mambetakunov, 2025). This approach requires systematically adapting instructional strategies, educational content, and assessment mechanisms to align with students' readiness levels,

interest profiles, and learning modalities (Nayak, 2025). When applied to History education, differentiation involves presenting historical narratives through varied media, providing flexible modes for demonstrating subject mastery, and designing learning tasks anchored in students' cognitive entry points (Fachrurrozi et al., 2025). By embedding these techniques, educators can enhance academic engagement, boost participation, and optimize learning outcomes across the entire ability spectrum.

Extensive international literature demonstrates that differentiated instruction significantly improves academic achievement, analytical reasoning, and knowledge retention in diverse learning environments (McLaughlin, 2025; Shareefa & Magu, 2025; Manzoor et al., 2022). For instance, McLaughlin (2025) observed that DI implementation in international private school settings yielded positive impacts on student engagement and academic performance. Nevertheless, critical research gaps persist; Shareefa and Magu (2025) highlight that despite widespread theoretical endorsement, empirical investigations focusing specifically on DI within History instruction remain sparse. Furthermore, research by Manzoor et al. (2022) in Pakistan revealed that although pre-service teachers maintained favorable attitudes toward DI, real-world application remained severely constrained by insufficient training and lacking institutional infrastructure.

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, differentiated pedagogy is increasingly recognized as a key strategy for fostering educational inclusion, though implementation remains fragmented. In South Africa, De Jager (2023) reported uneven execution of DI in secondary schools, attributing this inconsistency primarily to acute resource scarcity and systemic infrastructure challenges. Similarly, empirical evidence from multigrade classrooms in Kenya indicates that while teachers actively attempt to differentiate instruction, severe material constraints and inadequate professional development compromise overall effectiveness (Sitabkhan et al., 2022). Broadly across the continent, structural and operational bottlenecks continue to impede the systematic integration of DI in mainstream secondary education (Botha, 2023).

In Tanzania, the policy landscape strongly supports inclusive education through frameworks such as the *Education and Training Policy* (2014) and the *National Inclusive Education Framework* (2017). These documents formally mandate the integration of diverse learners while outlining guidelines for curriculum adaptation, teacher training, and resource allocation (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training [MoEVT], 2014; Ministry of Education, Science and Technology [MoEST], 2017). Despite these institutional commitments, recent empirical findings indicate a persistent implementation gap: while

teachers acknowledge the theoretical value of DI, actual execution is heavily restricted by overcrowded classrooms, insufficient continuous professional training, and acute shortages of differentiated teaching materials (Nguvava & Meremo, 2021).

Notwithstanding these policy advancements and general studies on inclusive education, there remains a pronounced lack of empirical research examining the application of differentiated instructional techniques specifically within History classrooms in Tanzanian inclusive secondary schools. Existing literature predominantly addresses general inclusive practices or STEM-focused subjects, leaving a significant void regarding subject-specific DI strategies and the lived experiences of History educators. Addressing this empirical gap is crucial for informing targeted teacher professional development, refining subject syllabi, and enhancing classroom practice in inclusive secondary schools.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

Globally, inclusive education is recognized as a fundamental imperative for guaranteeing equitable access to quality learning across diverse student populations (Qureshi et al., 2020; Charles & Otieno, 2023; Otieno, 2025). To support mixed-ability classrooms, Differentiated Instruction (DI) has gained widespread endorsement as a vital pedagogical framework—particularly in humanities disciplines like History, which demand active engagement, contextual reasoning, and critical thinking (Qureshi et al., 2020). By systematically tailoring instructional content, teaching strategies, and assessment formats, educators can foster greater classroom participation and optimize academic outcomes for all learners in inclusive settings (Rajak & Dey, 2025).

In response to these imperatives, the Tanzanian government has implemented key legislative and policy initiatives to advance inclusive schooling. Strategic frameworks—most notably the *Education and Training Policy* (2014) and the *National Inclusive Education Framework* (2017)—mandate the integration of learners with special educational needs into mainstream environments, supported by curriculum adaptation, teacher training, and targeted resource distribution (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, 2014; Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2017). These national policies directly reflect international commitments, particularly Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which advocates for inclusive, equitable, and lifelong quality education for all (Rad et al., 2022).

Despite this progressive regulatory framework, substantial implementation bottlenecks persist. A significant

proportion of educators remain inadequately trained and under-resourced to execute differentiated techniques in daily practice (Lavania & Nor, 2020; Otieno, 2025). These operational deficits are compounded by systemic challenges, including large class sizes, acute shortages of specialized instructional materials, and insufficient continuous professional development opportunities (Kapinga et al., 2024). Consequently, students with diverse learning needs—particularly those facing learning difficulties—continue to experience academic disengagement, exclusion, and poor achievement in History. In practice, a stark disconnect remains between theoretical policy objectives and actual classroom realities in Tanzania (Samwel, 2023), where teachers still rely predominantly on conventional, teacher-centered instructional methods that marginalize non-traditional learners (Adewale et al., 2024).

A critical empirical void persists regarding how differentiated instructional techniques are practically operationalized, perceived, and evaluated within inclusive secondary school History classrooms in Tanzania (Mtwewe et al., 2025). This disconnect between policy mandates and pedagogical execution not only undermines overarching inclusive education goals, but also hinders subject-specific cognitive mastery in History. Addressing this gap, the present study examines the practical application of differentiated instruction within inclusive secondary school History classrooms in Dodoma City. Specifically, it assesses the scope of teachers' instructional practices, their perceived efficacy in enhancing student participation and achievement, and the primary systemic barriers constraining execution through the following research question: what are the views of History teachers on the implementation of differentiated instructional techniques within inclusive secondary school classrooms in Dodoma City?

2. Literature Review

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

In an empirical study investigating school leadership and inclusive pedagogy, Wang and Tian (2023) examined the relationship between principal leadership styles and classroom differentiation in Beijing, China. Their study, titled *“Linking Distributed Leadership with Differentiated Instruction in Inclusive Schools: The Mediating Roles of Teacher Leadership and Professional Competence,”* surveyed a large sample of 780 in-service secondary educators. Utilizing structural equation modeling, the

authors demonstrated that distributed leadership directly predicted teachers' adoption of Differentiated Instruction (DI), with teacher leadership capacity and professional competence acting as sequential mediators. While the study underscores the vital role of organizational infrastructure and advocates for continuous professional development to foster teacher autonomy in inclusive settings, its broad focus omitted subject-specific pedagogical dynamics, particularly within humanities such as History.

Synthesizing wider implementation trends across China, Meijie et al. (2024) conducted a systematic literature review titled *“Differentiated Instruction in Chinese Primary and Secondary Schools: A Systematic Literature Review.”* Analyzing 45 empirical studies published between 2000 and 2022, the authors identified flexible grouping, tiered learning tasks, and diversified assessment methods as the most frequently cited instructional strategies. However, widespread implementation was significantly hindered by examination-oriented curricula and large class sizes. The authors concluded that while theoretical support for DI is strong, real-world execution remains incomplete, recommending structural reductions in class size and heavy investment in teacher training. A notable empirical gap in their review was the lack of subject-specific studies investigating DI practices within individual disciplines like History, particularly in inclusive secondary environments.

Within the East African region, Ituma (2025) explored pedagogical adaptation in Kenya through a study titled *“The Use of Differentiated Instruction to Achieve Culturally Responsive Teaching.”* Utilizing a descriptive survey design involving teacher questionnaires alongside qualitative secondary data, the research revealed that while 81.6% of respondents utilized flexible grouping and 79.6% presented information across varied formats, only 54.4% allowed learners autonomy in choosing learning activities. The study concluded that full differentiation and cultural responsiveness remain underutilized, proposing a Culturally Responsive Differentiated Instruction (CRDI) framework alongside advanced teacher training modules. Nevertheless, the investigation focused exclusively on primary/junior school levels rather than secondary inclusive classrooms, leaving a gap regarding subject-specific History instruction.

In Southern Africa, de Jager (2023) evaluated secondary school environments in a study titled *“Evaluating Effective Differentiated Instruction in Multicultural South African Secondary Schools.”* Drawing on quantitative survey data from 424 teachers and 4,510 students across 25 public secondary institutions in Gauteng Province, the study assessed the extent of DI execution in diverse classrooms.

Findings highlighted that teachers frequently struggled to assess student comprehension or identify learning difficulties—a limitation attributed to overcrowded classrooms, resource constraints, and inadequate specialized training. Although the study called for targeted professional development and smaller class sizes, its scope remained focused on general secondary instruction rather than the distinct pedagogical demands of History teaching within inclusive setups.

In Tanzania, Nguvava and Meremo (2021) investigated local implementation challenges in their study, *“Implementation of the Differentiated Instructional Approach among Public Secondary Schools in Mwanga District, Tanzania.”* Employing a mixed-methods convergent parallel design involving 98 participants (73 students, 20 teachers, 4 heads of school, and 1 district education officer) across 25 secondary schools, the authors observed that despite high teacher awareness of DI principles, actual classroom execution was severely constrained by heavy workloads and institutional barriers. They recommended expanding teaching facilities and offering continuous professional training on inclusive methods. However, the study evaluated secondary education broadly, without examining how History teachers specifically adapt learning materials within inclusive environments.

Focusing on specific learner cohorts, Milinga et al. (2022) conducted a qualitative study titled *“Teachers’ Perceptions of Differentiated Instruction for Academically High-Achieving Secondary School Students in Tanzania.”* Using a multiple case study design, the authors found that while educators valued DI, pedagogical adaptations for high-achieving students were constrained, relying primarily on basic ability grouping rather than comprehensive content, process, or product differentiation. The study concluded with a call for subject-specific DI training and improved resource provision. However, its explicit focus on high-performing learners leaves unaddressed the broader realities of fully inclusive classrooms containing diverse learning profiles and special educational needs.

Generally, these six empirical studies demonstrate that while differentiated instruction is globally and regionally recognized as essential for equitable learning, significant implementation gaps persist due to three major limitations in the existing literature: a lack of subject specificity that treats differentiation as a generic pedagogical tool rather than addressing the unique analytical, empathetic, and contextual demands of humanities like History; a narrow scope regarding classroom diversity in Tanzania that focuses on general student populations or isolated subgroups like high achievers rather than fully mixed-

ability inclusive settings with special educational needs; and a distinct geographic and contextual gap, as empirical evidence on the lived practices, specific techniques, and structural barriers of History teachers in inclusive secondary schools within Dodoma City remains critically absent.

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

A systematic review and meta-analysis conducted by Groenewald et al. (2024) evaluated the efficacy of differentiated instruction (DI) in improving student learning outcomes across a range of educational contexts. Their findings demonstrated that DI has a significant positive effect on various cognitive competencies, including overall academic achievement, critical thinking skills, and domain-specific knowledge. The analysis also revealed that the impact of DI varied across subjects and grade levels, with upper secondary students deriving the greatest learning gains. Overall, the authors emphasized the role of DI in fostering inclusive and effective teaching environments, making their research highly applicable to the present study by illustrating the potential of differentiation to foster learner engagement in History classrooms.

In another empirical study, Ardiawan et al. (2024) examined how differentiated learning materials influence Indonesian secondary students’ understanding of nationalism and global diversity. The results showed that students provided with varied instructional resources developed a significantly deeper comprehension of these concepts. Inferential testing using an independent sample t-test confirmed that these learning differences were statistically significant, with a strong effect size demonstrating that material differentiation substantially impacts conceptual understanding. These findings indicate that tailoring instructional resources to accommodate diverse learning profiles can enhance student engagement in social science disciplines, thereby aligning closely with the scope of this investigation.

Focusing on inclusive classrooms in SDO Calamba City, Philippines, Ramilo and Ting (2025) investigated the relationships between DI, active student engagement, and academic performance. Their results demonstrated strong support for the utility of DI alongside high levels of classroom engagement. Although the study found no statistically significant relationship between DI and overall academic grades, it identified a moderate, positive, and statistically significant correlation between DI

implementation and student engagement. This implies that differentiated instruction serves as an effective driver of active student participation even when its direct effect on academic marks is less marked, offering valuable context for examining the link between DI and engagement in the current study.

Similarly, Hall (2024) explored how differentiated instruction fosters learner engagement within secondary education environments. The study revealed that implementing DI practices—such as offering choices in learning tasks and modifying content to match student entry points—led to notable increases in classroom engagement. Learners reported heightened motivation and participation when instructional methods were customized to align with their learning preferences. Hall concluded that DI provides a powerful framework for driving student engagement in secondary settings, further reinforcing the theoretical and practical foundation of the current research.

Investigating similar dynamics, Lester (2023) evaluated the impact of DI on secondary student engagement. The findings indicated that employing strategies such as flexible grouping and varied instructional delivery significantly increased student involvement. Participants expressed greater interest and active participation when instruction was tailored to accommodate their individual learning needs. Lester concluded that DI serves as an effective pedagogical tool to boost classroom engagement, providing further empirical backing for the present study's focus on the positive relationship between differentiated teaching practices and student participation.

Finally, Smets (2024) conducted a domain-specific study analyzing DI within history classrooms in the Netherlands. The research highlighted that pre-service History teachers utilized a range of instructional techniques, including scaffolding and collaborative learning, to manage learner heterogeneity. Students demonstrated increased levels of engagement when lessons were adapted to meet their unique learning profiles and preferences. Smets concluded that DI can successfully enhance learner engagement in History education, provided that teachers receive adequate preparation and training to execute these strategies effectively—a finding directly relevant to understanding subject-specific DI implementation in the present study.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two theoretical frameworks: Tomlinson's Differentiated Instruction Model (2001) and Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which serves as a complementary lens as detailed below.

2.3.1 Tomlinson's Differentiated Instruction Model (2001)

This research is theoretically grounded in Carol Ann Tomlinson's (2001) Differentiated Instruction Model, which offers an adaptable structural approach for addressing diverse learner needs in inclusive educational settings. Tomlinson (2001) asserts that impactful differentiation relies on systematically modifying four core instructional dimensions—content, process, product, and the learning environment—to match students' entry-level readiness, individual interests, and preferred learning modalities. Within History education, this model serves as an analytical framework to evaluate teachers' actual instructional techniques (Objective One) and to analyze how their self-perceived roles as facilitators shape pedagogical execution (Objective Two). Furthermore, regarding Objective Three, the model maintains that tailoring these four curricular components directly elevates student motivation and academic performance. Nonetheless, as emphasized by Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010), the practical success of this theoretical framework remains fundamentally contingent upon a teacher's competence in managing classroom routines, time, and instructional resources.

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

Although Tomlinson's framework delineates the operational mechanics of differentiation, it presumes a level of resource availability that public secondary classrooms in Tanzania—frequently constrained by overcrowding and acute material shortages—cannot easily accommodate. To bridge this gap when interpreting empirical findings, this study incorporates Lev Vygotsky's (1978) Socio-Constructivist Theory, with particular emphasis on the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD is exceptionally pertinent to the Tanzanian educational context because it foregrounds peer-assisted learning and pedagogical scaffolding. In large History classrooms across Dodoma City, where one-on-one instructor interaction is practically limited, the ZPD demonstrates how differentiation can be operationalized through deliberate peer grouping and the engagement of More Knowledgeable Others (MKOs). Consequently, even within resource-constrained environments, instructional adaptation remains viable by leveraging classroom social diversity to drive learner participation.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Approach

To investigate how History educators operationalize differentiated instructional (DI) techniques in inclusive secondary classrooms, this study adopted a qualitative research design. Rather than evaluating pre-formulated hypotheses, a qualitative framework allows rich insights and explanatory narratives to emerge organically from participants' lived experiences (Haque, 2022). By utilizing semi-structured interviews and direct classroom observations, the investigation uncovered core themes, patterns, and underlying relationships regarding teachers' instructional practices and systemic challenges (Bonner et al., 2021). Ultimately, this qualitative orientation captured the intricate, contextual realities of History instruction in inclusive environments, offering a granular and comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing the implementation of DI.

3.2 Research Design

An exploratory case study research design was adopted to cultivate a comprehensive, contextually grounded understanding of the research phenomenon within its natural setting (Yin, 2018). This design is particularly well-suited to educational inquiry, where the boundaries between pedagogical practices and the socio-cultural context of the classroom are deeply intertwined (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). By employing a qualitative case study approach, the investigation collected rich, descriptive empirical data using semi-structured interviews with teachers and students, non-participant classroom observations, and document analysis. This multi-method strategy effectively captured the multifaceted complexities of inclusive teaching and its nuanced influence on student motivation and classroom engagement. Furthermore, the research design was conceptually aligned with Tomlinson's (2014) Differentiated Instruction Model, which emphasizes the necessity of tailoring instructional strategies to accommodate diverse learning needs.

3.3 Study Area

This study was conducted in Dodoma City, the administrative capital of Tanzania, which features several Ordinary-Level inclusive secondary schools. Dodoma City was purposively selected due to its demographic diversity and active implementation of national inclusive education policies, providing an ideal setting to investigate differentiated instructional practices within History classrooms (URT, 2016). The participating schools facilitated direct access to both educators and students—the primary actors involved in operationalizing and experiencing differentiated pedagogical strategies.

3.4 Target Population

The target population for this study comprised Ordinary-Level History educators across three selected inclusive secondary schools in Dodoma City. These teachers are directly responsible for designing, executing, and modifying differentiated instructional (DI) strategies to cater to heterogeneous learner profiles. Based on preliminary administrative records, the total population consisted of approximately 35 History teachers across the target institutions, serving as the complete sampling frame from which the study participants were drawn.

3.4.1 Sampling Technique

To select study participants, the researcher utilized a purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling is particularly effective in qualitative inquiry because it enables the deliberate selection of individuals capable of offering rich, detailed, and context-relevant insights regarding instructional practices, operational challenges, and pedagogical strategies within inclusive secondary environments (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This sampling framework was appropriate as it allowed the researcher to intentionally target History educators who possessed hands-on experience in inclusive classrooms and direct familiarity with differentiated instructional (DI) techniques.

3.4.2 Sample Size

Out of an estimated target population of 35 History teachers within the designated inclusive secondary schools, a sample of 20 educators was selected for the study. In alignment with qualitative methodology standards, this sample size was deemed appropriate as qualitative inquiry prioritizes empirical depth and contextual richness over statistical generalizability (Creswell, 2024). Consequently, the selected cohort provided granular insights into how differentiated instruction (DI) is planned, operationalized, and constrained within inclusive History classrooms.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

3.5.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Empirical data were gathered through semi-structured interviews incorporating open-ended questions, designed to examine History teachers' lived experiences, perspectives, and pedagogical strategies regarding differentiated instruction (DI). The sample comprised 20 to 25 purposively selected History educators from inclusive secondary schools in Dodoma City, with participant

selection governed by three explicit inclusion criteria: (i) a minimum of three years' teaching experience in inclusive environments, ensuring sufficient depth of pedagogical practice; (ii) current appointment as an active secondary-level History teacher; and (iii) prior engagement in professional development or training related to special needs education. Purposive sampling was essential for securing participants capable of providing detailed, contextually rich explanations of how they conceptualize, execute, and troubleshoot DI techniques, while the inherent flexibility of the semi-structured interview format enabled interactive probing into participant responses, generating comprehensive qualitative insights into intricate instructional practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.6 Research Trustworthiness

To establish construct validity, the primary research instruments—specifically the semi-structured interview guides and classroom observation protocols—were systematically developed in alignment with the study's core objectives and evaluated by experts in education and inclusive pedagogy. Additionally, pilot testing was conducted with a small cohort of History teachers from non-participating schools to refine question clarity, relevance, and alignment, thereby ensuring that the instruments accurately measured the targeted qualitative constructs (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Creswell, 2014).

Methodological rigor and trustworthiness were maintained by adhering to established qualitative criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was safeguarded through sustained field engagement, member-checking procedures, and data triangulation between interviews and observational records. Transferability was facilitated by providing rich, thick descriptions of the research setting, participant demographics, and instructional practices. To ensure dependability, a comprehensive audit trail documenting all phases of data collection and thematic analysis was systematically maintained, while confirmability was preserved by practicing reflexivity, maintaining investigator neutrality, and minimizing subjective bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004).

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The empirical process commenced with formal ethical review and institutional clearance, where the study proposal, research instruments, and participant protection protocols were vetted and approved by the Institutional Research Ethics Committee (UREC) under the Directorate of Research, Innovation, and Consultancy (DRIC). Upon issuance of the Ethical Clearance Certificate,

administrative authorization was systematically secured from government authorities by presenting university credentials to the Regional Administrative Secretary (RAS) and the Regional Education Officer (REO) of Dodoma. This administrative approval cascaded through the District Executive Director (DED) and District Secondary Education Officer (DSEO), culminating in final site access granted by the Heads of Schools at the designated inclusive secondary institutions.

To uphold the dignity and rights of all participants, the study strictly adhered to core ethical principles during data collection. Participating educators received a comprehensive explanation of the study's scope and signed an Informed Consent Form, affirming that their involvement was completely voluntary and subject to withdrawal at any stage without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were safeguarded by assigning alphanumeric codes and pseudonyms to all individuals and institutions. Furthermore, in accordance with the principle of beneficence, the research was conducted to ensure zero risk to participants while generating practical insights to advance inclusive pedagogical practices in Tanzania.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Differentiated Instructional Techniques in Inclusive History Classrooms

The empirical findings illuminate both the pedagogical utility and the systemic curricular rigidity experienced by History teachers within inclusive secondary school environments. Across the three sampled schools, eleven educators reported actively adopting differentiated instructional (DI) techniques to accommodate diverse learner needs, despite receiving minimal guidance from the national curriculum framework.

4.1.2 Teacher Perspectives and Classroom Application

Teachers emphasized that collaborative strategies, such as peer-mediated learning, significantly enhance support for students with disabilities, even though official curricular guidelines fail to formally recognize peer-teaching as an instructional strategy. This practice closely aligns with Tomlinson's (2001) model, which advocates adapting content, process, product, and learning environment to student readiness and learning profiles. As one educator noted:

"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)

Beyond peer-assisted instruction, teachers highlighted that shifting away from traditional, teacher-centered methodologies yields substantial improvements in student engagement:

“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.” Teacher B1 (Feb 2026)

Furthermore, respondents underscored the utility of tiered assignments in fostering simultaneous engagement across varying readiness levels. This approach enables teachers to adjust text complexity and cognitive tasks without marginalizing struggling learners:

“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)

These qualitative observations align directly with Tomlinson’s (2001) Differentiated Instruction Model, which maintains that effective differentiation requires modifying four key curricular elements—content, process, product, and environment—to match student readiness, interests, and learning styles. The findings are further reinforced by empirical literature, including Meijie et al.’s (2024; as cited in Wang & Tian, 2023) review of 45 studies, which confirmed the efficacy of flexible grouping, tiered tasks, and diversified evaluation methods in inclusive settings.

Ultimately, while current secondary school History curricula remain rigid and offer limited operational guidance on inclusive pedagogy, teachers actively bridge this gap through micro-level instructional innovations. The evidence demonstrates that peer teaching, tiered assignments, and flexible grouping enhance classroom participation and inclusivity, arguing strongly for their formal integration into national curriculum design.

4.2 History Teachers’ Views on the Implementation of Differentiated Instructional Techniques Within Inclusive Secondary Classrooms

The data reveal a profound paradox between pedagogical ideals and systemic constraints, highlighting a critical tension between the intrinsic value of differentiation and the demands of an examination-driven educational system. Although a majority of History teachers (11 out of 20) recognize the benefits of DI for student engagement and academic growth, they remain constrained by rigid institutional structures that prioritize syllabus coverage over inclusive depth.

4.2.1 Pedagogical Efficacy and Theoretical Alignment

Teachers who implement DI reported noticeable improvements in student participation and comprehension. Academically, the positive correlation between differentiation and student engagement aligns with Vygotsky’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). By tailoring content and instructional processes, teachers meet learners within their specific developmental zones, thereby mitigating the cognitive frustration common in standardized inclusive classrooms. For instance, teachers utilized linguistic scaffolding to bridge comprehension gaps during complex historical units:

“...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)

Adjusting instructional tasks to align with student ability levels also proved effective in re-engaging passive learners:

“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)

Additionally, teachers demonstrated how structural adaptations can support visual accommodations during assessments:

“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.” Teacher A9 (Feb 2026)

Providing diverse entry points into complex historical subjects (such as the rise of TANU) allows educators to stimulate higher-order historical thinking across heterogeneous learner profiles.

4.2.2 The Policy-Practice Gap and High-Stakes Assessment Pressures

Despite recognizing these benefits, teachers face a significant policy-practice gap. The national assessment structure, governed by the National Examinations Council of Tanzania (NECTA), relies on standardized examinations that prize syllabus coverage and content breadth over differentiated mastery. This creates a professional conflict where the desire to deliver inclusive instruction is often sacrificed to meet examination timelines.

As Suprayogi et al. (2017) observe, teachers' willingness to implement differentiation is heavily conditioned by the pressures of high-stakes testing. When assessment models remain rigid, pedagogical flexibility shrinks, forcing teachers to revert to traditional, teacher-centered lectures. Furthermore, the chronological nature of the History curriculum requires rapid coverage to meet national milestones. This generates a utility gap, wherein differentiation is perceived as an impractical luxury suited only for low-enrollment or well-resourced private institutions, rather than a fundamental right in public inclusive classrooms.

For DI to transition from an isolated practice to a standard classroom reality, educational policy must pivot from an exclusive focus on *Assessment of Learning* to incorporating *Assessment for Learning*. As long as standardized NECTA results remain the sole metric of institutional and teacher efficacy, differentiation will likely remain a peripheral practice utilized only by exceptionally resourceful educators.

4.2.3 Infrastructure, Class Size, and Training

The findings further demonstrate that physical and professional infrastructure deficits severely limit teachers' ability to sustain differentiated instruction. Even highly motivated educators encounter systemic bottlenecks, particularly regarding class size and resource distribution.

Differentiation inherently requires small-group interactions and individualized monitoring (Tomlinson, 2023). However, in high-enrollment urban secondary schools, excessive class sizes force teachers into crisis management rather than adaptive instruction. As Teacher A6 noted when managing a class of 90 students, overcrowding severely restricts individual student interaction. This finding corroborates Westbrook et al. (2013), who argue that in Sub-Saharan African contexts, high teacher-to-student ratios impose an unsustainable cognitive load on educators, neutralizing specialized pedagogical monitoring.

Beyond class size, professional development and material shortages pose significant challenges. While administrative support can facilitate resource access—as Teacher A8 noted:

“My administration supports us by providing extra teaching aids. Using these resources to differentiate makes the lesson more of a dialogue than a monologue.” Teacher A8 (Feb 2026)

Majority teachers lack specialized Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) tailored to inclusive settings. General teacher preparation programs rarely equip History educators with the discipline-specific skills needed to adapt complex historical texts for students with specific learning disabilities.

As Komba and Mwandaji (2015) point out, Continuous Professional Development (CPD) in Tanzania frequently lacks the subject-specific orientation required to translate general inclusive theory into classroom practice. When combined with acute shortages of adapted reading materials, visual aids, and digital tools, teachers' capacity to differentiate content is constrained.

Moving from rigid syllabus coverage toward inclusive pedagogical evaluation requires a comprehensive institutional investment. Without reductions in teacher-student ratios, aligned assessment frameworks, and embedded CPD programs where History teachers collaborate directly with Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs), the implementation of DI in Dodoma City secondary schools will remain fragmented. Systemic reform must address these structural challenges to enable inclusive pedagogical practices to achieve their full potential.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The investigation into differentiated instructional (DI) techniques within Dodoma City reveals a central pedagogical paradox: although History educators demonstrate commendable creative resilience via informal and adaptive practices—such as code-switching and peer-mediated learning—their efforts are frequently constrained by broader systemic barriers. While these micro-level strategies successfully cultivate student behavioral and emotional engagement, they encounter a cognitive ceiling, as the imperative to cover an uncompromising, high-stakes curriculum for NECTA assessments forces teachers to favor syllabus completion over high-level analytical reasoning. Additionally, the study exposes a pronounced gap between teaching experience and specialized training, showing that even veteran educators struggle to transition

beyond basic remedial instruction in the absence of subject-specific professional development.

Resolving this policy-practice disconnect requires comprehensive structural reform centered on curriculum deceleration, prioritizing conceptual depth over content volume, alongside the provision of standardized, low-tech inclusive resources and flexible learning spaces. Institutionalizing meaningful change demands coordinated policy shifts: the Ministry of Education must trim content requirements, the National Examinations Council of Tanzania (NECTA) should adopt alternative, differentiated assessment frameworks (such as portfolio-based evaluations), and the Dodoma City Council must establish school-based, discipline-specific instructional coaching. Transitioning from generic training workshops toward embedded pedagogical mentorship and physical classroom adaptation will enable Tanzania's education system to operationalize inclusive theory into a durable, equitable standard.

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