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# Beyond One-Size-Fits-All: Empowering EFL Students Through Differentiated Instruction

## تجاوز النموذج الموحد : تمكين طلبة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية من خلال التعليم المتنوع

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**Abstract**: Effective differentiated instruction aims to empower diverse learners through meaningful group discussions, the gateway to cooperative learning. Yet homogeneous grouping often undermines this goal. This study explores teachers' awareness of student differences, grouping practices, flexible strategies, and available training in EFL classrooms. Findings show that while teachers value differentiation, most struggle with flexible grouping due to insufficient training and support, limiting learners' opportunities to collaborate and build essential skills.

**Keywords:** Differentiated Instruction, Flexible Grouping, Cooperative Learning, Teacher Training, EFL Classroom

يهدف التعليم المتمايز الفعّال إلى تمكين المتعلمين المتنوعين من خلال المناقشات الجماعية الهادفة، باعتبارها مدخلًا أساسيًا للتعلم التعاوني. ومع ذلك، فإن التجميع المتجانس غالبًا ما يقوّض هذا الهدف. تستكشف هذه الدراسة وعي المعلمين بالفروق الفردية بين الطلاب، وممارسات التجميع، واستراتيجيات التجميع المرن، ومدى توفر التدريب في صفوف اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. وتُظهر النتائج أنه رغم تقدير المعلمين لأهمية التمايز، فإن معظمهم يواجه صعوبة في تطبيق التجميع المرن بسبب نقص التدريب والدعم، مما يحد من فرص المتعلمين في التعاون وتطوير المهارات الأساسية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** التعليم المتنوع، التجميع المرن، التعلم التعاوني، تدريب المعلمين، فصل اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

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## Introduction :

Teachers today face the challenge of helping all students succeed, even though their students have very different needs. Differentiated instruction is a teaching approach that tries to meet these diverse needs. But putting this into practice can be hard. This study looks at how teachers use flexible group work to encourage students to collaborate. It also explores what helps or hinders differentiated instruction in English language classrooms. The goal is to find insights that will improve how teachers approach differentiation and flexible grouping, so they can better support all their students.

### 1. Literature review

Education is a vital process that helps learners of all backgrounds and abilities acquire the knowledge, skills, and social aptitudes they need to thrive. Research shows that when learners develop strong problem-solving abilities and social skills, they can more easily adapt to new circumstances and undergo positive changes (Gedvilienė & Baužienė, 2008).

For EFL teachers in Algeria, meeting the diverse educational and social needs of their students can pose significant challenges. Clearly, effectively teaching English as a foreign language requires employing a range of instructional approaches and strategies. One promising method is differentiated instruction (DI).

The core idea behind DI is that teachers proactively respond to individual differences among their students. Educators who differentiate adjust the content, process, and products of learning to align with their students' readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles (Reis & Renzulli, 2018). Research also indicates that the ideal classroom environment leverages a mix of whole-class, small-group, pair, and individual instruction (Tomlinson et al., 2019).

Implementing DI involves teachers using a variety of effective teaching practices. These include ongoing assessment, flexible grouping, and cultivating a strong classroom community (Tomlinson, 2001). The overarching goal is for teachers to unlock the full potential of all learners by identifying their academic and social needs, then purposefully designing flexible grouping arrangements to address those needs.

Flexible grouping is especially powerful because it recognizes that students' readiness, motivations, and learning preferences can shift over time. By dynamically adjusting grouping structures as needed, teachers can help students forge new connections with their peers, develop essential collaboration skills, and experience learning in a variety of purposeful configurations (Valentino, 2000).

### 2.1. Tailoring Teaching for Each Student

Teaching shouldn't be the same for everyone. Good teachers know that students have different needs, interests, and ways of learning. Differentiated instruction helps teachers adjust the pace, difficulty, and approach of lessons to what works best for each student (Heacox, 2012). The goal is to help all students, no matter where they start, reach their full potential. Teachers do this by understanding their students as individuals - what motivates them, what challenges them, and how they learn best (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010). With this knowledge, teachers can customize the curriculum, activities, and assessments. Differentiation isn't easy, but it's a sign of great teaching (Parsons et al., 2018). By providing personalized instruction, teachers can unlock the potential in every student.

### 2.2. Flexible Grouping for Collaborative Learning

Differentiated instruction and flexible grouping work well together. Flexible grouping means organizing students into temporary, changing groups based on their needs and the lesson (Heacox, 2012). Unlike traditional fixed groups, flexible grouping lets students work with different peers on different tasks. These groups are constantly formed and reformed as learning goals change (Radencich & McKay, 1995). This fluidity ensures each student gets the right level of challenge and support. Flexible grouping creates a more engaging, collaborative environment. Students can take healthy risks, develop social skills, and learn from each other (Doubet, 2022). Teachers use ongoing assessment to decide the best grouping arrangements (Westedt, 2019 as cited in Jones, 2015). At its core, flexible grouping allows teachers to respond to the diverse needs in their classroom. It's key to delivering the personalized instruction that helps all students succeed.

## 2. Research Methodology

This section outlines the methodological approach employed in the inquiry. The researcher set out to uncover the perceptions held by both educators and learners towards implementing a flexible grouping strategy within the dynamic EFL classroom context. Adopting a descriptive case study design, the researcher collected quantitative data through the administration of structured questionnaires. The participant pool comprised middle school teachers and students hailing from District 4 in the Province of Batna. A convenient sampling technique was utilized to select the teacher participants, while 60 students were drawn from three distinct

schools. Rigorous inclusion criteria were applied, ensuring the teacher participants were middle school English instructors from District 4 who either held leadership roles as principals or teacher trainers, and were willing to contribute to the study. The quantitative data gathered through the questionnaires was subsequently analyzed using SPSS software. This section provides comprehensive details on the study's research design, participant selection, data collection procedures, and analytical techniques employed.

## 3. Data Analysis

This section outlines the techniques employed in the analysis of the quantitative data. As a precursor to the data analysis, a phase of computer-aided quantitative data coding was undertaken.

### 4.1.Quantitative Data Analysis Procedures

Prior to commencing the quantitative data analysis, the following preparatory steps were executed: (1) constructing a codebook to assign numeric scores to the data, (2) determining the appropriate scoring types (nominal, ordinal, or scale), (3) selecting a statistical software program to process the data, (4) cleansing the data to identify and address any scores falling outside the designated numeric range, and (5) assessing the presence and extent of missing data from questions that participants intentionally or inadvertently skipped (Creswell, 2012).

The quantitative data obtained through the questionnaire surveys was computer-coded. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, edition 26) was employed to perform statistical analyses on questions 1-15. Creswell (2012) explains that in educational research, quantitative data analysis can involve both 'descriptive analysis' and 'inferential analysis' (p. 183). The former is typically used to "help you analyze descriptive questions" while the latter method is applied "when you compare groups or relate two or more variables" (p. 187). Given that the research questions aimed to describe EFL teachers' attitudes towards implementing a flexible grouping strategy, the analysis of Likert Scale data entailed calculating measures of central tendency, such as means, medians, or modes. Additionally, visual representations like bar charts or histograms were leveraged to better understand the distribution of responses across the scale.

## 4. Results and Discussion

The main focus of the present study is to explore middle school EFL teachers' perceptions towards implementing flexible instructional grouping strategies by seeking to answer the following research questions:

- Do teachers take into account the vast differences among students in a classroom?
- How are groups constructed and managed, and what influence do these practices have on students' achievement?
- Do teachers employ flexible grouping strategies to meet their learners' various needs?
- Have teachers received any kind of TEFL training on flexible grouping strategies?

In this section, quantitative results obtained from teachers' and learners' questionnaires were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 26). Teachers' and learners' questionnaire responses were carefully coded and entered into the SPSS software, then analyzed with care and objectivity.

### 4.1. Analysis and Interpretation of Teachers' Questionnaire

The teachers' quantitative results are presented under four main sections following the design of the online questionnaire: (1) Demographic information, (2) teachers' differentiated instruction classroom practices, (3) teachers' classroom grouping practices, and (4) teacher training and professional development. Qualitative data were gathered from 40 participants who expressed their willingness to complete the questionnaire.

The questionnaire began with a brief description explaining the overall objective. It was divided into four sections, each dealing with a particular research question. All questions were continuously numbered, and instructions were stated as clearly as possible to make it easy for the participants to follow.

**Section 1**

In the first section, one question was asked to obtain demographic information, including teaching experience. The purpose of this information is to gain better insights into the extent to which teachers (novice, experienced) have coped with the Algerian middle school educational amendments since 2002.

**Q1.** How long have you been teaching English as a foreign language?

Based on the teachers' responses to this question, we categorized the results into the following categories:

- Less than 5 years: 30%
- From 5 to 10 years: 25%
- More than 10 years: 45%

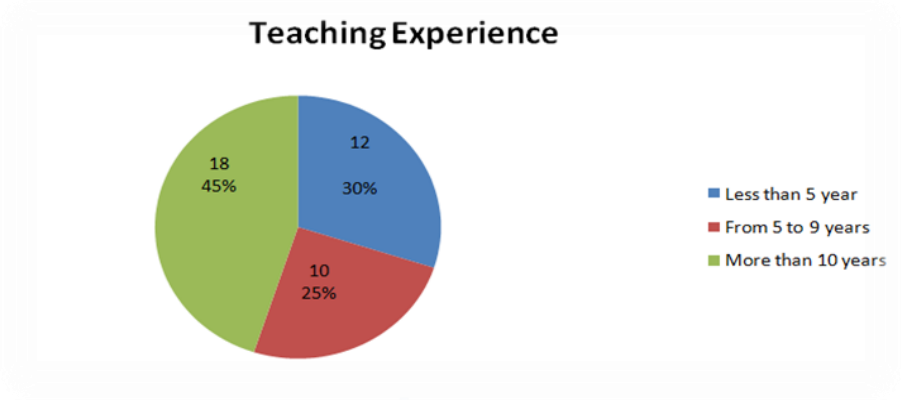



**Figure 1.** Teachers'experienceinTEFL

Figure 1 shows the participants' experience in teaching English as a foreign language. An important proportion of the participants (45%) indicate having 10 or more years of experience, while 30% have 1 to 4 years of teaching experience. Lastly, only 27% proclaim having 5 to 9 years of experience. The elevated percentage of highly experienced teachers in the present study contributes to the authenticity and reliability of the ongoing investigation.

**Table 1:** Teachers' attitudes towards differentiated instruction classroom practices

| To differentiate my lesson... | | Srongly agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly disagree | Mode | Mean | StdD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| teachers provides a variety of teaching strategies to learning | N | 17 | 21 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1.63 | 0,586 |
| | % | 42.5% | 52.5% | 5% | 0% | 0% | | | |
| teachers provides authentic tasks for effective group work | N | 11 | 29 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1,73 | 0,452 |
| | % | 27.5% | 72.5% | 0% | 0% | 0% | | | |
| Teachers implement various grouping strategies | N | 18 | 22 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1.55 | 0,504 |
| | % | 45% | 55% | 0% | 0% | 0% | | | |
| Teachers check learners progress through formative feedback | N | 17 | 23 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1.58 | 0.501 |
| | % | 42.5% | 57.50% | 0% | 0% | 0% | | | |
| Weighted Mean | | | | | | | | 1.622 | |
| St Deviation | | | | | | | | | 0,510 |

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for the differentiated instruction classroom practices. The highest average was awarded to item 2: "Teachers provide authentic tasks for effective group work" with a mean of 1.73 and a standard deviation of 0.452. The strongly agree and agree percentages for this item were 27.5% and 72.5%, respectively. This was followed by item 4: "Teachers check learners' progress through formative feedback" with a mean of 1.58 and a standard deviation of 0.501. Item 3: "Teachers implement various

grouping strategies" had a mean of 1.55 and a standard deviation of 0.501, with strongly agree and agree percentages of 45% and 55%, respectively.

The weighted average of this section was 1.622 with a standard deviation of 0.510. According to the Likert scale, a value of 1.622 falls within the interval of 1-1.80, which indicates that the trend of differentiated instruction classroom practices is strongly agreeable.

**Section 3:**

**Q3.** Implementing Various Grouping Strategies in the EFL Classroom

Using several sub-questions, this item seeks to uncover teachers' perceptions and understandings that guide their choices and decisions when implementing various instructional groups in the EFL classroom.

**Table 2:** Grouping and regrouping learners' criteria.

| On which criteria do you Often group your learners? | | Yes | No | Mode | Mean | StdD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grouping according to learners' choice | N | 10 | 30 | 2 | 1,75 | |
| | % | 25% | 75% | | | 0,439 |
| Grouping according to learners 'learning styles | N | 11 | 29 | 1 | 1,73 | |
| | % | 27,50% | 72,50% | | | 0,452 |
| Grouping based on close friends | N | 7 | 33 | 2 | 1,83 | |
| | % | 17,50% | 82,50% | | | 0,385 |
| Grouping according to learners' similar interests | N | 3 | 37 | 2 | | |
| | % | 7,50% | 92,50% | | 1,93 | 0,267 |
| Weighted Mean | | | | | 1,81 | |
| Std deviation | | | | | | 0,385 |

Note: 1 Agree, 2 Disagree, as for the mean; from 1 to 1.49, means "YES"; from 1.50 to 2 means "NO")

As evident from the upper table, the mean in the first (Grouping according to learners' choice), second(Groups based on learning styles) , third(Grouping according based on close friends) and fourth(Grouping according to learners' similar interests) statement is (1.75, 1.73, 1.83,1.93 respectively).Hence, it means that the majority of teachers do not group and regroup learners according to learners' learning needs.

**Table 3.** Teachers' Instructional Grouping Needs.

| Item | | Srongly agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly disagree | Mode | Mean | StdD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Using various grouping strategies requires more training | N | 4 | 23 | 10 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 2.30 | 0,758 |
| | % | 10% | 57% | 25% | 7.3% | 0% | | | |

The above table reveals that the trend regarding "Using various grouping strategies requires more training" is "agreeable" with a mean of 2.30. This suggests that an important proportion of teachers need more training to be able to effectively implement various grouping strategies in the EFL classroom.

### 5.2.Discussion of the Main Findings of the Teachers' Questionnaire

Upon analyzing the results from the teachers' questionnaire, several vital findings are unveiled. In relation to teachers' awareness of, and perceptions towards, differentiated instruction teaching practices, the majority of educators claim their awareness of their learners' varying needs and that the one-size-fits-all approach is no longer acceptable in today's classrooms. The results in this particular area fully support the assumption that teachers' responsibility extends beyond merely imparting knowledge, and that they must also consider how such knowledge is conveyed and perceived, as well as how factors such as learners' individual differences, needs, and learning difficulties may impact instruction.

On the other hand, the teachers' questionnaire results showed that numerous instructors affirm their frequent use of static instructional grouping instead of changing group members frequently and in a timely manner.

When asked about the training courses they have received regarding implementing flexible grouping strategies in the EFL classroom, the greater part of teachers indicated that they are unsatisfied. This suggests that the initial TEFL training courses provided by the Algerian Ministry of National Education are insufficient, and that teachers need more training to develop their instructional grouping teaching practices.

### 5.3.Analysis and Interpretation of Learners' Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect data from Algerian middle school EFL learners about their perceptions towards instructional grouping practices. The data collected will be analyzed and interpreted in order to fulfill and strengthen the research.

**Section 1.** The Impact of Group Work on Learners in the EFL Classroom

**Table 4.** Learners' Perceptions of Group Work in the Classroom

| Items | | Srongly agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly disagree | Mode | Mean | St dD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Group work | N | 29 | 20 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 1,87 | 1,142 |
| Motivates mean enhances my engagement | % | 48% | 34% | 8% | 4% | 7% | | | |
| Group work allows me to share and discuss my ideas with my peers | N | 24 | 24 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 1,98 | 1,127 |
| | % | 40% | 40% | 7% | 8% | 5% | | | |
| Group work allows me to listen and appreciate different opinions | N | 19 | 28 | 6 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 2,08 | 1,109 |
| | % | 32% | 46% | 10% | 5% | 7% | | | |
| Group work provides effective peer feedback | N | 17 | 25 | 7 | 8 | 3 | 2 | 2,25 | |
| | % | 28% | 42% | 12% | 13% | 5% | | | 1,159 |
| Group work Enables me to develop my social skills | N | 19 | 25 | 11 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2,08 | 1,046 |
| | % | 32% | 42% | 18% | 3% | 5% | | | |
| Weighted Mean | | | | | | | | 2,052 | |
| St Deviation | | | | | | | | | 1,116 |

Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics for the Impact of Group Work on Learners in the EFL Classroom. The weighted average for this section is 2.052 with a standard deviation of 1.116. According to the Likert scale, a value of 2.052 falls within the interval of 1-2.51, which indicates that the trend of Learners' Perceptions towards Group Work is agreeable.

**Section 2.** Learners' Perceptions towards Relationship in Group Work

In this section, learners were asked to choose the appropriate classroom learning situation to determine their perceptions of collaborative learning. The participants' answers to the four questions were summarized in one table.

**Table 5.** Learners' sense of community and learning

| Items | | Srongly agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly disagree | Mode | Mean | Std D |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| In class, I prefer to work with one other person | N | 14 | 28 | 11 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 2,27 | 1,118 |
| | % | 23% | 47% | 18% | 4% | 8% | | | |
| In class ,I prefer to work in groups (from 3 to 4) | N | 12 | 20 | 8 | 11 | 9 | 2 | 2,57 | 1,373 |
| | % | 20% | 34% | 13% | 18% | 15% | | | |
| | % | 14% | 8% | 28% | 32% | 18% | | | |
| Weighted Mean | | | | | | | | 2,42 | |
| St Deviation | | | | | | | | | 1,27 |

It is apparent from Table 8 that in the first statement "In class, I prefer to work with one other person," a small number of participants are independent learners, with 4% and 8% respectively. In contrast, the results obtained from the first statement ("In my classroom, I prefer to work with one other person") and the second statement ("In my classroom, I prefer to work in a group (3 to 6)") indicate

that the overwhelming proportion of the respondents are more dependent learners. This suggests that students' ability to perform a task or build their body of knowledge is directly related to working alongside their peers and classmates.

**Section 3.** Learners' Preferences for Group Membership

In this section, learners' preferences for group membership were investigated to record changes in perceptions while learning English as a foreign language. The purpose for focusing on student configuration was twofold: firstly, to learn more about students' preferences for group members, and secondly, to find out whether the membership group can significantly affect collaborative interactions and provide opportunities for detailed explanations and a more nuanced negotiation of meaning, which can be helpful in improving student learning.

**Table 6** . Learners' perceptions of group membership

| Items | | Srongly agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly disagree | Mode | Mean | Std D |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I learn best when group members are my best friends | N | 35 | 15 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 1,70 | 1,03 |
| | % | 58% | 25% | 7% | 8% | 2% | | | |
| I learn best when group members have common interests | N | 15 | 22 | 13 | 6 | 4 | 2 | 2,37 | 1,146 |
| | % | 25% | 37% | 22% | 10% | 7% | | | |
| I learn best when group members have different interests | N | 11 | 25 | 9 | 11 | 4 | 2 | 2,53 | 1,186 |
| | % | 18% | 24% | 15% | 18% | 7% | | | |
| I learn best when group members have different ability levels | N | 30 | 20 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 1,85 | |
| | % | 50% | 33% | 3% | 9% | 5% | | | 1,147 |
| Weighted Mean | | | | | | | | 2,112 | |
| St Deviation | | | | | | | | | 1.127 |

Table 6 (above) shows more noticeable changes among learners' perceptions of group membership. In each statement, there was a significant increase in the number of learners who found the group membership to be fitting their learning needs. Additionally, the mean of 2.112 falls within the interval of 1-2.60, which indicates that the trend of Learners' Preferences for Group Members is agreeable.

**Section 4.** Teacher's Grouping Arrangements Criteria

This section aims to investigate whether teachers provide opportunities for students to be part of various different groups based on their readiness, interest, or learning style.

**Table 7.**Teacher's Grouping Arrangements Criteria

| Items | | Always | Very often | Some times | Rarely | Never | Mode | Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1-When we work in groups ,our teacher asks us to form groups randomly | N | 2 | 10 | 11 | 18 | 19 | 5 | 3,70 |
| | % | 3% | 17% | 18% | 30% | 32% | | |
| 2-When we work in groups, our teachers arranges groups of friendship | N | 2 | 3 | 11 | 12 | 32 | 5 | 4,15 |
| | % | 3% | 5% | 15% | 20% | 54% | | |
| 3-Whenwe work in groups ,our teachers arranges groups of similar interests | N | 1 | 3 | 10 | 17 | 29 | 5 | 4,17 |
| | % | 2% | 5% | 17% | 28% | 48% | | |
| 5-Whenweworkin group, our teacher arranges small Groups of our choice | N | 0 | 1 | 9 | 12 | 38 | 5 | 4,45 |
| | % | 0% | 2% | 15% | 20% | 64% | | |
| | | Weighted Mean | | | | | | 3.62 |

When reading the mean scores of statements 1, 2, 3, and 4 in Table 10, it is revealed that the trend of Teacher's Grouping Arrangements Criteria is very low, which means that all the answers are located between the mean interval scale of 3.41 and 5, namely, 'rarely' and 'never'.

Upon analyzing the learners' questionnaire, the findings reveal that Algerian middle school learners consider collaborative work as an effective learning strategy to enhance their social skills as well as their creativity.

To shed more light on teachers' use of flexible grouping as one of the principles of differentiated instruction, learners were first asked about their perceptions of group work and then about their teachers' instructional grouping practices through fifteen ordinal-scale statements.

Apparently, most learners have different learning styles, interests, levels of readiness, and preferences. Unlike a small number of them who prefer to accomplish their tasks individually, many learners tend to share ideas, express opinions, and negotiate with peers in an inclusive EFL classroom. Additionally, some learners highlighted their strongest learning need to collaborate with groups of friends, members of similar or different interests, learning styles, and preferences.

In Section 4, the majority of the students affirm that their teachers do not use various grouping strategies. According to learners' learning preferences, such teaching practices may well hinder the development and achievement of the predetermined learning social skills.

### 5.4. General Discussion of Teachers' and Learners' Questionnaires

Upon comparing the main results from the teachers' and the learners' questionnaires, a number of findings are revealed. Although middle school teachers of English are aware of the importance of differentiated instruction practices within the EFL classroom, results from the teachers' questionnaires indicate that a considerable number of teachers seldom or never group and regroup learners according to their learning needs in the EFL setting. This finding is very much in keeping with the results from the learners' questionnaire, which also indicate that a considerable number of teachers always or very often arrange groups based on performance instead of other more influential factors such as interests and friendship.

## 5. Recommendations for Teachers and Learners

Differentiated instruction is all about understanding each learner's unique needs, interests, and abilities, and then tailoring the learning environment to support them. When it comes to instructional grouping, which is a key part of differentiation, teachers should keep in mind that grouping students can be really effective in EFL classrooms - as long as there's a clear purpose behind it and the groups are formed based on timely assessments.

### 6.1.For Teachers

Teachers should consider factors beyond just academic level when forming groups, such as students' interests, learning styles, and even friendships. It's important to vary the groups regularly and purposefully, so students can develop important social skills like openness and teamwork. The grouping and regrouping should be guided by ongoing assessments that help identify each student's particular strengths, needs, and preferences. This ensures everyone has fair ways to engage, express their understanding, and learn in their preferred way.

Teachers should also encourage active participation during group work. By examining ideas, thinking critically, and sharing their views, students can really get the most out of collaborative learning experiences, both in class and through assignments.

### 6.2.For Learners

Middle school students in Algeria should feel empowered to express their knowledge, ideas, and learning preferences. They shouldn't see the teacher as the

only actor - they need to take responsibility for their own learning. In fact, developing strong social skills from a young age can greatly benefit students' ability to form relationships and adapt well, both in school and later in life.

## 7. Suggestions for Future Research

- Other researchers could replicate this study using an experimental design, with a control group, to further investigate perceptions around flexible grouping. Interviews could also provide deeper insights.
- It would be valuable to research teachers' criteria and assessment methods for grouping students effectively to optimize learning.
- Since this study found that purposeful grouping can make students more active in their learning, future research could explore using flipped learning as a way to promote learner autonomy.
- There's a clear need to better understand students' diverse learning needs, profiles, interests, and readiness levels. More research in this area could yield important insights.

The key takeaway is that thoughtful, flexible grouping strategies have great potential to support differentiated instruction and engage learners in meaningful, collaborative ways. Building on this foundation can lead to exciting possibilities for enhancing EFL teaching and learning.

## 8. CONCLUSION

At the heart of effective differentiated instruction lies the fundamental goal of empowering diverse learners to engage meaningfully in group discussions - the proven gateway to the many instructional benefits of cooperative learning. However, the pitfalls of homogeneous grouping, whether of high-achievers or struggling students, risk undermining this very purpose.

This study set out to uncover crucial insights that could reshape how teachers approach differentiation and flexible grouping in the EFL classroom:

• Do teachers truly account for the vast differences among their students?

• How are groups constructed and managed, and how do these practices impact learner outcomes?

• Do teachers effectively employ flexible grouping strategies to cater to varied student needs?

• Have teachers been equipped with the necessary training and resources for implementing flexible grouping?

The findings are both illuminating and impactful. While teachers demonstrate a clear awareness of the importance of differentiation, the reality is that most struggle to translate this understanding into consistent, effective implementation of flexible grouping practices. As a result, learners are often deprived of the rich opportunities to collaborate, communicate, and develop key skills based on their unique interests, learning styles, and preferences.

The root cause? A lack of targeted professional development and support for teachers - a critical gap that must be addressed to unlock the full potential of differentiated, collaborative learning. When teachers are empowered to seamlessly integrate flexible grouping into their instruction, the benefits for student engagement, skill development, and academic achievement are profound.

This study issues a clarion call to educators, administrators, and policymakers alike: the time is now to revolutionize differentiated instruction through strategic, sustained investments in teacher training and resources. Only then can we fulfill the promise of collaborative learning for students of all backgrounds and abilities. The path to unlocking this transformative potential lies before us - let us seize it with conviction and clarity of purpose.

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