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Bayan Rababa'h, Jordan

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### School context

**Universal Civilizations Academy (UCA)** is located in Amman, Jordan. Universal Civilizations Academy offers both national and international curricula that emphasise academic excellence, character development and global citizenship. The school fosters a nurturing and inclusive environment, encouraging students to reach their full potential. Universal Civilizations Academy is accredited by international bodies like Oxford AQA, Cognia, Cambridge International Examinations and Pearson Edexcel, and integrates advanced programmes such as Engineering and Robotics, preparing students for a global future.

### About the author



**Bayan Rababa'h** is a dedicated educator from Amman, Jordan, with a deep passion for teaching and a commitment to shaping the future of education. With over 21 years of experience, she has grown from starting as an English language teacher in 2002 to becoming a respected leader in the field. Bayan holds a PhD in Linguistics from the University of Jordan and has taken on various roles throughout her career, including Head of the English Department, and now she serves as the Principal of the International Programmes at Universal Civilizations Academy. In this role, she oversees the learning journey of students from Grade 1 to Grade 11 IGCSE, ensuring they receive a well-rounded education. Bayan is also a part-time lecturer at the University of Jordan and a certified Cambridge Programme Leader, offering professional development training in both English and Arabic.

### Key findings

- It became evident that differentiated instruction requires not only teaching strategies but also a shift in mindset and classroom management practices.
- These findings suggest that while CPD workshops have had a positive impact, ongoing support is essential. Moving forward, the key focus should be on offering more tailored support for teachers who are still adjusting to these practices, and providing them with tools to manage time and student diversity more effectively.



## Exploratory Action Research questions

1. Why do I perceive differentiated instruction as challenging to implement in primary classrooms?
2. What are primary teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of CPD in improving their differentiated instruction practices?
3. How do teachers use differentiation in their classrooms?

## Action Research rationale

This Action Research focuses on enhancing differentiated instruction in primary classrooms through targeted continuous professional development (CPD) initiatives. Differentiated instruction, which involves tailoring teaching strategies to meet diverse student needs, is recognised as crucial for effective learning. However, it remains a significant challenge for many teachers, particularly in primary education. Managing varied learning styles, abilities and interests in one classroom often leaves teachers feeling overwhelmed, leading to inconsistent implementation and varied student outcomes.

At Universal Civilizations Academy, I have noticed that primary teachers have concerns about the practical challenges of applying differentiated instruction, even after participating in different CPD initiatives. This suggests a gap between the CPD content and the everyday classroom practices, raising important questions about how CPD can be more effectively designed and delivered to meet these challenges.

This research seeks to understand how CPD initiatives influence student behaviour and engagement in classrooms where differentiated instruction is applied. Effective CPD has the potential to transform teaching practices, leading to more inclusive and responsive learning environments. By investigating these issues, the research aims to provide actionable insights that will help refine the CPD initiatives, ultimately contributing to school improvement by enhancing both teaching practices and student learning experiences and outcomes.



## Data collection tools

### Methodology

To explore my research questions, I will use three data collection tools. First, I will conduct classroom observations with five primary teachers to identify the practical challenges they face when implementing differentiated instruction. My reflections will be documented in a reflective journal, which will provide real-time evidence for research question 1. Second, to address research question 2, I will distribute a questionnaire to primary teachers that will include a combination of Likert-scale and open-ended questions to collect both quantitative and qualitative data on their perceptions of the effectiveness of CPD in improving their differentiation practices. Finally, I will conduct focus group discussions with eight to ten teachers to explore how they use differentiation in their classrooms, which will provide detailed insights for research question 3. All participants will give informed consent, and confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained to ensure ethical research practices throughout the study.

## Data analysis for the exploration stage

### Key findings from exploration

Based on my own observations as a principal, teachers are working hard to implement differentiated instruction in their classrooms, but the outcomes of their teaching practices vary. According to the questionnaire responses and the focus group discussions, teachers with 6–15 years of experience, mostly teaching Grades 1 to 6, found CPD programmes on differentiated instruction very helpful. Strategies like project-based learning, group activities and flexible grouping have effectively met the diverse needs of students. However, challenges such as managing time, planning for larger classes and creating customised materials still exist. Despite these issues, it is noticed that differentiated instruction has improved student engagement and learning outcomes. Teachers noticed that students are more involved when lessons are planned and personalised to their individual needs and learning styles. The focus group highlighted the importance of CPD workshops on practical teaching strategies and formative assessment, but also revealed the need for ongoing support, teamwork and resources like ready-made lesson plans. Approximately 65 per cent of teachers believe that more training on time management and access to instructional mentors would help them overcome the challenges of differentiation.



**‘My understanding of differentiated instruction has deepened, showing me more effective ways to tailor lessons to diverse student needs. I now feel more confident in applying flexible strategies to enhance learning for all.’**

Teacher participant, focus group, post-workshop phase

## Action Research

### Action plan

My action plan will focus on **targeted CPD workshops** that will engage about ten school teachers in four weekly sessions, each lasting three hours.

The workshops will aim to address key challenges by enhancing time management, planning for large classes and applying effective differentiation techniques.

Each session will focus on practical strategies, including managing classroom practices, creating lesson plans for diverse groups and implementing differentiated instruction. Teachers will participate in hands-on activities, peer discussions and collaborative reflections. The workshops will also include feedback strategies and follow-up support to ensure long-term application.

### Action plan evaluation tools

A combination of tools will be used to evaluate the impact of the action plan.

1. **Pre- and post-workshop surveys** will assess changes in teachers' confidence and understanding of strategies for time management, planning for large classes and differentiation techniques. These surveys will include Likert-scale questions to measure growth, and open-ended items to capture detailed feedback.
2. **Classroom observations** will provide insights into how effectively teachers apply the learned strategies. Using a structured checklist, observations will focus on indicators such as improved lesson planning, effective classroom management and the application of differentiation methods.
3. **Focus group discussions** will be conducted with participating teachers to explore their perceptions of the workshops' effectiveness and their impact on teaching practices.

## Data analysis and conclusions

### Action plan implementation

The implementation of the action plan went smoothly in most areas, but several challenges emerged. One of the major obstacles was ensuring that all participants had consistent access to the necessary resources and materials. Despite detailed preparations, some teachers faced difficulties in accessing the online materials due to technical issues, which slightly delayed the progress for a few. Another challenge was managing the varying levels of engagement across participants. While some teachers embraced the strategies immediately, others were hesitant to integrate them into their teaching practices. To address this, additional support was provided through one-to-one coaching sessions, but this added extra time to the overall implementation process. Additionally, scheduling and time constraints posed difficulties in ensuring that teachers could attend all the training sessions and follow-up activities without disruption to their regular teaching commitments. However, the willingness of teachers to participate and adjust their practices was a positive aspect of the implementation. Despite these challenges, the overall response was favourable, with many teachers expressing interest in continuing their professional development in differentiated instruction. The key takeaway is the importance of ongoing support and flexibility to overcome logistical and individual barriers in professional development programmes.

### Key findings

The key findings from the implementation of the action plan reflect both progress and areas for improvement. On a positive note, teachers demonstrated a clear understanding of differentiated instruction strategies, with a noticeable increase in the use of differentiation in their lesson plans and classroom activities. Ninety-three per cent of teachers reported feeling more confident in addressing the diverse needs of their students, which suggests the effectiveness of the CPD programme in enhancing their skills. However, there were areas that required further attention. Fifty-three per cent of teachers struggled to consistently apply differentiation techniques across all subjects and grade levels, indicating that more subject-specific training might be needed. Additionally, while most teachers were receptive to feedback and coaching, a few still found the transition to differentiated instruction challenging, particularly in larger classes, where time management became a key issue. It became evident that differentiated instruction requires not only teaching strategies but also a shift in mindset and classroom management practices. These findings suggest that while CPD workshops have had a positive impact, ongoing support is essential. Moving forward, the key focus should be on offering more tailored support for teachers who are still adjusting to these practices and providing them with tools to manage time and student diversity more effectively.

## Conclusions

The conclusions of this action research highlight the significant impact that targeted professional development in differentiated instruction can have on both teachers' teaching practices and students' learning experiences. Teachers who participated in the CPD workshops reported increased confidence in applying differentiation strategies, resulting in a more inclusive and student-centered classroom environment. The research also revealed that while most teachers embraced these practices, continued support and follow-up were essential to ensuring consistent and effective application, especially for teachers managing larger or more diverse classrooms. Notably, primary teachers tended to rely more on addressing students' learning styles rather than focusing on the academic level of their students. This tendency reflects a practical approach, as teachers often feel more equipped to adjust based on individual learning preferences rather than tackling the more complex issue of varying academic capabilities.



The impact on the school setting has been positive, with teachers becoming more adept at meeting the individual needs of students, thereby improving overall student engagement and learning outcomes. The success of this initiative could be extended to other schools, particularly in a global context, where diverse student populations and varied teaching styles make differentiated instruction a valuable tool. Sharing the outcomes and strategies from this research could inspire other educational institutions to adopt similar CPD programmes, fostering a global movement towards more inclusive teaching practices.

Looking ahead, the school development cycle could be enhanced by incorporating ongoing, personalised coaching for teachers, expanding CPD opportunities to cover other aspects of pedagogy and building a culture of peer mentoring to encourage collaboration. Future actions could include integrating differentiation techniques into the school's regular curriculum reviews and ensuring that new teachers are provided with differentiated training from the outset. These initiatives would further embed the practices into the school's overall development strategy, ensuring sustained improvement in teaching and learning.



## Future actions

The conclusions from this Action Research emphasise the significant impact of targeted professional development in enhancing teachers' differentiated instruction practices. The workshops fostered a deeper understanding of differentiation, empowering teachers to address diverse student needs more effectively. However, the research also highlighted the ongoing need for continuous support, such as regular follow-up sessions and peer collaboration, to ensure these strategies are consistently applied in classrooms.

The impact on the school has been positive, with teachers reporting increased confidence and effectiveness in catering to varied learning styles. This shift contributes to a more inclusive and engaging learning environment. From a global perspective, the findings can benefit educational systems facing similar challenges with diverse classrooms, offering insights into how CPD can drive meaningful change.

Future enhancements in the school development cycle could involve integrating differentiated instruction more deeply into the curriculum, establishing collaborative teaching models and introducing structured peer mentoring programmes. These changes would ensure sustained improvement and foster a culture of continual professional growth. By scaling these practices, the school could serve as a model for other institutions, both locally and globally, demonstrating how targeted professional development can transform teaching practices and enhance student outcomes.

## Acknowledgements

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## References

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**'I have implemented the differentiation instruction in my classes and I have noticed that all my students were engaged. I have tried differentiated content and assessment to support all the students and learners to achieve the goals.'**

Teacher participant, questionnaire, post-workshop phase