

ADAPTING TEACHING AT THE RIGHT LEVEL (TaRL) IN ENGLISH INSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to share the idea of an approach of teaching adapted from Pratham (India's NGO). Lots of teachers have problems of what happened during pandemic era of Covid-19 when unwanted facts have occurred in education sector in Indonesia. Students underwent 'learning loss'. They have not been motivated to read or to learn. They have been 'addicted' to cell phones by playing games, enjoying *youtubes*, and chatting through other social media. The teachers must realize that this condition will be worse and even worst if they do not find ways to minimize bad things because of their inability to teach students by implementing a new appropriate approach or strategy for their class.

Teaching at The Right Level (TaRL) is one of the options to solve the problem of learning loss. Teachers begin with assessing their students before teaching in order to know the students' prior ability and what they want to. So the teachers will comprehend what is happening and eventually they will be able to design their learning scenario to achieve the learning achievement based on the students level of ability.

Teaching at The Right Level (TaRL) is a learning approach that does not refer to class but refers to students' abilities. TaRL can overcome gaps in understanding that have occurred in the classroom. Teachers must know their student's prior knowledge, their interests, and their learning styles. Students are different from each other in one class. The teachers have to serve students based on their characteristics. The teachers also have to know which strategies, learning materials, learning resources, learning products that are concord with the students' needs.

The steps of applying TaRL approach are 1) to have pre-assessment to the students to know their characteristics, potential, needs, 2) to arrange an appropriate learning process through a lesson plan, 3) to teach students accordance with their level of competence; and to assess students to know their progress.

Keywords: TaRL (teaching at the right level), flexibility, differentiated instruction, interest, potential

Introduction

The low quality standard of education in Indonesia has been a hot issue so far. Various efforts have been made by the government and society to improve the quality of education. These efforts involve various stakeholders ranging from government, private sectors, universities, communities, and NGOs but still are not satisfying yet (Yulianci et al., 2022). On every 8-10 years, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology revises or even changes the curriculum. Why it happens? What should we do to improve our curriculum or education sector?

Based on my experience when I supervise my teachers in teaching, they teach the same way, boring and monotonous. The same teachers with different curriculum are also the same way. They teach based on their lesson plans without knowing what their students are like. They do not notice what is happening in the classroom. Some students

are chatting, making jokes without paying attention to their teachers. The students seem not ready for the class. They have no interest in learning and do not care what their teacher instructs. The teachers have monotonous techniques by lecturing and sometimes having groups but the students do not do what to do and even do not care with their group members. When there is a presentation, other students talk with their friends, no questions, and the class does not have meaningful learning. The teachers go around the class but often without giving assistance. The only book that is used is the textbook without any additional materials taken from various learning resources and no presenting technology in the classroom.

The teachers are getting frustrated because of the class condition. They complain that their students are not interested in class. They do not take a part in the class as their teachers demand. They usually do not do homework or tasks. They are reluctant to join the class. The teachers feel that their learning scenario does not work but no obvious attempts. In fact, they consider that their students are the same. Teachers often fail to give varied teaching instructions that are suitable for a mixed-ability classroom because these instructions do not match students' proficiency levels (Magableh & Abdullah, 2020). Teachers must realize that students come to classrooms from different backgrounds, cultures, interests, readiness, preferences, and needs. Teachers need to reach all these types of learners at the same time in one classroom period is a very hard job indeed.

Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL)

The government of Indonesia applied the newest curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka* or transformation curriculum) that is considered to be able to overcome learning loss and more focusing teachers on essential learning materials. More interestingly, this curriculum gives the teachers flexibility in teaching according to the capacity of students or commonly known as **Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL)**. Learning will be meaningful according to the right level of students. Besides that, learning according to ability will also arouse students' learning motivation.

TaRL was introduced for the first time by Indian learning innovation organization, Pratham (A Non-Government Organization). It is managing students are not tied to the class level but grouped by phase development or in accordance with the ability level of the same students. So that the reference is to learning outcomes but adjusted to the characteristics, potentials, and the need of students. TaRL is called combining activities

for maximizing learning. (Banerjee, et al, 2016). The TaRL approach is a learning approach that refers to the ability of students (Cahyono, 2022). The teachers have to know the students' characteristics before teaching through analyzing their competence and their needs. The teachers group students in different groups because they have different background of competence.

Anggraena, et al (2022) said that the transformation curriculum in Indonesia indicates the importance of development learning strategies according to the stage student learning achievements or those also known as teaching at the right level (TaRL). This learning is done by providing learning materials which vary according to learners' understanding. The purpose of this differentiation is for every student to achieve expected learning goals.

Teaching at the Right Level is a pedagogical approach that pays attention to the quality of ability levels based on assessment. Students are grouped by learning level and the students' ability level. This is what makes TaRL different from the usual approach. TaRL can be the answer to the problem of understanding gaps that have been occurring in the classroom. This approach is made by adjusting the achievements, level of ability, and the needs of students. Students are not tied to the class level, but are adjusted based on the abilities of the same students. The goal of teaching is to support student learning (Hiebert et al., 2007). Teachers must be able to analyze teaching in terms of its effects on students learning. What students learn, how, why instruction influences such learning, and how lessons could be revised to be more effective next time and must be analyzed well by the teachers to improve the quality of teaching learning process. Even though the TaRL originally focuses on basic reading and math but I believe it can be modified in teaching English.

Differentiated Instruction in TaRL

Differentiated instruction is a way of recognizing and teaching according to different student talents and learning styles (Logan, 2011). Differentiated instruction means instruction to meet individual needs. Teachers may differentiate content, process, products, or the learning environment, the use of ongoing assessment and flexible grouping makes this a successful approach to instruction. Teachers need to take consideration not only the subject they teach but also the students. Differentiated instruction requires from the teacher to be familiar with the curriculum and the learners' characteristics (Ismajli & Imami-Morina, 2018).

Teaching is not differentiated when teachers ignore the difference of students' ability, interests, learning styles, and assessment. Every individual learner is unique as he or she is different from each other. The teacher should facilitate students according to their needs because each student has different characteristics, so they cannot be given the same treatment.

The characteristics of differentiated instruction includes the learning environment invites students to learn, the curriculum has clearly defined learning objectives, ongoing assessment and the teacher response to students' learning needs, and classroom management is effective. Differentiated instruction is an approach, not any single strategy (Kurkjian et al., 2009).

Deckman (2015) insisted that the teacher must provide students with choice, flexibility, on-going assessment, and creativity in differentiating the concepts taught. At the same time, the teacher has to understand how students process and develop understanding of concepts and skills. Additionally, the teacher has to know the level of knowledge students must tap into when asking them to develop products or projects to demonstrate learning. Based on this, teachers must be aware that their students are different from each other so the teachers must serve them differently.

According to Tomlinson in Defitriani et al., (2015) there are three things that can be modified in designing the differentiated instruction model, namely content, process, and product. *Content* is what the students need to learn and also what learning materials they have access to. *Process* is a learning activity used by the teacher to engage the students and make sense of the learning content. *Product* is a variety of projects designed to help the students apply their knowledge and challenge them to demonstrate it. One more addition is *learning environment* that is the way the classroom is set up and how it feels to learn it in that environment.

The Stages of Implementing TaRL in the Classroom

- a. To be able to make learning student-centered, then the assessment becomes the first stage we have to do. This assessment is also known as diagnostic assessment. Things to recognize include potential, characteristics, needs, developmental stages of students, stage of child learning achievement, etc.

- b. After successfully identifying the potential, characteristics, level of achievement, ability, then the next part is compiling appropriate learning process of our assessment data. This planning is also included grouping students in the same level.

With the preparation of learning that is according to achievement or level ability of these learners, then teachers place the learners at the center of the main learning.

- c. During this learning process, assessments are necessary made periodically to see the process of students' understanding, needs, progress during learning or known as formative assessment. As for the summative assessment as the goal achievement evaluation process learning at the end learning is also required for helping educators to design next projects.

From the three stages above I summarize that the steps to implement TaRL in the classroom are firstly the teacher assesses the learning level of students, groups them according to those who have similar levels of achievement and abilities, then providing teaching interventions and various learning activities according to the learning level not just looking at the class; and then the teacher teaches the basic skills that the students need to have and track their progress; next, the teacher needs to provide interventions that are in accordance with their learning needs; and finally the teacher assesses to know the students' progress.

In addition, according to Pratham, the session plan in TaRL is made by the teacher based on her observations of the children and data collected from formative assessments (Initiative, n.d.). It is an important resource for conducting TaRL sessions efficiently. The session of planning process helps to set achievable learning goals and plans the activities accordingly, to prepare the activities and appropriate materials in advance, to track progress and identify if children are ready to move to another level, to create future plans and make any necessary changes as needed, to reflect on what is going well and where to make changes during the week time and the end of the week.

The Implementation of TaRL in English Learning in Indonesia

Teaching English in Indonesia has been established in a very long time, however, either in primary schools or secondary schools, the result is not satisfying yet. This problem must be analyzed seriously by all stakeholders related to the English curriculum. What's wrong with this? Its Curriculum or its teachers? In teaching English, teachers need

to further develop their capacity and use the most suitable methods and strategies to facilitate the students in the teaching and learning process. (Ilmi, 2021). English teachers should not ignore that knowing students' prior knowledge, characteristics, interest, and learning styles are important things to know. Through the newest curriculum, it is hoped that English teachers can apply TaRL based on the condition of the class. Here is an example:

Procedure Text

- a. The teacher asks trigger questions based on the condition of the students' characteristics, potential, interests, and where the instruction occurs.

For example:

Have you ever made noodle? Do you make it by yourselves or your mother cooks for you? How often do you eat noodle in a week? Do you like it? Do you know how to make noodle? Please, tell me.

Note: Don't talk about a thing that is beyond students' thought like making burger, steak, etc. or don't talk about withdrawing money from bank machine. The purpose of this step is to know the students' interest.

- b. The teacher assesses students' vocabulary mastery relating to procedure text or phrases or sentences of imperative and prohibition. It aims to know the students' prior knowledge of simple grammar or words related to the material being discussed and some simple procedure texts to check students' understanding in reading comprehension.
- c. The next step is to design an interesting and challenging lesson plan or learning scenario based on the previous steps. The teacher arranges the lesson plan based on the students' diagnostic test and groups them into their learning styles whether they are visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners. Besides, the teacher must be able also to create learning from content, process, product, and learning environment to serve students differently.

Content may include familiar foods and drinks for students (printed materials from magazines or authentic materials, electronic such as internet or cell phones. Process may include various strategies such as engage, study, activate (ESA), project-based learning, genre-based approach or presentation, practice, production (PPP). Products may differ each other among students like making a

recipe of food or drinks, presentation and portfolio. Learning environment including school's learning equipment or media must be also considered.

- d. To know the students' progress, the teacher assesses the students with summative test or real-world tasks.

Some More Ideas

Note: In the beginning phase, giving a learning style survey/questionnaire is suggested to know which group the students are in: visual, auditory, or kinesthetic.

Genres	Pre-assessment (cognitive or non-cognitive)	Lesson plan/scenario (Active Learning)	Triggering questions/activities	Learning process	Assessment
Descriptive	Cognitive: Adjectives, be, infinitive, noun phrases, short descriptive paragraphs Non-cognitive: through pictures	Options: 1. Engage, Study, Activate 2. Presentation, Practice, Production 3. Project-based learning 4. Genre-based approach. 5. Think, pair, share, etc.	Showing simple pictures and asking students related to the pictures	Based on the lesson plan and students' ability, interest, and potential.	Formative or summative (authentic assessment): Tasks, tests, portfolio, quiz, projects
Narrative	Cognitive: Simple past, word order, adjective, adverb, short narrative paragraphs Non-cognitive: through pictures series		Showing samples through video, dolls of animals		
Recount	Cognitive: Simple past, word order, adjective, adverb, short recount paragraphs Non-cognitive: through pictures series		Telling a real experience		
Report	Cognitive: Simple present, word order, adjective, short report paragraphs Non-cognitive: through you tubes or TV program		Asking questions based on observing video		
Functional texts	Non-cognitive: authentic materials to know the content and their features		Asking questions based on personal experiences and real objects/media		

Discussion

The application of English curriculum in Indonesia seems one or two levels above what students expect to be. Producing a kind of text for students in general is not as easy as the teacher expects. Teaching at the right level approach is expected to meet the students' level at which they are. The approach involves identifying students' current learning levels, grouping them by level, assigning teachers to different groups after providing them with level appropriate learning materials, and monitoring students' progress. TaRL approach features

grouping students by learning level rather than grade level and teaching students at each learning level through engaging activities and tailored materials (Beery, 2017).

The TaRL has flexibility in terms of identifying students with quick or slow response, students level and learning achievements. Learning flexibility is needed so that teachers have flexibility to teach all their students to achieve their minimum competency. This approach can be applied by doing early assessment of learning to detect students' readiness, interest, potential, and learning styles through dialog to get to know students better. The second stage is aligning of learning objectives. Next, arranging an appropriate lesson plan and finally practicing differentiated instruction.

Differentiated instruction is good to apply because it meets the diverse needs of students. The differentiated instruction is important to differentiate learning styles, different performance, readiness level, and that engagement varies. In applying the TaRL approach, a teacher should begin with selection of standards-based content; determine readiness and students' interest through diagnostic testing or learning inventories; pay fully attention to content delivery through students interest, learning styles and readiness; work on varied activities; take questions and review whole class; variation of assessments and projects; and whole class review of standards. When teachers work together to improve their practice, students learn more (Department of Education and Training, 2019). So, learning will be meaningful according to the ability or level of the students. Teaching must be the right level of what students expect so that they make themselves as true learners (Jazuli, 2022). Teaching at Right Level model of the assignment method that can improve character strengthening and students' learning outcomes (Cahyono, 2022).

Conclusion

Differentiated instruction is not about lowering standards. Teachers do not differentiate all the time but only as needed (Logan, 2011). Teachers who differentiate believe that every child is unique with differing learning styles and preferences. They may differentiate based on students' readiness by varying the levels of difficulty of the material covered in class (Deckman, 2015).

There is a close relation between the concept of the differentiated learning and the teaching at the right level (TaRL). Both of them possess the same things that before teaching teachers should know their students learning styles, interest, potential, and prior competence. After that the teacher has to arrange a good and appropriate lesson plan including various learning materials or resources, method or strategy, media, and

kinds of learning outcomes or products which are suitable for each individual or group of students.

TaRL can be 'a medicine' to overcome teachers' problems in teaching learning process according to students' ability so the teachers can modify their lesson plan and can be applicable in different classes based on the students' needs.

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