

# Differentiated Reading Instruction: Teacher Beliefs and Strategies

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## Abstract

With an increasingly diverse student population in the classroom, it is imperative that teachers feel confident about their ability to teach reading to children who have varied reading proficiency to read. This study has explored in-service teacher beliefs on learner differences in reading instruction in school classrooms that instigated teacher strategies in meeting learner needs. Data were collected from classroom observation and interviews from two experienced teachers. Transcripts and field notes were coded and analyzed thematically. The result indicated that the teachers had high expectations for their students, however, they lacked sufficient skills to differentiate reading instruction to address the needs of students on a regular basis. Classroom instruction was mostly dominated by lecture methods and the materials and activities were limited to textbooks. The teachers saw reading differences as a classroom reality, recognized students reading differences in the classroom, and felt the need to grow every learning potential in reading. Some of the teaching strategies that aligned with differentiated reading instruction were: flexible grouping, library lesson and choice in reading, differentiated support, multisensory presentation of lessons, extension activities for high achieving readers, activating background knowledge and making connection, peer tutoring, exploratory activities, curriculum compacting, ongoing assessment and feedback, differentiated questioning, differentiated assignment, repeated instruction, and using technology.

**Keywords:** *strategies, reading, motivation, readiness, interest, learning profile*

## Introduction

In English language education, studies on teacher views in reading instruction have recently gained considerable research impetus. The notion that teacher beliefs are critical for understanding and improving educational processes and instructional practice has sparked a surge in study interest (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). Teachers' professional expertise, general classroom approach, and actual practices may differ depending on the types of ideas they hold, and their classroom instruction decisions are founded on their theoretical beliefs about teaching and learning (Wan, 2015).

Belief is a person's subjective judgement that can be positive, negative or ambivalent (Boyd 2003, as cited in Dhakal 2016). Pajares (1992) pointed out that attitudes, values, perceptions, understanding, and images are beliefs in disguise. Culture shapes teacher beliefs into teachers' everyday decisions and actions (Gay, 2000). This resonates with Bandura (1986) when he pointed out that all individuals have internal force that drives their actions (Murtiningsih, 2014). Borg (2003) admitted that beliefs have a number of characteristics, including the truth element, which indicates that the individual accepts the beliefs as truths. She also claimed that one's beliefs can be conscious or unconscious and that one can examine one's own

beliefs (Murtiningsih, 2014).

Beliefs can be of different types: examined or unexamined (Kindsvatter et al. 1988, as cited in Murtiningsih, 2014); core or peripheral (Kumaravadivelu, 2012) and controversy exists between the relationship between beliefs and practice (Murtiningsih, 2014). For instance, Richardson et al. (1991) discovered a strong link between teachers' perceptions about reading process and their teaching strategies (Murtiningsih, 2014). However, analysis of several studies by Pajares (1992) has shown that practices in the classroom do not always reflect teachers' beliefs.

In classroom instruction, student differences are not always taken into account (Dijkstra, Walraven, Mooij, & Kirschner, 2016). Teachers who deliver the same activities to all students rather than using assessment data to provide diverse sorts of activities to students with different ability levels often fail to meet student needs (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010). Teachers play a critical role in influencing the lifelong academic achievement of students, including their ability to read. Based on the meta-analysis of Hattie (2009), teachers impact at least 30% of student learning. Evidently, teachers have the power to influence student learning more than any other school-related variable.

Existing current student diversity in Nepali classrooms (Dhakal, 2016), brain research (Tomlinson&Imbeau, 2010), theories concerning learning styles (Tomlinson, 2001) and the multiple intelligences (Gardner,2011) all provide rationale for differentiated reading instruction. Student centered instruction requires educators to match curriculum and instruction to what students learn and how they learn to ensure every student grows to their full academic potential. Research has proved that students learn in various ways (Tomlinson, 2005). While educators in Nepal understand that all learners are different, and that their needs are diverse, few teachers accommodate these differences in their classrooms (Dhakal, 2016). Contemporary classroom instruction in Nepal is dominated by uniformity, rather than attending to students' reading diversity. It is evident that every learner benefits from an engaging learning experience, needs to be treated with respect, and requires opportunity to to grow and reach his or her fullest potential. This cannot be possible without the recognition of differentiated reading needs of the learners in the classroom. The current education system in Nepal does not adequately recognize differentiated reading needs of the students in the classroom. As a result, transmissionist classroom instruction dominates the classroom instruction assuming all the students in the class have the same instructional needs (Dhakal, 2016) neglecting the fact that their reading needs greatly vary. Therefore, teachers view in meeting learner needs in reading in classroom and teacher instructional strategies require to be explored.

## Literature Review

Studies have shown that teachers tend to form their beliefs about students based on their own life experiences and not necessarily based on actual experiences with others who might be culturally or linguistically varied (Pajares, 1992). This is significant when we consider how the teachers' attitudes, experiences, and expectations influence the type of reading instruction teachers can deliver, as well as the facts that all teachers require meaningful and strategic support in order to satisfy all students' reading requirements.

Previous research (Coubergs, Struyven, Vanthournout, & Engels, 2017; Tomlinson, 2005; Wan, 2015) has shown that differentiated reading instruction can meet the diverse learning needs of students in a classroom. Differentiated reading instruction is considered as the most effective strategy to tailor to learner diversity in reading. Instead of a one-size-fits-all approach, differentiated reading instruction gives

emphasis to the roles of teachers who have to address students' diversity in readiness, interest, and learning profiles (Rhonda & Akane, 2018; Tomlinson, 1995; Wan, 2015).

The current study was framed using Tomlinson's (2001, 2014) theory of differentiated instruction and the theory of mindset (Dweck, 2006). Differentiated instruction has been described as both philosophy and praxis (Coubergs, Struyven, Vanthournout, & Engels, 2017). Tomlinson (2001) has described differentiated instruction as a form of adaptive teaching which aims to provide all students with ideal learning environment through proactive plan, adjustment of curricula, instructional approaches, resources, activities, and student products to address the different requirements of students, to maximize learning prospects for every student in the classroom (Coubergs, Struyven, Vanthournout, & Engels, 2017).

Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) specified that a teacher's mindset can affect the successful implementation of differentiated reading instruction in the classroom. Dweck (2006) distinguished between fixed and the growth mindsets. Teachers with fixed mindset believe that the students' qualities, such as talent or intelligence, are fixed traits that determine their success, ignoring student effort. Fixed mindset teachers believe that some students have what it takes to succeed while others do not. Teachers with a growth mindset, on the other hand, feel that the majority of learning can be accomplished via devotion and hard work. From this perspective, if a student works hard enough, he or she can succeed. Such educators believe that intelligence and talent are just only the beginnings of learning. Teachers with a growth mindset are more likely to accept differences between students and consider student diversity as part of a rich learning environment (Hattie, 2009). Such teachers welcome challenges in the classroom and attribute students' failure to the lack of effort rather than the lack of intellectual ability.

Readiness, learning styles, and interests are the recognized forms of differentiated instruction that respond to the differing student needs in classrooms (Tomlinson & Eidson, 2003). Readiness based differentiated instruction focuses on differences according to a student's learning position in relation to the learning goals that must be met within a given subject at a specific time, which is referred to as state of preparedness. Differentiated instruction based on learning profile attempts to adapt instruction based on student's chosen mode of learning, such as learning styles, intelligence, preference, gender, culture, and context (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010). Differentiated instruction based on students' interests tries to adjust instruction by allowing students to choose between assignments, subject matter, and teaching methods (Tomlinson & Eidson, 2003). Tomlinson (2001) advocated a variety of instructional strategies to differentiate instruction in the classroom, including learning contracts, tiered instruction, and learning centers. These strategies help teachers to meet varied reading needs of the students in the classroom.

Children who have higher learning potential as well as children who struggle to read grade level texts typically have misaligned needs, abilities, and prevalent teaching techniques, resulting in them not working effectively (Dijkstra et al., 2016). A limited number of studies have specifically explored teacher belief on differentiated reading instruction. However, there are a few trends and themes that should be recognized from these investigations. Dijkstra et al. (2016) cited studies (Al Otaiba et al. 2011; Connor, Morrison, Fishman, et al. 2011; Firmender, Reis, and Sweeny 2013; Reis et al. 2011) that found differentiated instruction in small groups to be beneficial for children of all abilities in terms of oral reading fluency, study habits, social interaction, cooperation, attitude towards school and general mental health.

Classroom instruction that meets the reading needs of all students is really challenging. In the same classroom, differentiated instruction accommodates children with various comprehension and reading levels from high achievers to at risk students (Tomlinson, 2001). When instruction is differentiated, teachers use mixed ability groupings and utilize multiple pathways to achieve the same result, however,

most educators are not skilled in adapting to this form of instruction (Erickson, 2010). Teachers can enhance learning for all children in a differentiated classroom by providing additional support for struggling readers and enrichment activities for those who are ready to move ahead more quickly (Dijkstra et al., 2016).

Based on the literature review, differentiated reading instruction avoids the drawbacks of the one-size-fits-all curriculum; and includes current research into the workings of the human brain; supports learners in the classroom based on their learning styles and multiple intelligences; engages learners in learning; creates opportunities for success for all students based on their readiness, interest and learning profile. In this context, it is significant to explore and analyze carefully how teachers of English in Nepal view learner differences in reading instruction and how they adjust instruction to meet learner needs.

### *Nepali context*

Studies on reading instruction in Nepal are limited. Education Review Office (2015), has recently reviewed and summarized some of the earlier research studies (BPEP, 1994; CERID, 1993,1993,1999; CERSOD, 2001; Fulbright, 2008) that give attention to reading instruction and these studies indicate poor reading instruction in schools.

The data in 2013/14 showed that on average, 48 percent of grade 3 students, 51 percent of grade 5 students, and 52 percent of grade 8 students did not achieve their grade level in English, according to the data (NIRT, 2017). The causes of such poor proficiency are yet to be explored. A recent study by Educational Review Office (2020) has revealed startling evidence of reading proficiency of the grade three students. The study found that more than 10% of grade three students couldn't read a single word correctly. The average achievement percent in reading was found to be 43.53%. Similarly, average non-word reading ability of grade three students was 48.99% and oral reading fluency was only 25.04. Additionally, students were able to comprehend less 47.68% of the questions (Education Review Office, 2020).

Lack of qualified subject teachers, infrastructures, resources, and professional development are very common and these factors certainly impact quality of education, instruction, and achievement. Primary level teachers are supposed to teach any subject they are prescribed to teach. Reading is not taught as a separate subject in primary schools of Nepal although most countries teach reading as separate subject up to grade three globally.

Based on the empirical literature reviewed above, it can be deduced that reading is fundamental and reading related problems can be reduced if the differentiated reading instruction is practiced in regular classrooms. Although there is growing concern in researching differentiated reading instruction at international level, an acknowledged and decided gap in the literature in this area in the Nepali context exists and continued research is warranted. The objective of this study was to add to research on this topic and inform stakeholders by exploring school level English language teachers' beliefs on differentiated reading instruction and their instructional strategies in Nepal. To fulfil this purpose, the following research questions were employed:

1. How do teachers view learner differences in reading instruction?
2. What strategies do the teachers use to meet the learner needs?

This qualitative case study was carried out in two community schools in Kathmandu. Research on second language teacher beliefs and instructional strategies can most appropriately be conducted using constructivist paradigm (Alzaanin, 2020). This paradigm regards knowledge as a ‘human construction’ with researchers and participants as ‘co-constructors of knowledge’ (Hatch, 2002, P. 13). Researchers who adopt constructivist paradigm tend to employ qualitative research methodologies to explore, interpret and describe social realities (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). This study explicitly seeks out the multiple perspectives of cases, aiming to gather diverse notions of what occurred. Furthermore, ontological belief of this study is that reality is local and specifically constructed. This study is multiple case study in the sense that the participants were two in-service teachers who were invited to be the cases in the study. They were purposively selected for the study; had qualification of M.Ed. in English; and earned the experience of more than ten years teaching experience. One of the participants was male and the next was female, hereafter referred to as teacher A, and teacher B respectively.

Both participants in this study were identified by school administrators and English subject department head as effective teachers of English in their respective schools. The nature of the schools was different. School A was highly resourceful. School B was also resourceful, but in comparison to school A, it was far less in many ways. School A had better physical infrastructure such as buildings, furniture, playground, swimming pool, hostel, and resourceful library in comparison to school B.

In school A, only limited number of students coming from different districts are admitted. There were four sections in each class and each section contained 30-35 students. But in school B, the number of sections and students differed class wise. It ranged from 2 to 6 sections. The number of students in each section in school comprised of at least 50 students to maximum 60. Only the students with good proficiency in English, Mathematics, Science, and Nepali subjects were admitted based on entrance exams in school A. Both schools screened students for admission in school, however, in school B number of struggling students were more. Across all observed lessons, both teachers consistently exemplified characteristic of active, motivated teachers. I interviewed and observed both the teachers separately.

Semi-structured interviews and classroom observation were used to collect data. Classroom observation guidelines and interview guidelines were the tools for data collection. Interviews were taped but classroom observations were written down in the form of field notes. Researcher’s reflections were also captured in the form of field notes. The data was analyzed using Miles and Huberman’s (1994), interactive approach which included data collection, data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing. First, a set of topical codes was created based on the study objectives and a broad construct from literature on differentiated reading instruction. The results were analysed using Tomlinson’s framework of differentiated instruction and quotes from the answers were used to provide more specific evidence to support the issues and themes highlighted.

## **Results**

Teacher A’s primary manner of classroom instruction followed the traditional Initiation Response Feedback (IRF) pattern. This pattern, which was first described by Sinclair and Coulthard (as cited in Molinari, Mameli, & Gnisci, 2012) to analyze the classroom discourse, is made up of three turns (Molinari, Mameli & Gnisci, 2012). First, the teacher initiated a linguistic interaction directing question to the student. Then the student provides a response. Next, the teacher replies with a feedback. This pattern was dominant

classroom discourse in teacher A's classroom. In majority of the lessons, text reading was done through choral reading supervised by the teacher. Because the children could read the texts independently, they seldom stumbled over words and had limited opportunities to apply high-level comprehension strategies such as making inferences from the text, monitoring comprehension, and learning text structure knowledge. Teacher A often used verbal scaffolding during interactions with students.

Teacher B also followed IRF patterns in the lessons. However, her lessons were different in several ways. She prepared lesson plans on a regular basis. She was more interactive with students; made every lesson goal clear to her students before she started the lesson; and used a variety of materials and resources in the classroom to meet learner needs. Students read text nearly independently, with teacher guidance when needed. When students required help to decode or comprehend the text, teacher B offered various forms of verbal as well as other materials to scaffold student learning. She was readily available to students outside the class and assisted if they had any troubles. She created motherly environment in the classroom.

Both teachers provided prompts when students had difficulty in reading comprehension and the prompts provided seemed to lead to open-ended and diverse answers. During observation I could see that teacher B expected students to share their thinking and elaborated, rather than merely repeating, responding to help deepen their understandings.

The following sections represent the findings related to the views of these in-service teachers on learner differences in reading instruction and teachers' instructional strategies to meet their needs.

### ***Teachers view on learner differences***

The first research question of this study was to find how in-service teachers view learner differences in reading instruction. Both participant teachers recognized that classrooms were filled with diverse students with varied reading readiness, interests, and learning profiles. They asserted the need to recognize; be responsive to the needs of learner variance in reading instruction; and be aware of the existing student differences in the classroom. Four themes emerged from the teachers' view on learner differences. They are reading readiness; reading interest, motivation, and engagement; teaching philosophy; and reading profiles. They are as follows:

***Reading readiness.*** It is evident from the interview with the teachers that students' prior knowledge is one of the major causes of learner variance in reading. Both participant teachers believed that students' reading readiness differed even before they got admitted to school due to the factors such as home environment, opportunity to learn, developmental readiness to read, and home language. Some children joined school with basic literacy skills such as recognizing the alphabets and some others began to learn those skills only after joining schools. Teachers had to deal with all of them and meet their needs which was really challenging for them. Teachers were found to be cognizant of the learner differences in reading from the very beginning of schooling. Therefore, they indicated the need for differentiated reading instruction to meet the varied reading readiness of the students in the classroom.

***Reading interest, motivation, and engagement.*** Teachers also saw learner differences in their interest, motivation and engagement to read. Some students came the classroom already motivated to read and teachers didn't have to do much for them to engage in the reading task because they were intrinsically motivated to read by themselves. Such students seek help from teachers, engaged themselves

in the reading activities, and enjoyed reading variety of texts. These students had a strong will to read that drove their reading in large volume which consequently formed their reading habits. The teachers reported that they only facilitated to develop and maintain their will to read for such students. Moreover, teachers were cognizant that it was challenging for them to maintain student motivation to read because it might decline later for some students. Interviewed teachers revealed that all students they taught were not self-motivated to read. Some students loved to avoid reading. When they read, they read just to complete the task or assignment. They read because they had to. Therefore, teachers attempted to motivate such students by giving interesting reading materials, choice in reading, finding the topics or books that interests them, modelling reading, ongoing assessment, focusing on the students' progress in reading, scaffolding reading instruction, and providing feedback to ensure success. They reported that they focused on process and effort in reading to make their students feel that ability is not fixed, rather it develops with effort. Additionally, students were interested in reading varied genres of texts.

**Teaching philosophy.** Participant teachers believed in student centered, interactive view of teaching reading. I asked the participant teachers if they had changed their philosophy of teaching in the classroom when they started teaching to the date. Both of these teachers told that they had changed their philosophy of teaching. In the beginning they believed on the teacher centered methods of teaching but years of experience had changed their beliefs from being teacher centered to student centered. In this regard teacher A said:

*“Change in philosophy is common. In earlier days of my instruction, I used to be more active. I used to use teacher centered methods but now I use student centered, child friendly methods and involve the students in activities. This keeps learners more engaged in learning activities and their reading proficiency grows. The shift in my teaching style resulted from my experience. Student involvement in activities keeps them less distracted from the lesson than passively listening to the lecture (Field Note, 2021).”*

Teacher A's remarks showed that experience of dealing with students provided teachers the opportunity to test his beliefs and saw whether their beliefs worked or not. Action and experience changed teaching beliefs. Teachers recognized that learner differences within the same grade existed; expressed the need to be responsive to the needs of learner variance in the classroom; and believed that all students could read if they got the opportunity. But ironically, during classroom observation I noticed that these teachers' classroom instruction didn't necessarily matchup with the ways they wanted to teach despite their claim as constructivist during their interview. These teachers were overtly transmitting information expecting students to assimilate with the information provided rather than to construct their own meaning. This showed the inconsistency in their beliefs and practices and indicated a gap between the philosophy they hold and their actual classroom practice.

Both of these teachers believed that all students could achieve success academically despite the fact that their learning pathways are different. They wanted all of their students to perform better; believed reading skill as a foundational to succeed in all academic disciplines; and pointed out that reading success at lower level signalled academic success in the higher level. Regarding teacher expectations on students, teacher B said:

*“Teacher expectations directly affects students learning. Teacher has important role to play. I think this applies to most students. If the teachers look at them negatively, and presented himself disliking attitude develop. As a result, they loss interest, become disengaged. The teacher should have the capacity to motivate positively. Negative attitude of teacher is a barrier to students’*

*learning. The teacher should have the ability to encourage the students to read. Students become tired in the classroom reading for long hours in schools. Teachers negative attitude hampers students' reading. Solely, only the teacher is not responsible for students' ability to read. Forcing students to read by teacher does not ensure to learn. The teacher can motivate the struggling readers. I have seen many students who are poor in early grades but they can be better readers later. Students willingness is also necessary. Only the teachers' effort is not enough. Teachers can positively impact struggling readers (Field Interview, 2021)."*

Teacher B, revealed a belief system that was more aligned with growth mindset. For example, when asked in the interview what she felt was important in teaching reading she answered:

*"Learner differences are important. Every single student in my class is different. Each child needs individual attention in the classroom to grow at their own pace; they all learn in differently. Each child needs different things, sometimes word recognition, sometimes word meaning, sometimes the process of reading and understanding the story. Some students catch the lesson on quickly, some need more time to understand and practice (Field Note, 2021)."*

In this example, Teacher B shows a belief that student responses to instruction vary for a variety of reasons, and she encourages the use of several strategies based on the student's need and context.

Both teachers believed that students who develop reading skills faster are likely to succeed in future learning endeavor as well than their struggling peers. However, they also cautioned that all the students might not be equally successful academically.

**Reading profiles.** Teachers also recognized that students differ in their reading profiles. They asserted that these students needed different types of help in reading. Some learners had problems in word recognition, some in fluency, some in text comprehension, and many others in combination of all these. Students reading profiles can point to their instructional needs. Teachers indicated to the importance of assessing componential abilities in reading comprehension which may include orthographic knowledge, vocabulary, and sentence integration. Teachers need to teach students based on their needs to improve their reading profile. The following section presents various strategies teachers used to cope with varied reading needs of students.

### ***Strategies for Differentiated Reading Instruction***

Wide variety of reading levels in students exist in the same classroom. Teachers need to employ different strategies to meet the varied needs of the students in teaching reading. Teaching strategies teachers reported include: flexible grouping, library lesson and choice in reading, differentiated support, multisensory presentation of lesson, extension activities for high achieving readers, activating background knowledge and making connection, peer tutoring, exploratory activities, curriculum compacting, ongoing assessment and feedback, differentiated questioning, differentiated assignment, repeated instruction, modelling, integration of language skills, and using technology. They are described below.

**Flexible grouping.** Flexible grouping was one of the strategy teachers used for differentiated reading instruction. During classroom observation, I saw that they initially began lesson from whole group instruction. They inquired background information about the lesson from students. Then they showed pictures or told something related to the lesson. Then they asked students to find the new words in the lesson and pre-taught vocabulary. Sometimes, they asked students to find key ideas in the lesson in small



groups and share. Groups were formed differently. I also saw them giving pair work during the exercise in the lesson. The teachers often observed the classroom activities and provided feedback and guidance to students individually as per their needs. This variation in grouping patterns reveal that teachers prefer to use flexible grouping as a strategy to meet students' reading needs.

**Library lesson and choice.** Second differentiated strategy teachers used was library lesson and choice in reading. Teacher A took students to library once a week. The students could choose any book they liked for reading. But to ensure they read the book, they had to write a review of the book and submit to the teacher. Many students could easily choose the books but some couldn't. At that time the teacher and the librarian would guide them. Sometimes, teachers would take books from the department to the classroom and assign all the students to read the same book. Then they would discuss about the book in the classroom.

**Differentiated support.** Differentiated support was the third strategy teachers used for differentiated reading instruction. All students don't need the same level of support in reading. Advanced students may have already mastered the content while struggling readers may need more support. During classroom observation, I saw that some students were seeking support themselves. Then the teacher was available for them to help at their desk. Some students didn't ask for support but the teacher saw them confused and offered help to them. The type of support I observed included telling word meaning, retelling the information, paraphrasing, explaining, and giving examples as per the students' needs.

**Multisensory presentation.** Multisensory presentation was the next strategy teachers used for differentiated reading instruction. During classroom observation, I saw that the teachers were presenting the lessons with visuals, videos, graphic organizers, text-to-speech software, explanation, annotations, and zooming the text. This helped students to grasp information from multiple senses. This helped students from variety to learning styles and intelligence preferences.

**Activating background knowledge and making connection.** The fifth differentiated reading strategy teachers used was activating background knowledge and making connection. In the beginning of the lesson teachers asked if the students had heard or learned about the topic. The teachers wrote topic on board, showed related videos, pictures, or told an anecdote and asked to guess about the lesson. This allowed students to connect with prior knowledge. During the reading lesson, teachers frequently asked the students to predict what would happen next. After the reading lesson, teachers asked students to connect the text with other texts, text to their own experiences, and text to the world. Here all students got opportunity to connect the reading lesson to their personal experience.

**Peer tutoring.** Peer tutoring was the sixth strategy teachers used. For the teachers paired struggling readers with better readers. Better readers were assigned to help the struggling readers. This helped teachers to share their workload and meet the needs of struggling readers in such a large class. Students also remained open to share their problems with their peers.

**Extension activities.** Teachers also sometimes used extension activities for advanced readers. Whenever high achieving readers completed the reading tasks in the classroom, they needed to be engaged, while the struggling readers were still doing the task. One way teachers engaged them was involving them to help their struggling peers. Sometimes the students themselves asked for permission to read extra books in the class and the teachers allowed them. Such students kept some extra books in their bags for reading when they were free during class time. Other times, the teachers provided them with more challenging questions such as extending the story even further or answering some additional creative questions that

required higher level thinking skills.

**Curriculum compacting.** Curriculum compacting was the next differentiated reading strategy used by the teachers. Textbooks and reading lessons might contain the contents that students had already mastered. In that case, after the teachers assessed the students formally or informally to know how much of the course content students had already mastered. The contents that students had already mastered could be skipped or learned faster. In such situation, lessons or even the course contents could be finished earlier than the prescribed time. In this context, teachers said that they used new reading texts, books, or practice books to such students and classes to ensure students didn't feel bored. This way students got opportunity to enhance their reading proficiency.

Other differentiated reading strategies teachers reported included: Ongoing assessment and feedback, using technology, modelling of reading strategies, breaking up reading tasks, helping to choose grade level texts, repeating instruction for struggling readers, differentiating questions, and involving students in exploratory activities.

## Discussion

The goal of this study was to find out what teachers think about reading instruction; what strategies they use; and their experiences in addressing learner needs in the classroom.

The findings of this study support and extend previous studies on preservice teacher beliefs in general and reading in particular. The in-service teachers in this study attributed the formation of their beliefs to personal experiences, pedagogical experiences, and coursework. This confirms earlier findings that beliefs are formed through personal experience, experiences with schooling and instruction, and experiences with formal knowledge (Leko, Kulkarni, Lin, & Smith, 2014). The findings are also consistent with previous research by Dweck (2006) and Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) who advocate for teachers to adopt a growth mindset. Both of the participant teachers believed that abilities were malleable and they had high expectations for their students.

The outcomes of this study also confirm the assertion that beliefs are multidimensional and complicated constructs (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, 2012). Some beliefs are strongly ingrained and reoccur throughout time and space. These are fundamental beliefs that are unlikely to alter. Teachers, for example, always felt that reading instruction should be based on students' interest and preferences in order to make it enjoyable and stimulating. Because of their own experiences as in-service teachers, they have a deep belief in this. This makes sense, according to Kumaravadivelu (2012), because this notion is essential rather than peripheral to the teachers' identity. This also demonstrates how in-service teachers' put their seeing, doing and believing are into practice.

Another deeply held belief was that reading instruction should be tailored to the individual. I believe this belief was strong because of the idea of individualization for each students' background, abilities, interests, proficiencies, and choices are unique. This message is consistent with Tomlinson (2005) and Tomlinson & Imbeau (2010).

Finally, the findings of this study contribute to the field of belief transformation research. According to the findings of certain studies, changes in beliefs come before changes in behaviour (Richardson et al., 1991). Other studies, on the other hand, support the idea that changes in beliefs arise as a result of

positive improvements in practice (e.g., Fullan, 2007; Guskey, 1986; McLeskey, Waldron, So, Swanson, & Loveland, 2001). The latter is supported by the findings of this research. It was obvious throughout our research that the in-service teachers' classroom experiences had a significant impact on their beliefs. When they saw what they thought were successful techniques in their classrooms, they instantly incorporated them into their belief system. The teachers even claimed that they would consider adopting a certain reading method or approach before committing to it.

Based on the findings from this study it is clear that children differ in terms of reading readiness and achievement from the beginning of formal schooling and teachers require to respond to these students needs in the classroom through a variety of curricular and instructional strategies (Brighton, Moon, & Huang, 2015). The findings of this study support Brighton, Moon, & Huang's (2015) empirical investigation, which found that schools lacked resources, and had little or no experience in differentiation or acceptable approaches to push advanced readers in the classroom where they frequently put the needs of struggling readers ahead of those advanced readers. Finally, advanced readers in schools were frequently the last to be considered, and they were usually ignored. Rather than serving the needs of these children, they were used to teach other struggling youngsters.

The research has significant limitations as well. First, the findings of this study may not be generalizable due to the small number of participants. Therefore, survey study can further examine in-service teachers' views on differentiated reading instruction. Second, this study explored teacher as one of the most important school related variable for developing each student's reading proficiency, however, other factors include intellectual and sensory capacities, early literacy experiences, support for reading-related activities and attitudes, learning environments that are favourable to learning, and fulfillment of basic need for better reading to occur in the classroom, which need to be explored in other researches. Third, large scale study can be conducted to explore reading instruction in practice in Nepal and elsewhere because differentiated reading instruction is still under researched.

## Conclusion and implications

Some major conclusions may be derived from the findings of this investigation. First, reading is fundamental to all academic disciplines. Second, teachers' beliefs guide their action and profoundly impact students' performance. Third, effective teachers believe that all students can learn and grow in reading. Fourth, teachers need to know that all students are different; their needs vary; and the teachers need to be responsive to the needs of students.

This study's findings have significant implications for future research and practice. To begin, teacher education programs should provide explicit teaching and assistance on how to apply differentiated instruction. Pre-service and in-service teachers need sufficient opportunity for professional development where they could see the models and apply such skills in their classrooms. Teachers require sufficient practical experiences that will provide them with a range of differentiated strategies to expand their repertoire and skills. Second, ways to reduce teacher workload and number of students in a class should be identified so that teacher could get sufficient time to plan and care students. Third, causes of student indifference in learning and their misbehavior in their classrooms need to be identified and explored. Fourth, all the stakeholders should be responsive to the needs of the students and act accordingly to develop learning potential of every students and improve interests and abilities of school level students in learning to read and reading to learn. Fifth, not only the teacher, there are other important factors that impact students reading abilities, which need further exploration.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Interview Guidelines for Teachers

Teacher: Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Experience in years: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Qualification:

1. Background
2. Learning about students (readiness, interest, learning profile)
3. Motivating and engaging students to read (How)
4. Views on reading instruction
5. Strategies for teaching reading
6. Resources used for teaching reading
7. Assessment for reading instruction
8. Grouping students for reading instruction
9. Use of ICT for reading instruction
10. Professional Development

### Appendix B: Classroom Observation Guidelines

Teacher: Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ Section: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date of observation: \_\_\_\_\_ Start: \_\_\_\_\_ End: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Total no of students present: \_\_\_\_\_ Boys: \_\_\_\_\_ Girls: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Observational Elements:

1. Classroom environment and learning aids
2. Student motivation, engagement, and behavior management
3. Differentiation Strategies

<b>Readiness</b>	
<b>Interest</b>	
<b>Learning profile</b>	
<b>Assessment</b>	
<b>Other</b>	