



# INDIVIDUALIZING ENGLISH LEARNING: IMPLEMENTING DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

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## Keywords

*Differentiated Instruction, Individualized Learning, English Subject.*

## Abstract

*This study is intended to investigate the approaches employed by teachers in instructing English through differentiated instruction. A case study methodology was employed, focusing on three English teachers at SMPN 5 Padang Panjang. Data collection involved conducting interviews and making observations. The data was then analyzed through triangulation. The findings revealed that differentiated instruction involves adapting teaching methods to suit the individual needs of students. This is deemed crucial as it allows teachers to provide multiple avenues for students to comprehend information, addressing the diverse needs present within a classroom. Teachers utilize various strategies, including adjustments in content, process, product, and learning environment, to accommodate these needs while maintaining focus on the same topic. The study suggests that differentiated instruction in English education is grounded in the identification of students' learning needs, typically assessed through initial surveys, pretests, or diagnostic assessments. Subsequently, teachers tailor English instruction based on these assessments. Additionally, teachers conduct both summative and formative evaluations to assess the effectiveness of their instructional strategies.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, education in Indonesia has seen significant changes, particularly in the curriculum. The Merdeka Curriculum, introduced as one of the latest education policies, focuses on fostering creativity and adaptability in the classroom. It aims to promote a student-centered learning environment that encourages autonomy and flexibility. One key aspect of this curriculum, as explained by Mardhiyati (2023), includes project-based learning to enhance soft skills and character development according to individual talents. Additionally, it prioritizes essential learning content while allowing ample time for mastering foundational skills like reading and math. Teachers are encouraged to tailor instruction to suit students' preferences and abilities, making differentiated instruction a favorable approach for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.

In many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, students exhibit diverse backgrounds and learning needs. Despite this, some teachers persist with traditional teaching

methods aimed at the average student, overlooking the varying abilities and learning styles of their students. Students may have different preferences for learning, such as visual, auditory, kinesthetic, or reading-writing styles, influenced by their backgrounds. Teaching to the average student results in limited learning outcomes, leaving many students feeling disengaged and struggling to grasp the material.

Tanjung & Ashadi (2019) suggested that various learning processes can be utilized to cater to students' diverse learning styles, such as auditory, kinesthetic, visual, and reading-writing preferences. For auditory learners, teachers may incorporate speech, music, or sounds into their lessons. This method, rooted in traditional education, involves verbal explanations, listening to music, or utilizing audiobooks. Kinesthetic learners benefit from activities like role-playing, physical movement, or playing instruments. Visual learners may benefit from illustrations, animations, videos, or photos to aid in memorization. Lastly, reading-writing learners can benefit from activities like using dictionaries, reading stories, writing essays, or word guessing games. Students have different learning styles at all levels of education. Each student may have unique preferences and strengths when it comes to learning, whether in elementary school, high school, or higher education. For teachers, it's important to recognize and accommodate these differences in order to create inclusive and effective learning environments for all students, regardless of age or academic level. This is the right way to use differentiated instruction to help students meet their diverse needs.

According to Tomlinsom (2017) explained that differentiated instruction is a teaching and learning technique that enables students to study material according to their individual needs, interests, and abilities. This approach helps prevent frustration and the sense of failure in their learning process. Next, Marlina (2020) stated that differentiated instruction is adaptable learning students' needs in a way facilitate them according to readiness, interests, and learning styles of everyone.

Additionally, Aiman (2019) mentions that the utilization of differentiated instruction can enhance student engagement and academic outcomes, offering opportunities for students to learn effectively and naturally. Active participation in learning activities, such as questioning, expressing opinions, completing assignments, and responding to teacher inquiries, serves as an indicator of student engagement. Increased student activity fosters motivation, leading to enhanced learning outcomes. Differentiated instruction comprises four main components: content, process, product, and learning environment. According to Tomlinson (2017), content refers to the knowledge, skills, attitudes, or facts that teachers aim for students to acquire. This content can be adapted to students' readiness, interests, or learning profiles, with teachers providing suitable materials and resources to cater to individual needs effectively.

By considering the various needs of the students in learning, this research investigate the teachers in implementing of differentiated instruction in teaching English. It is hoped that this study will be useful for teachers in dealing with various kinds of students' needs.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Carol A. Tomlinson, an esteemed educator with a tenure since 1995, elucidated the concept of "differentiated instruction" in her seminal work, "How to Differentiate Instruction in Mixed Ability Classrooms." This pedagogical paradigm centers on the bespoke facilitation of learning, meticulously attuned to the idiosyncratic disparities among students. Within the framework of differentiated instruction, pedagogues adeptly calibrate their instructional methodologies to harmonize with the diverse levels of readiness, individual

interests, and distinct learning modalities exhibited by learners. This methodological finesse encompasses the dynamic adaptation of instructional content, pedagogical strategies, student assessments, and the scholastic milieu to optimize educational outcomes.

Building upon Tomlinson's foundational work, Heacox (2018) further expounds upon the multifaceted nature of differentiated instruction, positing it as a panoply of instructional methodologies that scaffold learners' nascent forays into self-directed learning choices. In a similar vein, Bondie, Dahnke, and Zusho (2019) underscore the strategic acumen inherent in differentiated instruction, accentuating its capacity to meticulously cater to individual learning proclivities and to furnish an array of cognitive tools and pedagogical techniques to engender comprehensive understanding, adept acquisition, and adept application of knowledge. This approach stands in stark contrast to the conventional one-size-fits-all pedagogical paradigm, heralding a transformative shift towards bespoke educational practices rooted in empirical research and pedagogical efficacy.

Differentiated instruction serves as a pivotal mechanism in facilitating the learning process, enabling educators to adeptly navigate classroom dynamics and foster collective student engagement towards the attainment of shared educational objectives. As elucidated earlier, this pedagogical approach encompasses a nuanced responsiveness to the diverse array of students' needs, tailored to their individual interests and learning modalities.

According to Marlina (2019), the overarching objectives of differentiated instruction are multifaceted, encapsulating the following aims: firstly, to ensure equitable access to learning for all students; secondly, to cultivate intrinsic motivation and bolster academic achievement among learners; thirdly, to cultivate a symbiotic rapport between educators and students conducive to collaborative learning endeavors; fourthly, to instill in students a sense of autonomy and self-directed learning; and fifthly, to engender a sense of professional fulfillment and efficacy among educators.

Bayumi et al. (2021) outline the principles of differentiated learning as follows: Firstly, continuous assessment is integral, with teachers consistently gathering information on students' progress to tailor learning plans accordingly. Secondly, teachers ensure inclusivity in the learning process, catering to diverse student needs and valuing each student's contributions. Thirdly, students are grouped flexibly, allowing for collaboration with peers of varying readiness levels and interests. Fourthly, ongoing collaboration between teachers across classes and subjects is emphasized. Fifthly, teachers and students collaborate to achieve desired learning outcomes. Sixthly, flexibility in time allocation is employed to accommodate student learning processes and results. Seventhly, various learning strategies, such as learning centers, are utilized. Lastly, students are assessed in multiple ways to track individual growth and development.

### **3. RESEARCH METHOD**

The research employed a qualitative case study methodology to explore the implementation of differentiated instruction in English teaching. Conducted at SMPN 5 Padang Panjang, west Sumatera, the choice of this school was influenced by its reputation as an inclusive and accommodating educational institution, known for welcoming students with disabilities and diverse learning styles. Given the varied learning abilities among students, it was imperative for teachers to tailor their strategies according to individual needs. The study involved three English teachers selected as subjects for observation in their classrooms. Observations were conducted to document teaching practices and ensure the implementation of differentiated instruction. Interviews with the teachers comprised open-

ended questions, following Creswell's recommendation to initiate with relaxed queries to foster a conducive environment for discussion (2014). Subsequent questions aimed to elicit specific insights, with caution exercised to avoid biased inquiries (Creswell, 2014). The documentation of notes and audio recordings during interviews facilitated data analysis.

#### **4. HASIL DAN PEMBAHASAN**

The discussion aims to fully answer the research questions by referring to the theory that fits the research findings. We break down how differentiated instruction is used into three parts, as shown in the research results

##### **4.1 The Implementation of English Differentiated Instruction.**

###### **4.1.1. Preparation in Differentiated Instruction**

Differentiated instruction is accomplished through mapping learning needs and designing learning based on the results of the mapping. These three steps are interconnected and complementary in order to create learning that meets the needs of students. Teachers play a crucial role in facilitating successful differentiated learning, particularly in the context of English language learning.

Based on the results of observation on January 8th 2024, teachers have mapped students' learning needs which leads to the mention of diagnostic assessments. The diagnostic assessment is proven only by a document. Moreover, learning has been designed according to the results of the mapping, but it still sometimes fails to meet students' needs optimally. To support the accuracy of diagnostic assessment done, other instruments like learning style tests were also carried out. The test was distributed and analyzed by counseling teachers using Howard Gardner principles. Several indicators related to learning readiness and learning diversity which covers students' learning styles to three domains; visual, auditory and kinesthetic.

The researcher also conducted an interview with the three teachers to support the data and discuss the first steps in preparing for differentiated instruction. Teacher A, who teaches class in VIII, collected information about mapping students' learning needs through assessment diagnostics

“ I administer pretests to assess students' English skills. The results of these tests help identify areas of weakness and inform their learning needs.”

In line with teacher A, teacher B also describes similar process in diagnosing the students' profile as it is stated in the interview :

“ The survey consisted of English questions, and the results were analyzed to determine if the students achieved the desired competencies. The scores were then mapped according to the students' proficiency level “

Based on the results of observations and interviews, it can be concluded that all teachers carried out diagnostic assessments before conducting differentiation instruction. To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the students' learning conditions, teachers conduct an initial survey or pretest by providing questions before beginning English learning. Additionally, teachers coordinate with student guardians to gather information about the students' development. The Merdeka Curriculum refers to this as

diagnostic assessment. According to Hidayat (2022) states that diagnostic assessment is an activity carried out to see the competence, weaknesses, or difficulties of students so that educators can adjust the material to be taught according to the competencies and conditions of students.

4.1.2. The implementation of Differentiated instruction

Implementing differentiated instruction always starts with planning for effective teaching. According to Aldiyah (2021), it's crucial for teachers to understand how each student learns and is ready to learn. This helps make teaching and learning more effective. Each student has different needs based on their learning style, which could be visual, auditory, or kinesthetic. This matches Tomlinson's theory (2001) that students have different backgrounds and learning styles. To check whether the instruction had fully diversify the students' need in classroom, the below indicator was implemented.

a. content

Sub-Indicator	Teacher		
	A	B	C
	Activity in the meeting		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>phrasing and presentation of content.</li> <li>peer and adult mentoring</li> </ul>	√	√	√
	-	√	√

b. process

Sub-Indicator	Teacher		
	A	B	C
	Activity in the meeting		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>class discussions.</li> </ul>	√	√	√

c. product

Sub-Indicator	Teacher		
	A	B	C
	Activity in the meeting		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide clear instructions for students to ensure their understanding of the task.</li> <li>Provide students with the freedom to choose their own tasks.</li> </ul>	√	√	√
	√	-	√

d. learning environment

Sub-Indicator	Teacher		
	A	B	C
	Activity in the meeting		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide support to students</li> </ul>	√	√	√
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide a conducive learning environment for students</li> </ul>	√	√	√

Based on the results of observations and interviews, it can be concluded that all teachers differentiate content in some manner, particularly English teachers when teaching English. They present and deliver varied material that supports student needs. When encountering students who require special guidance, such as those struggling more with English, teachers differentiate the learning outcomes while still covering the same material. This focus on addressing students' needs aligns with Tomlinson's concept of content (2017), which refers to what teachers want students to learn encompassing information, skill sets, attitudes, knowledge, ideas, or facts necessary for students to gain access. Teachers utilize differentiated instruction to meet student learning needs while building upon the teacher's background experience, rather than altering the topic.

The findings show that before using differentiated instruction, teachers did a diagnostic assessment. This helped measure students' abilities, identify their readiness, and understand their differences. Hidayat (2022) explains that a diagnostic assessment is done to see what students are good at, where they struggle, or what challenges they face. This helps teachers adjust what they teach based on students' abilities and needs.

Tomlinson (2010) outlines four key components of differentiated instruction: content, process, product, and learning environment. The findings indicate that teachers differentiate content in English teaching by adjusting what students learn. They utilize various learning materials such as reading materials, images, and educational videos, aligning them with students' learning needs. According to Tomlinson (2017), content differentiation involves altering how content is presented and providing peer or adult support.

Additionally, differentiated processes impact student learning outcomes. The research reveals that differentiated processes occur within group settings, where students are grouped heterogeneously or flexibly based on their abilities. This allows them to learn from one another. According to Tomlinson (2017), examples of differentiated processes include reading groups and group discussions. The key consideration is that activities must align with students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles.

Moreover, teachers differentiate products by offering students choices in assignments. In implementing product differentiation, students may produce various outcomes individually or in groups based on their interests and characteristics. Marlina (2019) explains that product differentiation involves providing students with multiple options to demonstrate their learning.

Another aspect to consider is the creation of a conducive learning environment. A supportive and nurturing setting plays a pivotal role in fostering the growth of both educators and learners within the school milieu. Classroom management, recognized as a collaborative endeavor, lays the groundwork for effective teaching and learning experiences. During observations, teachers endeavored to cultivate such an environment through ice-breaking activities, aiming to reignite students' enthusiasm for learning. Moreover, the formation of heterogeneous groups facilitates mutual support and collaborative learning among students. Tomlinson (2010) underscores the importance of nurturing a positive learning climate that nurtures and enhances the learning process.

Furthermore, the evaluation of student outcomes is conducted with reference to predefined learning objectives. Based on interviews, all teachers employ both summative and formative assessments. Summative assessments gauge students' progress towards achieving learning objectives and are typically used to determine final grades. These assessments, such as monthly progress checks and end-of-semester exams, align with Scriven's (1991) theory, which views summative evaluation as an appraisal conducted after

the program concludes, aimed at measuring program accomplishments. Conversely, formative assessments, as described by Sujana (1990), are conducted throughout the teaching and learning process, particularly towards its culmination. These assessments provide ongoing feedback to inform instructional decisions and enhance learning outcomes.

#### **4.2 Problems faced by the teachers in implementing the English differentiated instruction.**

From the interview, there were three big challenges faced by teachers in implementing differentiated instruction namely limited time, teachers' lack of understanding about differentiated instruction, and difficulty in adapting to each student's needs. According to Tomlinson (2001), educators who are eager to enhance their teaching practice face numerous challenges, including but not limited to, sizable class sizes, excessive workloads, and inadequate training on differentiation.

Preparing and planning lessons takes a lot of time and work. Shareefa's (2019) study shows this, pointing out tasks like making the curriculum, planning lessons, getting materials, making tests, and designing teaching stuff. Also, making lessons that fit each student's needs makes it even tougher and needs more time and effort. So, teachers need to spend enough time and effort on these things to make sure they teach well and engage students in meaningful learning.

Adapting to each student's needs is hard. Differentiated instruction means all students have the same learning goals, even if they learn in different ways. They learn based on how they like to learn, what interests them, and how well they understand things (Naka, 2017). Teachers need to teach the same stuff to everyone, even if students need different things. Zelalem (2022) says because there are so many students, teachers need more time to get ready, give out work, and check it.

Many teachers don't really understand how to differentiate the instruction. Figuring out the Merdeka Curriculum can be tough for them. Even though differentiated instruction is not new, it's still new for teachers in Indonesia. Syarifuddin and Nurmi (2022) say teachers only started learning about it in 2020. This means teachers might not know how to use differentiated instruction, especially in subjects like English.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

The research findings indicate that all English instructors at SMP 5 Padang Panjang have adeptly applied differentiated instruction methodologies within their English classes. This entails identifying individual students' learning requirements through diagnostic assessments and tailoring instructional approaches accordingly. It is important to note that differentiated instruction doesn't entail creating entirely distinct materials or teaching techniques for each student. Instead, educators assess student progress using both formative and summative evaluation methods to gauge advancement towards predefined learning objectives. Nevertheless, obstacles such as time constraints, individualized student adaptation, and teachers' unfamiliarity with the Merdeka Curriculum persist. To surmount these challenges, adjustments in time management strategies for learning and increased support and resources for educators are deemed necessary. Despite the hurdles, differentiated instruction remains a pragmatic approach for teachers to cater to the distinctive learning needs of each student.

Moving forward, the research results suggest promising avenues for further investigation and application. Future studies could delve deeper into the specific strategies

employed by teachers to effectively implement differentiated instruction and explore how these strategies can be refined or expanded upon. Additionally, the development of comprehensive training programs and resources to enhance teachers' understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum could be explored to address the identified challenges. Furthermore, examining the long-term impact of differentiated instruction on student learning outcomes and engagement could provide valuable insights into its effectiveness and potential areas for improvement. Overall, the research findings offer valuable insights into the application of differentiated instruction in English education and pave the way for continued exploration and refinement of this pedagogical approach.

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