

ENGLISH TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES OF DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION (DI) IN THE *MERDEKA* CURRICULUM

Mutmainah

Universitas Terbuka

Hanna Sundari

Universitas Terbuka

Juhana

Universitas Terbuka

mbakmut@gmail.com¹

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ABSTRACT

This research project investigated the use of DI by teachers and confirmed their practices to learn more about teachers' perceptions using a qualitative approach. Four research instruments were used to collect data in this investigation: document analyses, classroom observations, questionnaires, and interviews. Document analyses and classroom observations were employed to obtain data concerning teachers' actual practices of DI. In the meantime, a questionnaire has been used to obtain data on teachers' perceptions and practices regarding DI. Finally, interviews have also been conducted to determine teachers' perceptions of DI. The result of the study revealed that the participants exhibited high proficiency in using DI strategies in their classrooms. The assessment considered various dimensions, including understanding DI concepts and objectives, adapting instruction to diverse student needs, evaluating students through diagnostic assessments, and aligning teaching strategies with individual learning profiles. However, there was room for improvement, especially in tailoring instruction based on diverse learning profiles. Furthermore, the English teachers' perceptions of DI significantly shaped their instructional practices. While there was a solid theoretical understanding and commitment to personalized instruction, practical challenges and systemic constraints impacted the seamless integration of DI principles. The teachers' commitment to addressing these challenges, demonstrated through varied instructional practices, underscored the dynamic interplay between perceptions and the complex reality of implementing DI in the classroom.

Keywords: English Teacher, Differentiated Instruction (DI), Merdeka Curriculum, Perceptions and Practices

INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian government introduced the *Merdeka* Curriculum to revise the 2013 Curriculum in 2020 in response to feedback and to improve education. This new curriculum made teaching more balanced, adaptable, and student-centered. Teachers must adapt and modify educational material, instructional techniques, learning resources, and evaluation methodologies to provide millennials with the qualifications and 21st-century skills they need to succeed globally (Care et al., 2018).

Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes student autonomy and engagement (Risniyanti & Setiawan, 2023). Students should learn actively, not passively. The curriculum encouraged students to own their education, set goals, and explore their interests to foster autonomy, curiosity, and lifelong learning. It also encouraged communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and creativity. These traits were crucial for students' academic, emotional, and professional success. Furthermore, the 2013 Curriculum stressed character education, while the *Merdeka* Curriculum went further. It aimed to instill morality, social responsibility, and civic engagement in students. Priantini et al. (2022) further noted that the *Merdeka* Curriculum is being implemented to establish a quality education climate to produce a generation equipped to respond to current events.

The *Merdeka* Curriculum includes Differentiated Instruction (DI) as one of its three key components (Miftakhuddin et al., 2022). Diagnostic assessment data adapts the curriculum and teaching methods to students' readiness, preferences, and learning styles to ensure success (Hasanah et al., 2022). It uses DI to change traditional teaching approaches into a student-centered approach. DI is teachers' purposeful and well-planned strategy to use instructional methods that meet each student's needs in an academically diverse learning environment (Tomlinson & Allan, 2000). It differs from the one-size-fits-all education model, which assumes uniform procedures for all students and needs to be altered to accommodate the needs of most learners (Tomlinson, 2002). The DI recognizes that students have different learning requirements and takes proactive and conscientious measures to address them. The DI explores student diversity so students with varied backgrounds, talents, and difficulties can achieve in a welcoming atmosphere.

In *Indonesian* classrooms, several DI research projects have taken place. First, Pramono (2021) explored how Indonesian primary school teachers' expertise and confidence affected DI acceptance. DI is Indonesia's new education plan to overhaul schools. Since teachers apply this technique, their subjective appraisal of its suitability for school reform, such as teacher acceptability, is critical. An online survey was given to 70 primary school teachers to measure their understanding of

DI, confidence in using differentiation strategies, and receptivity to these methods. Results showed that teachers' DI method experience and self-efficacy affected perceived acceptance of this teaching technique. Despite the unique effects of these two criteria on acceptance, DI knowledge, and self-efficacy were not correlated. The study also found that professional development increased teachers' DI adoption. Results showed the need for professional development programs to improve teachers' knowledge and confidence in delivering differentiated education. These programs make DI adoption in Indonesian primary classrooms easier.

In addition, Digna et al. (2023) examined primary school teachers' views on varied learning in an independent curriculum. The study focused on teachers' perspectives. The qualitative study included 30 primary school teachers. Data triangulation was used to analyze questionnaires and interviews from the study. Teachers were enthusiastic about the autonomous curriculum and actively participated in relevant training programs, showing dedication to this new educational paradigm. However, teachers' understanding of differentiated learning principles was a considerable variation. While some possessed a comprehensive grasp of these principles, the majority were in the process of integrating differentiated learning into their classroom practices. This comprehension diversity highlighted the need for further support and training to effectively implement differentiated learning strategies within the curriculum.

These two articles concluded that DI is a significant educational reform in Indonesia, particularly in elementary schools. These studies emphasized the importance of continuous professional development to boost teachers' knowledge and self-efficacy DI. It, in turn, can create a more favorable environment for the successful adoption of DI in Indonesian schools.

The implementation of DI in Purworejo Regency also needs enhancement. As the *Merdeka* Curriculum introduced DI as a new element, many teachers needed to comprehend its principles better (Adare et al., 2023). Unfortunately, DI training as part of teachers' professional development has been predominantly received by only a select group of teachers referred to as *Guru Penggerak*. It is noteworthy that as of 2023, only four English teachers in Purworejo regency have completed the *Program Pendidikan Guru Penggerak (PPGP)* training, signifying that these teachers were the sole teachers who have received extensive government-sponsored training in DI. It resulted in a low implementation of DI in the classrooms as well. Due to the lack of effective DI in Purworejo, Indonesia, this study was chosen. The fact that only some English teachers have completed government-funded DI training implies that DI professional development should be more comprehensive and open to more teachers.

Finally, this study's outcomes aimed to understand better and describe the

implementation of DI by the teachers. The insights derived from this research will serve as foundational information for assessing the efficacy of DI in enhancing student learning outcomes within the Indonesian context. These findings can be pivotal in shaping policies and decisions concerning teacher training and support initiatives, particularly in Purworejo regency. In cases where areas for enhancement are pinpointed, targeted training programs can be designed to aid teachers in refining their competencies and expertise in effectively implementing DI.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Differentiated Instruction

By defining DI, various researchers have helped us understand this teaching technique. One of them was Tomlinson (2001), in *How to Differentiate Instruction for Mixed Ability Classrooms*, which defined DI. Historically, this pedagogical style valued student heterogeneity. Tomlinson emphasized customized training based on needs, preferences, and strengths. She claimed that DI helps teachers modify, not merely implement, strategies. Creating a classroom where students may demonstrate their knowledge, comprehension, and abilities regardless of background or aptitude is a priority. In short, most of the experts believed DIs were about students, flexibility, and diversity. The variations were subtle and may have been attributable to context or each author's focus on distinct techniques. These perspectives revealed DI's diversity and growth, making it an educational foundation.

Some researchers stressed that DI was not a set of strategies but a philosophy that guided teachers in generating and delivering education that met every student's needs. It involved respecting students' uniqueness and adapting to their learning styles, preferences, and strengths. In contrast to the literature's focus on content, process, and product, Reis and Renzulli (2018) proposed five DI principles. Integrating student voices and choices into this technique could help students actively participate in their education and learn pertinent information. In addition, Ojong (2023) claimed that DI adjusted both lessons and learning settings to address the various learning requirements of students. Teachers who use it strive to understand each student's unique strengths, conditions, and interests and use this information to design responsive and meaningful instruction.

Overall, the researchers concluded that DI was a teaching and learning technique, not a set of strategies. Despite differing principles, the scholars supported DI's nature and benefits. These findings underlined the importance of student diversity, individualized instruction, and inclusive education.

Reis and Renzulli (2018) developed the *Five Dimensions of Differentiation* to expand on those three factors and offer five ways to differentiate education. First,

teachers could tailor lessons to students' academic abilities and interests. They were moving away from a one-size-fits-all policy that guaranteed that every student received relevant information. Second, *instructional tactics consider students' learning styles.* Using different teaching strategies to meet the requirements of specific student groups or individuals can help teachers grow. The third dimension was *classroom differentiation and management.* Introduce new concepts like technology or guest speakers, allow students to work in groups based on their differences or similarities, and change the classroom with field trips. *Products and teachers* are fourth and fifth-dimensional. In this case, teachers can diversify their work by letting students choose the media they like to showcase their learning. Additionally, Unal et al. (2022) assessed Kindergarten–5th-grade teachers' DI attitudes and implementation. Teacher's understanding of content, process, and product differences was examined. It may have evaluated how teachers adapted material to different learning styles and classroom preparedness levels. The article also explored how teachers tailored methods to young students' needs.

Challenges in Implementing Differentiated Instruction

Some researchers have conveyed the challenges of implementing DI. In *Differentiated Instructions: Relevant Studies on Its Implementation*, Mirawati et al. (2022) examined library research for DI implementation. They found DI implementation issues. Due to time constraints, essential course professors needed help preparing, conducting, and assessing DI. More instruction was required to understand DI. Different procedures and tasks might make consistent evaluations unjust—students felt unequal in collaborative projects, damaging learning. DI failed in larger classes because distinct demands required separate methods. Space constraints make classroom mobility difficult. Equitable classroom differentiation needed several spatial and pedagogical solutions.

Mardhatillah and Suharyadi (2023) also noted DI implementation challenges for EFL teachers in *Differentiated Instruction challenges and Opportunities in EFL Classrooms*. Mixed-ability classrooms require extensive preparation to fulfill student needs and were EFL teachers' most significant challenge. DI implementation was complicated by high student-to-teacher ratios, limited teacher training, insufficient DI tools, student engagement issues, and dependency on traditional teaching approaches. DI struggled with time for deep learning. Practicalities prohibited many teachers from scheduling differentiated preparation and instruction. Teachers may have felt obligated to adopt traditional teaching methods due to time constraints, generating this implementation mismatch. DI inexperience may hinder teachers' implementation of this teaching technique. Lack of experience may make DI seem bad and encourage traditional ways.

In conclusion, both studies recommend addressing time restrictions, offering

training and resources, and supporting equitable differentiation tactics to overcome DI implementation issues.

English Language Learning in the *Merdeka* Curriculum

According to Standards, Curriculum, and Educational Assessment Agency Decision No. 008/H/KR/2022 of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology on Learning Outcomes in Early Childhood Education, Basic Education Level and Secondary Education Level, English instruction is mandatory during Phase D of the *Merdeka* Curriculum. A student studying English can interact with people worldwide and from various cultural backgrounds. Strong English language skills strengthen the student's confidence in using different resources. These interactions teach adolescents the essential characteristics and skills required for success in a multicultural, international environment. Additionally, the most common method used to teach English is the genre-based method (*Building Knowledge of the Field, Modeling of the Text, Joint Construction of the Text, and Independent Construction of the Text*), which focuses on language in all its forms—spoken, written, visual, audio, and multimodal.

In short, the genre-based approach, which emphasizes spoken, written, visual, aural, and blended language forms, has become the most popular. These programs demonstrated the importance of teaching kids English to succeed in a globalized, varied world.

Teachers' Perceptions

Some scholars proposed the notion of teachers' perceptions. Brouwer et al. (2018) characterized teacher assessments as cognitive, emotive, and evaluative. The attributes indicated how the teacher defined himself through teaching. The brain size included education and learning information, attitudes, and insight to evaluate educational practice. Impacting emotions and behaviors, affective perceptions increased learning motivation and engagement. Final evaluations included professional development and instructional efficacy reflection. Judgment, classroom choices, and student needs affected these elements.

Research has studied how English teachers view DI and how it affects their teaching. First, Onyishi and Sefotho (2020) researched teachers' attitudes toward DI in inclusive classrooms. Enugu elementary school teachers were polled about using DI in different classrooms. The descriptive survey included 382 elementary teachers. Teachers applauded DI for serving children's different learning needs in diverse schools. Teacher digital inclusion efforts needed to be improved by administrative support, training, and student performance issues, according to the report. By respecting students' opinions, teachers have established a friendly and inclusive learning atmosphere. It also advised teachers to assess their DI methods and training regularly to improve efficiency. In another study, Sapan and Mede

(2022) examined how differentiation affects English learner achievement, motivation, and autonomy. DI's effects on English learners' Foreign Language Accomplishment (FLA), Foreign Language Motivation (FLM), and Learners' Autonomy (LA) were examined. Sixteen Turkish high school English language students and teachers attended the program. The study had two groups: the control group received traditional schooling, and the experimental group received DI training. The experimental group outperformed the control group in FLM and FLA.

Together, these studies showed that DI might have some benefits, but they also revealed how important it was to deal with problems and make sure that people had the right help and training to make it work.

Several Indonesian schools have conducted DI research. According to Pramono (2021), Indonesian primary school teachers' knowledge and self-efficacy affect DI acceptability. This study assessed distinguishing knowledge, self-efficacy, and general acceptability in 70 first-grade instructors by online survey. The teachers' DI knowledge and skills influenced their choice of technique. Professional development also influenced teachers' DI acceptance. In conclusion, professional development increased Indonesian elementary school teachers' comprehension and confidence in differentiation of teaching, fostering DI.

Meanwhile, Digna et al. (2023) explored how teachers assess diverse learning in an independent curriculum. This qualitative study analyzed data from 30 primary school teachers using questionnaires, interviews, and data triangulation. Teachers enthusiastically engaged in curriculum revision training programs, demonstrating their commitment to this new educational paradigm. However, teachers' differentiated learning understanding differed substantially. Understanding diversity demonstrated the need for more assistance and training to use diverse curricular learning methodologies.

To sum up, these investigations helped us comprehend Indonesia's elementary schools' DI adoption. However, they identified some areas for improvement. The study examined numerous factors that influence DI adoption, implementation issues, and the DI's long-term benefits on student learning.

METHOD

This research project investigated the use of DI by teachers and confirmed their practices to learn more about teachers' perceptions using a qualitative approach. Four research instruments were used to collect data in this investigation: document analyses, classroom observations, questionnaires, and interviews. Document analyses and classroom observations were employed to obtain data concerning teachers' actual practices of DI. In the meantime, a questionnaire has been used to obtain data on teachers' perceptions and practices regarding DI.

Interviews have also been conducted to determine teachers' perceptions of DI.

The participants of this study were three English teachers at the junior high level. Additionally, they were required to complete the training provided by the PPGP, a professional development program for teachers. The training program included a module focused on DI, ensuring that the selected teachers had received training in this area and were familiar with its principles and practices.

The researcher conducted a thorough course analysis at the study subjects' teaching school on October 14, 2023. The school visit was utilized to talk to teachers and acquire vital documentation. The researcher examined DI practice papers following data collection. Each document was checked for essentials using a checklist. Next was the study code. Data was labeled with checklists. By identifying key DI issues, the study found document-wide tendencies. Coded data was utilized to examine how teachers used DI in the classroom to uncover patterns and differences. This study used classroom observations, questionnaires, and interviews.

Then, in data analysis process, the researcher implemented several steps. First, the researcher carefully collected syllabi, lesson plans, scoring books, and student products for document analysis. She then carefully read and circled DI-related portions. The data was analyzed for trends. The findings were arranged to demonstrate how teachers employed DI. Meanwhile, during classroom observation, the researcher also meticulously collected DI-related teaching approaches, student interactions, and class participation. The researcher then examined classroom behavior and student responses to identify patterns, strengths, and areas for DI practice improvement. Furthermore, questionnaire answers were also entered into a study data management system. Results were summarized using descriptive statistics. The final stage in processing interview data was transcribing the audio recordings word-for-word to ensure authentic interactions. The researcher sought themes and patterns and highlighted key points. The topics were chosen to create a coherent narrative.

FINDINGS

Three sections are set out in this part. In the first, teachers' practices of DI based on their responses to document analyses, classroom observations, and questionnaires are presented. The following section reviews teachers' perceptions of DI based on interviews to verify their practices in this area. Finally, the comparison of results obtained from four instruments will be presented to establish how perceptions by teachers relate to their practice.

Teachers' Current Practices of DI in the Classroom

The first research question has been developed to elicit data on the teaching

practices of DI in the classroom. At this stage, the researcher used three instruments: document analyses, classroom observations, and questionnaires.

Teachers' practices of DI from document analyses

The researcher analyzed their documents to obtain data on teachers' practices. These included syllabi, lesson plans, scoring books, and student products.

Teachers' practices of DI from the syllabi analyses

A checklist containing the results of teachers' syllabi analyses is presented in the table below.

Table 1 Teachers' Practices of DI from Syllabi Analyses

| No. | Analyzed Aspects | T1 | | T2 | | T3 | |
|-----|---|-----|----|-----|----|-----|----|
| | | Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes | No |
| 1. | Learning objectives formulated that reflect DI. | - | V | - | v | - | v |
| 2. | Learning materials that support the students' diverse needs | - | V | - | v | - | v |
| 3. | DI strategies that are mentioned specifically | - | V | - | v | - | v |
| 4. | Learning activities that demonstrate a variety of approaches | - | V | - | v | - | v |
| 5. | Assessment strategies that are tailored to the student's learning needs | - | V | - | v | - | v |

Given the information in this table, the teachers' syllabi needed to provide certain elements appropriate for the DI mentioned above. They only included aspects of learning, learning outcomes, learning objectives, materials or topics, classes, and semesters. When the researcher confirmed this fact to the teachers, they recognized these shortcomings. The teachers clarified that they obtained the syllabi from the *English Teachers Association (MGMP Bahasa Inggris)* but made no modifications or adaptations.

Furthermore, the participants claimed that two fundamental components, i.e., learning objectives and materials or topics, have been the key elements of their adherence to the syllabi. This commitment to established syllabi has been made primarily because of the continuing practice of conducting a collective final summative assessment at the district level. In this assessment, the questions are solely based on a list of predetermined learning objectives and the materials or topics in the syllabi.

Teachers' practices of DI from the lesson plan analyses

In this study, the lesson plans were analyzed based on five main aspects that are compatible with the principles of DI, just like a teacher's syllabi. A checklist setting out the conclusions from the analyses of teachers' lesson plans is presented in the following table.

Table 2. Teachers' Practices of DI from Lesson Plans Analyses

| No. | Analyzed Aspects | T1 | | T2 | | T3 | |
|-----|---|-----|----|-----|----|-----|----|
| | | Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes | No |
| 1. | Learning objectives formulated that reflect DI. | - | v | - | v | - | v |
| 2. | Learning materials that support the students' diverse needs | v | - | v | - | v | - |
| 3. | DI strategies that are mentioned specifically | v | - | v | - | v | - |
| 4. | Learning activities that demonstrate a variety of approaches | v | - | v | - | v | - |
| 5. | Assessment strategies that are tailored to the student's learning needs | v | - | v | - | v | - |

Based on the result of lesson plan analyses, the five principles of DI listed in the table showed that the teacher needed to include specific learning objectives. Even though students' learning needs vary, the learning objectives are the same. In this case, the teachers only include general learning objectives that students will achieve through learning. Meanwhile, it can be concluded that the teachers have included the other four principles of differentiated learning in their lesson plans.

Teachers' practices of DI from the scoring books analyses

The researcher analyzed four aspects to ensure that the teachers also apply DI principles in their scoring books, i.e., *a variety of instruments aligned with student learning needs, diverse ways students demonstrate understanding, effective feedback and communication, and special notes regarding student achievement*. The result of the scoring books analysis from the four aspects mentioned above is presented in the following table.

Table 3. Teachers' Practices of DI from Scoring Books Analyses

| No. | Analyzed Aspects | T1 | | T2 | | T3 | |
|-----|--|-----|----|-----|----|-----|----|
| | | Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes | No |
| 1. | Variety of instruments aligned with student learning needs | - | V | - | v | - | V |
| 2. | Diverse ways students demonstrate understanding | - | V | - | v | - | V |
| 3. | Effective feedback and communication | - | V | - | v | - | V |
| 4. | Special notes regarding student achievement | - | V | - | v | - | V |

According to the analysis of the assessment books, the teachers covered none of the four aspects related to DI. From the teachers' scoring books, it can be inferred that they only included kinds of assessments they should be conducted in the learning process, such as formative, summative for course content, mid-semester summative, end-of-semester summative, and report book grades in their scoring books without explicitly mentioning the principles of DI. Based on the teachers' statements, it could be inferred that they followed the *Panduan Pembelajaran dan Asesmen Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini, Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah* published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic

of Indonesia when constructing the scoring book format. This document will likely guide or reference learning and assessment practices in the education system in Indonesia and is used by most teachers. Unfortunately, it does not explicitly promote and apply DI principles in teacher assessment.

Teachers' practices of DI from the students' product analyses

The researcher applied four criteria to assess whether or not students' products meet the characteristics of differentiated learning, i.e., *variety of products matching students' readiness, array of products matching student interests, type of products matching learning style, and inclusion of teachers' comments on student products*. The following table sets out a list of results for students' product analyses.

Table 4. Teachers' Practices of DI from Students' Product Analyses

| No. | Analyzed Aspects | T1 | | T2 | | T3 | |
|-----|--|-----|----|-----|----|-----|----|
| | | Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes | No |
| 1. | Variety of products matching students' readiness | v | - | v | - | V | - |
| 2. | Variety of Product Matching Student Interests | v | - | v | - | V | - |
| 3. | Variety of products matching learning style | - | V | - | v | - | V |
| 4. | Inclusion of teachers' comments on student product | v | - | v | - | V | - |

According to the chart above, all three teachers, T1, T2, and T3, have ensured that the student products in their classrooms are acceptable for the students' readiness. To ensure the challenge of students but not burden them, they assign projects or assignments suitable for each student's capacity. Moreover, all teachers have considered the different interests of their students in producing projects. It shows the importance of involving students in the learning process by connecting the tasks to their specific interests, which makes learning more exciting and fun.

There was, however, no selection of items presented by these teachers suited to the learning styles of students. It is possible because of the teachers' limitations in designing instructions by considering student learning styles. Examples of students' work are included in the appendix. However, on the positive side, teachers provide comments and feedback on students' products, an essential aspect of the assessment and feedback process. This feedback allows students to understand strengths and areas for improvement, encouraging continuous learning and growth.

Teachers' practices of DI from classroom observations

An additional research instrument used to study DI is classroom observation. This observation aimed to reveal important information about how DI was used and its impact on learning. The following is a summary of the results of classroom observations from the learning process carried out by the three participants.

Table 5. Teachers' Practices of DI from Classroom Observations

| No. | Analyzed Aspects | T1 | | T2 | | T3 | |
|-----|------------------|-----|----|-----|----|-----|----|
| | | Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes | No |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Planning | | | | | | |
| | a. The teacher creates an English language learning plan, considering the students' learning needs. | v | - | V | - | V | - |
| | b. The teacher prepares English language materials and learning resources that support differentiated learning. | v | - | V | - | V | - |
| | c. The teacher plans various teaching strategies that align with the student's learning needs. | v | - | V | - | V | - |
| 2 | Teaching and Learning Process | | | | | | |
| | a. The teacher applies English language learning strategies according to the learning needs of the students. | v | - | V | - | V | - |
| | b. The teacher actively provides opportunities for students to participate in the learning process. | v | - | V | - | V | - |
| | c. The teacher provides individual support to students who need assistance or additional activities. | v | - | V | - | V | - |
| 3 | Assessment | | | | | | |
| | a. The teacher employs various forms of assessment that align with the student's abilities, interests, and learning styles. | v | - | v | - | V | - |
| | b. The teacher provides constructive and supportive feedback to encourage the development of the students. | v | - | v | - | V | - |

Similar to the findings from the document analyses, from the classroom observations, it was revealed that the teachers applied most of the principles of DI as stated in the observation checklist.

Planning stage

Initially, each teacher devoted considerable time and effort to creating lesson plans tailored to their student's unique learning needs. These lesson plans were comprehensive documents wherein teachers conscientiously considered the diverse requirements of their students, mainly focusing on aspects such as their readiness to learn and individual interests.

Furthermore, an integral component of this pedagogical approach involved carefully preparing English learning materials and resources designed to facilitate DI. The teachers went beyond conventional instructional methods, proactively developing supplementary materials that aligned with DI principles and resonated with the diverse learning styles in the classroom. These materials were strategically incorporated into the lesson plans, supporting the teachers' dedication to providing a dynamic and inclusive educational experience.

In tandem with this, the teachers systematically also devised an array of teaching strategies, each planned to resonate with the individual learning needs of their students. These strategies were intentionally selected and articulated through

various activities in the lesson plans to ensure a cohesive and well-rounded instructional approach.

Learning stage

During the instructional phase, the outcomes of classroom observations unveiled a commendable adherence by the teachers to the three core principles of DI, as outlined in the checklist sheet. Firstly, teachers demonstrated a nuanced application of varied methods to accommodate diverse learning needs. It encompassed the issuance of differentiated tasks, considering the student's readiness to learn and individual interests. Additionally, the teachers facilitated collaborative learning experiences by integrating peer tutors, fostering an environment where students could support and learn from one another. Recognizing students' varied levels of comprehension, the teachers extended their support to those struggling to grasp the learning materials. They concurrently challenged those who had achieved mastery with more advanced questions, catering to a spectrum of learning abilities.

Secondly, the teachers have deliberately created a conducive environment for student participation. Their proactive support and encouragement have created an exciting learning environment. By indicating and encouraging their students with words and gestures like a *good job* and *well done*, the teachers were helping to create a positive, stimulating learning environment. It indicated the teachers' determination to create a collaborative, interactive learning environment focused on active participation.

Lastly, the teachers exhibited a commitment to providing individualized support by tailoring their approach to meet the specific needs of each student. For those requiring additional assistance and scaffolding due to lower learning readiness, teachers offered targeted support to ensure comprehension. Simultaneously, students with higher learning readiness levels and a mastery of the curriculum were presented with more challenging assignments, incorporating a higher difficulty level. This personalized approach to support and challenge demonstrated the teachers' dedication to recognizing and addressing the unique learning profiles of each student, contributing to a well-rounded and inclusive educational experience.

Assessment stage

In the evaluative phase, which aimed to assess the teachers' proficiency in employing various assessment methods tailored to students' learning readiness and interests, the observed teachers demonstrated a commitment to providing constructive and supportive feedback to foster student development. Meticulous examination revealed that the teachers effectively implemented three critical principles of DI as delineated in the checklist sheet.

Primarily, the teachers executed diverse assessments, beginning with diagnostic assessments in the early stages of learning to gauge students' readiness. Leveraging the insights gleaned from these assessments, the teachers strategically planned subsequent learning activities. As the learning process unfolded, students engaged in various tasks, and the assessment strategies employed by the teachers remained equally diverse. Verbal feedback was pivotal, enabling students to comprehend their strengths and weaknesses in the presented materials. Unfortunately, during the observational process, it was noted that the participants did not align their assessments with students' learning styles, a deviation from the articulated intention in their lesson plans.

Teachers' practices (and perceptions) of DI from questionnaires

In this research, the third instrument utilized was questionnaires, specifically designed to elicit information regarding teachers' practices and perceptions in the context of DI. These questionnaires incorporated a *Likert* scale of 1 to 5. The summary of questionnaire results is presented in the following table.

Table 6. Summary of Questionnaire Results

| No. | Statements | T1 | T2 | T3 | Score | Category |
|-----|---|----|----|----|-------|----------|
| 1 | I understand the concept of differentiated learning in general. | 5 | 5 | 4 | 93 | VG |
| 2 | I understand the objectives of implementing differentiated learning. | 5 | 5 | 4 | 93 | VG |
| 3 | I conduct diagnostic assessments to obtain information about the learning needs of students. | 5 | 5 | 4 | 93 | VG |
| 4 | I understand the level of students' readiness to learn and adapt it to the teaching. | 5 | 5 | 4 | 93 | VG |
| 5 | I understand the level of students' interests and adapt it to the teaching. | 5 | 5 | 4 | 93 | VG |
| 6 | I understand the learning profile of students and adapt it to the teaching. | 3 | 3 | 2 | 53 | E |
| 7 | I develop lesson plans based on information about the learning needs of students. | 5 | 5 | 4 | 93 | VG |
| 8 | I prepare English learning materials and resources suitable for students' learning needs. | 4 | 5 | 3 | 80 | VG |
| 9 | I prepare English teaching strategies that align with students' learning needs. | 5 | 4 | 4 | 87 | VG |
| 10 | I use various English learning materials and resources suitable for students' learning needs. | 4 | 5 | 4 | 87 | VG |

| | | | | | | |
|-------------------|---|----|----|----|----|----|
| 11 | I group students in the learning process based on their readiness, interests, and learning profiles. | 3 | 3 | 3 | 60 | G |
| 12 | I ensure that all students are involved and actively participate during the learning process. | 5 | 5 | 4 | 93 | VG |
| 13 | I provide individual support to students who need assistance (scaffolding) and additional activities. | 5 | 5 | 4 | 93 | VG |
| 14 | I allow students to work individually, in pairs, or in groups. | 5 | 4 | 4 | 87 | VG |
| 15 | I give students the freedom to demonstrate their understanding according to their choices. | 5 | 4 | 4 | 87 | VG |
| 16 | I conduct formative assessments to measure students' understanding of specific learning objectives. | 5 | 5 | 4 | 93 | VG |
| 17 | I provide feedback to students on formative assessments. | 5 | 5 | 4 | 93 | VG |
| 18 | I conduct summative assessments to measure students' achievement. | 5 | 5 | 4 | 93 | VG |
| Gain Score | | 84 | 86 | 68 | | |
| The Highest Score | | 90 | 90 | 90 | | |
| Score | | 93 | 92 | 76 | 87 | |
| Category | | VG | VG | G | VG | |

According to the description above, it can be concluded that all teachers had a high level of proficiency in using DI. Teacher 1 is a better DI practitioner, based on a detailed analysis of the questionnaire responses. Teacher 1 demonstrated a thorough knowledge of the principal objectives and principles of DI throughout many dimensions, attaining an overall score of 5 for each size. In addition, the teacher's flawless results in diagnostic assessment prove that she is an excellent evaluator, even though significant improvement was needed in adjusting courses with learning profiles.

Meanwhile, Teacher 2 had a highly proficient and all-encompassing approach to DI. Teacher 2 received a perfect score of five for understanding DI concepts and objectives, demonstrating a solid foundation in guiding principles and the flexibility to modify instruction to a range of student needs. Similar to Teacher 1, although the teacher was very good at identifying and satisfying her students' needs, there was room for improvement in her ability to match courses with each student's unique learning profile. Exceptional instructional planning and varied learning tools underscored Teacher 2's commitment to fostering active student participation, providing individual support, and allowing flexibility in group settings.

Teacher 3, while consistently demonstrating excellence in DI practices,

exhibited areas for potential improvement. With a score of 4 in understanding DI concepts and objectives, Teacher 3 showcased a solid understanding of the fundamental principles of tailored instruction. Notably, the teacher excelled in diagnostic assessments, displaying a practical approach to gathering information about students' learning needs. However, a self-assessed understanding of learning profiles indicated room for improvement. Proficiency in developing lesson plans and aligning teaching strategies with identified learning needs was evident, although there was a need for improvement in preparing English learning materials.

In summary, Teacher 1, Teacher 2, and Teacher 3 all displayed strengths in implementing DI practices. Teacher 1 excelled in various aspects, showcasing a complete understanding of DI and creating an extraordinarily successful learning environment. Teacher 2 demonstrated exceptional competence, with particular strengths in identifying and addressing student needs. Teacher 3, while generally satisfactory, presented opportunities for improvement, especially in tailoring instruction based on diverse learning profiles. Overall, each teacher contributed positively to a supportive environment for DI.

To sum up, teachers' DI utilization was examined through document analysis, classroom observations, and questionnaires. Syllabi didn't incorporate DI tasks and procedures; hence, they differed from DI principles. District-level tests focused on learning goals, but DI approaches were excluded, indicating systematic issues with tailored teaching. However, DI lesson plans incorporated student-specific learning materials, procedures, activities, and evaluation methods. Meanwhile, the teachers' questionnaire responses demonstrated that they understood DI concepts. However, there were some minor discrepancies. Lastly, observations in the classroom showed how dedicated teachers are to making thorough lesson plans that use a variety of tools and methods to meet the needs of all of their students.

Teachers' Perceptions of DI and Its Impact on Their Instructional Practices

Teachers' perceptions of DI

Interviews were identified as the most appropriate research tool for exploring a complex field of teachers' views on DI. The decision to do interviews underscored a commitment to uncovering the multifaceted and deeply personal aspects of teachers' perceptions of DI. In Chapter 2, the primary theory is set out, defining elements of DI attributed to indicators in an interview.

After reviewing Teacher 1's, Teacher 2's, and Teacher 3's conversations, it was evident that all three teachers thoroughly understood DI that aligned with academic research. The teachers' suggestions demonstrate their commitment to personalizing lessons to each student's requirements and how they may apply educational information in a fast-paced classroom.

First, when discussing DI, all three teachers emphasized individualized

learning for each student. A prevalent theme was the importance of accommodating diversity to help kids succeed. It showed a commitment to identifying and supporting diverse student needs. All three teachers also explained that DI was student-centered because it met students' needs, considered their learning preparedness, and personalized teaching. This agreement supported DI's fundamental purpose of fulfilling each student's learning requirements.

Third, when discussing instructional methods, all three teachers applied some activities such as setting explicit learning goals, completing initial testing, and generating thorough lesson plans, which were proposed approaches to determine student needs, place achievable targets, and monitor progress. The teachers' exam techniques resembled Tomlinson et al.'s comprehensive models. Scholars recommend initial assessments, formative assessments through journals and observations, and product assessments using rubrics for a more comprehensive DI framework assessment technique. All three teachers agreed with top DI on its benefits. More student participation, equal learning opportunities, satisfying individual needs, developing a feeling of belonging, motivating students to realize their full potential, and improving motivation were highlighted. DI has several positive effects, as most people agree.

Finally, all three teachers said DI adoption could be difficult. It was evident that adopting DI effectively would be difficult due to its time requirements, difficulty with increased class sizes, differing teacher approaches, and difficulty fitting DI into regular classroom procedures.

Teachers 1, 2, and 3 agree on DI, as seen by their talks. Their suggestions demonstrated how academic concepts might be applied in many classes. Teachers gained credibility in DI discussions by connecting their ideas to well-known academic ones. Most importantly, these teachers share insights that might improve DI in schools.

The impact of teachers' perceptions on their instructional practices

From the descriptions above, all three teachers demonstrated a strong and well-aligned understanding of DI. Their analyses of DI closely mirrored established scholarly concepts in the field, indicating a commitment to personalized instruction and addressing the diverse needs of students. Each teacher's interpretation aligned with key elements proposed by scholars, such as Tomlinson's definition of DI as a pedagogical approach centered on addressing students' specific needs.

In terms of objectives, instructional strategies, assessment approaches, and the advantages and challenges associated with DI, all three teachers' perceptions converged with established scholarly perspectives, reinforcing the credibility and relevance of their insights. The parallel between the teachers' views and academic concepts enhanced the overall understanding of DI within the broader discourse.

Additionally, the teachers' acknowledgment of challenges related to the time-consuming nature of DI, difficulties with larger class sizes, varied understanding of DI among teachers, and struggles with integrating DI into regular classroom routines reflected a realistic awareness of the complexities and potential hurdles in implementing DI effectively. Overall, the consistency in alignment with scholarly concepts and the practical understanding of applying DI in a classroom context enhanced the credibility of the teachers' perceptions.

DISCUSSION

The comparison of the three studies—Pramono (2021), Digna et al. (2023), and the current research—revealed a consistent pattern of challenges teachers face in implementing DI in Indonesian schools. Firstly, the study conducted by Pramono (2021) primarily examined the influence of teachers' knowledge and self-efficacy on the acceptance of Differentiated Instruction (DI) among Indonesian elementary school teachers. The study, involving 70 first-grade teachers, revealed that understanding and capacity in dealing with DI significantly influenced the adoption of this instructional strategy. Interestingly, the study found no significant connection between knowledge about DI and self-efficacy in implementing it. In addition, the study revealed how important professional development is for enhancing teacher acceptance of DI. The first conclusion is that targeted training initiatives were beneficial to increasing the teachers' knowledge about and trust in differentiation, promoting an environment enabling this type of teaching at Indonesia's elementary schools.

In addition, the study by Digna et al. (2023) looked at perceptions and uses of DI among English teaching staff about the Merdeka curriculum. The study, conducted using qualitative methods and involving thirty teachers at primary schools, found that many actively participate in relevant training programs and are willing to accept curriculum changes. However, the research uncovered considerable variation in teachers' understanding of differentiated learning principles, indicating a need for further support and training to integrate DI strategies into classroom practices effectively. When cross-referencing these results with document analyses, classroom observations, and questionnaires, this study highlighted the complex nature of DI implementation, with identified challenges and the importance of support and training aligning with the findings of the other studies.

This current study entitled *English Teachers' Perceptions and Practices of Differentiated Instruction (DI) in the Merdeka Curriculum* was based on a multimodal approach of document analyses, classroom observations, questionnaires, and interviews to provide an overall understanding of teacher DI

practice. Document analyses identified a significant lack of compliance with the DI principles in teaching programs and were compatible with the problems noted in the first study.

In line with the second study's findings, the investigation also identified problems related to lesson planning and grading books, indicating potential systemic barriers to integrating DI into assessment techniques. Classroom observations showcased commitment to DI principles during the planning and learning stages. Still, they highlighted a deviation in the assessment phase, aligning with the second study's indication of the need for support and training in aligning assessments with students' diverse learning styles. The questionnaires and interview data provided detailed validation of the challenges and benefits identified in the analysis of documents and classroom observations, further supporting the complexity of implementing the DI.

As a result, the challenges teachers faced when implementing DI in Indonesian schools were remarkably similar to those encountered by this study compared with the first and second. Significant differences in the conformity of teachers' curricula with DI principles and a significant divergence during the evaluation phase have been among the common issues arising from all three investigations. This alignment has shown teachers' structural obstacles and difficulties in integrating DI into teaching practice.

The findings have shown that it was essential to introduce professional development schemes and targeted interventions to address these problems, thus bridging the knowledge gaps between theory and practice on DI implementation in Indonesia's educational institutions. The need for systemic change was highlighted by recurrent problems in these studies, indicating the urgency of ensuring that teachers are provided with specific support and training to implement DI effectively. Finally, these findings have shown that implementing the DI is complex and requires substantial work in raising teacher readiness and creating a more conducive learning environment.

CONCLUSION

Based on the detailed analysis of the perceptions and practices of English teachers in implementing DI in the *Merdeka* Curriculum, it can be concluded that the participants exhibited high proficiency in using DI strategies in their classrooms. The assessment considered various dimensions, including understanding DI concepts and objectives, adapting instruction to diverse student needs, evaluating students through diagnostic assessments, and aligning teaching strategies with individual learning profiles. However, there was room for improvement, especially in tailoring instruction based on diverse learning profiles. Furthermore, the English

teachers' perceptions of DI significantly shaped their instructional practices. While there was a solid theoretical understanding and commitment to personalized instruction, practical challenges and systemic constraints impacted the seamless integration of DI principles. The teachers' commitment to addressing these challenges, demonstrated through varied instructional practices, underscored the dynamic interplay between perceptions and the complex reality of implementing DI in the classroom.

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