AN ANALYSIS OF ASPECTS OF DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN KURIKULUM MERDEKA

Ricka Kurnia Ningsih[1] , Absharini Kardena[2], Eliza[3], Genta Sakti[4]

[1,2,3,4]*Universitas Islam Negeri Sjech M. Djamil Djambek, Bukittinggi*
rickakurnia14@gmail.com[1], absharinikardena@gmail.com[2], eliza@uinbukittinggi.ac.id[3], genta.sakti@uinbukittinggi.ac.id[4]

ABSTRACK

This study aimed to analyze the adaptation of Differentiated Instruction (DI) in English learning in class XI Culinary 4 of one of the vocational schools in West Sumatera, using a narrative inquiry approach. The research design involved qualitative methods, with the main informant being one experienced teacher and additional informants consisting of six students. Research instruments included an observation checklist and structured interviews. Data analysis was conducted through data collection techniques, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Results from observations and interviews indicated that the teacher had adapted DI aspects in content, process, product, and learning environment to create more inclusive learning experiences. However, areas such as adjusting the material's difficulty level, diversifying methods to foster participation, and providing technical guidance on assignments still needed optimization. Overall, the implementation of DI aligned with the principles of Kurikulum Merdeka, enhancing student engagement and supporting diverse learning needs. This study underscores the importance of adapting DI to achieve a flexible and inclusive educational approach, encouraging further improvement for optimal learning outcomes.

Keywords : *Differentiated Instruction, Kurikulum Merdeka, English Language Teaching*

INTRODUCTION

Several curriculum modifications have been made to the national education system since Indonesia gained its independence in 1945 in order to raise educational standards, adjust to changing social demands, and meet the changing objectives of national education (Purwowidodo & Zaini, 2023). Developing and preserving the continuity of student education programs is the fundamental goal of curriculum modifications in order to improve results (Kardena, 2015). The introduction of the Kurikulum Merdeka, which aims to provide teachers greater freedom in tailoring instruction to the requirements of their students, is among the most recent developments. The variety of students' cultural backgrounds and experiences frequently poses difficulties for teaching and learning processes when it comes to teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) (Kardena, 2016). Differentiated Instruction (DI), a teaching and learning process that allows students to learn subjects according to their individual abilities, interests, and needs, is introduced in Kurikulum Merdeka as a way to accommodate student diversity and allow each student to learn according to their own abilities, interests, and learning styles .

Teachers need to comprehend the following four aspects when conducting differentiated instruction: learning environment, method, product, and content. While the process component concentrates on developing meaningful activities during the learning process, the content component pertains to the subject matter to be taught. While the learning environment include the physical, social, and emotional elements of the classroom that affect student interaction, the product part involves evaluation in the form of creating products at the conclusion of learning to see the achievement of objectives (Kristiani et al., 2021). The efficacy of learning can be increased in English language instruction by implementing these four factors. Therefore, in order to maximize the learning process, teachers must employ tactics that align with the qualities of their students.

Based on preliminary study, the researcher observed teachers implementing Differentiated Instruction (DI) at one vocational school in west Sumatra. Some students were still not actively participating in the learning process, despite efforts to modify their learning habits. Despite the use of a variety of strategies by teachers, including conversations and visual aids, many pupils continued to be passive. According to the results of the interviews, students' degree of involvement is mostly determined by how relevant the subject is to their interests. For instance, students are more engaged in gathering knowledge when studying expository texts on beautiful art, but they become passive when asked to create texts using the material.

Interviews with three English teachers at this school revealed some challenges in understanding and implementing DI in the Kurikulum Merdeka. Limited time and resources are the main constraints, as adjustments to learning often take longer than expected. In addition, the diversity of students' abilities, learning styles and interests makes DI implementation more complex. Some teachers admit that they find it difficult to implement DI effectively without clear practical guidelines, even though they have theoretical knowledge of this approach.

In relation to the issues outlined, this study aims to explore the extent to which the content, process, product and learning environment aspects of Differentiated Instruction are applied in English language teaching. By focusing on these four aspects, this study will analyse how teachers adapt teaching strategies to meet the needs of diverse students, as well as reveal the effectiveness and challenges of DI practices in the classroom.

METHOD

This research used a narrative inquiry with a qualitative approach, which focused on collecting and analyzing stories or narratives from individuals to understand the experiences, meanings, and social context surrounding a phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, data were collected through in-depth interviews, diaries, and documents reflecting teachers' stories about the implementation of aspects of Differentiated Instruction (DI) in English language teaching. The research was conducted in class XI Culinary 4 at one of the vocational school, where the researcher observed directly. The main objective of the research was to gain an in-depth understanding of how teachers adapted DI by analyzing the data qualitatively to generate insights into teachers' subjective experiences in the context of the Kurikulum Merdeka. The instruments used included observation checklists, interviews with teachers, and interviews with students, all of which were validated through expert judgement. The data were also validated by method triangulation, which referred to the use of various data collection methods to improve the accuracy of the results (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Data analysis in this study used data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. At the data collection stage, observations and interviews were conducted to obtain relevant information. Data reduction was done by selecting data that aligned with the research objectives. The selected data was then presented in the form of a narrative that facilitated understanding, and the process concluded with drawing conclusions to explore the meaning of the analyzed data. Through these steps, it was hoped that this research could provide a comprehensive and informative analysis of teachers' experiences in implementing Differentiated Instruction in accordance with the principles of the Kurikulum Merdeka.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The table 1 presents the results of observations covering content indicators observed in each meeting. This table provides a comprehensive picture of differentiated teaching and shows how well teachers managed to adjust the content to achieve the desired learning objectives.

Table 1. Content Observation Checklist Results

Indicators	Sub Indicators	Meeting 1		Meeting 2		Meeting 3	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Content	Customising What to Teach or Learn	✓		✓		✓	
	Customising How Content is Delivered or Obtained	✓		✓		✓	

Observations and interviews showed that teachers have consistently adjusted learning content according to students‘ needs and preferences in class XI Culinary 4. This can be seen from the indicators of Customising What to Teach or Learn and Customising How Content is Delivered or Obtained, where teachers adjust learning materials and methods to meet students’ diverse needs.

a. First meeting: The teacher taught the structure of legend texts by providing some texts pasted on the blackboard. Students are given the freedom to choose a text that suits their level of understanding, then asked to identify its structure. This adjustment gave students the space to

learn at their own pace. In interviews, some students stated that the material taught was in line with their interests, making learning more interesting and less strenuous. However, one of six students felt that the material was sometimes too difficult, suggesting that there is room for improvement to make the material more suitable for each student's ability.

Student: "Gak terlalu, Jadi ada beberapa materi yang menurut Winda, gak sesuai gitu sama minat Winda. Beberapa materi gak cocok sama kemampuan terlalu sulit."

b. Second meeting: In teaching descriptive texts, the teacher invites students to perform movements to help them remember the subject of the description, a method that facilitates students with kinesthetic learning styles. This method reflects the application of Differentiated Instruction in customising the way the material is delivered. Interviewed students appreciated the variety of methods, especially the use of discussion and pictures. However, some students mentioned a preference for video, which has not been fully implemented, indicating the need for a wider variety of methods to accommodate individual preferences.

Student: "Sesuai sesuai, jadi Winda suknya yang ada video-videonya kak tpai guru pakai diskusi"

c. Third meeting: The teacher uses a creative approach to descriptive text by asking students to rate the teacher's appearance and draw pictures on the board to make it easier for students to identify the body parts to be described. Students were also asked to describe a famous character without mentioning the name, which was then guessed by their classmates. This shows the teacher's effort in customising the content and encouraging students' active participation, ensuring their understanding of the material.

Process

The table 42 presents the results of the observation of the Differentiated Instruction process aspect by the teacher for three meetings.

Table 2. Process Observation Checklist Results

Aspects	Indicators	Meeting 1		Meeting 2		Meeting 3	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Process	Activities that Utilise Learners' Information Skills	✓		✓		✓	
	Different Levels of Difficulty and Means of Achievement		✓	✓		✓	

The observation and interviews showed that the teacher actively integrated activities that utilized students' information skills and adjusted the difficulty levels of tasks in the learning process in class XI Culinary 4. These adjustments were evident from the indicators of Activities that Utilised Learners' Information Skills and Different Levels of Difficulty and Means of Achievement.

a. First Meeting: In this meeting, the teacher asked the students to analyze the structure of the legend text according to the text they had chosen. Students worked in groups to find important

information that indicated the structure of the text, such as orientation, complication, and resolution. In an interview, some students expressed that this activity greatly helped them in critically understanding text elements. However, there were also students who found it difficult to understand the assignment, indicating that although this activity was beneficial, not all students had the same level of understanding.

Student: "Ada seperti mencari kata-kata yang belum dimengerti."

b. Second Meeting: The teacher invited students to find descriptive vocabulary with the freedom to choose body parts according to their abilities. Students with higher abilities were asked to find more than 10 vocabulary words, while students with lower abilities only needed to find at least 10 vocabulary words with additional assistance. Some students stated that this method gave them the opportunity to be creative and choose words that aligned with their imagination. This activity also helped students develop critical thinking skills when selecting and applying vocabulary.

Students: "Pernah itu contohnya seperti kayak cari legend teks itu ya Oh disuruh bikin teksnya sendiri dari dari imajinasi aja."

c. Third Meeting: In this meeting, the teacher asked the students to find important information about the character they wanted to describe. Each student was given the freedom to choose a famous figure and write a description without mentioning the name of the character. More capable students were asked to create more than 5 descriptive sentences, while students with lower abilities only needed to create at least 5 sentences with the help of the teacher. One of six students stated that this activity honed their ability to process information independently and construct it into well-formed sentences.

Student: "Pernah, disuruh nyari tugas sendiri di internet, gitu. Menemukan kata-kata sulit, Kemarin pernah disuruh nyari di internet tentang teks legend juga."

In the indicator of Different Levels of Difficulty and Means of Achievement, teachers actively monitored students' abilities and adjusted the difficulty level of tasks based on the results of that monitoring. Most students felt that the tasks assigned were appropriate to their abilities, indicating that the teacher had successfully adjusted the difficulty level for the majority of students. However, there were students two students who felt that some tasks were still too difficult, especially in understanding English text materials, so they needed to use additional help like Google Translate.

Product

Table 3 presented the results of observations regarding the Product indicator for three meetings, focusing on Designing Products that Match Knowledge, Understanding, and Skills, Determining Assessment Criteria in Rubrics, and Explaining Product Presentation.

Table 3 Product Observation Checklist Results

Aspects	Indicators	Meeting 1		Meeting 2		Meeting 3	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Product	Designing Products that Match Knowledge,	✓		✓		✓	

	Understanding, and Skills			
	Determining Assessment Criteria in Rubrics	✓	✓	✓
	Explaining Product Presentation	✓	✓	✓

The results of the observations and interviews indicated that the teacher in class XI Culinary 4 was committed to designing learning products that matched the students' knowledge, understanding, and skills.

a. First Meeting: The teacher asked the students to choose a legend text that was easy to understand in order to analyze and create a text structure based on their understanding. This freedom created an inclusive learning environment. One student felt that understood the material better when organizing the structure in a table. The teacher also explained the assessment criteria in detail, allowing students to understand the expectations. In addition, the teacher provided extra time for students who had not completed their assignments.
   Student: "Contohnya kemarin kan disuruh cari struktur teks legend, kemudian ditulis. Kalau windah tulis itu winda kurang paham kak tapi kalau dalam bentuk tabel lebih pahama."
b. Second Meeting: In teaching descriptive sentences, the teacher asked the students to use their imagination to create descriptive sentences tailored to their abilities. Student stated that the teacher wrote the assignment on the board and explained the steps for the presentation, helping the students understand how to present their learning outcomes. The students were invited to come forward one by one to write their descriptive sentences.
   Student: "Disampaikan. Nanti Bapak itu kan nanti ditulis, dia nulis di papan, nanti dia menjelaskan. Baru dia kayak nanti suruh ringkas atau bikin tugasnya jadi kalau misalnya presentasi ternyata gini nih kalian nanti analisis dulu"
c. Third Meeting: Students were given the freedom to choose a famous figure they wanted to describe, which increased their engagement. Some students added that the teacher awarded extra points to students who were brave enough to perform in front of the class. The teacher ensured that students understood the assessment criteria while reading their descriptive sentences, with the evaluation based on their understanding of the figures and the structure of the sentences.
   Student: "Presentasi nya boleh berdua,boleh sendiri. Terus kalau berani tampil nanti dapat nilai tambah. Sebelum mulai harus perekanlan diri sama dari kelompok mana"

Learning Environment

Table below presented the results of observation checklist in the aspect of the learning environment, which includes personal, social, and physical aspects at each meeting.

Table 4 Learning Environment Observation Checklist Results

Aspects	Indicators	Meeting 1		Meeting 2		Meeting 3	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Learning Environment	Personal Aspect		✓	✓			✓
	Social Aspect	✓		✓		✓	
	Physical Aspect	✓		✓		✓	

The results of the observations and interviews indicated that the teacher in class XI Culinary 4 successfully created a learning environment that supported the individual development of students, as well as appropriate social interaction and physical arrangement.

a. Personal Aspect: In this indicator, the teacher set targets for completing the material and provided small quizzes to monitor the students' readiness. This showed concern for the individual development of students and an effort to ensure that all students were prepared to understand the next material. The interview results indicated that all students felt that the material taught was generally suitable for their abilities. However, some students expressed that there were certain topics that were not appropriate and required additional research outside of class.
b. Social Aspect: The teacher assigned grades for each level of student participation and encouraged positive cooperation among them, which created a supportive and collaborative learning environment. All six students interviewed stated that they appreciated the support of their peers and the cooperation in learning. Nevertheless, there were a few instances where cooperation was not optimal, such as students who did not participate actively.
c. Physical Aspect: In this indicator, the teacher recognized the importance of the physical arrangement of the classroom to support kinesthetic learning styles and planned to change the seating arrangement to be more dynamic. Overall, students felt that the physical arrangement of the classroom did not significantly affect the learning process, although some students acknowledged that a noisy classroom atmosphere could disrupt concentration.

Based on the results of the observations and interviews in class XI Culinary 4, there were four important aspects that indicated the presence of Differentiated Instruction in English language teaching. First, the teacher successfully adjusted the learning materials according to the needs and interests of the students, providing them with the freedom to choose texts that matched their understanding, although some students felt challenged by certain materials. Second, the teacher demonstrated a commitment to designing learning products that were relevant to the students' abilities through the use of clear assessment rubrics, which encouraged students to participate in ways that suited their communication styles, even though some students required additional support. Third, the learning environment created by the teacher supported the personal and social development of the students, with the establishment of targets and small quizzes that helped monitor students' readiness and enhance collaboration among them, despite some of them not participating actively. Finally, the physical arrangement of the classroom was taken into account to support kinesthetic learning styles, although students acknowledged that a noisy classroom atmosphere could disrupt concentration. Overall, the aspects of Differentiated Instruction in this class showed positive results, but there were still challenges and room for improvement to better meet the needs and abilities of each student.

Discussion

This research analyzes the implementation of Differentiated Instruction (DI) in English teaching in terms of content, process, product, and learning environment. Observations and interviews show that the teacher has adjusted the teaching to meet the students' needs, although some areas need development. The implementation of this DI is also supported by the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, but the challenge of meeting individual student needs still requires optimization.

Content in Differentiated Instruction (DI) needs to be adjusted according to students' readiness, talents, and interests (Wahyuninsih & Lestari, 2023). Teachers need to map learning needs to group students according to their readiness and interests (Purba et al., 2021). In this study, the teacher of class XI Culinary 4 has already given the freedom to choose texts and adjust the difficulty of the material based on feedback. However, the interview results show that some students feel the material is too difficult, so further evaluation is needed to ensure the content adjustments truly match their readiness.

The differentiation process involves adjusting methods and classroom activities according to students' abilities, interests, and learning styles (Tomlinson, 2014). Although the content needs to be adjusted to the students' needs, teachers often struggle to fully adapt the curriculum (Barlian et al., 2023). This research found that in the aspect of process, teachers adjust their teaching through collaborative learning and various approaches to delivering material.

The learning product is effective when it is adjusted to the students' level of understanding (Purwowidodo & Zaini, 2023). Product differentiation relates to the assessment of content mastery and the demonstration of student skills, which must be tailored to their interests and learning profile (Hidayati & Sujarwati, 2023). The findings of this study indicated that teacher give students the freedom to determine the format of their learning outcomes, thereby encouraging creativity in presentations.

The learning environment includes conditions that support the learning process, including personal, social, and physical aspects (Purba et al., 2021). It also includes classroom settings that create positive experiences for students (Barlian et al., 2023). This study found that teachers endeavour to create an interactive atmosphere by encouraging group discussions and collaboration. Observations show that teachers actively facilitate cooperation and provide additional explanations. However, there were still students who lacked participation, signalling that students' motivation and engagement were uneven.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings and discussion, the research question was answered. The observations and interviews indicated that the teacher made various efforts to tailor instruction to the diverse needs of students. However, challenges remained in ensuring that all students understood the material according to their readiness levels. In this study, the teacher demonstrated differentiation awareness by giving students the freedom to choose the analysis material. Although difficulty adjustments based on student feedback have been made, there is still a gap in ensuring the material is suitable for all students' readiness, where some feel the material is too difficult. The teacher successfully adapted teaching methods that support collaboration, but interviews revealed variations in student participation, indicating the need for additional strategies to enhance motivation, especially for those who are less confident. Additionally, the teacher allowed freedom in determining the format of learning outcomes, encouraging creative expression, although some

students still require technical guidance. Lastly, although an interactive atmosphere was created through group discussions, student participation was uneven, making it important to address participation barriers so that all students feel safe and valued, thereby increasing their engagement.

Based on the findings of this research, it is recommended that teachers delve deeper into assessing individual learning needs to ensure that the material delivered truly aligns with each student's readiness level. In addition, the implementation of more varied strategies to enhance student motivation and engagement, especially for those who lack confidence, needs to be strengthened. Teachers are also advised to provide more technical guidance on the use of presentation tools so that students can effectively express their learning outcomes. Finally, it is important to create a more inclusive learning environment by addressing participation barriers, such as embarrassment, to ensure all students feel safe and engaged in the learning process.

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