



Indonesian EFL Students' Perceptions on Implementing Differentiated Learning in Learning English

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Abstract

The Merdeka Curriculum has just been implemented to resolve Indonesia's long-standing educational issues, specifically the inability of Indonesian students to comprehend simple reading and apply basic math concepts. The two main points highlighted in the Merdeka curriculum are the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (Projek Penguatan Profile Pelajar Pancasila (P5) and Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL). In order to fulfill the TaRL aspect, differentiated learning is adopted which emphasizes the student-centered learning process and accommodates the different needs of students. This study aims to look at the perceptions of students regarding the implementation of differentiated learning in English language learning. The population of this study were 235 students in tenth grade at SMA Negeri 1 Tilatang Kamang. The samples were 65 students who were randomly selected using cluster random sampling. Descriptive quantitative was used to analyze and describe the questionnaire data. The finding shows (1) learning environment is an important aspect in the successful implementation of differentiated learning strategies in learning English (2) students learn better when given the freedom to learn based on their individual learning profiles (learning styles), learning readiness (abilities), and interests. In conclusion, differentiating content, process, product, and learning environment is an effective and fun learning strategies for students.

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INTRODUCTION

The Merdeka curriculum was implemented in order to restore learning loss due to the Covid-19 pandemic and resolve the learning crisis that Indonesia has

experienced for years. There are three characteristics of Merdeka curriculum; (1) soft skills and character development through the Pancasila student profile strengthening project (*Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5)*) (2) Focus on essential relevant and in-depth material to develop innovative thinking and creativity to overcome the learning crises in reading and numeracy (3) Flexible learning that can be done by teachers according to the achievements and development of each student. The flexible learning refers to Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL). In Merdeka curriculum, teachers adjust learning to the needs of each student by adapting a differentiated learning approach.

In some countries, differentiated learning has been implemented for a long time, so many research have conducted on this topic such as Melka & Jatta (2022) analyzed the effect of differentiated instruction on students' grammar learning achievement; Said and Abdullah (2021) studied on teachers' perceptions of customizing students' learning through differentiated instruction at a tertiary level on English as foreign language students. In Indonesia, there are few studies that discuss issues related to differentiated learning, some of which are Iskandar (2021) who investigated the improvement of student learning outcomes on Report text material through differentiated instruction and Ayuningtyas et al. (2023) inspected the pros and cons of differentiated online EFL teaching.

This study focused to identify the perceptions of students and teachers regarding the implementation of differentiated learning in learning English as EFL context. It is essential to know the students' perception in order to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of implementing differentiate learning in learning English for the teacher. Perception refers to the mental processes involved in forming an impression, evaluation, opinion, emotion, and interpretation of something based on information presented by external stimuli (Effendi, 2015).

Differentiated learning is a learning approach that accommodates different students characteristics such as different learning readiness, interests, and learning profiles. Teacher modifies content, process, and product based on student readiness, interest, and learning profile (Tomlinson, 2014). There are three stages required to implement differentiated learning: collecting information about students, designing differentiated learning, and implementing differentiated learning (Defitriani, 2019). Teachers can implement differentiated learning with four strategies; differentiating content, process, product, and learning environment in accordance with the learning readiness, interest, and learning profile of each student. Differentiating content means that teachers provide learning materials with some variations that can adjust to students' learning styles and topics of interest. Differentiating process implies a student-centered learning process. Providing differentiated assignments that correspond to students' ability levels, allowing students to learn independently or in groups, and providing options for how students express their comprehension. Differentiating product means freeing students to be creative by creating a learning product according to their interests and creativity. Last, differentiating learning environment means providing a safe and comfortable learning environment that can encourage students to continue to be enthusiastic in understanding learning. In short, accommodating each student with learning that suits individual needs, students will

get a better understanding of the material and able to improve learning performance so that there is no gap between one student and another.

METHOD

This study used descriptive quantitative research to analyze and interpret students’ perceptions on the implementation of differentiated learning in learning English. The population of this study were tenth-grade students of SMA Negeri 1 Tilatang Kamang. The samples were 65 students of two classes which are randomly selected by cluster random sampling technique. A questionnaire was used as an instrument with 25 statements that were analyzed using a Likert scale. The responses given by students on the questionnaire were calculated using Microsoft Excel and the mean value of the respond were compared with the mean value in the following table to assess the perceptions of students.

$$\bar{x} = \frac{\sum Xi}{n}$$

\bar{x} : mean score
 $\sum xi$: total value of respondents’ response
 n : total sample

Table 1. Degree of perception

No	Mean	Perception
1.	3.26 – 4	Very Positive
2.	2.51 – 3.25	Positive
3.	1.76 – 2.50	Negative
4.	1 – 1.75	Very Negative

Source: Dwipayana (2013)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The questionnaire was divided into 5 categories; differentiating content, process, product, learning environment, and general perspective with a total of 25 statements. Each statement in each questionnaire was given 4 responses with the options (Strongly Agree (SA); A (Agree); Disagree (D); and Strongly Disagree (SD)), then each student chose one response that best represents their perceptions. Each response was graded 4 for strongly agree, 3 for agree, 2 for disagree and 1 for strongly disagree. After that, the score was totalled and the mean score (\bar{x}) was calculated.

Table 2. Analysis Differentiating Content

Items	Statements	Responses				Mean	Category
		SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)		
1	I am happy learning English using videos/texts/audio that suit my learning style	31	32	2	0	3,45	Very Positive
2	I am happy to be given the freedom to choose learning materials according to topics that interested for me	21	43	1	0	3,31	Very Positive

3	The learning material that I like helps me comprehend better than the learning material I dislike	27	38	0	0	3,42	Very Positive
4	I am happy to learn English using materials presented with PowerPoint or short videos	23	35	7	0	3,25	Positive
5	I easily understand English materials using materials presented with PowerPoint or short videos	18	42	5	0	3,20	Positive
Total						3,32	Very Positive

Table 2 shows that item 1 has the highest average score 3,45, followed by item 3 with average score 3,42 and item 2 with average score 3,31. Based on these three items, students strongly agree that providing differentiating content to the students based on their learning styles and the topic that they are interested in, make students feel happy and easier to comprehend English learning material. Based on items 4 and 5, 35 and 42 students strongly agree that powerpoints or short movies make studying English more fun and easier than textbooks. With a total average score of 3.32, most students agreed that differentiating content makes English lessons fun and easy.

Table 3. Analysis Differentiating Process

Items	Statements	Responses				Mean	Category
		SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)		
6	I am happy when I am given tasks or learning activities that match my learning readiness (ability level)	28	36	1	0	3,42	Very Positive
7	I am more focused and earnest in doing tasks or learning activities that suit my level of learning readiness (ability level)	22	42	1	0	3,32	Very Positive
8	Flexible learning activities (pair work, group work, individual work, whole-class discussion) help me understand the material more easily and achieve the learning objectives	19	38	7	1	3,15	Positive
9	Flexible learning activities (pair work, group work, individual work, whole-class discussion) give me an interesting and helpful learning experience	19	42	3	1	3,22	Positive

10	I am happy to be given time to think and complete activities/tasks according to my ability and pace	30	32	3	0	3,42	Very Positive
Total						3,30	Very Positive

Table 3 shows that items 6 and 10 had the highest average score 3,42 followed by item 7 with 3,32. These three items indicate that the majority of students feel that studying and doing tasks according to their learning readiness (ability) and pace makes students happy and focused on completing tasks and learning English. All statements gave a very positive response with average score 3,30 which means that providing students with different learning processes in the classroom can help students be more serious in learning and help them understand better English lessons.

Table 4. Analysis Differentiating Product

Items	Statements	Responses				Mean	Category
		SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)		
11	I am happy when I am given the freedom to choose a final project that suits my interests and talents	34	30	1	0	3,51	Very Positive
12	I am happy to be given the freedom to complete my final project based on my learning style	28	35	2	0	3,40	Very Positive
13	I am happy when I am given the freedom to choose to do my final project individually or in a group	17	45	2	1	3,20	Positive
14	I am satisfied that the results of my final project are in line with my creativity	23	41	1	0	3,34	Very Positive
Total						3,36	Very Positive

Table 4 shows item 11 was the highest average score 3,51, followed by item 12 with average score 3,40 and item 14 with average score 3,34. These three items have a very positive response means that most students agree to complete the final project/product depending on their interests, talents, and learning style to be more creative and fulfilled. All statements gave a very positive response with average score 3,36. Thus, the majority of the students agree to make a product of learning according to their learning profile, interest, and creativity.

Table 5. Analysis Differentiated Learning Environment

Items	Statements	Responses				Mean	Category
		SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)		
15	I am happy that my English teacher support and reassure me that I could complete a task that I found difficult	31	34	0	0	3,48	Very Positive
16	I am happy that my English teacher respects and accepts my opinions/ideas	32	33	0	0	3,49	Very Positive
17	Studying with friends really helps me understand the material better	18	40	7	0	3,17	Positive
18	My English teacher never ignored me during the learning process in class	30	32	3	0	3,42	Very Positive
19	My English teacher never judges me when I fail to understand the material or complete an assignment	38	27	0	0	3,58	Very Positive
20	My English teacher helps me to understand material or assignments that I find difficult	38	26	1	0	3,57	Very Positive
21	I like the English class as I feel safe and comfortable, not frustrated during learning	15	46	4	0	3,17	Positive
22	I learn English comfortably and happily because the learning process suits my learning readiness, interests and learning profile	20	42	3	0	3,26	Very Positive
Total						3,39	Very Positive

Table 5 shows items 19 and 20 were the highest average score 3,58 and 3,57. Followed by item 16 with average score 3,49; item 15 with average score 3,48; and item 22 with average score 3,26 were categorized very positive responses. Meanwhile, items 17 and 21 were categorized as positive with average score 3,17. All statements were given very positive response with average score 3,39 means that differentiating learning environment have to be considered by teacher in purpose the succeed the implementation of differentiated learning in learning English.

Table 6. Analysis General Perspective

Items	Statements	Responses				Mean	Category
		SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)		
23	Differentiated learning strategy that my English teacher applies in class is appropriate as it facilitates learning for all students with different learning styles(auditory/visual/kinesthetic)	17	48	0	0	3,26	Very Positive
24	I think the differentiated learning strategies that my English teacher applies in the classroom is appropriate because it's facilitate learning for all students with different capabilities. (below achievers, average achievers, and high achievers	19	45	1	0	3,28	Very Positive
25	I think the new mode of teaching (differentiated learning) is more better than the previous traditional approach (one-fits-all-size)	17	48	0	0	3,26	Very Positive
Total						3,27	Very Positive

Table 6 shows item 24 was the highest average score 3,28, followed by item 23 and 25 with average score 3,26. All statements gave very positive responses with average score 3,27 which means that the majority of students were believe that differentiated learning is valid to be implemented in English classrooms since it accommodate all of the students who have different learning readiness, interest, and learning profile.

Research Finding

Table 7. Students' Perceptions on Differentiated Learning in Learning English

No.	Indicators	Mean	Category
1	Differentiating Content	3,32	Very Positive
2	Differentiating Process	3,30	Very Positive
3	Differentiating Product	3,36	Very Positive
4	Differentiating Learning Environment	3,39	Very Positive
5	General Perspective	3,27	Very Positive
Total		3,34	Very Positive

Based on the table 7 above, there are some findings can be concluded. First, the indicator with the highest student perception is differentiated learning environment. Through this fact, the learning environment is crucial to the success of differentiated

learning strategies in the English classroom. Students are enjoying and needing an English teacher who is encouraging, respectful of students' ideas, and willing to help every student who struggles with content or assignments. Second, students feel happy when they have the freedom to express their creativity through the learning products they have designed based on their learning styles, interests, and abilities. Thirdly, students are more motivated to learn and have an easier time comprehending the material or completing tasks that correspond to their learning style, learning readiness (ability), and topics of interest when they are assigned differentiated tasks. In conclusion, students are more likely to learn and retain information if the learning process is adaptable to their individual learning needs, such as the content and learning process that provided according to the students' learning styles, ability levels, and interests.

Discussion

Based on the results and data analysis, it was found that the learning environment is one of differentiated learning strategy that has an important role on students' learning performance in the classroom. This finding is consistent with the findings of Adewale et al. (2021), who discovered that the classroom environment has an impact on students' academic performance. Based on the data analysis, the learning environment that students like is the active role of teachers who help students during class. Students need teachers who actively encourage, motivate, and help students when they are struggling during the learning process. According to (Magdalena et al., 2020), teachers are responsible for guiding students who struggle to comprehend during learning, as well as encouraging and motivating students to achieve learning goals. Second, students are happier, more focused, and better to comprehend the material or complete the tasks which are given based on their individual learning profiles (learning styles), learning readiness (abilities), and interests. Students are more motivated to learn topics that are relevant to their interests and experiences and also learn more efficiently (Tomlinson, 2014). Students also feel happy and unburdened when given time to complete the tasks according to their own ability, time, and pace. This is supported by the theory of Doyle (2008) through his book entitled "Helping Students Learn In a Learner-Centered Environment". Doyle states that giving students choice and control over their learning will lead to a stronger sense of safety, more confidence in responsibility, and a willingness to be a more active participant in the learning process. Overall, the data analysis showed that differentiating content, process, product, and learning environment is an effective and fun learning strategies for students.

CONCLUSION

Differentiated learning should be continuously implemented in Indonesian schools. This is regarding to the benefits of differentiated learning that have been felt by the students. Differentiated learning actively provides comfortable learning environment for students during learning by accommodate students' learning needs, so that EFL students are more motivated and easier to understand learning especially in learning English.

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