

# THE CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTATION OF DIFFERENTIATED LEARNING STRATEGIES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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## Abstract

Even though each student has a unique learning style, aptitude, and interest, most English language teachers employ a single teaching method for all their pupils. There are students who have low, medium, or high cognitive ability. There are also students who have interest in art, science, sport, language, or many others. There are students who have visual, auditory, or kinesthetic learning styles. The diversity of students needs a learning strategy to accommodate in the class. Differentiated learning strategy is one of the strategies offered by a Kurikulum Merdeka to accommodate the differences that exist in the students. The study focused on challenging aspects in the implementation of differentiated learning strategies in English language teaching. The study used systematic review of 100 articles collected and sourced from Google Scholar to answer research questions. This study suggests that the challenges can be overcome by some strategies, namely 1) giving teachers plenty of time to plan and design their teaching, 2) giving students clear instruction before learning activity, 3) using group differentiation so that they can work independently in groups, 4) making a program that can increase teachers' teaching skill by sharing activity from experienced teachers who have conducted differentiated learning strategies. 5) making a program that can increase teachers' teaching skill by sharing activity from experienced teachers who have conducted differentiated learning strategies. In implementing a differentiated learning strategy, the teacher encountered challenges associated with students' participation, large number of students, lack of time for planning, the skills of managing the classroom when implementing differentiated learning strategy, limited knowledge in using media and methods, and assessing students' differences.

**Keywords – differentiated learning strategy, English language teaching, systematic literature review**

## Introduction

Teachers who teach students in their classes realize that their students are different (Tomlison, 2003). Students are different in many aspects, such as ability, interest, readiness, and learning profile, so teachers need to cope with this kind of student diversity. Teachers need to implement a teaching approach to cater to the diverse needs and characteristics of students. The diversity of students needs a learning strategy to accommodate it in the class.

Teachers have various students in the class. They cannot use one method to

accommodate all the differences readiness, interest, and learning style. Tomlison (2023) stated most teachers use one learning strategy to all students in English language teaching even though every student has different ability, interest, and learning style. There are students who have low, medium, or high cognitive ability. There are also students who have interest in art, science, sport, language, or many others. There are students who have visual, auditory, or kinesthetic learning styles. According to Tomlison (2005), teachers should focus their attention on three important student characteristics:

readiness, interest, and learning profile. The concept of readiness encompasses students' knowledge, understandings, and skills vis-à-vis the instruction a teacher is planning. *Readiness* is not synonymous with *intellectual ability* but rather a construct that encompasses prior learning and life experiences, attitudes about school, as well as cognitive and metacognitive proficiency. The goal of readiness for differentiation is to ensure all students are provided with appropriately challenging learning experiences, based on their individual readiness needs.

Students' interests are the topics and/or processes that evoke curiosity and inspire passion. Differentiating instruction in response to students' existing interests promotes engagement, facilitates motivation, and helps them forge connections between what is being taught and that which is already familiar and valued. Interest-based differentiation can also be structured to encourage students to discover new interests. Learning profile is an umbrella term used to describe the ways in which students learn most naturally and efficiently (Tomlinson, 2003). Acknowledging and adapting to the diverse learning profiles in a classroom is crucial. Students come with varied backgrounds, learning styles, and preferences. Tailoring instruction to these differences helps ensure that all students can access the curriculum effectively. Examples of elements that collectively comprise learning profile include grouping orientation (e.g., whole class, small group, partners, and individual), cognitive styles (e.g., whole to part vs. part to whole, linear vs. nonlinear, reflective vs. action oriented, collective vs. individualistic), and environmental factors (e.g., noise level, activity level, furniture options and arrangement). Students' preferences for learning are influenced by a variety of overlapping and inter-related factors such as gender and culture. Differentiated learning strategy is one of the strategies offered by an Kurikulum

Merdeka to accommodate the differences that exist in the students. Differentiated instruction is an important teaching approach that adapts educational experiences to fit the varied needs and learning styles of students in the classroom. Suprayogi et al. (2017) differentiated instruction (DI) as a teaching approach to cater to the diversity of students and to improve students' achievement. However, the implementation of differentiated learning strategies is not easy, there are challenges that are faced by English teachers in the class.

This study is different from the previous study that was conducted by Suryani et. al. (2023) revealed the teachers' challenges in implementing Differentiated Instruction in Teaching English at Junior High School. The limitation of previous study is the setting of research, namely Junior High School.

Another research barrier in Differentiated Instruction conducted by Lavania et el. (2020) found the challenges that teachers face in differentiated instruction I implementation from 2014 till 2019.

The differences in this study between both previous studies, namely this study is not limited to challenging teacher's Junior high school but also all English teachers that implement differentiated learning strategies. The period of sourced of selected articles that faced challenges in implementing DI is from 2022 till 2024.

This study seeks to explore the challenges faced by English language teachers when implementing differentiated learning strategies are. The study focused on investigating challenging aspects in the implementation of differentiated learning strategies in English language teaching. Teachers will benefit from knowing the study's finding about potential challenges in implementing differentiated learning

strategies so they can overcome the challenges.

### **Methodology**

To identify articles for this study, there are several numbers of criteria to be considered before conducting the SLR process which are population, intervention, comparison and outcomes, and context as in Table 1.

The criteria and scope of research help we screen 100 articles from Google scholar into 59 selected articles. We choose the source of article from the Google scholar articles because we have searched in esteemed publisher such as Sage, Emerald, and Tandf, there are no articles that found related to the specific keywords in the period 2022 till 2024 that was shown in Table 4.

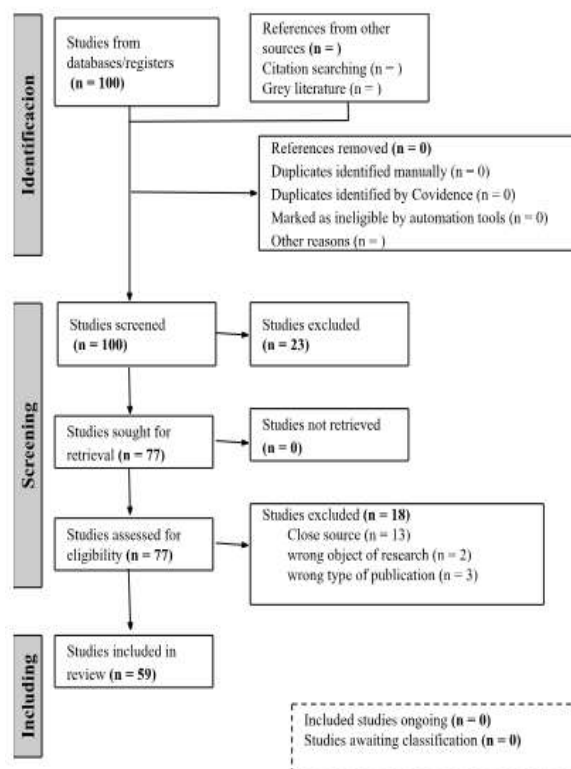
**Table 1. Criteria and Scope**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Scope</b>
Population	English language teachers implementing differentiated learning strategies in their teaching practices
Intervention	Differentiated learning strategies implemented in English language teaching
Comparison	Different types of settings and contexts of implementing differentiated learning
Outcomes	Challenges or barriers encountered in the implementation of differentiated learning strategies
Context	Educational settings where differentiated learning strategies are implemented in English language teaching.

The criteria and scope of this study are related to the population, intervention, comparison, outcomes, and context. The population criteria of this study are English language teachers that implement differentiated learning strategies in their teaching practices. It means that the paper which researched other subjects cannot be chosen. The intervention of this study is differentiated learning strategies implemented in English language teaching. It means that the research which used other strategies, such as project-based learning, problem-based learning, inquiry-based learning, TPR (total physical response) and so on were not chosen. The comparison of this study is different types of settings and contexts of implementing differentiated learning. The outcome of this study is challenges or barriers encountered in the implementation of differentiated learning strategies. The context of this study is educational settings where differentiated learning strategies are implemented in English language teaching.

The study used systematic review of 100 articles sourced from Google Scholar to answer research questions. The 100 articles that were collected screened into 59 articles that involve the criteria, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. PRISMA**



A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) identifies, evaluates, interprets and analyzes the available research findings related to formulated research questions, topic area or phenomenon. The main purpose of conducting a systematic review is to construct a general vision, gather evidence of specific questions and give a summary of the literature. This study conducted the SLR based on the guidelines by Kitchenham and Charters (2007) to identify, evaluate, interpret and analyze available study to address specific research questions on the challenges in the implementation of differentiated learning strategy in English language teaching.

This study used the iterative search process that consists of the following steps:

- 1) Found and collected relevant articles online using Publish or Perish (PoP) applications to collect relevant articles by using the following keywords string in table 3. In this step, researcher found 990 articles by using keyword: “Challenges AND Implementation AND differentiated learning strategy AND English teaching OR instruction” then setting the period

2022 till 2024, source from Google Scholar, publication journals only and get 100 selected articles. Researchers saved the results into RIS/Ref Manager.

- 2) Recorded search result to Mendeley and uploaded it to the Covidence software.
- 3) Classified, selected and screened the academic papers according to eligibility criteria in Table 4 by using Covidence software. In this step, researcher had gotten 100 selected articles then screened them by reading the title and the abstract of the papers, then 23 articles exclude. The 77 selected articles screen again by reading the full text papers and finally got 59 eligible articles. These 59 articles were extracted the data to answer the research question of this study.

These keywords string was used by the researchers to find specific articles that could answer the research question of this study. Difficult to find eligible articles that had peer-reviewed in the Scopus, the researchers did not get it. So, the researchers decided to use Google scholar articles.

**Table 3. Keywords String**

<b>Keywords String</b>	<b>Scopus</b>	<b>Google Scholar</b>
Differentiated learning strategy	200	998
English language teaching OR instruction	200	998
differentiated learning strategy AND English teaching OR English instruction	10	997
Challenges AND Implementation AND differentiated learning strategy AND English teaching OR instruction	0	990
<b>Total Articles</b>	410	3.983

To approve the quality of the chosen articles and conduct systematic literature review, some inclusion criteria are considered. Firstly, a collection of articles was reviewed and sorted using the Covidence application and priority is given to published articles of journals from open sources. Thus, the articles must be written in English and published in the period 2022 until 2024. Hence, the articles should contain the implementation of differentiated learning strategies in English language teaching. Based on the search process, the articles were required to include keywords that attempt to define, propose, suggest or describe existing

works in teaching and learning English using differentiated learning strategies.

There are also exclusion criteria applied to the SLR. Articles that were not written in English or other languages automatically were excluded from this SLR. Articles that do not follow the listed keywords, even though from a related field, were excluded. Lastly, the articles that fulfilled inclusion and exclusion criteria were short-listed and reviewed for final selection.

### **Finding and Discussion**

The outcome of the SLR leads to investigating challenging aspects in the implementation of differentiated learning strategies in English language teaching. The 59 selected papers met the eligibility criteria following the steps in the search process as shown in Table 2. Table 4 shows the eligibility criteria :

**Table 4. Eligibility Criteria**

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Inclusion</b>	<b>Exclusion</b>
Time period	2022 - 2024	Any study outside these years
Language	English	Non-English
Type of article	Original research articles	Any publication that was not an original research article, systematic review/meta-analysis, thesis, and reports.
Participant	English language teachers or educator	Non-English Language teacher, English teachers do not

	s impleme nting differenti ated learning strategies in their teaching practices	implement differentiated learning strategy in their teaching practices
Focus of study	Articles that directly mention the term differenti ated learning strategy.	Nil

In implementing differentiated instruction, instructors may adjust educational modules components within the parts of substance, prepare, and item, alluding to students intrigued, status, and learning profiles, in actualizing separated instruction, the instructor as of now altered the substance, prepare, and item based on student's intrigued and learning profile which as it were centered on students' learning fashion (Tomlinson, 2017).

In any case, the adjustment of educational programs components beneath students' preparation levels still was not unmistakable. Learning profiles relate to how understudies learn best. Understudies who learned best through perusing and composing might study different life story writings on the eLearning and the interface given by the instructor. Visual learners may learn by getting to recordings with outlines to assist them watch and connect what is composed within the video. Filling in a life story realistic organizer whereas observing the video might advantage the kinesthetic learner. The sound-related learner might observe a video that contained clarifications they might tune in to. To differentiate, varying students'

substance based on status level was not unmistakable. The status level is utilized by the educator in separating the components of learning, the objective is to thrust understudies a bit past their consolation zone (Tomlinson, 2001). In addition to varying substance based on students' status, instructors may separate the substance by utilizing major concepts and generalizations. The instructor did change the video in which there were a few complexes, more complex, and most complex recordings. All things considered; the educator did not donate a particular rule for understudies around which substance ought to be gotten to by who based on their assorted needs in terms of availability level.

The discussion is based on the SLR research question, namely the challenges faced by English language teachers when implementing differentiated learning strategies are:

1. *Lack of time for planning differentiated learning strategy*

Roiha (2012) found that the greatest challenges in implementing differentiated instruction by CLIL (content and language integrated learning) teachers in Finland, namely lack of time and resources, material, physical classroom setting and the large class sizes. Porta (2022) found that the challenges to effectively implement differentiated instruction (DI) in South- Australia were the lack of time and large class size. Based on the research that was conducted by Satyarini et al. (2022), the teacher needed more time to plan and design the content based on the students' characteristic and readiness. This finding is similar to the finding of the research by Magableh and Abdullah (2020) that planning for differentiation takes much time, especially in designing the tasks and the content.

The solution that was offered by Jarvis et al. (2016) is by giving teachers time to plan and develop strategies, allowing them to reflect on what has worked and what has not.

2. *Students' participation*

According to the research by Benjamin and Aguilar (2020) that the interaction between the teacher and students was limited since they only met in a virtual class during the pandemic period. The limit of interaction made less of students' participation. The students' participation also can be related to the challenge of Roiha's research (2012) about the lack of knowledge of the pupil.

Students who experience difficulties in their learning may display behaviors that are seen as inactive and inefficient learners who are off-task and easily distracted (Ashman & Elkins, 2002; Westwood, 2004) who may be unable to integrate prior knowledge into their own learning.

Based on the research, Mardhatillah (2023) found that the influence of grouping flexibility was an effective strategy for differentiating instruction and maximizing student performance.

3. *Large number of students*

Based on the research that was conducted by Zelalem et al (2022) that teacher's challenge was dealing with a large number of students in each class. Based on the research that was conducted by Roiha (2012), two of the greatest challenges in implementing differentiated learning to CLIC (content and language integrated learning) teachers of Finland were the physical classroom setting and the large class sizes. The large number of students need the large class and good classroom setting, such as group differentiation.

Haelermans conducted research (2022) about the effect of group differentiation by students' learning strategy showed the result that student performance is higher in classes where the differentiation was applied, and that these students score higher at some scales of the posttest of the questionnaire on

motivation, metacognition and self-regulation.

Based on Haelermans' research; to avoid the large number of students, teachers can use group differentiation so that students can work independently in groups.

4. *The skills of managing the classroom when implementing differentiated learning strategies.*

Based on the research by Satyarini et al. (2022), the teacher encountered challenges associated with students' participation, many students, lack of time for planning, and limited group activities in learning. This challenge needs the skills of managing the classroom when implementing differentiated learning strategies and clear instructions to every group.

5. *Limited knowledge in using media and methods.*

Based on Roiha (2012), the challenges of differentiation were lack of knowledge of the pupil, challenges in cooperation, lack of knowledge of the practical differentiation methods. Jarvis et al. (2016) suggested working together with teachers from a range of curriculum contexts is new knowledge. Collaboration is highly necessary, as it supports the individual school (Vangrieken et al., 2015). Suprayogi (2022) recommended schools to provide a specific program to increase differential instruction (DI) implementation among teachers. The program can be professional development on DI and sharing sessions among teachers who already have good experience in differential instruction implementation.

6. *Assessing students' differences*

Based on the research, Wouter Smets (2022) that teachers struggled in assessing students' differences. Faber et al. (2017) argued that teachers must assess students' need for additional instruction, and as such to decide for the appropriateness for each

student of a compacting and enrichment approach, or rather a scaffolded instruction approach.

### **Conclusions**

The purpose of this study focused on investigating challenging aspects in the implementation of differentiated learning strategies in English language teaching. In implementing a differentiated learning strategy, the teacher encountered challenges associated with:

1. Students' participation,
2. Large number of students,
3. Lack of time for planning,
4. The skills of managing the classroom when implementing differentiated learning strategy
5. Limited knowledge in using media and methods.
6. Assessing students' differences.

There are some suggestions based on some researchers to avoid the challenges in implementing differentiated learning strategy, namely:

1. Giving teachers plenty of time to plan and design their teaching.
2. Giving students clear instruction before learning activity so they can understand how to do it, give good responses, and participate.
3. Using group differentiation so that they can work independently in groups.
4. Making a program that can increase teachers' teaching skill by sharing activity from experienced teachers who have conducted differentiated learning strategies. This sharing can give new insight for teachers on how to manage students in differentiated instruction, use media and methods.

The limitation of this study is concerned with the challenges that faced to English teachers which implement differentiated learning strategies in the period 2022 till 2024. This study contributes to giving information to teachers about the challenges in implementing differentiated learning

strategies and offers suggestions to avoid those challenges.

Further research agenda is quasi-experimental research to examine some ways or methods to overcome the challenges in implementing differentiated learning strategies.

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