

EFL Pre-Service Teachers' Experiences in Implementing Differentiated Instruction during Teaching Practice Program

Eka Fajar Rahmani¹, Dwi Riyanti¹, & Kartika Yoga Eka Pratiwi Negara²

¹Department of English Language Education, Universitas Tanjungpura, Indonesia

²School of Environment, Education, and Development, The University of Manchester, United Kingdom

*Corresponding email: ekasastria10@fkip.untan.ac.id

Received: 03 September 2024 Accepted: 24 September 2024 Published: 04 October 2024

Abstract: EFL Pre-Service Teachers' Experiences in Implementing Differentiated Instruction during Teaching Practice Program. This study explores the experiences of pre-service English teachers (PETs) in implementing Differentiated Instruction (DI) during their teaching practice in Indonesian junior and senior high schools. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected from 17 PETs who had completed their teaching practice, focusing on how they differentiated content, process, product, and the learning environment to meet diverse student needs. The findings reveal that PETs employed strategies such as scaffolding, flexible grouping, and offering multiple forms of assessment to address the range of linguistic competencies and learning styles among students. However, they also faced challenges, including time management, balancing diverse needs, student resistance to flexible grouping, assessing different products, limited resources, and maintaining student engagement. Despite these obstacles, PETs viewed DI as a valuable approach that enhanced their teaching effectiveness, though they recognized the need for more training and resources to implement it successfully. This study provides insights into the challenges and benefits of DI in pre-service teacher education, particularly within Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum. The implications suggest that teacher education programs should integrate more extensive DI training to better equip future teachers for diverse classroom dynamics. Limitations include the small sample size and focus on a specific context, which may limit generalizability. Future research should explore DI across different regions and school settings with larger samples.

Keywords: differentiated instruction, pre-service teachers, ELT, teaching practice.

To cite this article:

Rahmani, E. F., Riyanti, D., & Negara, K. Y. E. P. (2024). EFL Pre-Service Teachers' Experiences in Implementing Differentiated Instruction during Teaching Practice Program. *Jurnal Pendidikan Progresif*, 14(2), 1245-1268. doi: 10.23960/jpp.v14.i2.202490.

INTRODUCTION

Pre-service teachers play a vital role in shaping the future of education as professional teachers. During their training, they are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively teach students in a variety of subjects, including English. The teaching practice component of pre-service teacher education programs provides a crucial opportunity for future teachers to apply their learning in real-world

settings (Ghufron et al., 2022; Heeralal & Bayaga, 2011; Ko'ar, 2021). This practical experience allows pre-service teachers to develop and refine their teaching strategies, classroom management techniques, and instructional approaches. Additionally, teaching practice allows pre-service teachers to experience the challenges and rewards of working with diverse groups of setting (Kaur, 2013; Ojo et al., 2017).

Differentiated instruction is a pedagogical approach that recognizes and accommodates the diverse learning needs, abilities, interests, and backgrounds of students (Ginja & Chen, 2020; Smale-Jacobse et al., 2019). It aims to provide personalized learning experiences that meet students at their individual levels and promote their understanding, engagement, and success in the classroom (Ontario Educational Institution, 2010; Rahmani & Riyanti, 2022; Shareefa & Moosa, 2020; van Geel et al., 2019). In the context of English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching in Indonesia, differentiated instruction can be particularly beneficial in addressing the wide range of linguistic competencies among students. Given the varying levels of English proficiency, DI allows teachers to tailor their instruction to meet each student's specific needs, whether through varying the complexity of reading materials, adjusting the pace of instruction, or providing differentiated support for language skills such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Fitriani & Rozimela, 2023; Haryanto & Rachmajanti, 2022). Moreover, DI can accommodate students' diverse interests by integrating topics that are relevant and engaging to them, thereby increasing their motivation to learn English (Rahmani & Riyanti, 2022). Additionally, by considering students' readiness levels, DI enables teachers to scaffold learning activities effectively, ensuring that all students, regardless of their starting point, can progress in their language acquisition journey (Susanti & Munir, 2023). This approach not only helps in maximizing each student's potential but also aligns with the inclusive and student-centered philosophy of the Merdeka Curriculum, making DI a powerful tool for enhancing EFL teaching and learning in Indonesia (Kusumawardhani, 2023).

The emphasis on differentiated instruction aligns with the broader educational policies of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of Indonesia, as outlined in the

Merdeka Curriculum. This pedagogical approach to differentiated instruction, which recognizes and accommodates students' diverse learning needs, abilities, interests, and backgrounds, resonates with the principles of inclusivity and personalized learning embedded in the Merdeka Curriculum. The Merdeka Curriculum represents a commitment to a more flexible and learner-centered education system in Indonesia. It acknowledges the importance of tailoring education to the needs of individual students to ensure a more qualified and effective learning experience. By emphasizing differentiated instruction, the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology signals a commitment to providing personalized learning experiences that meet students at their individual levels, as spanned in the objectives of Merdeka Kurikulum. This alignment not only supports students' academic development, but also contributes to fostering a more inclusive and supportive educational culture in line with the curriculum's principles.

However, despite the importance of differentiated instruction and how its crucial alignment with the curriculum, many pre-service teachers face barriers in implementing it during their teaching practice. These barriers can include a lack of understanding and knowledge of differentiated instruction strategies, limited access to resources and materials that support differentiation, and the pressure to adhere to a standard, grade-appropriate curriculum (Joseph, 2013; Nepal et al., 2021; Obrovská et al., 2023; Scarparolo & Subban, 2021; Wahyudi et al., 2023; Wan, 2016). In addition, the increasing cultural, linguistic, and developmental diversity in today's classrooms highlights the need for inclusive approaches to education (Florian, 2012).

Teachers are increasingly required to accommodate the varying abilities of a diverse group of learners and provide equal opportunities for all students to succeed. Furthermore, the rapid

pace of educational policy changes and the lack of available professional development resources pose additional challenges for pre-service teachers in implementing differentiated instruction (Obrovská et al., 2023). The experience of pre-service teachers in implementing differentiated instruction during their teaching practice is crucial for their professional development as future teachers (Gibbs, 2023; Ginja & Chen, 2020). It provides them with the opportunity to learn and adapt their instructional strategies to meet the needs of all students, regardless of their individual differences. This hands-on experience is a vital component of their professional development, serving as a bridge between theoretical knowledge acquired in teacher education programs and the practical demands of the classroom.

The implementation of differentiated instruction during teaching practice provides pre-service teachers with unique opportunities to observe, adapt, and refine their instructional strategies. This experience enables them to learn how to address the varying needs of students, irrespective of their cultural background, linguistic proficiency, or developmental stage. Research indicates that this hands-on practice is crucial in fostering a mindset of flexibility and responsiveness, which are essential qualities for effective teaching in diverse classrooms (Coubergs et al., 2017; Gheysens, Griful-Freixenet & Struyven, 2023; Smale-Jacobse et al., 2019). Additionally, these experiences contribute significantly to the professional development and preparation of pre-service teachers, as they navigate and overcome challenges associated with differentiated instruction (Gheysens, Griful-Freixenet & Struyven, 2023; Valiandes, 2015). In the context of EFL teaching, this adaptability is particularly crucial, as pre-service teachers must be equipped to address the diverse linguistic competencies and

cultural backgrounds of their students. By engaging in differentiated instruction, pre-service teachers can better tailor their teaching strategies to meet the specific language learning needs of students; thus, enhancing their overall effectiveness in EFL classrooms.

Studies conducted in this topic are numerous such as Nepal, 2021; Nepal et al., 2021; Rahmani & Riyanti, 2022; Scarparolo & Subban, 2021; Wan, 2016, and many more. These studies shared similar findings that differentiated instructions are crucial to be implemented by pre-service teachers as their professional development, preparations, maturity, and growth, not to exclude the English pre-service teachers. These studies also inspire the researchers to conduct this study. The urgency is crystal clear that the researchers would explore the English pre-service teachers' experiences while implementing differentiated instruction during the teaching practice. The researchers would like to see how the pre-service teachers have practiced differentiated instructions during the teaching practice. In addition, this research emphasizes on the practices, challenges, and how the pre-service teachers overcome them. This actually serves as self and professional reflection of their pedagogical competence, as well. Through a comprehensive exploration of pre-service teachers' experiences related to the implementation of differentiated instruction during their teaching practice, the researchers aims to uncover valuable insights into their experiences, thoughts, challenges, and strategies for overcoming the challenges of this pedagogical approach (Joseph, 2013).

Furthermore, studies on exploring pre-service English teachers' practices or experiences in implementing differentiated instructions in Indonesian context is very limited. In fact, the contribution of this study is impactful as valuable insights for other pre-service teachers, in this case

is the English ones, to learn, adjust, plan, and create preventive strategies when they implement the differentiated instruction strategy. This pedagogical approach is also highly recommended and emphasized in Merdeka Curriculum which means teachers should be able to practice it effectively since the classroom always consists of diverse learners in terms of cultural diversity and English competences. Henceforth, the contribution of this research urges on how it provides valuable, informative and practical insights for the target readers. It also contributes to the development in the field of English language pedagogy (serving as an additional reference), particularly concerning pre-service teachers' pedagogic competence and the implementation of differentiated instruction as a pedagogical approach for professional development, especially in the context of Indonesia. Finally, this research addresses four research questions involving:

1. How have the pre-service English teachers experiences on differentiated instruction application during the teaching practice at school?
2. Have the pre-service English teachers differentiated all aspects of differentiated instruction in their implementation?
3. What challenges have they faced while applying differentiated instruction during the teaching practice at school?
4. What are the pre-service English teachers' perceptions after implementing differentiated instruction in their classroom?

In this study, three theoretical frameworks underpin the exploration of pre-service English teachers' experiences in implementing differentiated instruction (DI) during their teaching practice: Tomlinson's Differentiated Instruction, Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and Constructivist Learning Theory. Tomlinson's DI framework (2001) serves as the

core pedagogical foundation, emphasizing the importance of adapting content, process, product, and learning environments to meet the diverse needs of students. As this study investigates how pre-service English teachers apply these DI principles in real classroom settings, the ability to tailor instruction to accommodate students' varying levels of linguistic competence, interests, and learning styles is paramount. Tomlinson's framework directly supports this goal, as it encourages flexible and personalized teaching approaches, ensuring that every student's unique needs are addressed.

Additionally, Vygotsky's ZPD (1978) provides a theoretical basis for understanding how pre-service teachers scaffold learning. According to this framework, students learn best when tasks are within their developmental reach, but still require appropriate guidance or support. This study examines how pre-service teachers use differentiated instruction to adjust their teaching strategies and provide the right level of challenge and support, allowing all students to progress in their learning, regardless of proficiency level. Furthermore, Constructivist Learning Theory by Piaget and Bruner (1954) reinforces the idea that learning is an active, social process. This theory suggests that students construct knowledge based on prior experiences, emphasizing the need for pre-service teachers to engage students through DI, helping them build on what they already know while guiding them toward new concepts. Collectively, these frameworks provide a strong theoretical foundation for understanding how pre-service teachers apply DI in their teaching practice, offering valuable insights into their strategies, challenges, and professional growth.

■ **METHOD**

Research Design and Procedure

The design of this research is descriptive study employing qualitative framework. The

researchers select this design since it allows the researcher to have opportunities to freely explore and describe the intended information from the participants without any constraints (Taylor et al., 2016; Wisdom & Creswell, 2013). The descriptive study within a qualitative framework

offers a rich, in-depth understanding of pre-service teachers' experiences with differentiated instruction during their teaching practice at school. This research was conducted following the research flow suggested by Creswell (2013, 2018) as depicted in Diagram 1 below.

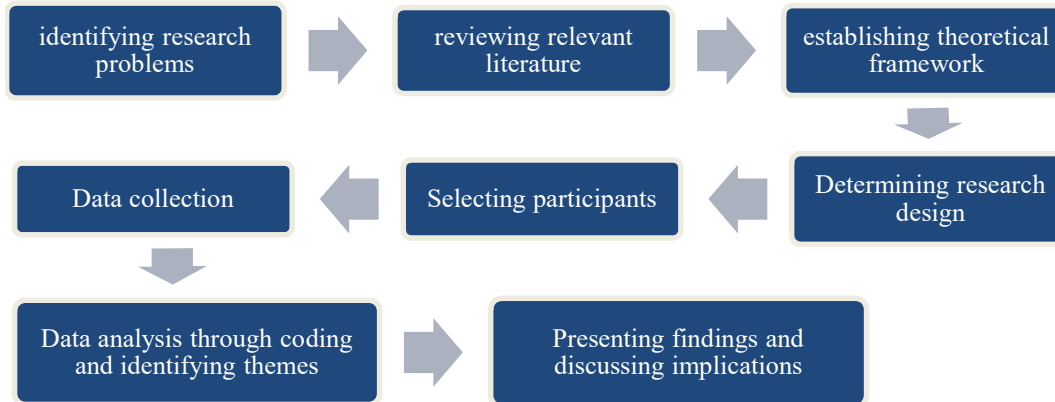


Figure 1. Research flow

The diagram illustrates the research flow of this study, which seeks into the experiences of pre-service English teachers in implementing differentiated instruction during their teaching practice. The process begins with identifying the research problems, focused on understanding how pre-service teachers apply differentiated instruction in real classroom settings and the specific challenges they encounter. Following this, the researchers conducted a review of relevant literature to gain insights from previous studies on differentiated instruction, its application in educational contexts, as well as relevant theoretical perspectives. The researchers, then, continued to establishing the theoretical framework based on the insights from the literature review. There are three theories selected namely Tomlinson's Differentiated Instruction, Vygotsky's ZPD and Constructivist Learning theory. In the next phase, the research design was determined, with the study adopting a descriptive

qualitative approach. It was chosen to enable an in-depth exploration of the participants' experiences with DI. After solidifying the design, the researchers proceeded with selecting participants using purposive sampling. This involved recruiting pre-service English teachers who had implemented differentiated instruction during their teaching practice.

During the data collection phase, the researchers used open questionnaires and closed-questionnaire to gather comprehensive data on the participants' experiences, challenges, and perceptions of DI. This approach allowed for the collection of rich, detailed information. The subsequent step involved data analysis through coding and identifying themes. Here, the researcher systematically analyzed the responses, uncovering patterns and key themes related to the implementation of DI in classroom settings. Finally, the study moved to the phase of presenting findings and discussing implications.

The core results from the analysis were presented in relation to the research questions and theoretical frameworks. This final step also involved discussing practical implications for teaching practice, offering recommendations for future research, and contributing to a deeper understanding of DI in teacher education.

Participant

The participants of this research were 9th-semester students of the English Language Education study program who had completed their teaching practice in the 7th semester. A total of 17 students were selected from 93 based on purposive sampling. This sampling technique was employed because the researchers specifically sought students who had implemented differentiated instruction (DI) in their English classes during their teaching practice, as identified through their responses. Purposive sampling was

chosen to ensure that the participants had direct experience with DI, making them the most relevant sources of information for this study. One of the main advantages of purposive sampling in this context is that it allows for the selection of participants who are most likely to provide rich, detailed insights into the implementation of DI, ensuring that the data collected is highly relevant to the research objectives (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Additionally, it streamlines the recruitment process by focusing only on those who meet specific criteria, saving time and resources while ensuring that the study's findings are based on the experiences of individuals who have directly engaged with DI in practice (Palinkas et al., 2015). This approach aligns well with the qualitative nature of the study, where depth of information and context-specific insights are more valuable than generalizability.

Table 1. Participants' demographics

No	Code	Gender	Level Of Education While Doing the Teaching Practice Program	Did You do DI in Your English Class While Doing Teaching Practice Program?	Did You Know DI Strategy Before You Had Your Teaching Practice?	Did the Practicing Teacher (Your Supervising Teacher) Introduce/Teach You About DI?
1	PET-1	Female	Junior high school	YES	YES	YES
2	PET-2	Female	Junior high school	YES	NO	YES
3	PET-3	Female	Senior high school	YES	NO	YES
4	PET-4	Male	Senior high school	YES	NO	YES
5	PET-5	Female	Senior high school	YES	YES	YES
6	PET-6	Female	Junior high school	YES	NO	YES
7	PET-7	Male	Junior high school	YES	YES	YES
8	PET-8	Female	Junior high school	YES	YES	YES
9	PET-9	Female	Junior high school	YES	YES	YES
10	PET-10	Female	Senior high school	YES	NO	YES
11	PET-11	Female	Junior high school	YES	NO	YES
12	PET-12	Female	Junior high school	YES	NO	YES
13	PET-13	Female	Senior high school	YES	YES	NO
14	PET-14	Female	Junior high school	YES	NO	YES
15	PET-15	Female	Junior high school	YES	YES	YES
16	PET-16	Female	Senior high school	YES	YES	NO
17	PET-17	Male	Junior high school	YES	NO	YES

The data presents demographic information for 17 pre-service English teachers (PETs) who participated in a teaching practice program. The majority of the participants were female (14 out of 17), while 3 were male. The teaching practice was conducted across two educational levels: junior high school and senior high school. Specifically, 10 participants completed their teaching practice at junior high schools, and 7 did so at senior high schools. All participants implemented differentiated instruction (DI) in their English classes during their teaching practice. Prior to the program, 8 participants reported having prior knowledge of DI, while 9 were unfamiliar with the strategy. During the teaching practice, 15 participants were introduced to DI by their supervising teachers, while 2 were not. Despite these differences, all 17 participants have confirmed DI implementation in their English classes throughout the program.

Research instrument

The data collection tools in this study included both open-ended and closed-ended questionnaires, designed to explore the experiences of pre-service teachers in implementing differentiated instruction (DI) during their teaching practice. The open-ended questionnaire featured four questions that asked participants to describe their experiences with DI,

the challenges they faced, and their perceptions on the effectiveness of the strategy. Additionally, the closed-ended questionnaire used four five-point Likert scale questions to measure the extent to which the pre-service teachers implemented the four key areas of DI: process, content, product, and environment. The scale ranged from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree,” allowing for the collection of quantitative data on DI implementation.

To ensure the questionnaires were valid, a construct validity table of specifications was created to align the questions with the study’s objectives and theoretical frameworks. The open-ended questions were based on Tomlinson’s Differentiated Instruction framework, Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and Constructivist Learning Theory. These questions aimed to explore the pre-service teachers’ experiences, challenges, and their perceptions after implementing DI. Meanwhile, the closed-ended questions focused on the specific aspects of DI (content, process, product, and environment) that the participants implemented, and were similarly grounded in Tomlinson’s DI framework. Tables 2 and 3 present the detailed specifications of the open-ended and closed-ended questionnaires, showing how each question aligns with the study’s research objectives and theoretical underpinnings.

Table 2. Specification of the open-questionnaire

Research questions	Theoretical framework	Question focus	Item	Item no.
1. Exploring pre-service English teachers’ experiences with DI implementation	Tomlinson’s Differentiated Instruction framework, Vygotsky’s ZPD	Experience in applying DI in terms of content, process, product, and environment	Describe your overall experience using differentiated instruction from content, process, product, and environment aspect in your English classroom during the teaching practice program.	1
			What aspects of DI did you find most effective in supporting the students’ learning?	2

3. Examining challenges encountered by pre-service English teachers while implementing DI during teaching practice program	Vygotsky's ZPD, Constructivist Learning theory	Challenges in implementing DI	What specific challenges did you encounter when implementing differentiated instruction in your classroom during the teaching practice?	3
4. Exploring pre-service English teachers' perspectives post-DI	Constructivist learning theory	Reflections and perceptions after implementing DI	How do you perceive the benefits of differentiated instruction after implementing it in your class?	4

Table 3. Specification of the closed-ended questionnaire

Research question	Theoretical framework	Question focus	Item	Item no.
2. Investigating DI aspects covered by pre-service English teachers	Tomlinson's Differentiated Instruction framework	Areas of DI implemented: content, process, product, environment	How much do you agree with the following statement: "During my teaching practice, I adjusted what my students learned to fit their different levels and needs."	1
			How much do you agree with the following statement: "I provided different ways for my students to engage with the material based on their learning styles during my teaching practice."	2
			How much do you agree with the following statement: "I allowed my students to show what they learned in different ways that matched their strengths and interests."	3
			How much do you agree with the following statement: "I made changes to the classroom environment to support different learning needs and create a flexible learning space."	4

Data Analysis

The data analysis process is depicted in Diagram 2, which was adopted from Miles, Huberman, Saldana (2014).

The researchers collected data through both open-ended and closed-ended questionnaires. As

mentioned in previous section, the open-ended responses allowed for a deeper exploration of the pre-service teachers' experiences with DI, while the Likert scale questions provided quantifiable insights into how effectively DI strategies were implemented in their teaching

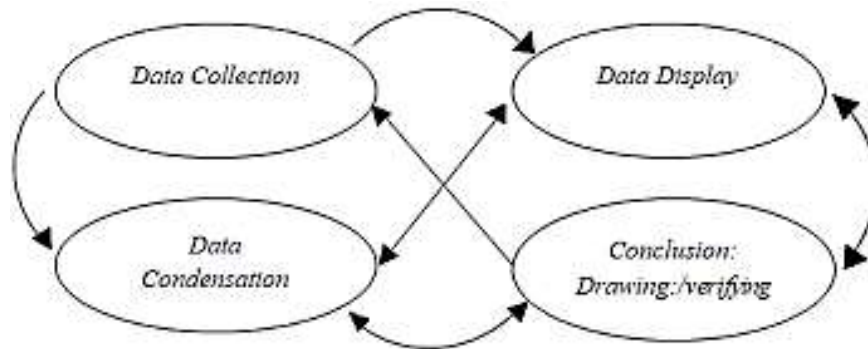


Figure 2. Data collection and analysis process

practice. Once data collection as complete, the responses from the open-ended questionnaires were transcribed and organized through coding or categorization. This process involved identifying recurring themes, patterns, or key ideas related to the implementation of DI. The data were then condensed to highlight the most important points that exemplified the participants' experiences. The responses from the closed-ended Likert scale questions were analyzed to quantify the extent of DI implementation in the areas of process, content, product, and environment. This was also done to ensure that the participants really implemented DI according to framework of DI or not. The quantitative used simple statistical calculation for descriptive study involving calculating frequency, percentage, mean score, and standard deviation of each item to present the responses in a more vivid way.

In data display phase, the condensed data were presented through narrative descriptions and interpretations. The use of narrative descriptions allowed the researchers to display the richness and complexity of the qualitative data by organizing it according to the themes. The researchers used key ideas from the participants' responses during the coding process to determine the appropriate theme. It has helped in making sense of the data and identifying relevant information to the research questions. The last, in conclusion drawing and verification, the

researchers summarized the key findings from the data. The conclusions were drawn by relating the findings to the research questions and theoretical frameworks. The researchers also compared and contrasted the results with the existing literature, discussed the limitations of the study, and did recommendations for future research in DI implementation.

■ RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The result of this study is presented and discussed in four sections following the research questions posed in this research. The results are below.

RQ 1: The pre-service English teachers' experience towards DI implementation during teaching practice program

In exploring the experiences of pre-service English teachers (PETs) who implemented Differentiated Instruction (DI) during their teaching practice, it became evident that these educators shared common strategies and challenges in adapting their lessons to meet the diverse needs of students. The PETs' approaches to differentiating content, assignments, and assessments reflect a deep commitment to creating inclusive and effective learning environments. This section explores how these teachers adjusted their teaching practices, highlighting the techniques they employed to

support varied learning styles and abilities in both junior and senior high school settings.

In detail, the PETs who had implemented DI in their English class during the teaching practice at both junior and senior high schools shared mostly similar experience in DI implementation. They said that they had adjusted materials by providing different texts or resources that vary complexity the reading materials, assignments, and assessments. PET-1, PET-5, PET-7, PET-9, PET-11, and PET-16, for example, mentioned that they applied scaffolding for the reading texts and assignments. They gave the students easy level of text first to introduce the topic of the lesson. After that, they continued with medium to difficult text level. As PET-1 said, *"I applied scaffolding for the reading texts by introducing easy-level texts first and then moving on to medium or difficult levels as students became more comfortable with the topic."* Or, PET-7 who said, *"I gave students easier reading materials at first, which helped build their confidence before moving on to more difficult assignments."* (PET-7). Then, for the assignment, they said that would give the students easy level of assignment. They prepared several easy assignment forms that the students might choose; after that, they gave more difficult ones. PET-5 said, *"I used a step-by-step approach with reading assignments, starting simple to more challenging tasks"*. PETs like PET-2 and PET-3 mentioned that they varied the content by providing multiple examples of reading texts. PET-3 noted, *"I gave different text examples to ensure that all students could connect with the material at their own level."* PET-16 added, *"I found that by giving various levels of texts, students felt more comfortable solving more challenging material after gaining confidence with simpler examples"*. Similarly, PET-15 stated, *"Providing different examples made the material more relatable and accessible to all students."*

Meanwhile, the rest of the PETs shared similar thing, yet, focused on the assignment and assessment differentiation. They mentioned that implementing assignments and assessment that were based on the students' preferences made the learning activities more engaging and effective. Some of these PETs (PET-6 AND PET-10) further mentioned that by giving students a choice between writing a simple composition, doing presentation, or doing a hands-on project to demonstrate their understanding of the topic given improved the quality of learning experience. In terms of assessment, they mentioned using a mix of quizzes, peer assessment, and simple reflective note were what they did so far in their DI strategy. One of the PETs (PET 6) even mentioned, *"I ever gave a video assignment to assess the students understanding towards a topic; although they still distributed standardized tests to the students to quantify the students' performances."*

The adjustment of materials (content) by providing texts, resources of varying complexity, and tasks, it can be seen how PETs did some efforts in implementing DI which is closely aligned with Tomlinson Differentiated Instruction framework, emphasizing the importance of adapting content to meet the needs of diverse students by offering varying levels of difficulty in tasks and resources (Tomlinson, 2001). This strategy was the evidence in the PETs' experiences. Besides, their strategy also reflected Vygotsky's ZPD. Vygotsky (1978) argued that students would learn best when tasks are within their "zone of proximal development", meaning tasks that are slightly beyond what they could do independently but they are achievable with proper support (Holton & Clarke, 2006, Wright, 2018). In line with this, Tudge (2012) and Wright (2018) emphasized and suggested that the support and guidance can be gradually reduced once the teachers are sure that the students have gained competence. Furthermore, research by

Hunter and Anthony (2011) points out the importance of structured scaffolding within ZPD where teachers, in this case is the pre-service English teachers, facilitate cognitive development by providing tasks that challenge students just beyond their current capabilities. Furthermore, using differentiated texts and scaffolded assignments, PETs were able to address the wide range of linguistic competencies in their classrooms, which is particularly important in the context of EFL teaching in Indonesia (Fitriani & Rozimela, 2023).

Besides differentiating the content, the PETs have also incorporated a variety of instructional methods to cater different learning styles. Although majority of the respondents did not mention specific terms of learning styles (such as if the students were auditory, visual, or kinesthetic), implicitly, they referred to the same issue. Instead of mentioning the types learning style, they said that in their classroom the students performed many traits such as being passive and focusing on the explanation, keep talking and moving during the explanation, and asking for extra time to read and write the explanations on the screen or blackboard. To meet these different styles, the PETs claimed that they had varied the learning activities such implementing group works, individual tasks, hands-on activities, multimedia resources, pair works, and discussions. PET-1 explained, *"I noticed that some students worked best in groups, but others liked individual work. So, I gave them the option to work in group or individually"*. Similarly, PET-13 stated, *"In my class, I used multimedia resources like videos and presentations to keep students engaged in my lesson"*.

Moreover, they also allowed the students to work at their own pace on certain tasks, providing more time and support to those who needed it, while also offering enrichment activities to students who finished earlier. PET-11 shared, *"I gave extra time to students who needed it*

and I also created extension tasks for students who finished early, so they did not disturb their friends". PET-9 similarly noted, *"I provided extra help to those who needed while keeping others engaged with more challenging activities. It was like a private section but in the classroom"*. All PETs responded more or less similar responses. Some of them (e.g., PET 1, PET5, PET 11, PET 9, and PET 13) even mentioned about giving extra-lesson to their students during breaktime or after school time. This was done to help the students whose assignments had not finished yet so they were not left behind. PET-13 explained, *"I did extra time for students for three times. Twice during the breaktime and once after the school time because some students needed it"*. PET-1 said, *"I offered extra sessions after school for students who needed more time to complete their tasks"*. The PETs also claim that they provided enrichment activity to those who finished early so they did not distract their friends or misbehaved, and they could improve their understanding towards the topic. PET-5 mentioned, *"I gave enrichment tasks to students who completed their tasks early. I did this to prevent them from disturbing their friends and to enrich their understanding"*. PET-9 responded, *"providing more meaningful activities kept them engaged and helped me to focus on supporting other students who needed extra help"*.

The findings above align well with Tomlinson's DI framework which emphasizes the importance of adjusting not only content but also the process of learning to engage students with diverse abilities and preferences (Tomlinson, 2001). In this context, PETs described how they used group work, individual tasks, and hands-on activities including multimedia resources to meet the diverse needs of students. These approaches reflect the flexibility mentioned in Tomlinson's model. The use of varied instructional

methods such as multimedia resources especially by pre-service English teachers is in line with the findings by Rahmani and Riyanti (2022), and also Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences which suggests that students should learn in different ways and sometimes can be through visual means, or others through kinesthetic activities and auditory channels (Gardner, 1999). PET-13's use of multimedia resources like videos and presentations to keep students engaged is an example of how DI accommodate various learning preferences. This strategy does not only cater students to learn best through visual or auditory means but also to ensure the learning experience is dynamic and interactive to maintain focus and motivation of students during the lesson.

Furthermore, offering extra time and additional support where necessary is a practice that reflects Vygotsky's ZPD, as he (1978) outlined that students learned best when tasks were scaffolded. Providing proper support would help them move beyond their current abilities since they feel more motivated and secure than without the support (Mahn & John-Steiner, 2012). PET-11's and PET-9's strategies of giving extra time and also creating extra tasks for students illustrate how pre-service teachers apply ZPD in practice. They probably did not realize this framework explicitly; yet, they have implemented it in their classroom. The flexibility shown by the pre-service English teachers, further aligns with Gheysens, Griful-Freixenet and Struyven's (2023) findings. Their research emphasizes the need for additional time and resources to support students who are struggling with the standard pace of instruction. By doing this, PETs have demonstrated an understanding of how to manage time flexibility to support student learning, particularly for those who may need additional reinforcement to grasp the material. Moreover, the enrichment activities, as highlighted by PET-5 and PET-9, align with the inclusive and student-centered philosophy of the

Merdeka Curriculum. This approach ensures that advanced learners remain engaged and productive, a critical component of DI that emphasizes the need to challenge students at all levels while providing them with meaningful and stimulating activities (Kusumawardhani, 2023). This enrichment not only prevents early finishers from distracting their friends but also deepens their understanding of the topic being learned.

Then, in terms of differentiating the product, the PETs had given students choices in how they demonstrated their learning. For instance, some students might write a composition, while others create presentation, perform a role-play, storytelling, or complete a project. PET-2 responded, *"I let students to choose whether they wanted to write an essay, the simple one, or perform a role-play. I wanted to give them chance to express themselves in the way they felt most comfortable with"*. Similarly, PET-6 mentioned, *"I found out that some students preferred storytelling-like task to demonstrate their understanding, so I let them to do that"*. The PETs noted that designing assignments to cater different students' interests and abilities was important in ensuring that each of them could connect with the material in a meaningful way. PET-8 shared, *"I taught junior high school students Grade 8. Their ability was mixed, their preferences also. So, I created types of assignments to accommodate varying levels of difficulty. Students who felt more confident could do more complex tasks, but others may do simpler one. But, both are meaningful"*. PET-11 added, *"It was important for me to offer tasks that ranged in difficulty because I didn't want any students to feel afraid to do the task. So I designed assignment to their level of comfort"*.

The PETs also ensured that their assignments were accessible and clearly understood by providing detail rubrics that explained how each type of product would be

assessed. PET-4 explained, *"I created rubrics for each type of assignment, whether it was a presentation, composition, or project. I want to help students understand exactly what they must achieve"*. PET-13 mentioned, *"I used the rubric to help students feel more secure about their work. Whether they were writing or presenting, they knew the criteria they needed to meet"*. To further support students, many PETs offered additional guidance during class and even after school when needed. PET-5 noted, *"some students needed extra help to complete their projects, so I stayed after school to provide personal guidance. I sometimes asked my supervising teacher also for the things I am confused with before giving extra explanation or guidance to my students"*. PET-7 added, *"during class, I would go around the class and check my students, but for those who needed more guidance, I made myself available after class"*. By differentiating the product, the PETs ensured that their students were able to demonstrate their learning in ways that aligned with their individual strengths and preferences. This approach helped to make learning more engaging and accessible for all students, regardless of their confidence levels or abilities.

The findings regarding how pre-service English teachers (PETs) differentiated the product in their classrooms align closely with the principle of Tomlinson's Differentiated Instruction (DI) framework (2001). By offering students various ways to demonstrate their learning, this strategy allowed PETs to cater students' diverse interests, abilities, and learning preferences, making learning more engaging. The PETs' strategies of allowing the tasks that match their confidence level and abilities is also supported by the Constructivist Learning theory by Piaget and Bruner (1954), emphasizing that learning is an active process in which the students build new knowledge based on their prior understanding. PET-2's approach of offering students the option between an essay

and a role-play activity, for example, provided students with the autonomy to choose the method that best aligns with their strengths and learning preferences. This choice fosters a sense of ownership in the learning process, as supported by Vygotsky's (1978) idea of scaffolding, where teachers provide necessary support to help students progress at their own pace while still encouraging independence (Mahn & John-Steiner, 2012).

Moreover, the PETs' focus on using rubrics to provide clear expectations for each type of assignment highlights their commitment to making the assessment process transparent and accessible. Using rubric helped students feel more secure about their work, whether they were writing or performing. Research by Ginja and Chen (2020) has emphasized the importance of clarity in assessment when implementing DI, as it ensures that all students, regardless of the task they choose, can meet the expected learning outcomes. In addition to differentiating the product, the PETs also offered additional guidance to students both during and after class, reflecting their commitment to ensuring that all students received the support they needed. Vygotsky's ZPD underscores the importance of providing support that is appropriately matched to the learners' current level of development, enabling students to complete tasks that they would not be able to accomplish independently (Vygotsky, 1978). By offering this extra support, the PETs helped students engage with more complex tasks and demonstrated a flexible approach to instruction, which is in line with the Merdeka Curriculum's emphasis on personalized and student-centered learning (Kusumawardhani, 2023). Furthermore, the findings are also in line with research that emphasizes the importance of providing differentiated assessments to enhance student engagement. Studies have shown that providing students with choices in how they demonstrate their learning increases motivation

and improves outcomes, particularly for students with diverse needs and abilities (Rahmani & Riyanti, 2022; Fitirani & Rozimela, 2023). For example, PET-8 designed tasks with varying levels of difficulty to ensure that all students could engage with the material, a practice that has been shown to promote confidence and success in learning (Smale-Jacobse et al., 2019).

Lastly, for the learning environment, PTEs recognized that it was important to make the classroom environment conducive to learning for all students. They believed that a well-managed space can significantly impact students' engagement and security. Majority of PTEs shared that they rearranged the classroom layouts to create special areas for different activities. For example, they would set up a round layout for table to encourage group discussions and boost communication among group members. Then, when it comes to individual or independent task, they would give space for the table allowing the students to feel comfortable and concentrate on the tasks. PET-2 explained, *"I rearranged the seats into a round table layout to encourage group discussion. I want to help the students to communicate not only stay silent"*. PET-7 also shared, *"I arrange the space for group work and pair work to make the students interact each other"*.

When it came to individual or independent tasks, the PETs designed the classroom layout to create a comfortable and focused space. PET-10 stated, *"I give my students space to work independently by giving spaces from one table to another table"*. Likewise, PET-8 said, *"The arrangement is important when students worked individually. So, I gave them space to concentrate better"*. Additionally, the PETs applied flexible grouping strategies, where students worked with different group members based on their interests, abilities, or learning styles. PET-14 described, *"I grouped students differently depending on the activity—*

sometimes by ability, other times by their interests." PET-17 added, *"Flexible grouping allowed me to mix students of different abilities, which was great for peer learning. The students really enjoyed it."* In adjusting the classroom layout and grouping strategies, the PETs aimed to create a learning environment that supported various teaching activities and catered to the diverse needs of their students, fostering collaboration, focus, and student engagement.

The PETs' approach to differentiating the classroom environment through seating arrangements and flexible grouping aligns with several educational theories and practices. Tomlinson's Differentiated Instruction (DI) framework (2001) emphasizes the need for teachers to adapt the physical environment to foster engagement and accommodate student needs. PETs like PET-2 and PET-7, who reorganized their classrooms to facilitate group discussions and peer interaction, embraced this idea of creating responsive learning spaces. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) further supports this, as peer collaboration is a critical element in scaffolding learning, allowing students to learn from one another within their ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978; Mahn & John-Steiner, 2012). Additionally, Piaget's Constructivist Learning Theory argues that learners actively construct knowledge through interaction with their environment, making the PETs' emphasis on independent workspaces for focused tasks equally important (Piaget, 1954; Rahmani & Riyanti, 2022).

Moreover, the use of flexible grouping, as described by PET-14 and PET-17, aligns with research supporting peer-assisted learning and differentiated instruction. Studies by Smale-Jacobse et al. (2019) and Ginja & Chen (2020) show that flexible grouping enhances engagement by allowing students to collaborate based on shared interests or abilities, making learning more personalized and effective. This approach is

particularly relevant in the Merdeka Curriculum's focus on creating a student-centered, inclusive learning environment (Kusumawardhani, 2023). By adapting their classroom layouts and applying flexible groupings, the PETs were able to meet diverse learning needs, promote peer collaboration, and foster a supportive environment, thereby aligning their practices with both theoretical frameworks and curriculum standards.

Out of the four aspects, PETs have different perspectives dealing with the most effective aspect of DI in supporting the students English learning. Nevertheless, content differentiation and process differentiation are the most effective aspects according to PETs with six responses each, followed by product differentiation 5 responses, and learning environment with 3 responses. In detail, the content differentiation was highlighted by six PETs (PET-1, PET-5, PET-6, PET-8, PET-11, PET-16). They found that adapting the complexity of the materials to match students' proficiency levels allowed all students to engage with the content at their own pace. The learning became more accessible, effective, and efficient. PET-1 said, "*Content aspect is the most effective for me. Some students struggled with reading, so I adapted the materials to simpler texts to the hard one.*". Similarly, PET-5 said, "*For me, content aspect. Reading materials with different level helped the students to participate in the class without insecurity. I had handled one class with 'mixed- ability' or competences, and this strategy helped me a lot*".

Likewise, process differentiation stood out as an effective strategy as well according to six PETs (PET-2, PET-4, PET-7, PET-10, PET-12, and PET-14). They noted that letting the students to choose how to engage with the material – whether working individually, in pairs, or in groups – helped maintain motivation and participation, catering to different learning

preferences. PET-7 stated, "*I see good improvement when I focused on differentiating the process. Some students needed more time, while others were faster. So, by giving them freedom in the task made a big impact in the process*". Similarly, PET-14 mentioned, "*I think process aspect is the most effective. I realized students had different preferences in classroom activities. Some students learned better in groups, while others preferred individual work. So, I gave them freedom to choose how they learn, and it was effective. They understood the topic well*".

The second most aspect responded by the participants was product differentiation with four respondents (PET-3, PET-6, PET-13, and PET-17). According to the pre-service English teachers, this aspect let the students to demonstrate their learning in various ways, such as through presentations, compositions, or projects, which leveraged students' strengths and interests. As PET-3 said, "*For me, the most effective aspect was differentiating the product. I let the students choose how to show their understanding. They can choose presentations, posters, or writing based on their interests and strength*". PET-19 stated, "*I found product differentiation to be the most impactful. Students appreciated having options to present their knowledge in various forms, such as through projects, presentations, or writing tasks*".

The last aspect responded by the participants was the learning environment. PETs (PET-9 and PET-15) recognized the importance of creating a classroom setting conducive to learning for all students. PET-15, noted, "*I arranged the seats to create different atmosphere for activities such as group work, discussion, or individual work*". PET-9 shared, "*When I set up the tables in round form or gave space for individual activity, the students liked it*". These show flexibility in classroom

layouts and grouping is seen as positively influencing student's engagement and comfort while learning English.

The findings indicate that content differentiation and process differentiation were identified as the most effective aspects of DI by PETs, with six responses each. Content differentiation, as emphasized by PET-1 and PET-5, involved adapting the complexity of reading materials to suit students' varied proficiency levels, which aligns with Tomlinson's DI framework (2001) and is supported by Rahmani & Riyanti (2022) in the EFL context. This strategy made learning more accessible, allowing all students to engage with the material at their own pace. Similarly, process differentiation, highlighted by PET-7 and PET-14, involved allowing students to choose how they engage with tasks—individually, in pairs, or in groups. This aligns with Vygotsky's ZPD, emphasizing social interaction and scaffolding for effective learning, and is supported by research that highlights the importance of catering to diverse learning preferences to maintain motivation (Mahn & John-Steiner, 2012; Ginja & Chen, 2020).

Product differentiation, chosen by four PETs, was valued for allowing students to showcase their understanding through various formats such as presentations or projects. This approach also reflects Tomlinson's DI by

leveraging students' strengths and interests, as seen in Rahmani & Riyanti (2022). Finally, learning environment differentiation, though noted by fewer respondents, was acknowledged for creating flexible classroom spaces that encourage student engagement, a concept supported by Vygotsky's ZPD and the Merdeka Curriculum (Kusumawardhani, 2023). PETs' adjustments to seating arrangements and grouping strategies facilitated different types of learning activities, further enhancing student comfort and focus. Together, these findings underscore the importance of a flexible, responsive approach in promoting effective learning outcomes in diverse classrooms.

RQ 2: The DI aspects done by pre-service English teachers during implementing DI in the classroom

This research question is answered through the four items of closed-ended questionnaire about if the pre-service teachers truly covered the aspects of DI (content, process, product, and teaching learning environment) as they claimed they implemented DI in their English classroom during the teaching practice program. The result, then, indicates that the pre-service teachers indeed involved all four aspects of differentiated instructions proven by the data analysis in the following table.

Table 2. Aspects of DI done by PETs

No.	Item	Frequency Percentage					Mean score	Std. Dev
		1	2	3	4	5		
1	Item 1 (Content)	0 0%	0 0%	2 11.77%	10 58.82%	5 29.41%	4.18	0.62
2	Item 2 (Process)	0 0%	0 0%	6 25.29%	8 47.06%	3 17.65%	3.82	0.71
3	Item 3 (Product)	0 0%	0 0%	2 11.77%	6 35.29%	9 52.94%	4.41	0.69
4	Item 4 (Environment)	0 0%	0 0%	8 47.06%	6 35.30%	3 17.65%	3.71	0.75

Table 2 above presents the analyzed results from 17 pre-service English teachers (PETs) who responded to four items on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The items measure their implementation of differentiated instruction strategies in their teaching practice, specifically focusing on differentiated content, process, product, and environment. The results include the frequency and percentage of responses for each Likert scale option, as well as the mean score and standard deviation for each item. Generally, the data indicates that PETs felt confident in implementing differentiated instruction strategies, particularly in differentiating product (Item 3) and content (Item 1). There was a slightly more variability in responses regarding the process (Item 2) and environment (Item 4) differentiation, which may suggest differing levels of comfort or experience with these aspects. The relatively consistent agreement across items points out the PETs commitment to adapting their teaching practices to meet diverse needs of students.

In detail, Item 1 with a statement “during my teaching practice, I adjusted what my students learned to fit their different levels and needs” has a major response of ‘agree’ with 58.82% selecting scale 4, and 29.41% selecting ‘strongly disagree’ or scale 5. Only 11.77% were neutral (scale 3), and there were no responses in the ‘disagree’ (scale 2) or ‘strongly disagree’ (scale 1) categories chosen. The mean score is 4.18 with a standard deviation of 0.62 suggest that most PETs felt they effectively conducted the differentiated instruction, especially in content aspect to meet students’ diverse levels and needs, and the responses were generally consistent. Then, Item 2 with a statement “I provided different ways for my students to engage with the material based on their learning styles during my teaching practice” has more variety of responses where 47.06% agreeing (scale 4), 25.29% being neutral (scale 3), and 17.65% strongly agreeing

(scale 5). No respondents disagreed or selected scale 1 or 2. The mean score is 3.82 with a high standard deviation of 0.71 suggesting that while many PETs provided differentiated processes, there was more variability in their experiences compared to content differentiation.

Item 3 with a statement “I allowed my students to show what they learned in different ways that matched their strengths and interests” was responded by predominantly positive, with 52.94% strongly agreeing (scale 5), and 35.29% agreeing (scale 4). Only 11.77% were neutral (scale 3), with no negative responses. The mean score reaches 4.41 with a standard deviation of 0.69 indicating strong confidence among PETs in allowing students to demonstrate their learning in ways that align with their strengths and interests. Lastly, Item 4 with a statement “I made changes to the classroom environment to support different learning needs and create a flexible learning space” has a noticeable distribution in responses, with 47.06% agreeing (scale 4), 35.30% neutral (scale 3), and 17.65% strongly agreeing (scale 5). No respondents disagreed or selecting scale 1 or 2 in this item. The mean score was 3.71 with a high standard deviation of 0.75 indicating that while many PETs made efforts to differentiate the environment, there was a broader range of responses, reflecting more diverse experiences or interpretations of this practice.

RQ 3: The challenges encountered by pre-service English teachers while implementing DI during teaching practice program

There are at least six challenges that PTEs faced while implementing differentiated instruction during the teaching practice program at school. They are:

Time Management

Fifteen out of seventeen PETs identified time management as their biggest challenge, particularly because they were still in the process

of learning and practicing to become professional teachers. They found it difficult to plan and prepare different materials, assignments, and assessments. Creating multiple versions of reading texts and assignments to scaffold students' abilities was particularly time-consuming, often requiring them to spend extra hours after school or at home, which they found exhausting. Some PETs also mentioned that time management was especially challenging due to the demands of their own coursework, as they had lectures and assignments to complete in addition to their teaching practice. Additionally, those who were teaching at English courses outside of their practice struggled to balance their time effectively. They further noted that administrative tasks, such as completing daily reports for the teaching practice program, added to the difficulty of managing time for preparing differentiated instruction strategies.

Balancing Diverse Needs

Balancing diverse needs emerged as the second most significant challenge for the PETs. Ten out of seventeen PETs identified this difficulty, attributing it largely to a lack of preparation prior to implementing DI. The absence of diagnostic assessments meant that the PETs did not have a clear understanding of their students' individual needs. Some PETs acknowledged that they had taken the risk of implementing DI out of curiosity, without fully understanding the complexities involved, which often led to chaotic situations. The challenge was particularly happened in large classrooms where students displayed a wide range of English proficiency levels and learning styles. The PETs encountered substantial gaps between students who quickly grasped the material and those who required more time and support, making it difficult to ensure that all students were engaged and learning effectively without leaving anyone behind. Moreover, managing such diversity often felt like a balancing act for the PETs. While they were willing to design

activities that catered to all students, there was a persistent concern that some students might feel neglected or that the tasks were either too challenging or insufficiently supportive. For instance, when advanced tasks were provided for higher-level students, the PETs struggled to keep those who needed more additional supports or guidance equally engaged. Balancing the pace of instruction also proved to be a challenge advancing too quickly risked losing some students, while slowing down could disengage others. This tension between meeting individual needs and managing the overall class dynamic was one of the most complex aspects of effectively implementing DI.

Student Resistance to Flexible Grouping

Another challenge, particularly noted by the PETs teaching in junior high schools, was managing students who were resistant to flexible grouping. Many students expressed a strong preference for staying with their friends and felt uncomfortable working with peers they were less familiar with. This resistance sometimes led to friction within groups, making it more difficult to achieve the collaborative learning objectives that the PETs had intended. For example, when PETs grouped students based on their abilities or learning styles, some students reported feeling singled out or even embarrassed, which negatively impacted their participation. In several instances, students resisted the new group dynamics by becoming uncooperative or withdrawing from the activity. This resistance highlighted the significant role those social dynamics play in how junior high school students engage in classroom activities. Additionally, PETs observed that some students placed in groups with higher-achieving peers felt intimidated, which further hindered their willingness to contribute. Conversely, students placed in groups with peers who struggled more academically often felt frustrated, as they perceived the pace of the group's work to be

too slow. This challenge underscored the difficulty of balancing the need for effective group work with the students' social preferences and comfort levels, making the implementation of flexible grouping more complex than initially anticipated. However, similar case was also spilled by the senior high school PETs, yet, it experienced boldly by the junior high school PETs.

Assessing Different Products

All 17 PETs reported facing challenges when it came to assessing students' work, especially when students were given different options to show what they had learned. Making sure the grading was fair across different tasks was really tough. PETs found it tricky to keep things consistent, even though students were doing different types of assignments. For example, comparing a student's written essay to another's presentation or role-play required careful planning and clear rubrics to explain what was expected. Even with rubrics, PETs often worried about whether they were being truly fair. Each type of assignment has its own strengths and weaknesses, and PETs struggled with how to balance these differences when grading. For instance, a student might do really well in a presentation because they're great at speaking, but they might not be as strong in writing. On the other hand, a student who writes well might find a live presentation or role-play more difficult.

Another issue was that some tasks, like presentations and role-plays, are more subjective to grade. While essays can be graded more straightforwardly by looking at structure, content, and language, presentations and role-plays often depend on things like delivery, creativity, and how well the student engages the audience. PETs worried that their own preferences or biases might affect how they graded these tasks, even though they tried hard to be objective. Giving useful feedback was also a challenge. PETs wanted to help each student improve, but the

variety of assignments made this really time-consuming. Balancing the need to give detailed feedback with the pressure to meet grading deadlines was tough, and many PETs found themselves second-guessing whether they had been fair and consistent across all the different types of student work.

Limited Resources

The limited resources available at the school posed significant challenges for the PETs in effectively implementing DI. For instance, there were not enough computers for every student to use during individual mini-research activities, and the classroom layout could not always be easily altered to accommodate various learning activities. This often forced PETs to be creative with the resources they had on hand, but it also meant that many of their plans had to be adjusted or simplified, which led to considerable frustration. Moreover, the difficulty was not confined to the lack of resources within the school; finding additional resources outside of school also proved challenging. PETs reported spending a significant amount of time searching for materials to support their lessons, such as supplementary reading texts, multimedia tools, or even basic supplies like paper for different assignments. Often, they had to rely on what they could find online or create materials themselves, adding to their already heavy workload. The scarcity of accessible resources frequently forced PETs to compromise on the quality or variety of activities they wished to offer, which was particularly frustrating as they were aware that better resources could have enhanced the learning experience for their students. All respondents or PTEs experienced the limited resources as one of their challenges in implementing DI.

Keeping Students Engaged

All of the PETs reported that keeping students engaged across different activities and

levels of difficulty was a major challenge. It was hard to make sure every student stayed focused and motivated, especially when the activities varied so much in type and difficulty. PETs noticed that while some students were really involved in hands-on projects or group work, others would quickly lose focus or get distracted, especially during tasks that required them to work on their own. This often led to issues with managing the classroom. PETs had to constantly find ways to bring back the attention of students who had lost interest, without interrupting those who were already engaged. It was a tricky balance—on one hand, PETs wanted to keep the students who were on task moving forward, but on the other hand, they couldn't ignore the students who were struggling to stay focused. For example, during group activities, some students would be fully involved in discussions, while others would start chatting about unrelated topics or just lose interest altogether. This challenge was even more noticeable during individual tasks, where students who found the work too hard or too easy would often become bored or frustrated, leading to a lack of participation or even disruptions.

PETs also observed that students with different learning styles responded differently to the activities. Some students excelled in creative or hands-on tasks, while others preferred more structured, quiet work. Trying to meet all these different needs in a single lesson was really tough, and despite their efforts, PETs often found it challenging to keep everyone equally engaged. This was particularly frustrating for the PETs because they knew that keeping students engaged is key to effective learning. However, they often felt like they were constantly juggling different needs to maintain a productive learning environment for everyone.

RQ 4: The pre-service English teachers' perceptions after implementing DI

The PETs perceived mixed appreciation or perceptions towards DI after implementing it. The

responses were varied but dominantly positive. The PETs likely recognize that DI can be highly effective in meeting the diverse needs of students. Despite difficulties they faced, many PETs saw firsthand how DI strategies such as scaffolding, flexible grouping, and varied assessments, could engage students at different levels and help them better understand the material. This likely reinforced their belief in the value of DI as an approach that can make learning more accessible and meaningful for all students. At the same time, the PETs also perceived that they developed a strong awareness of the practical challenge of implementing DI. They experienced directly how difficult it can be to manage time, meet diverse needs, and maintain engagement fairly when using DI. These challenges gave them a more realistic perception of what it takes to effectively implement DI in a classroom setting when they become the practicing or professional teachers.

Then, the PETs also see DI strategy important to be implemented as an ongoing professional development. They believed that more training, practices, readings, trial and errors, and perhaps mentorship would improve their skills in the weak areas of DI. On contrary, some PETs have mixed feelings about the feasibility of DI, especially in environment with limited resources or large class sizes. While they likely see the benefits, the challenges they faced also led skeptical assumptions or thoughts that DI is difficult to implement effectively without significant support or resources. This results in a perception that while DI is valuable in theory and framework, it is challenging to apply consistently in every classroom situation. Finally, on the other side, the PETs' experiences with DI also boost their motivation to improve their teaching practices. They promise themselves to keep learning and practicing strategies that are more suitable to their students once they become practicing or professional teachers. In short, the PETs perceive DI as a powerful strategy but also a demanding one for teachers since it requires careful planning,

adaptability, commitment, and continuous improvement.

The findings have offered significant insights into the implementation of Differentiated Instruction (DI) by pre-service English teachers (PETs) during their teaching practice. These insights contribute to the broader discourse on the practical application of DI in diverse educational contexts, particularly within the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) landscape in Indonesia. The experiences shared by the PETs align closely with the theoretical underpinnings of DI, which emphasize the importance of tailoring educational experiences to meet the diverse needs of students (Tomlinson, 2001). The PETs demonstrated an understanding of DI principles, particularly in differentiating content, process, product, and environment. This aligns with Tomlinson's (2001) framework, which posits that effective DI requires flexibility in these four areas to address students' varied learning profiles.

The findings also resonate with the existing literature on the challenges of implementing DI in practice. For instance, Wan (2016) and Nepal et al. (2021) highlighted the difficulties that teachers face in balancing diverse student needs within a single classroom. Similarly, the PETs in this study reported significant challenges in time management, balancing diverse needs, and assessing different products. These challenges reflect the broader issues identified in the literature, where the practical application of DI often encounters barriers related to resource limitations, time constraints, and the complexity of catering to diverse learners (Joseph, 2013; Obrovská et al., 2023). Moreover, the PETs' strategies for overcoming these challenges, such as scaffolding assignments and using flexible grouping, are consistent with best practices identified in previous studies (Coubergs et al., 2017; Gheysens, Griful-Freixenet, & Struyven, 2023). These strategies are essential for effective

DI implementation and demonstrate the PETs' commitment to adapting their teaching methods to support all students.

While the findings of this study are consistent with much of the existing literature, they also offer unique contributions that differentiate this research from previous studies. For example, Fitriani and Rozimela (2023) emphasized the importance of DI in addressing linguistic diversity in EFL classrooms. The PETs in this study not only recognized this importance but also implemented specific strategies, such as varying the complexity of reading materials and providing differentiated assessments, to accommodate the diverse linguistic competencies of their students. This practical application of DI in the Indonesian EFL context adds a new dimension to the understanding of DI's effectiveness in addressing linguistic diversity.

Additionally, the study by Rahmani and Riyanti (2022) explored the awareness of pre-service teachers in DI implementation in Indonesian EFL classrooms and highlighted the need for tailored strategies to effectively meet students' diverse needs. Rahmani and Riyanti (2022) found that while teachers were aware of the theoretical benefits of DI, they often struggled with practical implementation due to limited resources and large class sizes. The findings of the current study align with these observations, as PETs also reported challenges related to time management, balancing diverse needs, and resource limitations. However, this study goes further by detailing the specific strategies that PETs employed to overcome these challenges, such as scaffolding assignments, using flexible grouping, and providing differentiated assessments. By focusing on the practical application of DI, this research complements Rahmani and Riyanti's (2022) findings and contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how DI can be effectively implemented in Indonesian EFL contexts.

One of the key contributions of this research lies in its focus on the experiences of pre-service English teachers in implementing DI during their teaching practice in Indonesia, a context that has been relatively underexplored in the literature. While there is a growing body of research on DI, studies that specifically examine the practical experiences and challenges faced by pre-service teachers in the Indonesian EFL context are limited. This study fills this gap by providing detailed insights into how PETs navigate the complexities of DI in real classroom settings. Furthermore, the research highlights the importance of ongoing professional development in DI for pre-service teachers. The PETs in this study recognized the value of DI but also identified areas where they needed further training and support, particularly in managing time, balancing diverse needs, and assessing different products. This finding suggests that while DI is a powerful pedagogical approach, its effective implementation requires continuous professional learning and support, a point that has not been extensively explored in previous studies.

■ CONCLUSION

The knowledge of differentiated instruction (DI) in the context of Indonesian EFL is greatly enhanced by this study. The results of the research support established theories like Vygotsky's ZPD and Tomlinson's DI framework, but they also offer new perspectives on the strategies and difficulties that pre-service English teachers (PETs) face when putting DI into practice. In line with other research, the PETs identified content and process differentiation as the most effective components. They also emphasized the significance of modifying instructional strategies to accommodate a range of student requirements. PETs' experiences demonstrate that, in spite of these difficulties, DI improves learning outcomes and student engagement, especially in classrooms with diverse ability. This study explores how PETs, who are not yet certified teachers, modify DI

strategies during their teaching practice programs, contributing to the increasing literature of research in Indonesian EFL education.

This study has substantial implications for Indonesian educational policymakers and teacher preparation programs. First, in order to guarantee that pre-service teachers have the practical abilities necessary to manage diverse classrooms, the study highlights the importance of continual training and professional development in DI. In order to provide PETs with additional opportunity to apply differentiation approaches during their training, educational institutions should concentrate on integrating DI tactics into their curricula. When creating teacher training programs, policymakers should take these findings into account as well, since successful DI implementation can directly impact the Merdeka Curriculum's success and promote more diverse, student-centered learning settings. Furthermore, this research implies that in order to help PETs negotiate the difficulties of DI and provide a more fair learning environment for all students, additional institutional support is required.

■ REFERENCES

- Coubergs, C., Struyven, K., Gheysens, E., Griful-Freixenet, J., & Engels, N. (2017). Measuring teachers' perceptions about differentiated instruction: The DI-Quest instrument and model. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 53, 41-54. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2017.02.004>
- Fitriani, L., & Rozimela, Y. (2023). Differentiated instruction in EFL classrooms: Challenges and opportunities in the Indonesian context. *International Journal of Education and Learning*, 5(1), 89-102. <https://doi.org/10.23960/ijel.v5.i1.2023.089102>
- Florian, L. (2012). Preparing teachers to work in inclusive classrooms: Key lessons for the professional development of teacher

- educators from Scotland's inclusive practice project. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 63(4), 275-285. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487112447116>
- Ghufron, A., Gozali, R., & Mubarak, H. (2022). Teaching practice in pre-service teacher education: Challenges and reflections. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, 12(3), 224-234. <https://doi.org/10.5430/jler.v12n3p224>
- Gibbs, A. (2023). Pre-service teachers' perceptions of differentiated instruction: A critical reflection on practice. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 35(1), 103-116. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487122345120>
- Ginja, T., & Chen, X. (2020). Differentiated instruction in EFL: Theoretical perspectives and classroom practices. *English Language Teaching*, 13(3), 28-35. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v13n3p28>
- Haryanto, A., & Rachmajanti, S. (2022). Differentiated instruction in Indonesian secondary EFL classrooms: A review of the literature. *Journal of English Language and Literature*, 10(2), 134-145. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2017.02.004>
- Heeralal, P. J. H., & Bayaga, A. (2011). Pre-service teachers' perceptions of teaching practice: The case of an education college in South Africa. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 29(1), 43-52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09718923.2011.11892952>
- Joseph, D. (2013). The challenges of teaching English to students with diverse needs: Lessons from a Singapore classroom. *Language Teaching Research*, 17(3), 359-376. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168813482935>
- Kaur, D. (2013). Pre-service teachers' reflections on their teaching practice: Exploring classroom management strategies. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 38(6), 120-135. <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2013v38n6.6>
- Ko'ar, G. (2021). Understanding pre-service EFL teachers' experiences of differentiated instruction in the practicum: A Turkish case study. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 44(2), 257-272. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2020.1856943>
- Kusumawardhani, P. (2023). Differentiated instruction and the Merdeka Curriculum: Strategies for inclusive EFL classrooms in Indonesia. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 14(2), 75-83. <https://doi.org/10.7176/jep.v14n2p75>
- Nepal, D. (2021). Exploring challenges in implementing differentiated instruction in Nepalese classrooms. *Journal of Educational Research*, 45(2), 23-32. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00224871212345120>
- Nepal, D., Rai, R., & Singh, S. (2021). Teachers' readiness for differentiated instruction: Insights from Nepalese schools. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, 12(3), 179-190. <https://doi.org/10.5430/jler.v12n3p179>
- Obrovská, H., Smale-Jacobse, A. E., & Valiandes, S. (2023). Pre-service teachers' self-efficacy in implementing differentiated instruction: A cross-cultural study. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 74(1), 32-47. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00224871221098765>
- Ontario Educational Institution. (2010). *Differentiated instruction: A guide for teachers*. Toronto: Ministry of Education.
- Rahmani, E. F., & Riyanti, D. (2022). Pre-service EFL teachers' challenges in implementing differentiated instruction during their teaching practice. *Journal of Language*

- Teaching and Research*, 13(5), 999-1008. <https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1305.18>
- Scarpapolo, G., & Subban, P. (2021). The implementation of differentiated instruction in Australian classrooms: A review of the literature. *Journal of Education*, 65(2), 22-34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2020.1849087>
- Shareefa, H., & Moosa, A. (2020). Differentiated instruction in inclusive education: A case study from the Maldives. *International Journal of Special Education*, 35(1), 56-70. <https://doi.org/10.2174/97816810874671190101>
- Smale-Jacobse, A. E., Meijer, A. D., Helms-Lorenz, M., & Maulana, R. (2019). Differentiated instruction in secondary education: A systematic review of research evidence. *Educational Research Review*, 27, 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2019.100269>
- Susanti, H., & Munir, A. (2023). Differentiated instruction and student engagement in EFL classrooms: Evidence from Indonesia. *TESOL Journal*, 14(1), e565. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.565>
- Taylor, S. J., Bogdan, R., & DeVault, M. (2016). Introduction to qualitative research methods: A guidebook and resource (4th ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
- Valiandes, S. (2015). Evaluating the impact of differentiated instruction on literacy and reading in mixed ability classrooms: Quality and equity dimensions of education effectiveness. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 45, 17-26. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2015.02.005>
- Wahyudi, D., Setiawan, R., & Aryanti, N. (2023). Implementing differentiated instruction in large EFL classrooms: Indonesian teachers' perspectives. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning*, 11(3), 145-160. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2023.02.005>
- Wan, G. (2016). Differentiated instruction: An analysis of its effectiveness in the English classroom. *Journal of Educational Research*, 32(3), 213-226. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487112345678>
- Wisdom, J., & Creswell, J. W. (2013). Mixed methods: Integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches. Sage Publications.