



Unlocking potential: The role of differentiated instruction in shaping English learning outcomes among EFL students in Takalar, South Sulawesi, Indonesia

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Abstract

This study examined the effectiveness of differentiated instruction (DI) in improving English reading comprehension and attitudes among Grade XII students at SMA Negeri 3 Takalar, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Notwithstanding the Indonesian government's focus on English language instruction, numerous learners encountered considerable obstacles in attaining competency. The research adopted a mixed method with a quasi-experimental design comprising 216 students, categorized into DI and Non-DI groups, to evaluate the effects of differentiated instruction compared to conventional teaching methods. Analyses of preliminary test and post-test results indicated that the DI group, which utilized a differentiated instruction strategy, exhibited substantial enhancements in reading comprehension, attaining superior mean scores relative to the non-DI group. Qualitative evidence obtained from teacher observations and student surveys revealed favorable impressions of differentiated instruction, emphasizing heightened involvement and motivation among students. Nonetheless, problems, including time restrictions and budget limitations, were observed. The



findings highlight the need for a differentiated instruction strategy to address varied learning requirements, enhancing English language training in Indonesian educational settings. The findings emphasize the necessity of employing customized instruction methodologies to meet varied learning demands, hence improving English language education in Indonesian settings. Research implication suggests that teachers require specialized professional development in differentiated instruction to adeptly customize instructional techniques and resources, thereby enhancing student outcomes and promoting a more inclusive learning environment. The study underscores the necessity for educational policymakers and curriculum developers to integrate differentiated instruction into national teaching frameworks, especially in English language education. Educational institutions should prioritize the provision of training programs and practical workshops to equip teachers with the skills needed to implement DI effectively. Additionally, resource allocation should be improved to support the adaptation of instructional materials to suit students' varying readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles. Future research is encouraged to explore the long-term impact of DI across different subjects and educational levels, as well as to investigate scalable models for its implementation within resource-constrained school systems in Indonesia.

Keywords: *EFL, Learning Outcomes, Instruction, Language Education,*

1. Introduction

Teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) is particularly difficult for Indonesian upper secondary education learners. In UPT SMA Negeri 3 Takalar, many students are unable to meet the expectations in English, which is important for their academic and career endeavors. The latest evaluation conducted by the Ministry of Education shows that over 50 percent of high schoolers are failing to achieve the national language proficiency benchmark, highlighting the collapse of the educational system in this regard and having a sharper focus on the problem is critical. Inadequate support from parents, as well as societal perceptions regarding education, and poor pedagogical practices contribute to the students' inability to meaningfully use the language in practice, which impedes engagement with the language. These factors contribute to a persistent cycle of underachievement extending into higher education and later professional life.

In Indonesia, the English curriculum focuses primarily on the learner's listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities. Unfortunately, students have

lingering issues with language comprehension and use, especially in the productive skills of speaking and writing. It is widely accepted that the use of old-fashioned teaching styles, which heavily depend on rote learning, does not accommodate a broad range of learners and is rather dull, unmotivating, and disengaging. It is common knowledge that students in these environments experience learners block, which makes it even more crucial to address such problems with creative solutions in teaching. We are not trying to say that this is a problem only Indonesians face; there are EFL students all over the globe facing similar challenges, thus the need for teaching frameworks that defend active engagement and higher-order thinking is justified.

SMA Negeri 3 Takalar does not provide an encouraging atmosphere that can engage the pupils. A good proportion of English language learners come from families where English is not practiced. This places a restriction on their ability to consolidate and build upon what they learn in class. Moreover, the absence of educational materials, technology, and other activities from the pupils' socio-economic environment hampers the rate at which they can learn the language. The far end of the socio-cultural context of the region gives the impression that English is subordinate to other disciplines, which makes it more difficult. Consequently, the students lack the self-assurance and ability to actively participate in English language exercises, which negatively affects their academic endeavors.

As a response to these difficulties, differentiated instruction (DI) seems to be a viable option. With DI, teaching methods and materials are adjusted to the abilities and interests of each student, which increases their attention and learning results. It has been noticed that students whose teachers use some form of DI usually have greater motivation, stronger self-esteem, and higher achievement than those in traditional classes. For example, some studies suggest that DI has the potential to produce large improvements in reading comprehension and vocabulary skills. Through the provision of tailored learning activities, diverse assessments, and flexible instruction strategies, DI can foster a supportive climate in the classroom and attend to learners' individual language learning needs so that they can succeed in their language learning endeavors.

This research is designed to assess the effectiveness of differentiated instruction in enhancing the reading comprehension skills of the twelfth-grade students of SMA Negeri 3 Takalar. It will focus on how DI can improve students' practical uses of English, including participation in group projects, self-initiated application, and receiving feedback from peers. By concentrating on these objectives, the study hopes to address the practical gaps in effective teaching methods that improve language skills and increase motivation towards learning in the context of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in Indonesia. These results could also help inform the discussion aimed at elevating the standards of English language instruction in Indonesia by providing insights to teachers on how to adopt more effective teaching approaches, and as such, help close the divide between educational policy and classroom reality.

2. Literature

Differentiated Instruction (DI) is an educational technique that seeks to meet a student's specific learning needs by tailoring teaching to their interests, strategies, and how prepared they are for the lesson (Tomlinson, 2001). This approach is premised on the idea that no teaching is comprehensive without fully acknowledging a student's characteristics, which profoundly shape their participation and results. DI includes changes to content, method, product, and learning environment (Tomlinson, 2014). In response to differences among students, this helps all students achieve educational success. In the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environment, DI is aimed at addressing the multicultural and multilingual diversity of learners in order to ensure relevance and effectiveness of instruction.

EFL learners often come from diverse scopes of education, which greatly impacts their language learning in English (Reis & Renzulli, 2015). Learners with little access to English resources outside the classroom are likely to lag behind those who interact with the language outside the classroom setting. There is evidence that some cultural factors, such as background education and language-related environment, can facilitate or hinder the process of language acquisition. Implementing differentiated instruction strategies allows teachers to effectively

address this variance, resulting in enhanced language acquisition and improved attitudes toward learning (Logan, 2011). Such tailored instruction, which includes the use of culturally relevant materials, has been proven to enhance communicative competency and foster participation in the language.

In as much as the benefits of DI are well-known, there is little focus on its application to more local contexts like Takalar. This need strongly shifts the focus toward researching effective DI approaches in diverse sociocultural settings, especially those with specific educational difficulties. Closing this gap would provide valuable information about applying DI to EFL learners in Takalar, considering the local educational context and available resources.

Several studies confirm the effectiveness of DI in developing the language capabilities of EFL learners. For instance, Demissie (2013) reported that DI significantly enhanced vocabulary retention, which enabled language use to be expressed with greater fluency. Melka (2022) similarly reported that children who were taught grammar on an individual basis performed better than those taught through standardized systems. These conclusions support research conducted by Tomlinson et al. (2003), which asserts that students taught with individual instruction tailored to their preparation, interests, and learning profiles receive heightened motivation and engagement as well as improved academic performance.

The rationale of differentiated instruction is well founded and attributed in part to the work of Lev Vygotsky and Carol Ann Tomlinson. The zone of proximal development, as put forth by Vygotsky, highlights the need for education that is age appropriately tailored to a learner's development stage (Vygotsky, 1978). This approach underlines the importance of scaffolding to enable students to reach optimal learning levels. Tomlinson's frameworks for tailoring instruction and materials to the students' specific needs and interests (Tomlinson, 1999) are particularly important in EFL situations. Providing more relevant context to these theories as to how they were enacted in Takalar's classrooms, through culturally based collaborative projects, would be beneficial.

Integrating additional literature and research conducted in Indonesia would enhance the understanding of perceptions and practices of DI in the region. Studies conducted in urban and rural schools in Indonesia may shed some light on the opportunities and obstacles associated with DI implementation. For example, the work of Ahmad (2018) and Sari (2020) highlights students' culturally responsive teaching alignment with students' backgrounds, which requires teachers to adapt their strategies to local contexts.

In the case of Takalar, EFL learners face additional challenges: socio-economic disparity, socio-cultural attitudes toward education, and limited resource access. Some learners may be deprived of English resources, which limits their English language skills and their classroom engagement. The dominance of indigenous vernaculars may heighten the barriers to English Language acquisition. All these factors require the use of DI to address socio-economic disparity and create an equitable learning environment. Solving local challenges with purposeful tailored approaches, such as integrating students' mother tongues into the English language framework, increases the chances of improved learning outcomes.

The use of differentiated instruction (DI) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom has far-reaching practical consequences. As for educators in Takalar, customized strategies such as differentiated instructional grouping, tiered assignments, and adaptive assessments can be implemented to meet specific learner needs. The implementation of collaborative learning strategies can foster students' self-sponsorship and increase language practice among learners of different social strata. Hattie's (2009) research shows that the implementation of cooperative learning methodologies can raise achievement levels among learners, especially in heterogeneous classrooms. In-service training on DI methods for teachers improves the use of these strategies, ensuring appropriate support for all children.

Follow-up studies should specifically assess the impact of tailored instruction on student achievement in Takalar and how these methods sustain language skills and interest over time. The assessment of the effectiveness of teacher training programs for the application of DI would provide valuable information on the refinement of teaching practices. Studies designed on the integration of DI with local cultural and

community aspects might empower educators to devise the most effective strategies tailored to students' diverse needs. Furthermore, soliciting student opinions on DI could enhance understanding of its rationale and impact.

Overall, differentiated Instruction is the most important method to address the needs of diverse EFL learners in Takalar. Understanding the theories, recognizing the local context, and applying workable steps enables teachers to develop inclusive classrooms that enhance language skills and academic achievements. Sustained research and refinement of DI practices will be necessary to respond to the growing demands of students in this setting so that all learners can succeed in their educational pursuits.

3. Methods

3.1 Research Design

This study uses a mixed-methods approach to investigate the effectiveness and implementation of Differentiated Instruction (DI) in improving English reading comprehension among Grade 12 students. The use of quantitative and qualitative methodologies ensures a thorough grasp of the study problem. The quantitative component employs a quasi-experimental methodology to compare the reading proficiency of pupils exposed to DI to that of those receiving traditional education. This method is useful for determining cause-and-effect correlations (Creswell, 2014). The qualitative component takes a case study approach, focusing on reflective practices and teacher perceptions, allowing for a thorough examination of teaching strategies and outcomes (Yin, 2018). The use of methodological triangulation, which includes instructor reflections, classroom observations, and student surveys, improves the findings' validity and reliability (Denzin, 2012).

3.2 Sample

The study was carried out at UPT SMA Negeri 3 Takalar during the 2023-2024 academic year. The study included 216 Grade 12 students who were purposefully selected to represent the usual student demography. The pupils were separated into four groups: two DI (55 students each) and two non-DI (53 students each). To

ensure comparability, the groups were divided according to their English scores from the first semester. This classification reduces the potential of bias while also ensuring that both groups have comparable baseline proficiency.

3.3 Instruments.

Several instruments were used to collect data, assuring both quantitative precision and qualitative depth.

- The Reading Comprehension Exam is a standardized test with 50 questions divided into five competency levels: Advanced, Proficient, Approaching, Developing, and Beginner. To ensure dependability, the test underwent piloting and statistical validation (Gay et al., 2012).
- Instructional modules: Two sets of modules were created: one using traditional teaching methods and the other utilizing Differentiated Instruction (DI) principles as described by Tomlinson (2014). Both modules were consistent with the senior high school core curriculum.
- Three qualified English teachers completed observation forms to assess the application of DI methods using the Black and Williams (1998) framework. Validated by expert judgement and piloting, student surveys aim to gather views and attitudes towards DI.
- Teacher-Researcher Journal: Analyzed reflective thoughts during the implementation phase using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.4. Procedures

To maintain ethical standards, formal approval was acquired from the school principal and the local education authority. All participants provided informed consent. The research was conducted in four stages.

- Preliminary Assessment: The DI and Non-DI groups were given a pre-test to determine their baseline reading proficiency.
- Intervention: The DI group received a six-week instructional program based on DI concepts, with 24 contact hours. The non-DI group continued to use conventional procedures.

- **Post-Intervention Assessment:** Both groups took a post-test to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention.
- **Qualitative Data Collection:** Observations, surveys, and teacher reflections were collected during the intervention period to understand instructional dynamics and student involvement.

3.5. Data Analysis.

To find significant differences between the DI and Non-DI groups, quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) as well as inferential statistics using independent samples t-tests and paired t-tests. To discover recurring patterns and insights, thematic analysis was applied to the qualitative data, which included observation notes and survey responses. The quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated via side-by-side comparison, as recommended in mixed-method research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

4. Findings

4.1 *The effectiveness of DI in English class*

To assess the effectiveness of Differentiated Instruction (DI) in the EFL classroom, students' reading levels were compared in both the Non-DI and DI groups. This analysis was helped by administering pre- and post-tests to both groups to assess their reading comprehension abilities, such as main concept identification, inferencing, word comprehension, and understanding of text structures. The pre-test assessed students' started reading ability before the DI techniques were adopted, and the post-test measured their progress following the intervention.

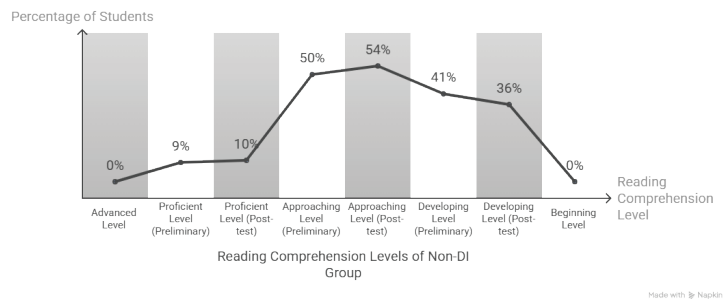


Figure 1. Percentage and Frequency of Levels of Students’ Reading Comprehension in Non-DI Group

The figure depicts the Non-Differentiated Instruction (Non-DI) group’s reading comprehension levels, as well as the percentage of students who achieved each level during the preliminary and post-test evaluations. Notably, no pupils were identified as Advanced in either evaluation (0%). The proficiency level increased slightly from 9% in the preliminary exam to 10% in the post-test. In the Approaching level, the proportion increased from 50% to 54%, showing that pupils’ performance remained consistent. However, the Developing level dropped from 41% to 36%, indicating that some pupils moved on to higher levels. Finally, no students were assigned to the Beginning level for any evaluation (0%). Overall, the figure shows that, while there were slight increases in the Proficient and Approaching levels, the non-DI group did not make significant gains in reading comprehension skills, especially in the higher categories.

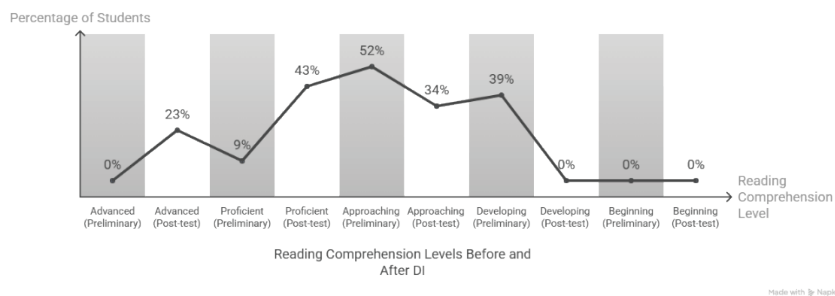


Figure 2. Percentage and Frequency of Levels of Students’ Reading Comprehension in DI Group

The figure 2 displays the reading comprehension levels of the Differentiated Instruction (DI) group, with percentages of students at each level before and after the intervention. Initially, no pupils were rated as Advanced in the preliminary test, but 23% attained it in the post-test. The Proficient level increased from 9% in the preliminary exam to 43% in the post-test, suggesting a considerable improvement in reading ability. In the Approaching level, the percentage fell from 52% to 34%, indicating that many pupils advanced to higher levels. The Developing level decreased from 39% on the preliminary exam to 0% on the post-test, suggesting that all students in this category improved. Finally, no students were recorded at the Beginning level for any exam. Overall, the chart shows a significant increase in reading comprehension for the DI group, notably in the Proficient and Advanced categories.

Investigating more pretest and posttest for students, particularly by seeing mean scores, group mean scores, and standard deviation, helped the researcher to clearly see how effective DI was in enhancing students' reading skills. The following table presents the standard deviations, mean scores, and group mean scores for both the **Non-DI** and **DI** groups before and after the intervention.

Table 1. The preliminary test and post-test results, the reading comprehension level, standard deviations, mean scores, and group mean scores.

The Level of Reading Comprehension	Traditional Approach (Non-DI Group) n = 110				Differentiated Instruction (DI Group) n = 106			
	Preliminary test		Post-test		Preliminary test		Post-test	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Advanced (41-50)	0	0	0	0	0	0	46.67	1.21
Proficient (31-40)	33.5	1.5	36.36	1.29	33.50	1.5	37.15	1.02
Approaching (21-30)	24.78	0.93	24.63	0.92	24.78	0.93	28.19	0.88
Developing (11-20)	13.76	1.65	15.4	1.55	13.85	1.68	0	0
Beginning (1-10)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Group Mean Score	24.012	0.31	25.46	0.26	24.045	0.32	37.338	0.138

The table above compares the reading comprehension skills of 110 students in the Traditional Approach (Non-DI Group) and 106 students in the Differentiated Instruction (DI Group), including scores from preliminary and post-test evaluations. In the Advanced level, no students in the non-DI group scored in either assessment, whereas the DI group averaged 46.67 in the post-test. The Proficient level improved for both groups, with the non-DI group's mean going from 33.5 (SD = 1.5) to 36.36 (SD = 1.29), and the DI group's mean rising from 33.50 (SD = 1.5) to 37.15 (SD = 1.02). The non-DI group's mean Approaching level score fell slightly from 24.78 (SD = 0.93) to 24.63 (SD = 0.92), while the DI group improved from 24.78 (SD = 0.93) to 28.19 (SD = 0.88).

In the Developing level, the non-DI group's mean score went from 13.76 (SD = 1.65) to 15.4 (SD = 1.55), whereas the DI group demonstrated that all students advanced beyond this level, moving from 13.85 (SD = 1.68) to 0 in the post-test. There were no pupils in any category classed as Beginning. Overall, the mean score for the non-DI group increased from 24.012 (SD = 0.31) to 25.46 (SD = 0.26), whereas the DI group increased significantly from 24.045 (SD = 0.32) to 37.338 (SD = 0.138). These findings show that the DI group outperformed the non-DI group at all levels, notably in the Advanced and Proficient categories, demonstrating the efficacy of differentiated instruction in improving reading comprehension.

Furthermore, it's critical to understand the differences in post-test scores between the Non-DI and DI groups. This table shows the change in scores after the intervention, allowing us to assess how Differentiated Instruction (DI) affected students' reading skills compared to standard teaching methods. The T-test allows us to determine if the observed difference between the two groups is statistically significant or merely due to chance. The findings of this study will help us better understand the efficacy of DI in enhancing student outcomes.

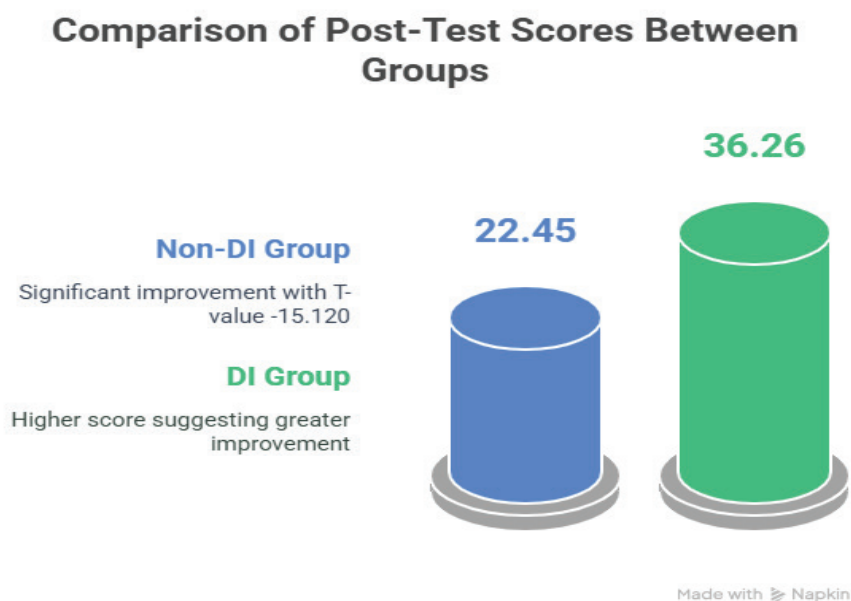


Figure 3. Comparison of post-test scores between the non-DI and DI group

Table 5 shows the **post-test scores** for both groups. The **Non-DI Group** (N = 110) had a **mean post-test score** of **22.45** with a **T-value** of **-15.120** and a **P-value** of **<0.001**, indicating a significant improvement. The **DI Group** (N = 106) had a **mean post-test score** of **36.26**, but no T-value or P-value was provided. The DI group's score is notably higher than the non-DI group's, suggesting a greater improvement.

4.2 Advantages and Disadvantages of Utilizing Differentiated Instruction in English Class, particularly in reading class.

From the observation, the research found that the average outcomes gained from implementing DI in the EFL classroom. It can be seen as follows:

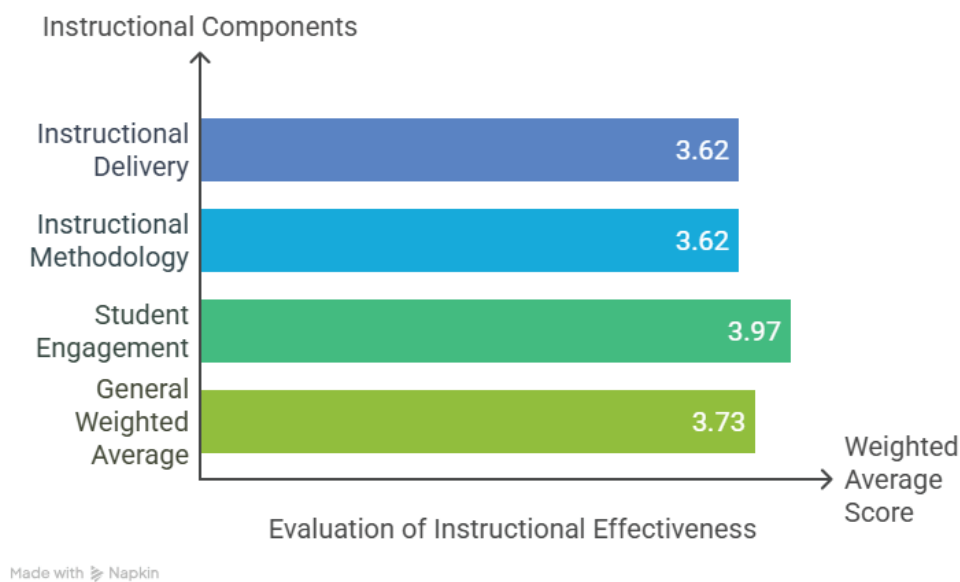


Figure 4. Weighted Average Outcomes from the observation conducted by the teachers

The study’s evaluation of instructional efficacy is divided into three major categories: instructional delivery, instructional methodology, and student engagement. The results show that both Instructional Delivery and Instructional Methodology had a Weighted Average of 3.62, which is classified as Evident. This shows that teaching tactics and delivery methods were clearly shown and effective in promoting student learning. Meanwhile, Student Engagement obtained the highest rating (Weighted Average of 3.97, also indicated as Evident), indicating significant student participation and active involvement in the learning process. The overall weighted average is 3.73, indicating that teaching approaches were applied consistently and effectively throughout the study.

4.3 Thematic presentation of observed advantages and disadvantages of observed advantages and disadvantages of DI

4.3.1 From teachers' response

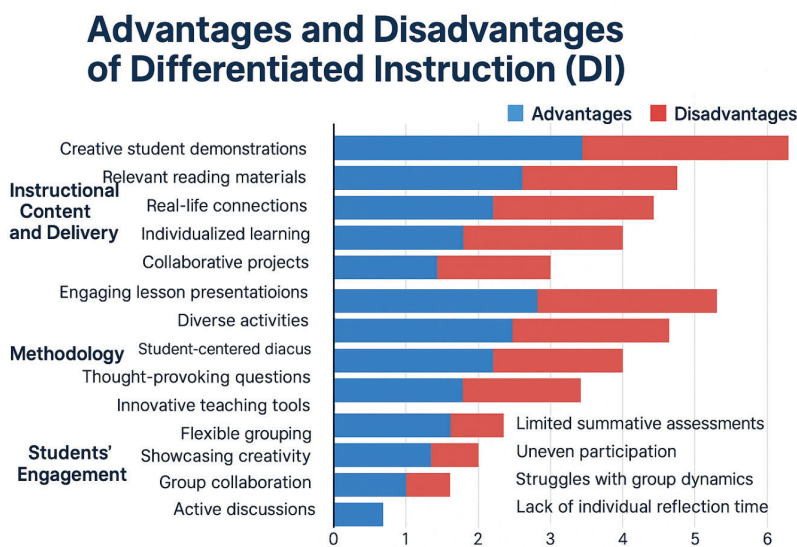


Figure 5. Thematic presentation of observed advantages and disadvantages of differentiated instruction from Teachers' response

The figure above highlights the benefits and drawbacks of three main categories in the implementation of Differentiated Instruction (DI): instructional content and delivery, instructional methodology, and student engagement. In terms of instructional content and delivery, prominent benefits include creative student demonstrations, relevant reading materials, real-life linkages, personalized learning, and collaborative projects. However, issues include an excessive amount of content, limited discussion time, a lack of various assessments, misalignment with student understanding, and insufficient scaffolding. In Instructional Methodology, strengths include engaging lesson presentations, diverse activities, student-centered discussions, thought-provoking questions, innovative teaching tools, and flexible grouping, while weaknesses include classroom management, progress tracking, noise disruptions, and teaching method clarity. Finally, Students' Engagement benefits from demonstrating creativity, group collaboration, active discussions,

peer feedback, and self-assessment opportunities, but it faces challenges such as limited summative assessments, uneven participation, difficulties with group dynamics, and a lack of individual reflection time. These findings underscore DI’s dynamic nature, which combines substantial strengths with areas that require careful management and strategic improvement.

4.3.2 From students’ responses

Upon synthesizing the comprehensive feedback from the students, the benefits of D.I. were observed in multiple domains as follows:



Engagement vs. Limitations		
	<div> Engagement</div>	<div> Limitation</div>
Activity Type	Simulation and role-playing exercises	Temporal limitations
Group Dynamic	Group activities	Disruptive group members
Material	Viewing visual content	Material shortages
Preparation	Audio listening and vocabulary discussions	Insufficient preparation time
Presentation	Engaging classroom presentations	None
Assignment	Real-world assignments	None
Thinking	Activities that promote rapid thinking and brainstorming	None
Output	Outputs that enhance creativity	None
Question	Increased student engagement through provocative questions	None

Figure 6. Benefits and Challenges faced in teaching with DI in EFL classroom

The figure above compares participation and restrictions in educational activities based on student responses, emphasizing how strategies such as simulation and role-playing exercises, group debates, and provocative questioning effectively increase student involvement. In contrast, it highlights restrictions such as time constraints, disruptive group members, and insufficient materials that might impede the learning process. Overall, while varied activities encourage involvement and creativity, obstacles such as time and resource constraints might limit successful training.

4.4 Advantages and disadvantages of DI according to Teachers and students' reflections

According to the students and educators within the context of differentiated instruction, below are advantages and disadvantages of Using DI in class.

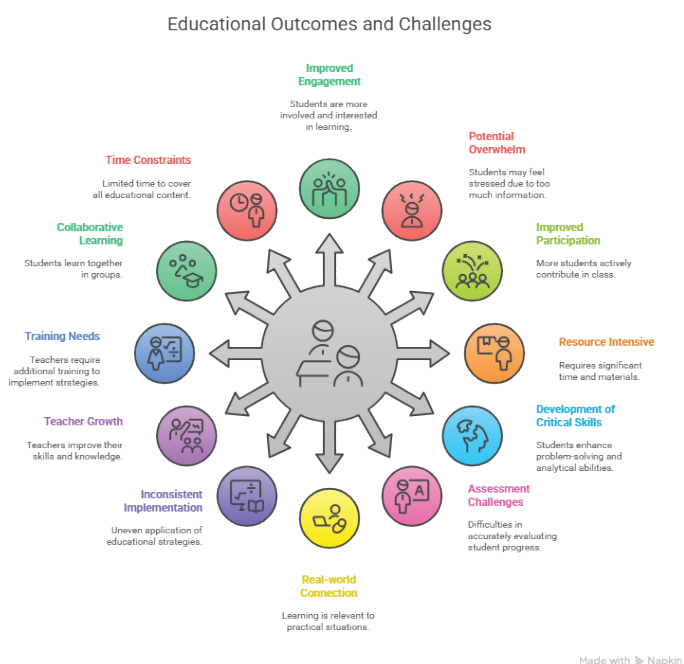


Figure 7. Educational outcomes and challenges faced by teachers in teaching English

The picture “Educational Outcomes and Challenges” depicts the advantages and disadvantages of employing differentiated education. A teacher and students are surrounded by arrows pointing to potential outcomes. Improved engagement, collaborative learning, teacher improvement, real-world connections, key skill development, and increased involvement are among the advantages. These help students stay engaged, collaborate, think critically, and apply what they’ve learnt to real-world situations. issues include time limits, possible overload, resource-intensive needs, training requirements, assessment issues, and inconsistent execution. These difficulties might make planning and teaching difficult.

5. Discussion

5.1 Analyzing the Effectiveness of Differentiated Instruction in EFL Classrooms

The study’s first finding examines the effectiveness of Differentiated Instruction (DI) in enhancing reading comprehension among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in Takalar. This was accomplished by a comparison of two groups: one trained using traditional methods (non-DI) and the other employing DI strategies. As shown in the figures and statistical data, the DI group made significantly greater gains in reading comprehension across multiple dimensions, supporting the hypothesis that DI can be a transformative instructional model in multilingual, multicultural, and resource-constrained EFL settings.

The bar charts (Figures 1 and 2) show the distribution of students at five reading comprehension levels—Beginning, Developing, Approaching, Proficient, and Advanced—before and after the instructional intervention. In the non-DI group, there was only a tiny rise in the percentage of students attaining the Proficient level (from 9% to 10%) and those at the Approaching level (from 50% to 54%), while the Developing level showed a slight decline (from 41% to 36%). Notably, no students in this group achieved the Advanced level, and none were classified as Beginning level, indicating a performance plateau. In contrast, the DI group experienced a significant shift: pupils classified as Advanced increased from 0% to 23%, Proficient from 9% to 43%, and developing decreased from 39% to 0%. These

huge improvements indicate that DI offered the essential scaffolding and assistance to help students advance to greater levels of comprehension.

Table 1, which summarizes mean scores and standard deviations, adds to the validity of the visual data. The DI cohort's mean score grew from 24.045 (SD = 0.32) to 37.338 (SD = 0.138), while the non-DI group's score improved only significantly from 24.012 to 25.46. Furthermore, the DI group's Advanced level post-test mean was 46.67, a substantial increase from 0 for the non-DI group. These findings are consistent with Hattie's (2009) meta-analytical study, which emphasizes that instructional techniques customized to student needs, particularly those that promote active participation and personalized support, are among the most effective strategies for increasing learning outcomes. The DI group's low standard deviation also suggests improved performance consistency, implying that DI effectively reduced achievement gaps across a range of competence levels.

The theoretical underpinning of these findings can be traced back to Carol Ann Tomlinson's Differentiated Instruction framework, which emphasizes the importance of tailoring content, process, product, and learning environment to learners' readiness, interest, and learning profiles. This adaptability is extremely important in EFL settings, particularly in underserved situations like rural Indonesia. According to Tomlinson et al. (2003), DI not only improves academic performance but also increases student motivation and engagement by making learning more relevant and personalized. This study supports that sentiment, as children exposed to DI not only increased their test scores but also moved totally out of the "Developing" and "Beginning" groups, demonstrating that the instructional approaches were both successful and equitable. The findings also align with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, specifically the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1978) proposed that learning is most effective when instruction focuses on the gap between what a student can achieve independently and what they can do with supervision. The DI tactics employed in the study, such as tiered reading tasks, guided questions, and varied group work, provided the essential scaffolding for students to advance beyond their existing abilities. The entire removal of the Developing category in the DI group's post-test

lends credence to this viewpoint, implying that all students were able to achieve more thanks to suitable support mechanisms.

In Takalar's EFL environment, such outcomes are especially impressive given the hurdles students experience, such as socioeconomic inequality, limited access to English outside of the classroom, and the prevalence of local vernaculars (Reis & Renzulli, 2015; Logan, 2011; Sari, 2020). These barriers frequently lead to limited exposure to the target language and decreased interest. However, DI's ability to combine culturally relevant materials and learner-centered practices was beneficial in addressing these issues. The DI group's significant post-test gains illustrate how customized instruction that considers learners' linguistic backgrounds and cognitive preparation can help to close the learning gap in EFL settings.

Furthermore, reflective behaviors and instructor responsiveness contributed to the effectiveness of DI. According to the literature journal, the incorporation of DI in Takalar was more than just a pedagogical shift; it was also a mindset makeover in which teachers became more attuned to their students' learning requirements, resulting in a more flexible and dynamic classroom environment. Teacher reflection as part of the DI cycle has been found to help teachers make more informed instructional decisions, which in turn helps students achieve more (Tomlinson, 2014; Ahmad, 2018).

Finally, the study's findings highlight the importance of institutional support for growing DI techniques, such as teacher training, curriculum development, and resource allocation. To successfully apply DI on a larger scale, particularly in contexts such as Takalar, educational stakeholders must invest in professional development and provide access to instructional resources that enable flexible learning pathways (Melka, 2022; Hattie, 2009). Without systematic support, even the most dedicated teachers may struggle to maintain DI practices over time.

5.2 The Advantages and Disadvantages of Differentiated Instruction in the EFL Reading Classroom

This second finding examines the overall benefits and drawbacks of using Differentiated Instruction (DI) in the context of English as a Foreign Language

(EFL) reading instruction. The analysis divides outcomes into three categories: instructional delivery, instructional methodology, and student involvement. As shown in the weighted average chart (Figure 4), all three components earned ratings of at least 3.6, demonstrating a consistently good assessment of DI's application. Most significantly, student involvement received the highest weighted average score of 3.97, indicating that DI not only changes the way instruction is given but also has a significant impact on learners' motivation and participation in reading activities.

From a theoretical aspect, these findings are consistent with Tomlinson's concept of Differentiated education, which emphasizes the necessity of tailoring education to students' readiness levels, learning profiles, and interests. The high ranking for instructional approach (3.62) shows that the strategies used, such as variable grouping, diverse reading resources, and multimodal tasks, were effective in handling learner variation. The addition of multiple reading materials and tiered tasks helped students of varying abilities to gain meaningful access to content, supporting the notion that differentiated tasks assist narrow performance disparities while maintaining high standards for all students.

The significant results in student engagement (3.97) demonstrate DI's effectiveness in improving learners' motivation. Logan (2011) found that DI classrooms that incorporate students' cultural backgrounds and interests generate deeper engagement in language activities. In Takalar's EFL setting, where learners encounter hurdles such as limited English experience and sociolinguistic barriers, making lectures accessible and personally meaningful is crucial for maintaining attention and interest. Real-world reading simulations, group reading conversations, and reflective journaling all helped to improve comprehension while also encouraging affective connection with texts.

The results also revealed a weighted average of 3.62 for instructional delivery, indicating that teachers were usually effective at delivering DI-informed courses. This may include using a variety of teaching modes, such as visual presentations, audio-visual information, and scaffolded questioning strategies. According to Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the teacher's responsibility is to scaffold learning by providing support structures that assist

pupils from their current level of understanding to a higher level. In this study, effective instructional delivery tactics helped to close the gap, particularly in reading comprehension, where students were able to connect with increasingly complex texts.

While the paper emphasizes the benefits, it also notes the obstacles that come with deploying DI, especially in resource-constrained situations like Takalar. Though not precisely described in this section, prior research (e.g., Melka, 2022; Ahmad, 2018) indicates that DI necessitates extensive teacher training, access to various materials, and the ability to manage diverse learner groups within a single classroom. Teachers must carefully balance several educational pathways, actively monitor progress, and provide personalized feedback—all of which need time, training, and institutional support. If DI strategies are not adequately supported by policy and professional development frameworks, there is a substantial risk of teacher burnout and inconsistent implementation.

Furthermore, EFL teachers in Indonesia frequently confront problems related to inadequate classroom resources, large class numbers, and limited access to technology—factors that can impede the complete implementation of DI (Sari, 2020). While the weighted averages in this study indicate generally favorable experiences, it is critical to place these within the larger context of local education systems. According to Hattie (2009), the effectiveness of DI is largely dependent on institutional commitment to equity. He discovered that constant teacher training and collaborative teaching cultures are crucial for sustaining high-impact instructional innovations.

The study's local significance is very important. In Takalar, where kids come from a variety of languages and socioeconomic backgrounds, customized learning is a realistic way to create diversity. According to the literature, DI promotes culturally responsive teaching—a strategy that integrates instruction with students' life experiences and linguistic heritage (Reis & Renzulli, 2015). This not only makes learning more accessible but also affirms students' identities, which can boost motivation and retention, especially in language learning situations.

Furthermore, collaborative learning opportunities, which are key to DI, appear to have a major impact on the observed outcomes. According to Tomlinson et al. (2003), student-centred learning, which includes peer conversations, shared reading activities, and collaborative meaning-making, increases student agency and accountability. These strategies empower students to take control of their reading experiences, which improves both skill development and learner confidence. In the Takalar environment, group-based solutions were effective in overcoming linguistic and cognitive limitations, particularly when students supported one another through peer scaffolding.

5.3 Analyzing teacher and student perspectives on the implementation of differentiated instruction in EFL classrooms.

This third finding provides a thematic synthesis of the benefits and drawbacks of Differentiated Instruction (DI), based on direct feedback from both teachers and students. The dual-perspective approach provides a comprehensive knowledge of how DI works in actual EFL contexts, notably in the rural Indonesian context of Takalar. The study uses this method to capture not just the measured benefits of DI (as demonstrated in earlier findings), but also its perceived worth, practicality, and challenges in day-to-day instructional practice.

5.3.1 Teacher Insights: Balancing Innovation with Implementation Challenges

Figure 5 depicts the thematic advantages and limitations of DI as recognized by EFL teachers, which are organized into three major dimensions: instructional material and delivery, instructional methodology, and student participation. Teachers observed numerous important benefits in terms of content and delivery, such as the utilization of creative student demonstrations, culturally relevant reading materials, and the encouragement of personalized learning experiences. These findings significantly support Tomlinson's (2001, 2014) definition of DI, which emphasizes adapting content to individual students' interests and readiness. Furthermore, incorporating real-life contexts into reading lessons not only improves comprehension but also reflects the principle of culturally responsive pedagogy,

which is advocated by Reis & Renzulli (2015) and Ahmad (2018), who argue for learning tasks that are directly related to students lived experiences.

Despite these positives, teachers identified substantial implementation obstacles. These included many materials, insufficient time for in-depth talks, a lack of assessment diversity, and a mismatch between student understanding and instructional content. These concerns are consistent with Logan's (2011) findings, which said that while DI promotes engagement and language acquisition, it places enormous demands on teachers, especially in big, diverse classrooms. The topic of scaffolding, which was raised as a deficiency in the teacher responses, is strongly related to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (1978). Even if the information is well-differentiated, students may struggle to shift to higher-order abilities if sufficient scaffolding is not provided.

Teachers praised compelling presentations, innovative technologies, student-centered conversations, and flexible grouping as instructional methodologies for creating dynamic and inclusive learning environments. These features are congruent with best practices in EFL instruction, especially when promoting communicative competence through cooperative learning, as Hattie (2009) suggests. However, problems such as classroom management issues, tracking individual achievement, noisy disturbances, and a lack of technique clarity highlight DI's complicated classroom orchestration requirements. This is consistent with Melka's (2022) findings, which indicate that unless teachers obtain enough professional development, DI approaches may not be sustainable in real-world practice.

Teachers reported favorable trends in student participation, such as creativity, peer collaboration, and self-assessment. These activities encourage learner autonomy, motivation, and self-efficacy, all of which are essential for successful second language learning (Tomlinson et al., 2003). Nonetheless, issues were raised about uneven student involvement, group disagreements, and a lack of contemplation time. These challenges highlight the importance of intentional classroom arrangements that promote collaboration while also allowing for individual accountability and introspection, which are commonly overlooked in group-heavy DI tactics.

5.3.2 Student Perspectives on Engagement, Empowerment, and External Constraints

Figure 6 offers another important aspect by depicting students' assessments of DI's strengths and weaknesses. Students responded positively to active learning tactics such as simulation and role-playing, group discussions, and provocative questioning, all of which were found to increase involvement, inventiveness, and interest in reading assignments. These interactive approaches back up Logan's (2011) claim that DI, when used intelligently, fosters student engagement and communicative confidence, especially in linguistically diverse classrooms. These tactics also promote deeper cognitive processing and aid in the internalization of new vocabulary and grammatical structures via context-based application.

Despite these teaching gains, students identified significant obstacles. Time constraints, resource shortages, and disruptive group dynamics were identified as significant obstacles. These issues reflect systemic hurdles that are widespread in rural Indonesian schools, such as short instructional time for each course, unequal access to learning materials, and complex social dynamics within classrooms (Sari, 2020). The complaints about disruptive group members imply that, while collaborative learning is helpful in theory, it must be carefully planned, distributed evenly, and facilitated by the teacher to be effective.

Students also reported that, while DI encouraged them to be more active and expressive, assessment techniques frequently lacked structure or summative feedback. This is a key discovery because it illustrates the conflict between process-oriented learning and product-based evaluation, a delicate balance that DI must maintain. As Tomlinson (2014) points out, assessment in a differentiated classroom should be both formative and diagnostic, guiding instruction and promoting learning progress rather than simply measuring outcomes.

DI in EFL classrooms can generate high engagement, personalized learning, and enhanced comprehension—but only with proper scaffolding, preparation time, professional training, and flexible resources. The Takalar setting, with its socioeconomic disparities, multilingual student population, and infrastructure restrictions, presents both a problem and an opportunity. When implemented with

contextual sensitivity, DI becomes more than a tactic; it is a vehicle for educational equity and transformation.

This emphasizes the necessity of teacher capacity building, which includes training in adaptive assessment methods, group management, and task differentiation. Institutional support, such as collaborative planning time and resource allocation, is also important. Furthermore, including student voice into instructional design, as proven in this study, can guarantee that DI remains relevant to the learners it seeks to reach.

5.4 Reflective Insights into the Benefits and Challenges of Differentiated Instruction in High School EFL Classrooms

The fourth finding in this study is a thematic reflection on the implementation of Differentiated Instruction (DI), based on both instructors' and students lived experiences in the high school English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. This comprehensive approach emphasizes not only the cognitive and educational advantages of DI but also the logistical, structural, and emotional demands placed on its users. Figure 7 ("Educational Outcomes and Challenges") depicts how both groups recognized a dual range of outcomes, ranging from improved engagement and learning benefits to limits related to time, resources, and training. These thoughts highlight the complexities of educational reform at the classroom level, particularly in resource-constrained and varied learning environments like Takalar.

According to the reflections, one of the most consistent and significant benefits of DI is its potential to increase student participation. Students stated that learning became more relevant when challenges were personalized to their talents, interests, and real-world experiences. Teachers reported heightened interest and desire to participate. These findings corroborate Tomlinson's core model of DI (2001, 2014), which argues for tailoring content, process, and product to students' readiness, learning preferences, and backgrounds. DI's individualized approach ensures that all students, regardless of starting level, may access and participate in the curriculum in a way that is both personally meaningful and motivating.

In line with this, collaborative learning appeared as a beneficial outcome. Teachers and students agreed that DI strategies such as flexible grouping, pair conversations, and cooperative tasks enabled students to learn from one another. This is consistent with Hattie's (2009) meta-analytical findings, which state that cooperative learning tactics are among the most effective ways to increase student achievement, particularly in diverse classrooms. In diverse EFL environments such as Takalar, where students may come from a variety of linguistic and educational backgrounds, collaborative tactics not only improve language competency but also build social cohesiveness and mutual support.

Another significant observation is that teacher improvement is a benefit of DI. Teachers reported that the process of creating and delivering varied courses prompted them to think carefully about students' needs, enhance their assessment procedures, and become more adaptable in their instructional design. This is consistent with Tomlinson et al. (2003), who believe that DI promotes professional growth as teachers become more diagnostic, purposeful, and student-centered in their approach. DI's reflective teaching techniques also assist educators in internalizing Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory, which emphasizes the significance of instructional scaffolds to help learners shift from supported to independent performance.

However, in addition to these benefits, both groups identified many ongoing problems that limit DI's full potential. The most important of these is the limitation of time. Teachers discovered that, despite investing significant effort in preparing tiered assignments and evaluations, there was often inadequate class time to complete activities, hold in-depth conversations, or allow students to reflect. One teacher commented:

“...Implementing my lesson takes a considerable amount of time. Although I carefully planned and selected the objectives and assessments for my learning materials, I found that I did not have enough time during the discussion...”

(Interview with T1, 21/02/2024)

This problem has been expressed in prior research, notably Melka (2022) and Sari (2020), which discovered that DI in Indonesian high schools is frequently confined by tight scheduling and curricular demands, leaving little possibility for student-led investigation or reflection. In high school settings where exam preparation is prioritized, DI's student-centered pacing frequently clashes with the needs of standardized education.

Another significant difficulty is that DI is resource intensive. To meet the different requirements of their students, teachers must have access to a variety of instructional materials, technological tools, and assessment instruments. However, as Ahmad (2018) points out, infrastructure limitations prevent the adoption of innovative or flexible assignments in many schools, particularly those in rural or underserved locations such as Takalar. Furthermore, the lack of formal training programs for DI forces many instructors to rely on trial and error, which can lead to inconsistent execution, as highlighted in the reflections.

The issue of appraisal was another constant theme. Teachers found it challenging to grade pupils fairly and efficiently when they were working on different assignments with varying levels of complexity. This is consistent with Tomlinson's (2014) admonition that DI may fail to achieve fair learning results if formative and diagnostic assessment procedures are not robust. In practice, teachers may struggle to track progress, provide individualized feedback, and maintain accountability while managing a large classroom.

Students, for their part, expressed similar sentiments. While they valued engaging tasks such as role-playing, simulations, and group activities, they also identified challenges such as time constraints, group dynamics concerns, and insufficient materials. These limits may result in uneven involvement and frustration, especially among students who favor structured, independent learning techniques. The observation that DI occasionally lacked space for individual reflection is significant because it emphasizes the need to combine collaborative activities with metacognitive time, allowing students to integrate learning on their own terms.

Despite these challenges, prior research has validated the long-term impact of DI in high school EFL situations. For example, Demissie (2013) discovered that vocabulary memory improved dramatically among high school students who were taught utilizing DI strategies. In that study, students who received personalized activities and scaffolded vocabulary education outperformed their classmates in traditional settings. Similarly, Melka (2022) demonstrated that students taught grammar using customized methodologies had higher fluency and accuracy than those who followed a one-size-fits-all syllabus. These findings support the idea that, even in confined circumstances, DI can improve language learning outcomes, if it is accompanied by sufficient training, planning time, and contextual adaptation.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates how tailored instruction increases engagement, participation, and critical thinking in high school EFL situations, resulting in considerable improvements in students' reading comprehension and motivation. The results show that the DI group outperformed the non-DI group across all competency levels, especially in the Proficient and Advanced categories. However, the study was hampered by time constraints, a small participant sample, and resource availability, all of which may have an impact on generalizability. To effectively use DI, teachers should begin with small-scale tactics like flexible grouping and tiered reading tasks to manage complexity and increase student confidence. To encourage long-term DI practices, educational authorities should prioritize professional development and access to differentiated resources. This study advances EFL pedagogy by demonstrating that DI not only enhances academic achievement but also generates a more inclusive learning environment, increasing student agency and involvement in linguistically diverse classes, particularly in low-resource settings. Future research should investigate how DI may be applied across multiple topic areas and scaled sustainably in Indonesian public schools, while simultaneously addressing resource constraints and diverse student requirements.

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