

DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION IN ACTION: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF TEACHING ENGLISH VOCABULARY WITH CHARACTER AND CULTURAL VALUES THROUGH FOLKLORE AT TAWA PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

This autoethnographic study reflects the implementation of Differentiated Instruction (DI), specifically Differentiate Content and Differentiate Process strategies, in a non-formal educational setting at Tawa Project, a community learning program at Mega Mulia Orphanage in Takalar, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Drawing on reflexive personal inquiry across two sessions conducted on May 21 and July 15, 2023, the researcher documented learner profiling of 19 children and subsequently delivered a DI-informed English vocabulary lesson using local South Sulawesi folklore, specifically Legenda Si Penakluk Rajawali and Putri Tandampalik narratives, as the primary instructional medium. Drawing on Tomlinson's framework of learner readiness, interests, and cultural profile, the researcher designed multi-modal learning activities, including LCD-assisted storytelling, cut-and-paste worksheets, whiteboard writing practice, and illustrated texts. These were paired with tiered scaffolding, collaborative groupwork, and one-on-one tutoring to address the wide range of learner needs present in the group. Both legends were selected deliberately: Legenda Si Penakluk Rajawali, a regional folklore centering on courage and perseverance, and Putri Tandampalik, a Bugis legend known for themes of loyalty, grace, and respect for elders. Together, they provided culturally grounded content that resonated with the children's lived experience and local identity. The findings show that familiar local folklore reduced learners' affective barriers to English vocabulary acquisition, encouraged broader and more equitable participation, and organically transmitted character values including bravery, devotion, and respect. These outcomes affirm the principles of Culturally Responsive Teaching, extend Tomlinson's DI framework into non-formal community learning settings, and demonstrate the continued relevance of Ki Hadjar Dewantara's educational philosophy in contemporary EFL practice. The study offers a practical and replicable model for educators seeking to integrate cultural heritage into differentiated language instruction without requiring significant institutional resources.

Keywords: Differentiated Instruction, Autoethnography, Teaching English Vocabulary, Folklore, Character and Cultural Values, Non-formal Educational Settings.

1) INTRODUCTION

Indonesian education is guided by the philosophy of Ki Hadjar Dewantara (KHD), who argued that genuine education must form character alongside intellect, and that teaching materials should reflect the cultural reality of the learner. For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Indonesia, this creates a practical question: how do the EFL teachers teach

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English in a way that is also culturally meaningful? Local wisdom traditions offer one answer. When learners encounter language through stories and values they already recognize, the gap between foreign content and personal relevance narrows considerably. Dewantara's insistence that educational materials be infused with the values of Indonesian-ness (ke-Indonesia-an) remains as relevant now as when he first articulated it (Dewantara, 1977).

Against this backdrop, Differentiated Instruction (DI) emerges as a particularly responsive pedagogical framework. Tomlinson (2012; 2001) posits that effective teaching recognizes that learners differ in readiness, interest, and learning profile, and that instruction must be adjusted accordingly. While DI has been extensively studied in formal schooling contexts (Hasanah et al., 2022; Primadani, 2020; Sari et al., 2025), its application in non-formal community learning settings, particularly those characterized by significant socioeconomic and educational heterogeneity, remains substantially underexplored (None of the papers explicitly study DI in non-formal community centres). Community-based programs, such as orphanage learning centers in Indonesia, present a particularly intense form of learner diversity in which institutional resources are simultaneously most limited and most needed.

Complementing the DI framework, Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), as theorized by Gay (2018), emphasizes the importance of leveraging students' cultural knowledge, experiences, and perspectives as bridges to facilitate more effective and meaningful learning. In the context of EFL teaching in South Sulawesi, the use of local South Sulawesi oral tradition, specifically *Legenda Si Penakluk Rajawali* and *Putri Tandampalik*, as primary instructional material represents a concrete implementation of CRT principles. When instruction centers characters and narratives that learners recognize as their own, the classroom becomes a space where their cultural identity is not incidental but foundational to the learning itself.

This intersection of DI and CRT within a non-formal setting is what the present study examines. Conducted at Tawa Project, a community education initiative established in 2018 at Mega Mulia Orphanage in Takalar, South Sulawesi, the study documents the researcher's personal experience of designing and delivering a differentiated English vocabulary lesson using local South Sulawesi folklore. The study uses autoethnography as its methodology, a qualitative approach that weaves personal narrative with cultural analysis (Ellis et al., 2010). This approach fits because the questions being asked are deeply personal: how did it feel to teach in this setting, what tensions

arose, and what did those tensions reveal about the relationship between pedagogy, culture, and context?

The present paper aims to: (1) analyze student profiling and teaching environment observation as the foundational basis for differentiated instruction in a non-formal community learning setting; (2) describe the implementation of DI strategies, specifically differentiating content and differentiating process, while integrating local South Sulawesi folklore to mediate English vocabulary acquisition; and (3) offer autoethnographic reflections on what the teaching experience revealed, including how cultural and character values are embedded through differentiated pedagogy. In doing so, this study contributes to the DI literature, advances understanding of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) in Indonesian EFL contexts, and demonstrates the continued practical relevance of Ki Hadjar Dewantara's educational philosophy.

2) METHODS

Research Design: Autoethnography

This study employed an autoethnographic research design, a qualitative methodology that positions the researcher's personal experience as the primary site of inquiry and connects it to broader cultural, pedagogical, and social phenomena (Ellis et al., 2010). Autoethnography was selected because it allowed for deep reflexive engagement with the inherent tensions of implementing DI in a community setting, tensions between pedagogical ideals and resource constraints, between attending to the group and individual learners, and between practicing and simultaneously analyzing one's own teaching. Rather than treating the researcher as a neutral observer, autoethnography acknowledges that the practitioner is also a subject of inquiry, a position Chang (2016) describes as epistemically valid and analytically productive.

The autoethnographic tradition employed here follows the conventions described by Ellis et al. (2010), and contributes to the growing body of reflexive practitioner research in EFL education, particularly in contexts, such as non-formal, community-based learning, that have been systematically underrepresented in the academic literature.

Research Context and Participants

The study was situated at Tawa Project, a community education initiative established on August 6, 2018, under the slogan "Bringing Love, Light, and Smile to Young Children." Operating

at Mega Mulia Orphanage in Jl. Bontokassi, Panrannuang, Polongbangkeng Utara, Takalar, South Sulawesi, the program provides educational mentorship to children of varying educational levels. The broader Tawa Project community includes approximately 30 children spanning elementary school through university level. For the purposes of this study, 19 children participated in the DI lesson implementation conducted on July 15, 2023. The researcher was a graduate student of English Education at Universitas Negeri Makassar, implementing this teaching initiative as part of the "Project Kepemimpinan" (Leadership Project) course, in collaboration with the Persepsi Project student team.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were generated across two sessions. The first session (May 21, 2023) was dedicated to learner profiling through structured observation and consultation with resident Tawa Project tutors. This session generated qualitative data across Tomlinson's (2001) three DI dimensions: learner readiness, learner interests (preferred modalities), and cultural profile. The second session (July 15, 2023) constituted the instructional implementation phase, in which the researcher delivered a differentiated vocabulary lesson using South Sulawesi folklore as instructional material.

The researcher maintained a reflective field journal throughout and following both sessions, capturing pedagogical decisions, participant responses, challenges, and personal emotional responses. These field notes and reflective journal entries served as the primary data corpus. Analysis followed a thematic reflexive approach consistent with autoethnographic practice (Ellis et al., 2010), with interpretations grounded in Tomlinson's (2001) DI framework, Gay's (2018) CRT principles, Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis, and Vygotsky's (1978) scaffolded learning theory.

3) RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students Profiling and Teaching Environment Observation

The profiling session conducted on May 21, 2023, constituted the foundational phase of the DI implementation. Before any instructional design decisions could be made, the researcher engaged in a structured observation of the Tawa Project learning environment and conducted in-depth consultations with resident tutors who had sustained familiarity with the children. This process generated detailed knowledge of learner demographics, academic readiness, modality

preferences, and cultural background, the four pillars of a comprehensive DI learner profile as conceptualized by Tomlinson (2001). The resulting profile data directly informed every instructional decision made for the July 15 lesson.

The 19 participating children represented a wide demographic range, spanning elementary school (SD) through senior high school (SMA) levels, with ages ranging from 9 to 18 years. A group spanning from Grade 3 primary school to Grade 12 senior high school cannot reasonably be taught as a single, undifferentiated unit. Table 1 presents the full learner demographic profile.

Table 1. Learner Demographics, Tawa Project DI Lesson

No.	Learner	Age	Education Level	English Exp.	Preferred Modality
1	Learner 1	9	SD Grade 3	None	Visual
2	Learner 2	10	SD Grade 4	None	Kinesthetic
3	Learner 3	10	SD Grade 4	Minimal	Visual
4	Learner 4	11	SD Grade 5	Minimal	Auditory-Kinesthetic
5	Learner 5	11	SD Grade 5	None	Kinesthetic
6	Learner 6	12	SD Grade 6	Minimal	Visual
7	Learner 7	12	SD Grade 6	Conversational	Auditory
8	Learner 8	12	SD Grade 6	None	Kinesthetic
9	Learner 9	13	SMP Grade 7	Conversational	Auditory-Kinesthetic
10	Learner 10	13	SMP Grade 7	Minimal	Visual
11	Learner 11	13	SMP Grade 7	Conversational	Auditory
12	Learner 12	14	SMP Grade 8	Formal (School)	Visual
13	Learner 13	14	SMP Grade 8	Formal (School)	Auditory-Kinesthetic
14	Learner 14	14	SMP Grade 8	Conversational	Kinesthetic
15	Learner 15	15	SMP Grade 9	Formal (School)	Visual
16	Learner 16	15	SMP Grade 9	Formal (School)	Auditory

No.	Learner	Age	Education Level	English Exp.	Preferred Modality
17	Learner 17	16	SMA Grade 10	Formal (School)	Auditory-Kinesthetic
18	Learner 18	17	SMA Grade 11	Formal (School)	Visual
19	Learner 19	18	SMA Grade 12	Formal (School)	Auditory

Building on the demographic profile, the profiling session operationalized Tomlinson's (2001) three-dimensional DI framework across the dimensions of Readiness, Interests (learning modality), and Cultural Profile. These dimensions were assessed through structured observation and direct consultation with Tawa Project tutors, whose sustained relational knowledge of the children provided qualitative depth unavailable through formal assessment instruments. The profiling outcomes are synthesized in Table 2.

Table 2. Learner Profile Based on Tomlinson's (2001) DI Framework

DI Dimension	Level / Category	Learner Characteristics
Readiness	Lower Readiness (n=6)	Basic literacy level; limited English vocabulary; no prior formal English instruction; responds well to guided phonics prompts
	Mid-Level Readiness (n=7)	Conversational English exposure; capable of word recognition and basic sentence comprehension; benefits from peer-assisted learning
	Advanced Readiness (n=6)	Prior formal English learning (school-based); capable of independent reading and vocabulary exploration; benefits from extended self-paced tasks
Interests (Learning Modality)	Visual (n=7)	Responds to illustrated texts, whiteboard writing, and visual vocabulary cards
	Auditory-Kinesthetic (n=7)	Engages actively with storytelling via LCD, pronunciation repetition, and group activities
	Kinesthetic (n=5)	Thrives in hands-on activities; cut-and-paste worksheets; physical manipulation of learning materials

DI Dimension	Level / Category	Learner Characteristics
Profile (Cultural Aspect)	Cultural Familiarity	Strong familiarity with Bugis-Makassar oral tradition; prior exposure to Legenda Si Penakluk Rajawali and Putri Tandampalik folklore narratives; internalized community values of courage (warani), loyalty and devotion (setia), and mutual respect (sipakatau)

In terms of readiness, the 19 learners were categorized into three tiers. Six children demonstrated lower readiness, characterized by basic literacy and limited English vocabulary with no prior formal instruction. Seven children were assessed at mid-level readiness, having conversational English exposure sufficient for word recognition and basic comprehension. The remaining six learners demonstrated advanced readiness through prior formal English instruction in school, enabling more autonomous vocabulary engagement. This tripartite readiness distribution directly structured the tiered scaffolding approach subsequently employed in the lesson.

With respect to learning modality preferences, observation and tutor consultation identified three dominant profiles among the 19 learners. Seven learners were identified as primarily visual learners, responding most readily to illustrated texts and whiteboard-based activities. Seven learners demonstrated auditory-kinesthetic orientations, engaging most actively with storytelling delivered through LCD projection and pronunciation repetition exercises. The remaining five learners were identified as kinesthetic learners, thriving in tactile, manipulative activities such as cut-and-paste exercises. The distribution of preferred learning modalities among the 19 participants is illustrated in Figure 1 and the supporting data table (Table 3) below.

Table 3. Distribution of Preferred Learning Modalities

Learning Modality	Number of Learners	Percentage (%)
Visual	7	36.8%
Auditory-Kinesthetic	7	36.8%
Kinesthetic	5	26.4%
Total	19	100%

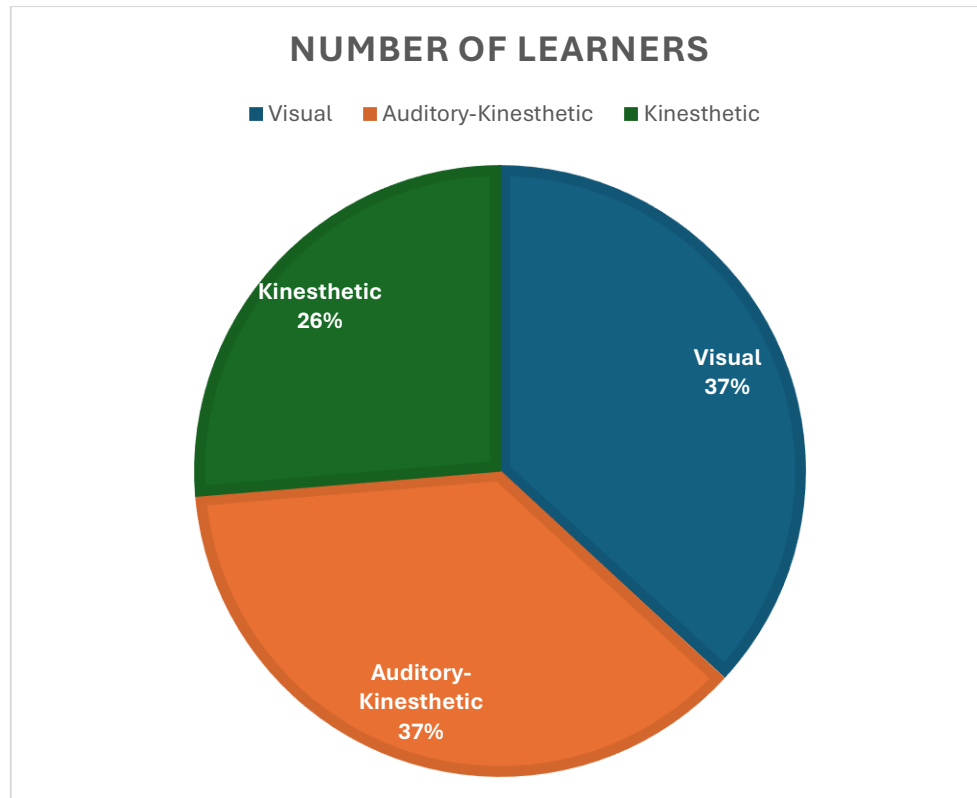


Figure 1. Distribution of Preferred Learning Modalities among Tawa Project Learners (n=19)

Regarding cultural profile, all 19 learners demonstrated varying degrees of familiarity with Bugis-Makassar oral tradition. Consultation with tutors confirmed that the children had prior exposure to the Legenda Si Penakluk Rajawali, a regional folklore legend celebrating courage and perseverance, as well as to Putri Tandampalik, a traditional oral narrative of South Sulawesi. The community values embedded within these traditions, warani (courage and bravery), setia (loyalty and devotion), and sipakatau (mutual respect for others), were recognized by the children not as foreign ethical constructs but as lived cultural values. This cultural familiarity was identified as the most strategically significant asset for the subsequent lesson design, providing an affective and cognitive bridge between learners and the target vocabulary.

Implementation of DI Strategies

The July 15, 2023 instructional session operationalized the profiling data into a structured DI lesson focused on two types of differentiation: Differentiate Content and Differentiate Process. The lesson centered on South Sulawesi local folklore, specifically the Legenda Si Penakluk Rajawali and Putri Tandampalik storytelling tradition, as the core instructional text, selected for its direct

alignment with learners' cultural profiles identified during the profiling phase. The instructional design was intentionally multi-modal and multi-tiered to accommodate the diverse readiness levels and modality preferences documented in the profiling session.

Differentiate Content

Content differentiation involved providing learners with access to the same core vocabulary, drawn from the Legenda Si Penakluk Rajawali and Putri Tandampalik narratives, through multiple representational formats, each calibrated to different learning modality profiles. Rather than assigning different vocabulary sets to different learners, the same target vocabulary was made accessible to all 19 children through four simultaneous activity streams. This approach ensured that all learners engaged with identical linguistic content while the medium of access was differentiated according to individual strengths.

The first content delivery format was LCD-Assisted Storytelling, which served as the whole-group introductory activity. An animated narration of the Legenda Si Penakluk Rajawali story was projected via LCD, providing shared, contextually rich exposure to target vocabulary within a culturally resonant narrative frame. This format addressed the auditory-kinesthetic learner profile identified in the profiling phase, providing oral-aural vocabulary pronunciation practice in a stimulating, visual-narrative context. The LCD delivery also served to establish a shared cultural reference point for all learners regardless of readiness level, creating an inclusive entry point into the lesson.



Figure 2. LCD-Assisted Storytelling, narrative narration for whole-group vocabulary introduction

The second content format consisted of Cut-and-Paste Worksheets, designed specifically for kinesthetic learners and lower-readiness learners. These worksheets presented vocabulary

matching and sequencing activities derived directly from the folklore narrative, enabling learners to engage with word-meaning associations through tactile manipulation of printed materials. The hands-on nature of this activity provided essential scaffolding for learners who struggled with the more abstract demands of reading and listening comprehension, grounding vocabulary learning in physical engagement with the material.

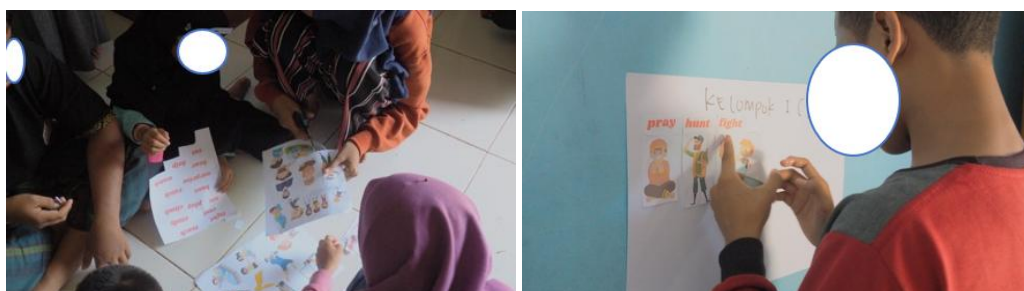


Figure 3. Cut-and-Paste Worksheet Activity, Vocabulary matching and sequencing from folklore

The third format was Whiteboard Writing Practice, a facilitator-guided activity supporting mid-level learners in vocabulary spelling and sentence formation. Drawing vocabulary items from the folklore narrative displayed on the LCD, the facilitator modeled correct spelling and sentence structure on the whiteboard while learners copied and practiced independently. This format addressed visual learners and mid-readiness learners, providing a structured but more cognitively demanding engagement with target vocabulary than the worksheet activities.



Figure 4. Whiteboard Writing Practice, Guided vocabulary spelling and sentence formation activity

The fourth and most advanced content format was the provision of Illustrated Texts, printed booklets combining images from the Legenda Si Penakluk Rajawali narrative with extended vocabulary in context. These materials were designed for advanced learners, enabling self-paced independent exploration of target vocabulary in richer narrative contexts beyond the animated LCD presentation. Illustrated texts supported deeper vocabulary comprehension for learners

capable of independent reading, providing an appropriately challenging extension activity within the same lesson framework.

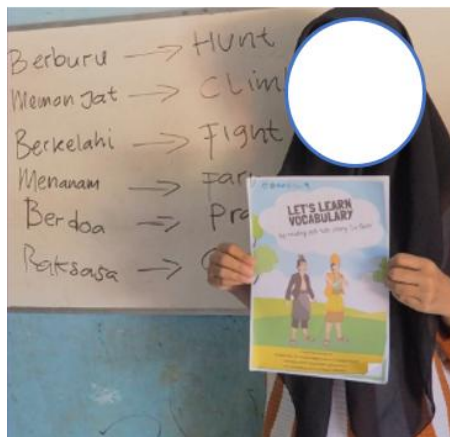


Figure 5. Illustrated Text Exploration, Advanced learners engaged with self-paced narrative booklets

Differentiate Process

Process differentiation addressed how learners engaged with and made sense of the core vocabulary content, recognizing that learners require different types and degrees of support in processing new linguistic information (B. Tomlinson, 2012; C. A. Tomlinson, 2001). Four process differentiation strategies were simultaneously deployed during the July 15 lesson, each directly informed by the readiness and modality data gathered during the profiling session.

The primary process strategy was Tiered Scaffolding, in which the degree of facilitator support provided to individual learners was calibrated to their readiness level. Lower-readiness learners received tighter facilitator proximity and more explicit guided prompts for phonics and word recognition, with the facilitator modeling pronunciation, pointing to individual words, and providing immediate corrective feedback. Mid-level learners received more moderate support in the form of prompting questions and comprehension checks. Advanced learners received minimal direct facilitation, being directed primarily toward their illustrated text materials with periodic check-ins.

The second process strategy was Pair and Group Work, through which collaborative vocabulary activities were designed to leverage the social and linguistic resources of peer-assisted learning. Mid-level and higher-readiness learners were paired or grouped to engage in collaborative vocabulary matching and discussion tasks derived from the Putri Tandampalik narrative, enabling learners to support one another's comprehension and reinforcing vocabulary retention through

social language use. This strategy both reduced facilitator load and created productive learning interactions consistent with Vygotskian principles of peer-mediated learning (Vygotsky, 1978).



Figure 7. Pair and Group Work, Collaborative vocabulary activities among mid-level learners

Whole-group Pronunciation Practice constituted the third process strategy, in which the facilitator led the entire class in repeated oral pronunciation of target vocabulary items drawn from the Legenda Si Penakluk Rajawali narration on the LCD. This whole-group repetition served as an inclusive, low-risk process for vocabulary acquisition, allowing all learners, regardless of readiness, to participate simultaneously in auditory vocabulary encoding. The use of familiar folklore vocabulary as the pronunciation base further reduced anxiety by grounding oral practice in culturally recognized content.



**Figure 8. Whole-Group Pronunciation Practice,
Facilitator-led vocabulary repetition from Legenda Si Penakluk Rajawali LCD narration**

The fourth process strategy was One-on-One Tutoring, provided on an as-needed basis for children who demonstrated particular difficulty with reading or vocabulary retention during the lesson. The facilitator, along with members of the Persepsi Project collaborative team, identified learners showing signs of frustration or disengagement and provided brief individualized tutoring sessions, including guided phonics decoding and personalized vocabulary review. This strategy ensured that the most linguistically vulnerable learners in the group received direct interpersonal support without disrupting the independent or collaborative activities of other learners.



Figure 9. One-on-One Tutoring, Individualized vocabulary support for lower-readiness learners

Autoethnographic Reflections: What the Teaching Experience Revealed

The autoethnographic dimension of this study extends beyond the descriptive account of lesson design and delivery. As both practitioner and researcher, the author maintained a reflective journal throughout the implementation, capturing not only observable pedagogical outcomes but also the subjective, emotional, and interpretive dimensions of the teaching experience. What follows is a systematic account of the key themes that emerged from that autoethnographic reflection, themes that speak not merely to what worked in the classroom, but to the deeper pedagogical, cultural, and relational meanings embedded in the experience of teaching at Tawa Project. These reflections are offered not as objective findings but as autoethnographic insights, written from the standpoint of someone who was both inside the experience and trying to make sense of it.

Folklore as Effective DI Material

The decision to use Legenda Si Penakluk Rajawali and Putri Tandampalik narratives as the core instructional text proved to be the single most consequential design choice of the entire lesson. All 19 children, across vastly different readiness levels, engaged with the folklore content with a degree of attention and enthusiasm that would have been unlikely with a generic EFL textbook passage. Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis predicts that learners acquire language most effectively when anxiety and psychological distance from the material are minimized; the observable enthusiasm and voluntary participation of learners, including those who typically withdrew from formal learning activities, confirmed this prediction vividly. The folklore did not feel foreign to learners, it was theirs, and that sense of ownership opened a door to vocabulary acquisition that no externally produced material could have replicated.

This aligns with Gay's (2018) CRT framework, which holds that instruction works best when it builds on students' existing cultural knowledge rather than setting it aside. Using local South Sulawesi folklore did exactly that: it put learners' cultural identities at the center of the lesson rather than at the margins. Hammond (2014) further argues that culturally responsive pedagogy is also cognitively responsive, when learners encounter content through familiar cultural schema, the cognitive load of processing new linguistic information is reduced, making deeper vocabulary encoding more likely. The Tawa Project lesson bore this out in practice.

Multi-Media Engagement

Running LCD storytelling, cut-and-paste worksheets, whiteboard writing, and illustrated texts at the same time meant every learner had at least one mode of engagement that worked for them. This aligns with what Fleming and Mills (1992) describe, who proposed that learners differ fundamentally in how they process and retain information depending on their preferred sensory channel. Critically, the multi-modal approach in this lesson did not segregate learners into ability tracks, all four activity streams were available simultaneously in the shared learning space, allowing learners to migrate organically toward the format that best suited them while remaining part of a unified, culturally coherent instructional experience.

Tomlinson and Imbeau (2023) emphasize that effective content differentiation is not about giving different learners different knowledge, but about providing multiple pathways to the same

essential understanding. The multi-modal folklore lesson embodied this principle precisely: all 19 learners encountered the same target vocabulary, the same cultural narrative, and the same character values, but through instructional formats calibrated to their individual modality strengths. The result was a classroom in which diversity was not a pedagogical problem to be managed but a resource to be leveraged through intentional design.

Cultural and Character Value Integration

Beyond vocabulary acquisition, the lesson achieved implicit character education outcomes through the moral and social dimensions of the Legenda Si Penakluk Rajawali and Putri Tandampalik narratives. The values embedded in both legends, including courage and perseverance in Legenda Si Penakluk Rajawali and loyalty, grace, and respect for elders in Putri Tandampalik, were absorbed by learners through narrative engagement rather than direct moral instruction. Lickona (1992) argues that character education works best when values are lived through story rather than delivered through instruction. That is what happened here: value learning was not a separate agenda but a natural consequence of the narrative itself.

This character-through-folklore mechanism is also deeply consonant with Ki Hadjar Dewantara's foundational educational philosophy that teaching content must be internalized with the values of ke-Indonesia-an, that education is not merely the transmission of academic skills but the formation of character through culturally grounded experience (Dewantara, 1977). The Tawa Project lesson brought this to life: using local South Sulawesi folklore to teach English vocabulary meant character education was not a supplement to the lesson but built into its materials. Language learning and moral formation happened through the same stories, at the same time. This integration is what Ki Hadjar Dewantara envisioned, and what CRT theory endorses.

Scaffolding and Equitable Participation

The scaffolding strategies deployed throughout the lesson reflected Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), the theoretical space between a learner's independent performance and their potential performance with appropriate assistance. Vygotsky's scaffolding concept is, in many respects, one of the theoretical bases of DI itself: both frameworks share the conviction that learners are most productively engaged when instruction is calibrated to their developmental edge rather than applied uniformly regardless of individual capacity. The tiered scaffolding and one-on-one tutoring strategies implemented in the Tawa Project lesson constituted

direct instantiations of ZPD-responsive teaching, ensuring that each learner's interaction with the vocabulary material was appropriately challenging, neither so easy as to produce boredom nor so difficult as to produce disengagement.

Perhaps the most personally significant insight from this autoethnographic reflection was the observation that differentiated scaffolding produced genuinely equitable participation, not merely equal access to activities, but meaningful cognitive engagement across all readiness levels. Children who had never before actively participated in a group learning session were observed engaging with the cut-and-paste worksheets with sustained focus; children who typically dominated group discussion were redirected toward the independent illustrated texts, creating space for quieter learners to engage. Wood et al. (1976), in their foundational articulation of scaffolding theory, describe effective scaffolding as support that enables the learner to achieve more than they could independently while gradually releasing responsibility as competence develops. The Tawa Project lesson provided a real-time demonstration of this process, with the folklore narrative functioning not only as linguistic content but as an affective scaffold, a familiar, trusted cultural companion that made the unfamiliar linguistic challenge feel manageable.

4) CONCLUSION

This autoethnographic study demonstrates that a DI-informed approach, centered on two types of differentiation, namely Differentiate Content (LCD-assisted storytelling, cut-and-paste worksheets, whiteboard writing, and illustrated texts) and Differentiate Process (tiered scaffolding, pair and group work, whole-group pronunciation practice, and one-on-one tutoring), constitutes a pedagogically response to the intense learner diversity characteristic of non-formal community education settings. The strategies employed directly addressed the three learner dimensions identified in the profiling phase: readiness, modality preferences, and cultural profile, ensuring that instructional design was responsive rather than assumptive. Using local South Sulawesi folklore as the instructional medium put Gay's (2018) Culturally Responsive Teaching framework into direct practice, making the lesson both culturally relevant. The study also contributes to Tomlinson's (2001) DI framework by demonstrating its applicability and necessary adaptations beyond formal schooling contexts, and showing that community-based learner profiling through tutor consultation and direct observation is a viable alternative to formal assessment instruments. At its deepest level, the lesson embodied Ki Hadjar Dewantara's educational philosophy: language

learning and character formation were not separate activities but part of the same experience, grounded in the cultural heritage the children already carried with them.

The implications of this study are direct and practical. For educators and volunteer facilitators at Tawa Project and similar orphanage-based learning programs, this study offers a replicable model for implementing DI using locally available cultural resources, demonstrating that meaningful differentiated teaching does not require extensive institutional infrastructure, but rather careful learner profiling and culturally informed instructional design. For researchers, this study serves as an empirical foundation and methodological invitation to further explore DI implementation in non-formal educational settings, particularly in the Indonesian context, where community-based learning environments are rich and varied but still largely absent from the research literature. Future research should extend this work by examining DI implementation across multiple sessions with systematic vocabulary assessment, by incorporating learner and tutor perspectives through participatory methods, and by investigating the long-term retention of both vocabulary and character values transmitted through folklore-based DI pedagogy.

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