UNCOVERING THE REALITY: TEACHERS' VIEWS ON IMPLEMENTING DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION IN ENGLISH CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to look at the viewpoints of senior high school English teachers in Takalar, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, on the application of Differentiated Instruction (DI) in English Language Teaching (ELT) and identify the obstacles they confront. A mixed-methods approach was used, including quantitative data from a Likert-scale questionnaire distributed to 22 teachers and qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews with ten participants. The findings show that, while teachers are aware of DI ideas and recognize their benefits for student engagement and learning outcomes, classroom practices remain primarily traditional, with limited use of DI tactics. Efforts to develop supportive learning environments and provide student options are clear; nonetheless, differentiation in learning objectives, content, assessments, and evaluation remains limited. The study underlines the importance of focused professional development and institutional support in bridging the gap between understanding and practice of DI in ELT. Recommendations for improving DI implementation are made with the goal of creating a more inclusive and student-centered learning environment at Takalar's senior high schools.

Keywords: *Differentiated Instruction, EFL Classroom, Perspective, Professional Development, Implementation*

INTRODUCTION

Today's classrooms have a high level of academic variety. Dixon et al. (2014) state that kids with special educational needs, including gifted learners, are increasingly being incorporated into mainstream classrooms. This integration necessitates instructors tailoring their teaching and evaluation procedures to match the various needs of all students (Suprayogi et al., 2017). To guarantee equitable academic performance, educators must deliver high-quality education that is individualized to each learner (McTighe & Brown, 2005; Tomlinson, 2001).

Differentiated Instruction (DI) is an important method within this paradigm. According to Tomlinson (2005), DI is a teaching philosophy that emphasizes that kids learn best when instructors adapt to their diverse preparation levels, interests, and learning preferences. Dack (2018) observes that instructors in differentiated classrooms recognize that students begin their learning journeys from a variety of backgrounds and thrive when provided multiple entry points to information and support networks. DI is thus considered as a teaching philosophy rather than a rigorous approach.

Modern classrooms are likewise culturally diverse, with learners of all genders, experiences, and interests (Burke & Ray, 2008). This variability poses challenges for educators, who must accommodate different learners and their educational goals (Dosch

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& Zidon, 2014). Traditional teaching approaches frequently result in passive learning, in which instructors deliver lectures while students listen, ignoring learners' different demands (Merriam et al. 2007). DI recognizes these variances and promotes personalized learning experiences by assessing students' preparedness, interests, and learning profiles (Dosch and Zidon, 2014). This technique enables instructors to adapt education and establish alternative avenues for students to demonstrate their learning, thereby increasing engagement and motivation.

In Indonesia, DI indicates a change toward more effective teaching methods that emphasize student participation. Teachers who focus on customizing education to varied abilities and interests can create dynamic classroom environments that engage students and develop responsibility for their learning (Sari & Supriyadi, 2020). Continuous professional development is critical for successful DI implementation, providing educators with the confidence and abilities required to address the needs of their pupils (Sari, 2021). The application of Differentiated Instruction (DI) in Indonesian high schools has the potential to significantly enhance students' educational experience and academic outcomes. Although research specifically on DI in this context is limited, existing studies provide valuable insights into effective strategies and challenges.

Evidence shows that DI can boost student engagement and performance. Rachmawati et al. (2020) found that teachers using DI methodologies reported increased enthusiasm and collaboration among students. Creating a positive learning environment with mutual respect and supportive class agreements further improved engagement and academic results. Successful DI implementation requires diverse pedagogical approaches to cater to various learning styles. Susanto (2019) noted that offering choices in learning activities, such as project-based tasks, led to better comprehension and retention. Similarly, Santangelo and Tomlinson (2009) found that interactive methods like role-playing foster deeper understanding.

A key aspect of effective DI is prioritizing student well-being. Iskandar et al. (2021) emphasized that educators who listen to students and provide constructive feedback create a supportive classroom atmosphere, increasing motivation and ownership of learning. However, many educators in Indonesia continue to rely on traditional teaching methods, such as lectures, which limits their ability to implement DI effectively. Putra (2018) highlighted that standardized curricula can be restrictive, underscoring the need for professional development and training to support DI practices (Tieso, 2005; Lawrence-Brown, 2004).

This study seeks to elicit revolutionary changes in educational practices by investigating how educators match their techniques with DI principles. Understanding DI's effectiveness is critical, as evidence shows that it improves student performance and engagement. Finally, this study aims to raise awareness of DI's potential by supporting the use of learner-centered approaches and lesson plans that address students' different cognitive and linguistic profiles. By creating a more inclusive and effective educational environment, educators may better prepare students for success in a quickly changing world.

METHOD

The research uses an exploratory design using a mixed-methods approach. Recognizing the limits of questionnaire surveys, notably the possibility of erroneous data

due to limited response possibilities, the study also includes qualitative data gathered through interviews. Conducting interviews with chosen participants enables for instant explanation of any confusing questions, allowing the researcher to delve further into certain areas of interest. As Wilkinson and Birmingham (2003) point out, this strategy improves oversight of the data collection process. The study's goal is to gain a better understanding of respondents' opinions by combining qualitative and quantitative data.

The questionnaire employed in this study contains 38 items arranged on a Likert scale, allowing participants to express their opinions on various elements of teaching. Educators ranked their responses on a four-point scale: always, sometimes, seldom, and never. This scale accurately measures the frequency of specific behaviors or attitudes, offering subtle insights into teachers' methods. The first thirteen questions examine educators' teaching approaches and comprehension of student requirements, evaluating how successfully teachers modify their strategies accordingly. The remaining 25 questions are divided into five categories: content, process, product, environment, and assessment, ensuring a thorough assessment of various teaching and learning factors.

In addition to the quantitative data from the questionnaire, qualitative insights were obtained through semi-structured telephone interviews with ten selected individuals. This semi-structured technique was specifically designed to elicit extensive information about instructors' use of Differentiated Instruction (DI) methodologies. It provides you more freedom in questions while still focusing on essential DI concepts. The study aims to provide a comprehensive assessment of educators' teaching practices by combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

The qualitative insights complement the quantitative findings, providing a better knowledge of instructors' perceptions and implementations of differentiated teaching in their courses. This mixed-methods approach is especially useful in educational research since it captures the intricacies of teaching practices as well as educators' different perspectives.

The study included 30 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors from senior high schools in Takalar. Participants were purposefully chosen to guarantee a balanced gender representation, with 20 male and 10 female teachers. This selection process sought to represent a diverse spectrum of perspectives and experiences within the educational community. The study focuses on the specific issues and techniques related with teaching EFL in Takalar's senior high school context.

The completed questionnaire was issued following multiple revisions based on comments from a pilot survey of five EFL instructors from Takalar's senior high schools who were not included in the main study. These first responses provided critical insights for revising the questionnaire, assuring its clarity and relevance to the target audience. This iterative method was designed to improve the reliability and validity of the data collection tool.

All quantitative survey data were analyzed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, means, and standard deviations, were produced for each survey item to offer a comprehensive summary of responses. Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews were examined using coding approaches to uncover recurring themes, allowing for a systematic investigation of participants' viewpoints and a better understanding of trends and patterns in responses.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

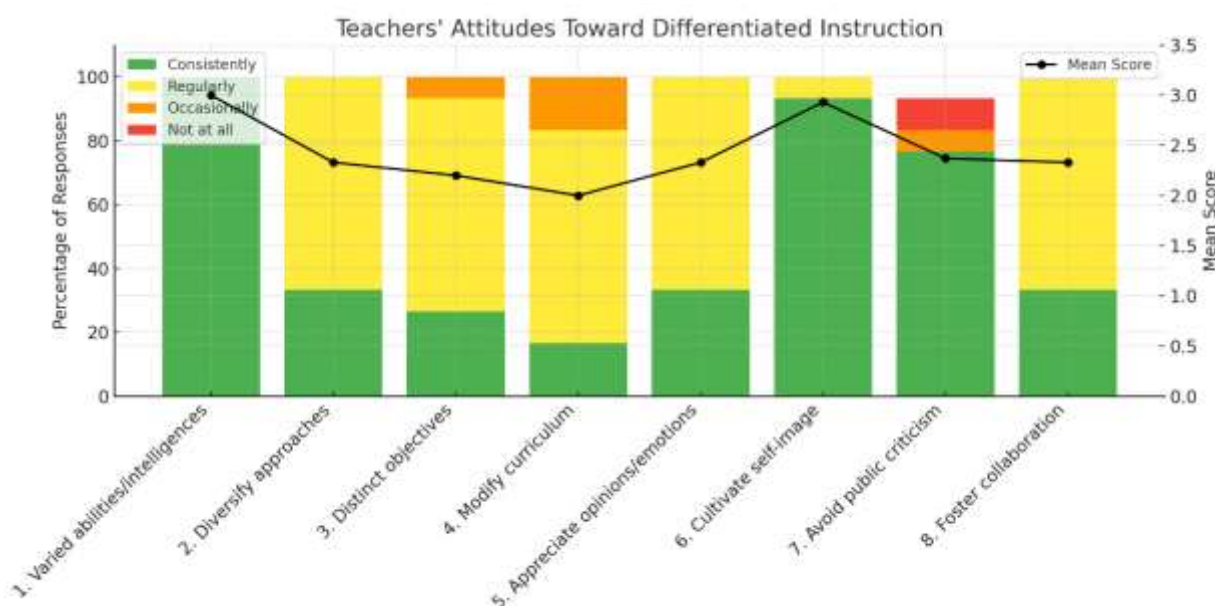## Findings and discussion from the quantitative data

Figure 1. Results of the questionnaire: Educators' classroom practices and understanding of differentiated instruction

Figure 1 highlights the perspectives of thirty EFL teachers on their comprehension and application of diversified teaching principles. All teachers recognize that pupils have varying talents and intelligence levels (item 1, M = 3), demonstrating an understanding of the importance of personalized teaching tactics. A large majority (66.67%) support varying instructional techniques to accommodate different learning styles (item 2, M = 2.33). However, just 26.67% agree on establishing unique targets for individual learners (item 3, M = 2.20), showing a barrier in personalizing goals. Furthermore, 16.67% say they should alter their curriculum to better match student needs (item 4, M = 2.00), indicating space for growth in curriculum adaptation. On a bright side, 93.33% underline the importance of assisting students in developing a positive self-image (item 6, M = 2.93), demonstrating a dedication to their emotional health. Furthermore, 76.67% recognize the importance of not criticizing kids in front of their classmates (item 7, M = 2.37), which promotes a positive classroom environment. Most teachers (66.67%) advocate for student collaboration rather than competition (item 8, M = 2.33), reflecting the notion that a cooperative environment is necessary for effective learning. To summarize, these EFL teachers generally grasp and embrace the fundamental concepts of differentiated education. However, there is always need for improvement in the development of particular objectives and curricular revisions to better address the requirements of diverse students. These findings are consistent with Tomlinson's differentiated instruction approaches and backed by Vygotsky's theory, which emphasizes the significance of tailoring educational experiences to individual learners.
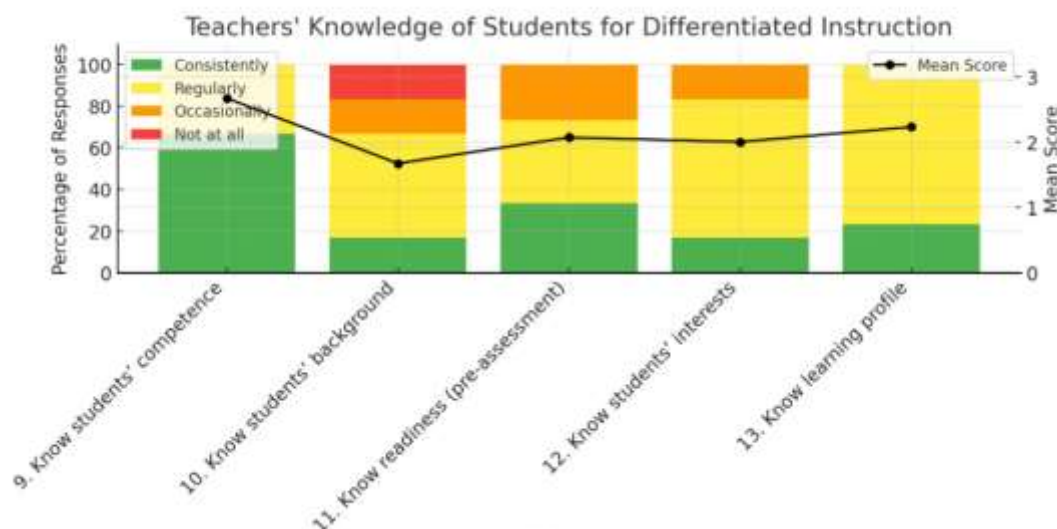
Figure 2. Results of the questionnaire: Understanding of learners

The results in figure 2 provide important insights into EFL teachers' comprehension of their students. Notably, 66.67% of responders consistently perceive their pupils' abilities, with a mean score of 266.67 (item 9). However, there is a substantial discrepancy in comprehending pupils' origins, with only 16.67% being confident in this area, resulting in a mean score of 166.67 (item 10). In terms of student preparation, 33.33% use pre-assessment examinations, with an average score of 206.67 (item 11). Additionally, just 16.67% recognize their pupils' interests, with a mean score of 200 (item 12). Only 23.33% of instructors report knowing their students' learning characteristics, resulting in an average score of 223.33 (item 13). These findings show that, while teachers have a strong awareness of their students' competencies and preparation, there is still room for development in recognizing individual histories, interests, and learning styles. This is consistent with Vygotsky's emphasis on the social context of learning and the significance of recognizing individual differences, as well as Tomlinson's framework for differentiated education, which argues for tailored teaching techniques to fit the requirements of varied learners.

Table 1. Results of the questionnaire: Understanding of learners

No	Statements	Consistently	Regularly	Occasionally	Not at all	Mean
14	I primarily utilize a designated textbook in the classroom	16.66667	50	16.66667	16.66667	166.6667
15	I adjust the intricacy, complexity, and difficulty of reading materials based on my pupils' capabilities.	33.33333	50	16.66667	16.66667	216.6667
16	I instruct on several subjects exclusively through lectures.	33.33333	50	16.66667	16.66667	216.6667

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No	Statements					
17	I utilize both audio recordings and visual media (video, multimedia) in my classroom.	50	43.33333	6.666667	6.666667	243.3333
18	I seek learners' counsel regarding the curriculum of my course.	16.66667	43.33333	33.33333	33.33333	170

The table above highlights key insights into EFL teachers' instructional practices. Only 16.67% consistently use a designated textbook (M = 166.67), suggesting reliance on varied resources. Meanwhile, 33.33% adjust reading material complexity based on student ability (M = 216.67), reflecting principles of differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 2001). An equal percentage rely solely on lectures (M = 216.67), indicating room for more interactive methods. Notably, 50% incorporate audio-visual media (M = 243.33), supporting diverse learning preferences (Vygotsky, 1978). However, just 16.67% seek student input on curriculum design (M = 170), revealing missed opportunities for learner engagement. Overall, while some differentiated strategies are applied, greater emphasis on student voice and instructional variety is needed to meet diverse learner needs.

Process differentiation

Table 2. Results of the questionnaire: Process differentiation

No	Statements	Consistently	Regularly	Occasionally	Not at all	Mean
19	I group the students according to their interest, readiness level, and learning profile	66.67	33.37	16.67	16.67	2.83
20	I vary the learner's activity	33.33	50	16.67	16.67	2.17
21	I motivate learners to share their opinions	50	50	0	0	2.5
22	I give a face-to-face conference to help the slow learners in my class	16.67	16.67	66.67	66.67	1.5
23	I address learners' personal issues that may impede their academic progress.	16.67	50	33.33	33.33	1.83

Table above summarizes major findings about EFL teachers' ways to processing differentiation. A majority (66.67%) of students are regularly grouped by interest, readiness, and learning profiles (M = 2.83), demonstrating high compatibility with differentiated education concepts (Tomlinson, 2001). However, only 33.33% of students routinely vary classroom activities (M = 2.17), indicating that different learning tasks are

not being implemented in sufficient numbers. Half of the professors (M = 2.5) encourage students to share their opinions, boosting collaboration and student agency. In comparison, just 16.67% of teachers hold face-to-face sessions with challenging students (M = 1.5), and the same low percentage address personal student issues (M = 1.83). These gaps indicate a need for more specialized assistance. Overall, while grouping and student voice are rather well-practiced, more attention is required for activity variation and learner support, which are consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) emphasis on social learning and Tomlinson's (2001) differentiated instruction approach.

Product differentiation

Table 3. Results of the questionnaire: Process differentiation

No	Statements	Consistently	Regularly	Occasionally	Not at all	Mean
24	I provide various topics with various media according to the students' preferences	33.33333	50	16.66667	16.66667	2.166667
25	I provide various learning activities according to the students' readiness level	33.33333	50	16.66667	16.66667	2.166667
26	I provide various hands-on support for my students	33.33333	50	16.66667	16.66667	2.166667
27	I provide an extra hour for face-to-face conference for slow learners	16.66667	16.66667	66.66667	66.66667	1.5
28	I address learners' personal issues that may impede their academic progress.	16.66667	50	33.33333	33.33333	1.833333

Table 3 highlights EFL teachers' practices related to product differentiation. Only 33.33% consistently present varied themes through multiple media based on student interests (M = 2.17), suggesting limited use of diverse delivery methods. An equal percentage tailor activities to students' readiness (M = 2.17) and provide differentiated hands-on support (M = 2.17), aligning with differentiated instruction principles (Tomlinson, 2001). However, just 16.67% offer additional time for struggling learners (M = 1.5), and the same percentage address students' personal concerns (M = 1.83), indicating a need for greater individualized support. While some differentiation is evident, the findings point to a significant opportunity to strengthen personalized learning and emotional support—core elements emphasized by Vygotsky (1978) and Tomlinson (2001).

Learning environment

Table 4. Results of the questionnaire: Learning environment

No	Statements	Consistently	Regularly	Occasionally	Not at all	Mean

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No	Statements					Mean
29	I create an enjoyable class for my students	66.66667	33.33333	0	0	2.666667
30	I provide freedom for students to share their opinions	33.33333	66.66667	0	0	2.333333
31	The materials used are taken from the students' background	33.33333	50	16.66667	16.66667	2.166667
32	I provide topics from recent issues	33.33333	50	16.66667	16.66667	2.166667
33	I assist learners in recognising that some require mobility for effective learning, whereas others perform best in a state of quietude.	16.66667	50	33.33333	33.33333	1.833333

Table 4 provides crucial insights into how EFL teachers influence the classroom learning environment. A majority (66.67%) routinely creates an engaging environment (M = 2.67), demonstrating a dedication to student motivation. However, only 33.33% often enable students to express their opinions (M = 2.33), demonstrating moderate support for student voice. Similarly, 33.33% of students routinely use materials related to their histories (M = 2.17) and current events (M = 2.17), indicating some contextual relevance in training. Notably, only 16.67% of students are involved in determining their learning preferences for movement and calmness (M = 1.83), indicating a gap in detecting unique learning needs. Overall, while teachers make commendable attempts to create an engaging environment, more attention to student expression and learning preferences is required, along with the concepts of Vygotsky (1978) and Tomlinson (2001).

Table 7. Results of the questionnaire: Assessment

No	Statements	Consistently	Regularly	Occasionally	Not at all	Mean
34	I employ a consistent technique to evaluate each learner's performance.	33.33333	66.66667	0	0	2.333333
35	I adjust the assessment strategy based on learners' capabilities	16.66667	66.66667	16.66667	16.66667	2
36	I identify the positive aspects in each learner's performance.	16.66667	66.66667	16.66667	16.66667	2
37	I evaluate a learner based on their personal development and achievements.	16.66667	50	16.66667	16.66667	1.666667

38	I assess students solely on their factual knowledge.	16.66667	33.33333	50	50	1.666667

The table above provides insight into EFL teachers' assessment techniques. Only 33.33% regularly apply standardized evaluations (M = 2.33), indicating a basic approach that may lack flexibility. Only 16.67% of evaluations are routinely adapted to student skills (M = 2.00), showing low differentiation. Similarly, only 16.67% consistently notice students' strengths (M = 2.00) or assess based on individual growth (M = 1.67), indicating the need for more individualized evaluation. Another 16.67% rely entirely on factual information (mean = 1.67), indicating a restricted concentration that may overlook higher-order skills. Overall, the findings highlight the need for more flexible, student-centered assessment procedures, which are consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) emphasis on individual learning and Tomlinson's (2001) demand for diverse assessment approaches.

According to interview findings, the majority of EFL teachers are aware of Differentiated Instruction (DI) and identify learner disparities in intelligence, readiness, and interests, which aligns with Tomlinson's (2005) and Dixon et al.'s (2014) emphasis on classroom diversity. For example, Teacher T4 described their class as comprised of "amazingly different learners," emphasizing a dedication to a variety of tactics. However, despite this awareness, effective implementation remains restricted. According to Suprayogi, Valcke, and Godwin (2017), simply understanding learner variety is insufficient; teachers must also change instruction accordingly. Institutional constraints, rigid curricula, and insufficient training impede this application (Putra, 2018).

Teachers demonstrated an understanding of their students' origins and skills, mirroring Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development and Tomlinson's (2014) need for instruction tailored to learners' profiles. However, teachers expressed difficulty identifying students' interests and learning styles (Items 12-13), indicating missed opportunities to personalize instruction (Gregory and Chapman, 2013). Regular diagnostic tools are required to close this gap (Sousa & Tomlinson, 2018).

Most teachers employ the same resources for all pupils because to institutional constraints, which contradicts Tomlinson's (2000) premise of content differentiation. This one-size-fits-all strategy, as emphasized by Santangelo and Tomlinson (2012), inhibits student involvement and achievement.

Instructional processes also remain consistent. Teachers rarely use flexible grouping or tiered exercises, instead resorting to lectures due to a lack of resources (Susanto, 2019). This contradicts Heacox's (2012) belief that teaching approaches must be adapted to learners' requirements, and it confirms survey data revealing a limited utilization of various instructional styles.

Product, assignments, and deadlines are standardized. Teachers are concerned that differentiated assignments may be perceived as unfair, demonstrating a lack of comprehension of DI (Gregory and Chapman 2013). This is consistent with Tieso's (2005) finding that regulatory constraints impede variance, despite its relevance in allowing students to exhibit learning in many ways (Tomlinson and Moon, 2013).

The classroom setting was largely controlled and teacher-centered, with minimal room for movement or seating. This defies DI's notion of dynamic, student-friendly environments (Tomlinson, 2005; Burke and Ray, 2008), limiting collaboration and

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autonomy. Assessment was also uniform, with few examples of diversified or formative approaches. Teachers depended largely on standardized examinations, which limited their capacity to track different learning development (Chapman and King, 2005; Wormeli, 2006).

In conclusion, while instructors grasp DI principles, their capacity to apply them is limited by systemic, institutional, and perceptual constraints. A considerable knowledge-doing gap persists (Suprayogi et al., 2017). To address this, classrooms must be made more inclusive, responsive, and student-centered through flexible policies, practical teacher training, and ongoing support (Tomlinson, 2014; Hall, Meyer, and Rose, 2012).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that English language teachers in Takalar's senior high schools have a commendable theoretical understanding of Differentiated Instruction (DI) and demonstrate true awareness of student variability in readiness, interest, and learning characteristics. However, this awareness has not been adequately used in practice. DI adoption is incomplete and inconsistent, particularly in important aspects like as content, process, product, learning environment, and evaluation. Teachers frequently rely on standardised materials, traditional lectures, and identical evaluations due to structural restrictions such as restrictive curricula, institutional expectations, and restricted instructional planning liberty. Despite efforts to foster healthy classroom connections and increase student participation, differentiation in educational delivery and evaluation remains confined. The findings highlight a large gap between pedagogical awareness and classroom implementation, a knowing-doing gap, that impedes DI's full potential for increasing learner engagement, autonomy, and achievement.

These restrictions are not only due to individual teacher reluctance, but are also based in institutional and governmental constraints. Teachers encounter numerous problems, including huge class sizes, rigid curricula, limited professional development opportunities, and insufficient support for diversified methods. Furthermore, the study's conclusions are limited in scope because they are solely based on teachers' viewpoints and do not include learners' voices.

Nonetheless, this study provides important insights into the practical reality of DI implementation in the Indonesian EFL setting. It emphasizes the critical requirement for targeted professional development, enabling institutional policies, and curricular flexibility in order to foster genuine pedagogical innovation. Future research could broaden its scope by including a more diverse sample from various places and incorporating student comments to get a better picture of classroom dynamics and learning results.

To summarize, while teachers are theoretically ready for DI, meaningful implementation necessitates a structural shift—one that provides educators with the training, tools, and autonomy they need to create inclusive, responsive, and learner-centered classrooms. Addressing these institutional and pedagogical issues will be critical to realizing the transformative promise of Differentiated Instruction in Indonesian high schools.

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