

## UNDERSTANDING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION BY ENGLISH TEACHERS AT VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOLS IN PARIAMAN

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**Abstract:** For the past four years, English teachers in Indonesia have been required to adopt Differentiated Instruction in their lessons to make their learning more adaptable for students' needs as a result of modifications to a new curriculum known as Merdeka Curriculum. However, there were limited studies conducted to investigate English teachers' understanding and implementation of Differentiated Instruction at vocational high schools' level. The purpose of this research is to fill this gap through qualitative research. This study is intended: (1) to investigate English teachers' understanding of Differentiated Instruction, (2) to explore how English teachers use Differentiated Instruction as a teaching approach in the classroom. Five English teachers from SMK 1 and SMK 2 Pariaman participated in this research. The data were gathered from observation checklists and interviews. The results suggested that the teachers understood the concept of Differentiated Instruction and knew how to identify their students' needs but they lacked knowledge of how to differentiate interests in teaching process especially regarding the content differentiation. The implementation of the approach in the classroom showed that teachers differentiated the content based on students' ability level and learning styles, while in the process, it was differentiated according to students' ability level and product was differentiated based on students' learning styles and interests.

**Keywords:** *differentiated instruction ; DI understanding; DI implementation.*

### INTRODUCTION

Several teaching approaches and methods have been developed with the goal of assisting students in becoming skilled in the target language. Those approaches and methods are assumed to be applicable to all students regardless of their needs and differences. In reality, in the mixed classroom where the students have various background knowledge, interest and learning profile, certainly those approaches and methods cannot accommodate students' diverse learning needs. Therefore, the teachers need to adapt the approaches and the methods that can embrace students' diversity.

In Indonesia, the new curriculum has been implemented which is called Merdeka curriculum (A curriculum with various intra-curricular learning which prioritizes essential materials and character development for students) in order to restore learning and catch up with learning loss during COVID-19 (Kemdikbud, 2022a). The

Merdeka curriculum has three main characteristics: 1) project-based learning to develop soft skills and character for Pancasila students, 2) focus on essential materials to allow for deep learning of basic competencies like literacy and numeracy, and 3) flexibility for teachers to differentiate learning based on student abilities. Thus, every teacher including English teachers are required to use Differentiated Instruction (DI) in their lesson to make the learning more adaptable for students' needs.

Differentiated Instruction is a teaching idea based on the premise that instructional approaches should vary and be altered in accordance to the unique and diverse needs and abilities of students in a classroom (Tomlinson, 2017; Kotob & Arnouss, 2019; Ismail, 2019; Abramove & Mashoshina, 2021; Neuvirthova & Gadusova, 2021). Students in DI have a variety of content (what they will learn), process (the activities through which they will learn), and product (how

they demonstrate their comprehension) options based on their degree of readiness, interest, and learning profile (Roberts & Inman, 2023; Tomlinson, 2021; Gheysen et al., 2020). In other words, it is the adaptation of teaching materials, practices, and learning objectives to accommodate students' varying readiness level, interests, and learning profile.

Readiness refers to the learners' knowledge, skills and understanding in a certain area of learning (weber et al., 2021). It is related to students' prior learning, experiences, and attitudes about the subjects. Interests begin with topics that create passion in learners' learning and where they would like to invest their time and effort in learning (Sousa & Tomlinson, 2018). Teachers differentiate teaching by employing different resources to meet the diverse needs of students in the same classrooms. While A learning profile describes how a learner learns best (weber et al., 2021). Each individual has a learning method and style that best matches their needs. The students' learning style are divided into three aspects which are audio, visual and kinesthetics. By taking these into account, each student's opportunity in the classroom is maximized. Differentiated Instruction presupposes the possibility of tackling diversity in a student-centered manner by making them feel appreciated and believing in their abilities.

Several studies that have been conducted prove that DI helps students to improve their achievements in learning English (Ismail, 2019; Hussein, 2021; Rumkoda, 2022; Mehany, 2022; Jufrianto et al., 2023; Purnamaningwulan, 2024; Azimah, 2024). The studies found that implementing differentiated instruction in listening, speaking, reading, and writing enhanced students' performance in those areas.

In order to implement Differentiated Instruction in the classroom successfully, it is essential for teachers to have solid understanding of the concept and its strategies because without the knowledge base, it might be difficult to implement it appropriately. However, there are still some teachers who don't have adequate knowledge about Differentiated Instruction resulted in poor of its implementation in the teaching process (Shareefa, 2019; Mengistie, 2020; Kyeremeh et al., 2022; Mohammed, 2020; Endeshaw, 2023; Suprayogi, 2021). The difficulties of implementing Differentiated Instruction due to teacher's lack of understanding are showed in those research. Other study done by Zelalem & Melesse (2022) investigated educators'

self-efficacy and perceived Differentiated Instruction in Ethiopian primary teacher education programs. Their findings demonstrated that the majority of teachers had received no training in Differentiated Instruction and hence had insufficient understanding to implement it appropriately. In the previous studies, it shows clearly that teachers' understanding of Differentiated Instruction has major effects toward their teaching practice.

According to the previous studies, implementing Differentiated Instruction in English class improved the students' achievement and increased the students' autonomy. However, there are still some English teachers who don't have adequate knowledge about Differentiated Instruction resulted in poor of its implementation in the teaching process.

In comparison to prior research, there were limited studies conducted to investigate English teachers' understanding and implementation of Differentiated Instruction conducted at vocational high schools' level. As a result, the current study will investigate more about English teachers' understanding and implementation of Differentiated Instruction at vocational high schools in Pariaman. SMK 1 and 2 Pariaman were chosen for this study because only these two vocational schools are designated as Pusat Keunggulan (Center of Excellence) where these two vocational schools serve as models for other vocational schools in implementing Merdeka Curriculum based on Differentiated Instruction in Pariaman. SMK 1 has used Differentiated Instruction in teaching English for about three years, while SMK 2 has been using it for nearly four years.

Based on the study's the background, this study intends to answer the following research issues. (1) How is teachers' understanding of Differentiated Instruction? (2) How do teachers implement Differentiated Instruction as a teaching approach in the classroom?

## **METHOD**

This study falls under the category of descriptive qualitative research. Descriptive qualitative research seeks to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics. According to Maria (2024), qualitative research tries to explore deeply into the research environment in order to understand how things are, why they are that way, and how the participants in the context view them (Pasque, 2023; Crabtree, 2023; Okoko, 2023).

This research was carried out at two vocational

schools in Pariaman that use Differentiated Instruction in teaching English. The participants were five English teachers from both schools namely two English teachers from SMK 1 Pariaman and three English teachers from SMK 2 Pariaman. They were chosen using purposive sampling. Participants from SMK 1 have implemented Differentiated in teaching English approximately three years, whereas participants from SMK 2 have participated Differentiated Instruction in teaching English for nearly four years. The data were collected through interview and observation checklists. The interview was conducted face to face and it was audio recorded to investigate teachers' understanding of differentiated instruction. While the observation was carried out in each participants' classroom and was video recorded to probe teachers' implementation of differentiated instruction. The data of the interview and observation were examined and categorized and organized into primary topics of teachers' understanding and implementation of Differentiated Instruction.

The observation checklist and interview data were utilized to gather information about English teachers understanding, implementation and challenges of differentiated instruction. Gay and Airasian (2000) define data analysis as a five-step process in analyzing observation checklist, interview data and artifacts. However, the data examined in this study were only based on observation checklist and interview data.

The first step was managing the data. The data were organized and examined for its completeness before beginning the process of analyzing and interpreting the data. It involves verifying the observation checklist and transcribing interviews. The second step was reading. To obtain a sense of the data, the observation checklist results and interview transcripts were studied in order to familiarize with the data acquired. The third step was describing. Comprehensive descriptions of the phenomena studied were depicted thoroughly. The fourth step was classifying. Sorting the observation checklist and interview transcriptions into groups representing various features of the material. The data were categorized and organized into primary topics of teachers' understanding, implementation and challenges in applying differentiated instruction. The final step was interpreting. Interpretation was carried out after the data collection, analysis, and interpretive stages of the study. The process of writing the study's findings also includes interpretation. Finally, analyzed data about teachers'

understanding, implementation and challenges of differentiated instruction were obtained.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *RQ 1: How is the teachers' understanding of Differentiated Instruction?*

The data analysis from interview revealed that the teachers understood the concept of Differentiated Instruction and knew how to identify their students' needs by applying the assessment from the beginning, during and at the end of the lesson. However, the teachers did not fully understand how to differentiate content based on students' interest during their teaching and learning process.

#### *The concept of Differentiated Instruction*

When asked about their opinions on the notion of Differentiated Instruction during the interview, all teachers' responses indicated that they understood the concept of Differentiated Instruction. They stated that because each student was unique and had distinct needs, instruction must be tailored to the students' varying needs in order to meet the lesson's objectives. Furthermore, they stated that there were three approaches to differentiate the curriculum which were based on the students' abilities, interests, and learning styles. They were familiar with Differentiated Instruction because of the twice-yearly training held in their schools and they found more information through surfing on the internet and through social media platform like TikTok, and Youtube. As Teacher 3 remarked that:

"This differentiated learning is a part of the Merdeka curriculum which has been implemented at our school for four years. The Merdeka curriculum itself emphasizes student-centered learning. So, we have to adjust the learning based on students' interests, ability and learning styles in order to make the final goal or objective can be achieved and when they are learning, they feel that they are not forced to do that and they feel happy because what we provide is in accordance with what they want. Thus, this differentiated learning is what fits into the concept of Merdeka curriculum. Differentiation itself means difference. So, each student is not the same, they are different, so in the process of teaching and learning, it must be implemented differently. That's according to my understanding." (Teacher 3)

Furthermore, Teacher 2 stated that Differentiated Instruction focused on the students' needs and that each student had their own

weaknesses and strengths, as well as their interests and learning styles when it came to understanding the lessons. She believed that Differentiated Instruction was the best strategy to deal with the students' diverse needs.

While Teacher 1 elaborated on how students had their own manner of understanding the material. She commented that some students were visual, audio and kinesthetic and teacher had to adjust their teaching strategies to cope with these aspects. Furthermore, one of the characteristics of Differentiated Instruction is the flexible grouping where the students can be grouped based on their reading ability, interests and learning styles. as mentioned by teacher 4:

"In Merdeka curriculum, which is based on Differentiated Instruction, it is regulated that the students can be grouped based on their level of ability, interests, and learning styles." (Teacher 4)

Furthermore, all teachers were familiar with the concept of Differentiated Instruction because they learnt about it during teacher training held twice a year in their schools. They also looked for the information on Google and social media platforms such as Tiktok and YouTube, as well as source books that discussed Differentiated Instruction and PMM. PMM is a site that allows teachers to search for information about the implementation of Differentiated Instruction in Merdeka curriculum.

#### *Identify the students' needs through assessment*

The interview results revealed that all teachers assessed their students' needs by administering a diagnostic test at the beginning of the semester or at the beginning of the lesson. During the teaching process, teachers observed and administered tests to assess the students' understanding before and after learning new materials.

In Differentiated Instruction, diagnostic test is held at the beginning of the semester or the beginning of the new unit or a new material of a lesson to know the students' needs before implementing the lesson. As teacher 5 explained that she got the information about her students' needs by carrying out a diagnostic test at the beginning of the semester followed by interview. She also did the test every time she taught a new material to know their students' abilities in understanding the materials. Similarly, teacher 2 and teacher 4 conducted the same method to get the students' information and adapt it to their

lesson.

Furthermore, teacher 1 stated that she knew her students' needs through observation and interaction with them, and she also provided her students tests and quizzes to assess their understanding of the materials.

"I know the students' needs by observing and interacting with them in the classroom. I also use tests and quizzes to evaluate students' understanding of the lesson material before and after I provide the material. So, from those data, I can tell that this student is one of those whose abilities are still low or medium and above average. Likewise with this students' learning style. Later during the process, we can see that this student tends to be kinesthetic, audio or visual." (Teacher 1)

Teacher 3 stated that she found it difficult to understand the needs of her students. However, she was able to gain it through the test and observation she conducted before and during the learning process.

"Knowing students' needs is a challenge because I teach in many classes. This semester, I teach seven classes. One class has 30 to 35 students. Remembering each students' interests, ability levels and learning style is a bit difficult for me. But as a teacher it is something that is mandatory. We have to get to know our students so that we can provide material that fits with their needs. I tried to do it by observing my students during the lesson and As I previously stated, at the beginning of the semester, our school will conduct a diagnostic test to identify the students' requirements." (Teacher 3)

The teachers proposed that they identify their students' requirements by administering a diagnostic test at the beginning of the semester or each unit. Furthermore, during the lesson, teachers observed and engaged with their students and administered a test to learn more about their students' strengths and shortcomings, which would be used to plan their instruction.

#### *The implementation of Differentiated Instruction Content*

According to the interview data, the teachers differentiated the content based on students' ability levels and learning styles. Three teachers stated that they differentiated the content based solely on the students' ability level, whereas two differentiated based on both the students' ability levels and learning styles. They differentiated the

text presented to the students' ability levels by paying attention to the complexity of the words and accommodated students' learning styles by providing them with audio, video and visual media. For instance, Teacher 3 stated that:

"When it comes to differentiating the content, I differentiate it based on the students' ability levels and learning styles. For example, in class 11 the first material is narrative text. There are many models or types of narrative text. Then, to provide the material, we differentiate the reading text according to the students' ability level. The students are divided into three types of groups which are low, average and advance. So, the texts given are differentiated based on the language class. For the low-level students, perhaps the choice of vocabulary is easy for them to understand according to their abilities. Likewise for average students or students who are above the average level and when varying the content based on students' learning styles, the content might be presented in the form of video, audio, and visual." (Teacher 3)

Similarly, Teacher 1 stated that she differentiated the content based on both the students' skill levels and their learning preferences. When determining students' ability levels based on content, she changed the text to students' vocabulary mastery, while in accommodating students' learning styles in content, she employed media such as video, audio, and visual.

Furthermore, three other teachers frequently differentiated the content based on students' ability level. Teacher 5 believed it would be easier for the students to understand the content if she differentiated it based on the students' level of ability. Moreover, Teacher 2 thought it was easier for her to differentiate the content based on the student's ability level because she knew their students' ability through a test that was done at the beginning of the semester and she regularly did the test at the beginning of the new material to check her students' mastery level of the topic.

Most teachers differentiated their content based on students' ability levels because they had already known their students' level of ability from the diagnostic test administered at the beginning of the semester and they thought it would be easier for the students to understand the content if they differentiated based on their level of ability.

#### *Process*

When asked how the teachers differentiated the process, four teachers responded that the activities

that the students did were tailored based on the content. For example, if the content differentiated based on students' ability levels and the activities in the process would likewise be differentiated accordingly. While one teacher differentiated the process based on students' learning styles.

"In the process, of course, it also adapts to what I was explained earlier which is from the content. For example, if I differentiate the content in terms of the students' ability levels, the selection of texts and exercises will be adjusted to the student's ability levels." (teacher 1)

Furthermore, Teacher 2, 4 and 5 shared similar opinions with Teacher 1 on how they differentiated the process. Teacher 5 stated if she differentiated the content based on the students' ability levels, then she also differentiated the exercises based on their ability levels. She provided the students with different text based on their ability levels and asked them to find the generic structure of the text and answer the questions and she sometimes varied the number of questions. Teachers 2 and 4 indicated that during the exercises, students would be divided into three groups: low, moderate, and advanced.

On the other hand, teacher 3 preferred to differentiate the process based on the students' learning styles. She stated that the students were pleased if she diversified the activity based on their learning preferences.

"As for the process, it's more about the main activities. I differentiate it based on students' learning styles which means I provide the way they want to learn. In terms of learning styles, there are three categories. There are audio, visual and kinesthetic. Then there are also combination ones, some are audio visual, audio kinesthetic or visual kinesthetic." (Teacher 3)

In general, it can be said that most teachers differentiated the process referred to the content differentiation. If the content was differentiated based on students' ability level, then so were the process or the activities.

#### *Product*

According to the interview results, most teachers preferred to differentiate the product based on the students' learning styles and interests.

Teacher 2, 3 and 5 preferred to differentiate the product based on students' learning styles and interests. Teacher 3 exemplified that if the

students studied narrative text, the students whose learning styles were kinesthetic could create a work in the form of drama and performed it. Audio students could practice the dialogue and recorded it and for the visual students they could make the story in the cartoon form or comic. Furthermore, for product based on students' interests, she presented the students with several topics and asked them to select one that captured their interests.

In selecting the modes of presentation, Teacher 1 offered the decision to the students whether they wanted to make video presentation, demonstrate it or they wanted to make a video report. In choosing whether they wanted to work alone or to work in the group, Teacher 2 gave the freedom for their students to present the product in the group or they wanted to present it individually.

Beside differentiating the product based on the students' learning styles, Teacher 4 added that she also differentiated the product based on the students' ability level. She would reduce the concept of the assignments to slow students and gave more challenging assessment to advanced students.

In conclusion, most teachers chose to differentiate the product based on their students' learning styles and interests. Furthermore, students were allowed to choose who they wished to collaborate with while presenting their product.

*RQ 2 : How do teachers use Differentiated Instruction as a teaching approach in the classroom?*

*Teachers' implementation of Differentiated Instruction*

*Teacher 1 from SMK 1 Pariaman*

On the day of observation, Teacher 1 taught grade 11 students majoring in modeling design and building information. The hortatory exposition served as the topic. She tailored the content according to students' ability level. The process was followed by differentiation, in which students were assigned different texts based on their reading ability level and instructed to read, mark the generic structure, and answer the questions in order to grasp the material. There was no differentiation of the product components. Until the end of the class, the students and the teacher discussed the previous tasks that had been done by the students, followed by reviewing what had been studied from the beginning.

*Teacher 2 from SMK 1 Pariaman*

Teacher 2 was observed while she was teaching grade 10 grade of motorcycle engineering major. The subject of the material was procedural text. Teacher 2 varied the content according to the students' learning styles. She shared the content, which included video, audio, and a PowerPoint presentation via the student's WhatsApp group. Students studied materials in three groups: audio, visual, and kinesthetic. During the activity, the students were divided into three groups based on their skill level: low achieving, moderate, and advanced students. Each group's text and questions are different. There was no evidence of differentiation in the output, which required students to generate or demonstrate their understanding of the information.

*Teacher 3 from SMK 2 Pariaman*

Teacher 3 taught 10 grade students of hospitality major on the day of observation. The topic was about procedure text. the content was differentiated according to their level of ability. Each group has different reading text about the procedure text. During the process of doing the task, they were grouped into three group which were low, middle and advanced students. the differentiation on the product is based on their learning style which means the students demonstrated their understanding using different modes which were through audio, video or presentation.

*Teacher 4 from SMK 2 Pariaman*

Teacher 4 taught 10 grade students of hospitality major on the day of observation. The topic was about recount text. The content was differentiated according to their level of ability. Each group has different reading text about the procedure text. During the process of doing the task, they were grouped into three group which were low, middle and advanced students. The differentiation on the product is based on their learning style which means the students demonstrated their understanding using different modes which were through audio, video or presentation.

*Teacher 5 from SMK 2 Pariaman*

On the observation day, Teacher 5 taught 10 grade students majoring in marketing. The topic was procedure text. She differentiated the content based on the students' ability level. The teaching aids to help the students understand the material only limited to the printed form. During the activities, the students were asked to discussed the text in their group and they also answered several

questions in order to understand the materials. Finally, for the product, Teacher 5 asked the students to make simple writing of procedure text and the topic was based on the students' interests.

To address research question one on teachers' understanding of differentiated instruction, the study's findings were discussed. The discussion covered the sub-themes of the concept of differentiated instruction, identify the students' needs through assessment and the implementation of Differentiated Instruction.

The research discovered that all teachers grasped the concept of Differentiated Instruction and recognized that students learn differently. During the interview, five teachers used similar definitions of the term, such as student diversity in terms of ability, interests, and learning styles, and adapted the curriculum based on these differences. The findings were consistent with Talain's (2023) study on the attitudes of Differentiated Instruction among English Language teachers in Quezon Province. Talain discovered that most teachers understood the concept of Differentiated Instruction, which is about meeting students' needs by adapting instruction to their level of ability, interests, and learning styles. Furthermore, the findings were consistent with another study conducted by Mutmainah (2023) on English teachers at the junior high school level in Indonesia. Mutmainah discovered that most teachers thought that differentiated instruction involved teachers varying their teaching strategies based on student differences. This is consistent with Tomlinson's (2001) theory, which states that in a differentiated teaching approach, instruction about content, process, and product is differentiated based on students' readiness, interest, and learning profiles.

The research discovered that all teachers grasped the concept of Differentiated Instruction and recognized that students learn differently. During the interview, five teachers used similar definitions of the term, such as student diversity in terms of ability, interests, and learning styles, and adapted the curriculum based on these differences. The findings were consistent with Partami et al., 2019; Pozas et al., 2019; Hasanah, 2022; Talain, 2023; Mutmainah, 2023.

Before applying Differentiated Instruction in the teaching and learning process, teachers must first assess their students' requirements so that the curriculum may be tailored to them. According to the interview findings, the teachers knew how to determine their students' needs by administering a pre-assessment test at the beginning of the

semester or the beginning of the course unit. During the lesson, the students were observed in order to see how they were improving. At the end of the class, exams or quizzes were administered to assess the student's understanding of the topic. Several studies also showed that in Differentiated Instruction, the teachers conducted the assessment before, in the process and after teaching to obtain the students' needs (Arzaq et al., 2023; Kholid, 2024; Nazial, 2024). Differentiated assessment is a continuous process in which teachers collect data before, during, and after teaching to determine each learner's needs and capabilities (Chapman & King, 2013; Salend, 2019; Firmansyah & Sudibyo, 2021; Yani, 2023).

After acquiring information about the requirements of the students, teachers can differentiate the curriculum, which includes the content, process, and product of their teaching and learning. According to the findings, four teachers differentiated the content based on students' ability level, with each group receiving a different text based on their level of ability, while one teacher differentiated the content based on students' ability level and learning style. The majority of teachers differentiated the approach related to the content differentiation. If the content was differentiated based on the skill level of the students, so would the process be. Three teachers differentiated the product based on students' learning styles, one based on students' interests, and one based on students' skill level.

Content, process, and product cannot be differentiated just on the basis of students' learning abilities; they must also be differentiated according to their interests and learning styles. Differentiating students interests and learning styles can boost their motivation to learn (Glass, 2009; Ismail, 2019; Magdalena, 2020; Getie, 2020; Herwina, 2021). Thus, it is preferable for teachers to include students' interests when varying the content in order to engage them with the learning materials.

Based on the implementation of Differentiated Instruction in the classroom, the teachers differentiated the content based on students' ability levels and learning styles. They divided the content based on length and language level of the texts. The text given to the low-achieving students was the shortest of the three groups; the middle group got an average length of material, and the advanced students had the longest content. The findings were similar to Halim's (2022) study, in which the teacher presented text of varying lengths to provide students different ability levels.

While in differentiating the content-based students' learning styles, the teachers provided the students with audio, video and Power Point materials.

In presenting the content, the technology used to support the class was confined to a projector that solely displayed visuals. Only one out of five teachers employed a variety of media, including pictures, video, and audio. The use of media in differentiated instruction is critical because teachers must address a variety of students' needs, particularly those related to their learning styles. Teachers who give content to groups of students in a variety of ways are aware of students' learning preferences (Noviska, 2023; Madu, 2023; Al-Kha'leh, 2020). Some students like to study by looking at pictures, diagrams, and charts, while others learn more quickly by watching videos and others like to listen to grasp the materials. Furthermore, to support the lesson based on students' interests, teachers must give numerous links to materials so that students can access materials that are relevant to their interests. To be able to access those materials, each member of the group must have a laptop and use it jointly rather than their personal phones.

During the process, the teachers designed the assignments based on content differentiation, which means the activities were also tailored to the students' ability levels and learning styles. In the activity that differentiated based on students' ability levels, the students in each group were asked to marked the text generic structure of the text and answered the questions according to their text content. In differentiating the process according to the students' learning styles, one teacher asked the students to note the material that they got from the video, audio and Power point slides. While the other teacher asked the audio students to present materials in front of the class, the visual group explained it by writing on the whiteboard and the kinesthetic group modeled the example of the dialogue.

The data revealed that three teachers differentiated the product based on students' learning styles and interests. While two other teachers did not distinguish the product on the day of the observation. In order to differentiate the product based on students' learning styles, the teacher let the students choose the method of presentation for their products, whether it was video, audio, or visual. Teacher 5 differentiated the product based on the students' interests by requesting the students to create a product by writing simple procedural text based on their

interests and provided them the opportunity to select the topic they wanted to create. The students made it individually. Similar to teacher 5, teacher 3 also differentiated the product based on students' interests. The teacher asked the students to work in pairs and make the dialogue by choosing one of the topics she had provided. The students were given the freedom to choose their partner and the teacher allowed the students to just read the dialogue from their book or memorized it.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study explored teachers understanding of Differentiated Instruction and the implementation of the approach in the classroom. The study was conducted at two vocational schools in Pariaman: SMK 1 and SMK 2. Data was gathered through interviews and classroom observations.

The first finding concerned teachers' understanding of Differentiated Instruction. Teachers grasped the concept of Differentiated Instruction and how to identify their students' needs by conducting assessments at the beginning of the semester, during the teaching and learning process, and at the end of each class session. Furthermore, the interview revealed that most teachers differed content depending on the student's ability levels and learning styles, while the majority differentiated process linked to content differentiation. Teachers differentiated the product according to students' learning styles, interests, and ability level.

The second was the implementation of Differentiated Instruction in the classroom. The teachers differentiated the lesson content according to their students' ability levels and learning styles. During the learning process, the teachers assigned activities based on content differentiation. In the product differentiation, two teachers differentiated the product based on the student's interests, while one differentiated it based on the students' learning styles. Two other teachers did not differentiate the product. Due to the limitation of observation that were only conducted once, the results of product differences were not particularly obvious to these two teachers.

Due to the limits of observation that were only conducted once, the results of product differences were not particularly obvious. Based on the findings of a study undertaken to assess English teachers understanding of Differentiated Instruction and the implementation at vocational schools, the following recommendations are



made: The English teacher could learn more about how to implement Differentiated Instruction including how to differentiate content, process, and product based on students' ability levels, interests, and learning styles. More seminars will be held to address Differentiated Instruction, specifically for English teachers. This will help teachers plan and deliver lessons more effectively and while the findings of this study provide valuable insights into teacher's understanding and the implementation of Differentiated Instruction, further research could explore from the students' perception of the Differentiated Instruction approach

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