

IMPLEMENTING DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION IN INDONESIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FROM LANGUAGE TEACHERS

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Abstract: The implementation of differentiated instruction (DI) is pivotal in Indonesia's new curriculum, which emphasizes enhancing student learning outcomes and addressing diverse learning needs. This study employs a qualitative case study approach to investigate teachers' understanding of DI, its perceived benefits, and the challenges faced during implementation in language classrooms. The research involved five language teachers from three public secondary schools in Indonesia, all with over five years of teaching experience and trained as Guru Penggerak. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, and analyzed using a thematic framework. Findings indicate that teachers viewed DI as beneficial for fostering student engagement and addressing diverse learning profiles. However, challenges such as time constraints in lesson preparation, inconsistent student responsiveness, and limited parental support were identified as barriers to effective implementation. Despite these hurdles, teachers demonstrated a strong commitment to adapting instruction to meet varied student needs. The study also provides practical insights into integrating DI within Indonesia's education system, offering recommendations for teacher training, resource allocation, and stakeholder collaboration to enhance its implementation. These findings contribute to the broader discourse on equitable and inclusive teaching practices in diverse educational contexts.

Keywords: *differentiated instruction; language classroom; Guru Penggerak.*

INTRODUCTION

The curriculum serves as a foundation for guiding educational practices by defining objectives, content, and instructional methods to achieve national education goals. In Indonesia, curricular reforms have been frequent, reflecting efforts to meet evolving educational demands. For instance, the Kurikulum 2013 (K-13) was revised in 2018 to address emerging needs in the educational landscape (Yawan et al., 2023). More recently, the introduction of the Curriculum Merdeka marks a significant shift. This new framework emphasizes fostering a stress-free and enjoyable learning experience, allowing students to discover and nurture their natural talents. Fauzi (2022) highlights how this approach promotes freedom of thought and creativity, laying the groundwork for

differentiated instruction (DI) to address diverse student needs effectively

One of the key initiatives supporting Merdeka Belajar is the Sekolah Penggerak program, which aims to cultivate lifelong learners who embody the profiles of Pancasila students (Fauzi, 2022; Safrizal et al., 2022; Sarzhanova, 2023). Central to this effort is the evolving role of teachers, particularly Guru Penggerak (GP), a select group of educators who receive specialized training to drive transformative changes in their schools. These teachers are equipped with the skills to foster critical and creative thinking among students while championing learner-centered practices. Within this framework, differentiated instruction (DI) emerges as a vital strategy to address the diverse learning needs of students and support the holistic

development envisioned by Merdeka Belajar (Damayanti & Asbari, 2024)

Differentiated Instruction (DI) is a teaching strategy that plays a crucial role in addressing the diverse learning needs of students, a key focus of Indonesia's ongoing curricular reforms. As part of the Merdeka Belajar initiative, DI supports the shift toward student-centered learning by enabling teachers to tailor instructional processes based on students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles (Tomlinson, 2014; Puzio, Colby & Algeo-Nichols, 2020). This approach aligns with the goals of Curriculum Merdeka, which emphasizes inclusivity and flexibility to accommodate individual differences. Daulay (2023) highlights the importance of addressing students' learning readiness—their capacity to engage with and master new material—by designing tasks that provide the right level of challenge and support. By implementing DI, Indonesian educators can better foster the holistic development of Pancasila students, as envisioned by the nation's educational reforms.

Tomlinson (2013) identifies three types of differentiation: content, process, and product, all of which are highly relevant in the context of Indonesian classrooms. Content differentiation involves adapting what is taught to match students' needs, such as simplifying reading materials for students with lower proficiency or integrating local cultural themes to engage learners in diverse regions of Indonesia. Process differentiation adjusts the complexity of tasks, for instance, by providing scaffolding for students struggling with mathematical concepts or offering open-ended projects for advanced learners to explore creative solutions. Product differentiation enables varied outputs, such as encouraging students to demonstrate their understanding through written essays, visual presentations, or group performances, based on their readiness and learning preferences. By applying these strategies, Indonesian teachers, especially those implementing Merdeka Belajar, can better address the diverse needs of their students and foster equitable learning environments.

With the shift from the K-13 curriculum to the Curriculum Merdeka, the focus has also turned to enhancing teacher quality through the Guru Penggerak program. This initiative encourages teachers to adopt innovative approaches, such as Differentiated Instruction (DI), and to serve as motivators and agents of change within their schools. Guru Penggerak are expected to master four competencies: pedagogical, personal, social,

and professional. These competencies align closely with the principles of DI. For example, the pedagogical competency equips teachers to design and implement differentiated lessons tailored to students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles, while the social competency enables them to create inclusive and supportive classroom environments.

However, teachers face several challenges in adopting DI under the Guru Penggerak framework. These include limited access to professional development resources (Damayanti & Asbari, 2024; Pozas, Letzel, & Schneider, 2020), large class sizes that make individualization difficult (Fauzi, 2022; Yavuz, 2020; Shareefa & Moosa, 2020), and resistance to change from traditional teaching practices (Safrizal et al., 2022; Ginja & Chen, 2020). Despite these hurdles, the program aims to empower educators to embody Pancasila values and advance education in their communities.

Several studies have explored DI in various educational contexts. For instance, Hussein and Saleh (2021) examined the impact of DI on reading comprehension among secondary school students in Bahrain, finding that it positively influenced learning outcomes. Similarly, Jamoliddinova (2022) studied teachers' perceptions of DI in Uzbekistan and highlighted the need for professional development in differentiation techniques. Alsubaie (2020) further demonstrated the effectiveness of DI in addressing individual learning needs in English language education through a literature review.

While these studies highlight the benefits of Differentiated Instruction (DI) in language learning, they frequently fall short in providing practical insights into its implementation, particularly in Asian contexts such as Indonesia. Existing research often emphasizes theoretical frameworks or general outcomes without addressing the specific strategies teachers use to adapt DI to diverse classroom settings. Moreover, there is limited exploration of how national programs, like Indonesia's Guru Penggerak, shape teachers' ability to implement DI effectively within unique cultural and institutional frameworks. This study seeks to address these gaps by examining the real-world application of DI by Guru Penggerak, focusing on the methods, opportunities, and challenges they encounter in language teaching.

Therefore, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how GPs apply DI in language classrooms. Specifically, it investigates the methods used by GPs to cater to students' diverse learning needs and the challenges

they face in doing so. By adopting a case study approach, this research seeks to offer practical insights into the implementation of DI in Indonesian schools.

The research questions are: (1) How do *Guru Penggerak* conceptualize and implement differentiated instruction in language teaching? (2) What opportunities arise from implementing differentiated instruction in language teaching? (3) What the challenges did *Guru Penggerak* face in implementing DI in the context of Indonesian education?

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to investigate the understanding, opportunities, and challenges of implementing Differentiated Instruction (DI) by teachers in the *Guru Penggerak* program within the context of language learning. A case study design is particularly ideal for this research because it allows for an in-depth exploration of complex, context-specific phenomena, such as how teachers adapt DI to meet diverse student needs in real classroom settings (Bryman, 2016; Qorib, 2024). The *Guru Penggerak* program represents a unique educational initiative in Indonesia, making it a compelling case for understanding DI's practical application and its potential for broader educational reforms.

Qualitative research, as defined by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), emphasizes the collection of descriptive data through written or spoken words and the observation of participants' behaviors, providing rich insights into their experiences. In this study, primary data collection methods include semi-structured interviews with *Guru Penggerak*, classroom observations, and the analysis of teaching artifacts, such as lesson plans and student work. These methods enable a comprehensive understanding of "how" and "why" *Guru Penggerak* implement DI while addressing the challenges unique to their educational context.

The participants in this study were selected using purposive sampling, based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. According to Swain and Chen (2024) purposive sampling enables the selection of participants who can provide rich, detailed information about the topic under study. The participants are five teachers from three public secondary schools in Indonesia, all of whom have a minimum of five years of teaching experience, have completed the *Guru Penggerak* program, and have implemented Differentiated Instruction (DI) in their teaching

practices.

While purposive sampling allows for targeted participant selection, it has limitations, such as potential researcher bias in participant selection and limited generalizability of findings (Creswell, 2014). To mitigate these issues, clear and transparent selection criteria were established to ensure consistency and alignment with the research objectives. Additionally, triangulation was employed by collecting data from multiple schools and cross-referencing findings with classroom observations and teaching artifacts to enhance credibility and reliability.

Data collection for this study relied on multiple instruments: a) the primary instrument was the researcher, who conducted all observations and interviews, following Creswell's (2013) recommendation that qualitative researchers act as key instruments in data collection. b) the secondary instruments included:

Interview guidelines: Semi-structured interviews, as defined by Bryman (2016), were used to guide the interviews. The interview questions, developed by the researcher, focused on the planning, implementation, and evaluation of Differentiated Instruction (DI). The interview guide comprised 35 questions organized into five themes. To ensure clarity and relevance, the interview guidelines were piloted with a small group of teachers before the full data collection, and adjustments were made based on their feedback to refine question clarity and improve question flow.

Observation checklist was developed to systematically document aspects of DI in the classroom, specifically focusing on the content, process, and product dimensions of instruction (Tomlinson, 2017; Magableh & Abdullah, 2020). The checklist was structured to capture whether specific instructional elements were present during lessons. Similar to the interview guidelines, the observation checklist was piloted in a preliminary observation session, and revisions were made to ensure comprehensive coverage of DI elements.

Regarding researcher bias, the potential for subjectivity in data collection and interpretation was acknowledged. To mitigate bias, a reflexive approach was adopted, with the researcher maintaining a reflective journal throughout the data collection process to monitor personal assumptions and biases. Additionally, efforts were made to ensure objectivity by employing triangulation—cross-referencing data from multiple sources (interviews, observations, and teaching artifacts) to verify findings and increase

credibility

Three primary methods of data collection were employed in this study:

Observation. Classroom observations were conducted to record the real-time application of Differentiated Instruction (DI). As outlined by Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2011), systematic observation provides a structured way to document the teaching-learning process. The observations focused on how teachers differentiated content, process, and product to meet students' needs. A total of six classroom observations were conducted, each lasting approximately 45-60 minutes, to ensure a thorough understanding of DI practices across different lessons. Detailed field notes were taken during each session, capturing specific instructional strategies and classroom dynamics.

Interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the five teacher participants following their classroom observations. The interviews, guided by a predetermined set of questions, aimed to explore the teachers' understanding of DI, as well as the opportunities and challenges they encountered in implementing it. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and was recorded with the participants' consent. The recordings were later transcribed for analysis, ensuring an accurate representation of the participants' perspectives.

Document analysis. Relevant teaching documents, such as lesson plans, learning modules, and assessment tools, were collected and analyzed to gain additional insight into the teachers' instructional practices. Document analysis, as described by Bryman (2016), allows researchers to corroborate data from other sources and provides a comprehensive view of the instructional approaches used. A total of 10 lesson plans, along with supplementary teaching materials, were reviewed to examine the alignment of lesson content with the principles of DI.

Ethical considerations were strictly adhered to during data collection. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring that they understood the study's purpose, their role in the research, and their right to confidentiality. Participants were assured that their identities would be kept anonymous, and all data would be securely stored and used solely for research purposes. Additionally, participants were given the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke

(2013). Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. This method was chosen for its flexibility and its capacity to produce detailed, nuanced insights. The analysis process involved the following steps: (1) Familiarization with the data: The researcher immersed herself in the data by reading the interview transcripts and field notes multiple times. (2) Generating initial codes: Data were systematically coded to identify significant features related to the research questions. (3) Searching for themes: Codes were organized into broader themes that captured key aspects of the participants' experiences with DI. (4) Reviewing themes: The researcher refined the themes to ensure they accurately reflected the data. (5) Defining and naming themes: The final themes were defined and named, and a detailed analysis was conducted to explore their meaning and relevance. (6) Writing up: A comprehensive report was produced, integrating the findings with existing literature.

To ensure the reliability and consistency of the coding process, multiple coders were involved in the thematic analysis. Two additional researchers independently coded a sample of the data. Any discrepancies in coding were resolved through discussions and consensus, ensuring that the final themes accurately represented the data. For enhanced efficiency and accuracy, NVivo software was used to assist in organizing and managing the data throughout the analysis process. The software facilitated the coding and categorization of themes, allowing for a more systematic approach to data analysis.

To ensure the credibility and validity of the data, triangulation was employed. Triangulation, as described by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), involves using multiple data sources and collection methods to cross-check and validate findings. Three forms of triangulation were applied: (1) Source triangulation: Data from multiple sources (observations, interviews, and documents) were compared to ensure consistency. (2) Method triangulation: The use of different methods (observation, interviews, document analysis) allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the teachers' experiences with DI. (3) Time triangulation: Data were collected at different times to account for variations in participants' responses and classroom dynamics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of participants

The participants in this study are five language

teachers who have attended the Pendidikan Guru Penggerak (PGP) program, earned the title Guru Penggerak (GP), and actively implemented differentiated instruction (DI) in their language classrooms. The participants' profiles, as shown in Table 1, provide important context for understanding their qualifications and how these relate to the implementation of DI. Their diverse teaching backgrounds and years of experience offer valuable insights into how DI is applied across different educational settings.

Table 1. *Profile of participants*

No	Name	M /F	PGP Batch	Level	Teacher Experience
1.	MSL	F	Batch 8	SMA	15 years
2.	KM	F	Batch 6	SMP	13 years
3	LN	F	Batch 7	SMP	10 years
4	MH	F	Batch 7	SMA	11 years
5	LT	F	Batch 8	SMP	10 years

These teachers possess a deep understanding of DI and have actively integrated it into their teaching practices. Their years of experience, ranging from 10 to 15 years, indicate a strong foundation in educational practices, which is essential for the effective application of DI. Additionally, their participation in the Guru Penggerak program equips them with advanced pedagogical skills and a learner-centered approach, making them well-positioned to implement DI strategies that address the diverse needs of students. The participants' varied teaching contexts—ranging from SMP (junior high school) to SMA (senior high school) and spanning multiple PGP batches—contribute to the richness of the study's findings.

Their different teaching environments provide a broad perspective on the challenges and opportunities of DI in language classrooms across Indonesia. For example, differences in student demographics, available resources, and institutional support for DI practices may influence how DI strategies are implemented and adapted. By examining these varied experiences, the study can offer a more nuanced understanding of how DI can be successfully integrated into language education in diverse contexts.

RQ 1: How do Guru Penggerak understand the application of differentiated instruction in teaching English?

Teachers' understanding in planning differentiated instruction

Extract 1

The concept of differentiated instruction is actually, if I remember correctly, an effort made by teachers to present learning that is tailored to students' readiness, interests and learning profiles. ... it's more focused on the students, we in the classroom have to know their interests first (MSL).

The data reveal that Guru Penggerak has a clear understanding of differentiated instruction (DI) as a teaching approach tailored to students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. Teachers focus on adapting their instruction to meet the diverse needs of students rather than delivering a uniform lesson to all. Extract 1 underscores this, highlighting the need for teachers to first understand students' interests and capabilities, which is central to planning effective differentiated instruction.

This explanation aligns with the fundamental principles of differentiated instruction, which advocate for responsiveness to student diversity (Hussein & Saleh, 2021; Jamoliddinova & Kuchkarova, 2022). The teachers recognize that planning for DI requires an initial phase of understanding students' individual differences, which is critical for informed instructional decisions. This shows their knowledge of the theoretical underpinnings of DI, particularly the need for student-focused planning (Hasanah et al. 2022; Shareefa; 2021; Smets & Struyven, 2020).

Pre-assessment as the basis for planning differentiated instruction

Extract 2

"We have to conduct a test first, give an assessment first. It can only be done if we already have a handle, the basics. ... It is important to do a test first. So that we can know the needs and abilities of the students, and how they learn best. That way we can determine the right strategy to apply in the subject to be taught"(LN)

The teacher's response in Extract 2 highlights the significance of diagnostic assessment, a crucial step in differentiated instruction. This reflects a practical understanding of DI, as teachers use this assessment to determine how to differentiate their instruction to cater to individual students' needs. This aligns with best practices in DI, where formative assessments guide instructional planning

and decision-making (Tomlinson & Tonya, 2013; Westbroek, Rens, Berg & Janssen 2020)

Extract 3

“In general, we use assessment diagnostic first so we understand ohh this child he already understands about this, so we can later differentiate when entering the class or when entering the learning we already know ohh this child doesn't understand anything, if child B already understands half of it, if this one ohh already understands once mi, so we can determine, we can design what we have to give them”(KM)

This detailed explanation from Extract 3 indicates that the teachers apply differentiated instruction by first assessing the varying levels of knowledge and skills among students. Teachers then tailor their lessons to these different levels. This is a critical component of differentiated instruction, where student grouping and instructional scaffolding are used to ensure that each student receives the level of support and challenge they need (Lavania & Nor, 2020; Sharp, Jarvis & McMillan, 2020; Anis, 2023)

Extract 4

“Well, for me personally, I have tested the children both in writing, and I also tell them to access there is an online test at akupintar.co.id. In I'm smart, there are aptitude tests, interest tests, major tests, and learning profile tests ... If to identify, there must be observation first, we can ask first how it is today, initial observation then we must ask students interviews to students, what they need today”(MSL)

The use of both traditional (written tests) and modern (online applications like akupintar.co.id) diagnostic tools demonstrates the teachers' adaptability in identifying students' diverse learning styles. This further reinforces their understanding of the flexible nature of differentiated instruction, as they seek to collect comprehensive data on students' preferences and capabilities. This approach aligns with the differentiated instruction model, which encourages multiple methods of assessment to gather holistic data about students (Tomlinson & Tonya, 2013; Gheyssens et al. 2022; Eikeland & Ohna, 2022)

Teachers' understanding in implementing differentiated instruction

The teachers' approach to implementing differentiated instruction (DI) centers around three

primary components: content, process, and product. These elements are the foundation of DI and are applied based on the students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles (Tomlinson & Marcia, 2010; Pak, Desimone, Saldivar, 2020). Teachers design their lessons by incorporating these elements to cater to the diverse needs of their students. The extracts illustrate how teachers operationalize this in their classrooms.

Extract 5

“Of course there is such a thing as a lesson plan, or now it is called a teaching module. after analyzing the students what they need, we must know what I have to make this. well, it is poured in the teaching module”(LT)

Teacher highlights that after conducting a diagnostic assessment to understand students' needs, teachers develop a teaching module. This module reflects lesson planning designed specifically to address students' readiness levels and learning preferences.

Content differentiation, as evidenced in this extract, requires that teachers carefully curate and adapt their teaching materials (e.g., texts, media, and assignments) to fit different learning profiles. This approach ensures that all students, regardless of their starting point, can engage meaningfully with the material (Zens, 2021; Wan, 2020; Jang & Sinclaire, 2021). It also shows the teacher's commitment to scaffolding learning, where students can build upon their knowledge progressively based on the content tailored to their needs (Zólyomi, 2022; Halil et al., 2023).

Teacher' response below demonstrates how process differentiation is implemented by adjusting the way learning occurs in the classroom. The teacher in this extract focuses on grouping students based on their learning styles, which allows for instructional activities that accommodate different approaches to learning.

Extract 6

“So once I know what their learning style is, I start designing the lesson. For example, I use a process differentiation strategy. Suppose they are in groups, then I just need to group them. If it's content, I prepare the content. If it's product, it's the students who do it”(MH)

Process differentiation involves varying the activities or processes by which students engage with the material. By grouping students according

to their learning styles, the teacher creates opportunities for peer interaction, collaboration, and tailored instructional methods that address students' strengths and weaknesses. This approach enhances student engagement by providing multiple pathways to understanding the material (Zens, 2021; Yawan & Halil, 2022). It also indicates a flexible teaching style that adapts to the unique needs of each learner (Saleh, 2021; Griful-Freixenet, 2020).

The teachers discuss the third element of differentiated instruction: product differentiation. Here, the focus is on allowing students to demonstrate their learning in various forms based on their strengths. The teacher gives students the freedom to complete tasks that align with their skills and interests.

Extract 7

“It depends on what differentiation strategy we apply in the classroom. Because differentiated instruction is different. There are three, content differentiation, process differentiation, and product differentiation. The question is. Do these three strategies have to be applied? It depends on the teacher. But is it okay to apply just one? Yes, you can. Suppose I just do product differentiation, that's okay, no problem. Can it be all three? You can. That's why it all comes back to the teacher as the spearhead of education” (KM)

Product differentiation recognizes that students have different ways of expressing their knowledge. By offering diverse assessment options, such as written tasks, presentations, or creative projects, the teacher ensures that students can select the format that best suits their learning style. This increases student motivation and ownership over their learning outcomes (Alsubaie, 2022). Moreover, allowing choice fosters a sense of empowerment, as students can leverage their strengths to demonstrate mastery of the subject matter (Alsubaie, 2022; Thapliyal et al. 2022).

The teacher also mentioned the flexibility in applying DI strategies, stating that teachers can choose to apply one, two, or all three differentiation strategies (content, process, and product). This suggests that the teacher views differentiated instruction as adaptable and teacher-driven, based on the specific needs of their classroom.

This flexibility indicates that the success of differentiated instruction largely depends on the teacher's ability to make informed decisions

(Bondie, Dahnke & Zusho, 2019; Brevik & Rindal 2020). The teacher in this case recognizes the fluid nature of DI, where the number of strategies applied can vary depending on the classroom situation and students' needs. This flexible and adaptive mindset is crucial for effective DI implementation, as it ensures that the instruction remains dynamic and responsive to the evolving learning landscape (Brevik, Gunnulfson, & Renzulli, 2018).

Teachers' understanding about assessments for differentiated instruction

The teachers also reflect their understanding of how assessment plays a crucial role in evaluating the effectiveness of differentiated instruction (DI). The focus is not solely on evaluating the final product but also on observing the learning process and adapting teaching strategies based on students' performance.

Extract 8

“The only way is to check all the learning outcomes. I also assess the process a lot. ohh this child in group learning seems less active, in this material this child is less enthusiastic, ohh maybe it doesn't fit where nihh, ohh doesn't fit with the group. Maybe in the next grouping I will group him with another group” (MH)

The teacher emphasizes the importance of assessing the learning process, not just the outcomes. This teacher uses continuous observation to assess students' engagement and participation in group activities. When the teacher notices that certain students are less active or not fully engaged, they consider adjustments, such as changing group dynamics.

The focus on process-based assessment aligns with the principles of differentiated instruction, where teachers tailor their strategies based on ongoing observations (Halil & Yawan, 2023). This adaptive approach is key to maintaining an inclusive and supportive learning environment, where students' individual needs and learning styles are constantly monitored and addressed (Magableh & Abdullah, 2020; Lin, Wu & Yang, 2021). By tracking students' behavior and engagement in real-time, the teacher is able to make proactive decisions that can improve both group dynamics and individual learning outcomes.

The teacher also emphasizes the importance of reflection in the assessment process. The teacher explains that after students complete assignments

or demonstrate their understanding of a concept, the next steps depend on their performance. If students struggle or fail to grasp the material, the teacher re-teaches it, but with different methods or variations to accommodate diverse learning styles.

Extract 9

“for the reflection, when I ask the students to demonstrate or display the results of the assignment, if they are able, then I continue the material, but if they don't understand, there are some who don't understand, then I repeat the material but with variations and different learning methods” (LN)

Providing timely feedback, whether through direct comments or adjustments in teaching strategy, is crucial for promoting student growth (Jamoliddinova & Kuchkarova, 2022; Heacox & Cash, 2020). By evaluating both the process and the final outcomes, teachers can give students the necessary support to address their weaknesses and build on their strengths. This ongoing cycle of assessment, feedback, and adjustment creates a dynamic learning environment where the needs of all students are met (Goddard & Kim, 2018; Housel, 2020).

RQ 2: What are the opportunities obtained through teaching English using differentiated instruction? The findings also illustrate how differentiated instruction (DI) can significantly enhance the learning environment, creating a space that is comfortable, supportive, and focused on individual growth. Through personalized approaches, this method reduces stress and fosters active engagement among students. The following analysis explores how DI contributes to a positive learning atmosphere, based on insights from the teachers' experiences.

Reduced stress and pressure on students

As highlighted in Extract 10, one of the most important benefits of differentiated instruction is the reduction of stress among students. The teacher explains that students are not pressured to meet external expectations set by the teacher but are instead encouraged to exceed their own personal capabilities. This shift in focus allows students to work at their own pace, achieving progress based on their individual readiness and strengths.

“Of course there is an increase in learning outcomes. Because they are not tense, not required to exceed the expectations of meeting

the expectations of the teacher, but required to exceed their own abilities. There is definitely an improvement.”(LT)

This approach is particularly impactful in minimizing the competitive and stressful nature of traditional classrooms, where students often feel pressured to meet a standard that may not align with their abilities. By encouraging personal growth, DI helps students to build confidence, creating a more relaxed and comfortable learning environment (Jamoliddinova & Kuchkarova, 2022).

A fun and engaging learning atmosphere

Extract 11 below highlights how DI not only lessens anxiety but also makes the learning process more enjoyable. The teacher shares that by understanding students' needs, they can make lessons more engaging and fun, especially in subjects like language, which some students might find intimidating.

“I understand more of what they want, what their needs are. ... so students are also not too stressed, I see that they don't feel afraid or anything with English for sure. it definitely makes the learning process fun, active then certainly not as scary as they imagine, not tense.”(LN)

This extract emphasizes how DI transforms the learning environment into one where students feel at ease, actively participating without fear or pressure. By tailoring lessons to students' interests and readiness, teachers can foster a more dynamic classroom atmosphere that keeps students engaged and motivated to learn (Ismail, 2019).

Visible changes in students' attitude and knowledge

Building on the previous points about reduced stress and increased engagement, **Extract 12** illustrates the long-term benefits of DI. The teacher observes that over time, students who initially struggled or felt anxious in the classroom began to show improvements not only in their academic performance but also in their attitudes toward learning.

“There are many changes, many developments. Who previously could not and felt afraid, over time, a month or two months, there must be a change in attitude, a change in knowledge, from those who could not at all, finally they can. There are changes that occur in students.”(LT)

This extract highlights the gradual transformation that occurs when students are given the right support through DI. By addressing their specific needs and creating a positive, low-pressure environment, teachers can help students overcome their fears and steadily improve their skills. The combination of personalized learning strategies and a supportive atmosphere leads to long-term academic and emotional growth (Lavrijsen et al., 2021; Lindner & Schwab, 2020)

The shift from passive to active participation

Differentiated instruction shifts the classroom dynamic from passive to active participation by acknowledging students' individual needs. In Extract 13, the teacher reflects on the clear difference in student engagement between traditional K-13 teaching and the differentiated approach used today

"Student participation is active... there is I think a big difference when I taught in K-13 in the past and now students who can't talk at all also talk a little too. but in the past, forced to talk they didn't want to. but now when I know, ohh this child doesn't want this, wants this. so talk too."(MSL)

The teacher points out that even previously reluctant students are now more willing to participate because their preferences are considered. This reflects how DI creates an environment where students feel more comfortable expressing themselves, resulting in heightened participation and a sense of ownership over their learning (Tomlinson & Marcia, 2010).

Enhancing inclusivity in learning environments

As student engagement increases, so does the inclusivity of the learning environment. In Extract 14, the teacher emphasizes how differentiated instruction, when applied correctly, tailors learning to meet individual needs and abilities, making students feel that their learning requirements are addressed.

"If implemented correctly, it should definitely create an inclusive learning environment according to needs and abilities.... Well, it's very helpful, because it's as if their needs about learning are met."(KM)

This inclusion is essential for fostering student engagement. When students feel that the instruction aligns with their capabilities and learning preferences, they are more motivated to

participate actively (Blaz, 2016; Goddard & Kim, 2018). The teacher notes that by meeting individual needs, the overall learning atmosphere becomes more inclusive and supportive, allowing every student to engage fully.

RQ 3 : What are the challenges faced by Guru Penggerak in teaching using differentiated instruction?

Requires more time to prepare for learning

One of the primary challenges reported by the teachers is the time-consuming nature of preparing differentiated instruction. In Extract 15, one teacher articulates the additional workload involved in planning effective lessons tailored to students' diverse needs.

"The preparation of differentiated instruction is rather time-consuming for me personally. Because of the preparations, not to mention the thinking. Now in addition to our other work and then we want to make preparations, I think it does take a lot of time when implementing differentiated instruction."(LN)

This highlights the substantial effort required for planning, which can lead to feelings of being overwhelmed, especially when coupled with other teaching responsibilities. The complexity of the preparation process can deter some teachers from fully implementing differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 2003; Zólyomi, 2022).

Some students have not followed instructions

Another challenge arises from student compliance and engagement. Extract 16 reveals that some students may resist following instructions, hindering the effectiveness of differentiated instruction.

"If the challenges from the students, well, there are definitely one or two people who kapatuli, for example, don't want to listen at all... not want to accept or follow directions and in the end do not follow the learning process properly." (MH)

This lack of compliance creates obstacles for teachers trying to implement tailored learning experiences. Further elaboration in Extract 17 shows that students may respond randomly, making it difficult for the teacher to assess their learning styles effectively.

"If the challenge from the students in differentiated instruction, well, they like to answer randomly, so we don't know what the

learning style of this child is." (KM)

Moreover, Extract 18 illustrates that while some students may prefer interactive or peer-led explanations over video materials, this diversity in learning preferences can lead to a noisy classroom environment, which can be both challenging and beneficial.

"Sometimes there are children who don't like videos, but prefer their friends to explain themselves, so I let them go. so surely a class that applies that, it must be noisy. definitely noisy, but noisy in a positive sense." (LT)

This quote emphasizes that, despite the chaos, active participation remains crucial. The teacher acknowledges that they must adapt their approach, and when students lack initiative, the teacher must take charge (Alsubaie, 2020; Wei, 2023).

Difficulty in getting parents of learners to collaborate

Finally, collaboration with parents is essential for supporting students' learning at home. Extract 19 conveys the frustration teachers experience when parental support is lacking.

"What is really needed is the help of parents at home because let's see how we pote-pote ta at home, unfortunately if there is no help from parents it is the same as zero, we are like me only 2 3 hours in class, I give it what is called this briefing all may not want to hear all. yahh so mi 80% of parents entrust their children at school. that obstacle actually."(MH)

This statement underscores the crucial role parents play in reinforcing the lessons taught in the classroom. Without active parental involvement, teachers feel limited in their effectiveness, as they only have a few hours each week to engage with their students. This lack of collaboration becomes a significant barrier to the successful implementation of differentiated instruction (Irwan, Nuryani, & Masruddin, 2023).

CONCLUSION

The findings highlight the significant knowledge and efforts of *Guru Penggerak* in implementing differentiated instruction in language teaching, while also revealing several challenges they face in this process. The teachers demonstrate a solid understanding of differentiated instruction, recognizing its importance in catering to students' diverse readiness, interests, and learning profiles.

Through diagnostic assessments, they are able to identify students' needs, which informs their lesson planning and enables them to create a more engaging learning environment. However, the implementation of differentiated instruction is not without obstacles. The time-consuming nature of preparation, as emphasized by the teachers, poses a challenge that can hinder effective execution in the classroom. Additionally, issues related to student compliance and varying engagement levels further complicate the teaching process. Some students may resist following instructions or have differing preferences for learning activities, leading to difficulties in meeting all students' needs. Furthermore, the lack of parental involvement emerges as a critical barrier, as teachers often find themselves limited in the impact they can have within the short hours spent in the classroom. Therefore, addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including enhanced teacher training, increased support for lesson preparation, and strategies to foster better collaboration with parents. Future research should explore longitudinal studies to examine the sustained impact of DI on student outcomes over time. Also comparative studies between urban and rural schools could also shed light on contextual factors influencing DI effectiveness.

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