



## The Implementation of Differentiated Instruction in EFL Learning and Students' Perceptions

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**Abstract.** *This study aims to examine the implementation of differentiated learning in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction at SD Negeri 1 Banjar Jawa and explore students' perceptions of the approach. Given the diversity of students' learning characteristics, this study aims to determine how teachers adapt materials, processes, and learning environments to meet individual students' needs and how students perceive the implementation of this strategy. Using mixed methods, data were collected through questionnaires, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews with 37 fifth-grade students and English teachers. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively, while qualitative data were analyzed through data reduction and thematic drawing. The results indicate that differentiated learning was effectively implemented through varied teaching materials, flexible grouping, and a conducive classroom atmosphere, which increased student engagement, motivation, and understanding. Students' perceptions of this approach were very positive, with reports of increased self-confidence and decreased learning anxiety. The implications of this study support the widespread use of differentiation strategies to improve the quality of language learning at the elementary level.*

**Keywords:** *Differentiation of Learning, EFL Learning, SD Negeri 1 Banjar Jawa, Student Perception, Teaching Strategies.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This research is based on the importance of developing English language skills at the elementary level, given English's role as an international language that supports global communication, academic exchange, and technological advancement (Silaban et al., 2023). In the Indonesian context, English instruction in elementary schools is crucial for building the foundation of students' linguistic abilities and reducing learning anxiety that may arise in the future. However, implementing the learning process in the classroom often faces challenges due to diverse student characteristics, such as varying ability levels, learning styles, and motivations (Baiti et al., 2024). Conventional, uniform teaching approaches often fail to meet individual student needs, thus reducing engagement and learning effectiveness.

The need to implement a more inclusive and adaptive teaching model has led to the emergence of the concept of differentiated learning (Inganah et al., 2026). This approach emphasizes tailoring materials, activities, and learning environments to student characteristics and needs, thereby increasing motivation, understanding, and reducing learning anxiety.

Previous research has shown that differentiation in English language learning can improve learning outcomes and strengthen student participation (Widayanti et al., 2024). However, there is a lack of studies specifically examining the implementation and student perceptions of this method at the elementary school level in Indonesia, particularly in the EFL context (Ramadhani et al., 2026).

The novelty of this research lies in its focus, which combines two aspects: the practical implementation of differentiated instruction and students' perceptions of the strategy in elementary schools. Through a mixed-methods approach, this study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the effectiveness and feasibility of the differentiated teaching model in English learning at the elementary level (Ma'rifat, 2024). The results are expected to contribute to the development of more inclusive and relevant teaching strategies, as well as encourage improvements in the quality of English learning that prioritizes student needs. Thus, this research has an urgency to support innovative teaching practices that are responsive to student diversity.

## **2. THEORETICAL STUDY**

### **Review of Literatures**

This study focuses on the concept of differentiated instruction and students' perceptions of the method, particularly in the context of learning English as a foreign language (EFL) at the elementary level. Previous studies have shown that differentiation strategies can increase student engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes by tailoring content, processes, and learning environments to individual student needs (Tomlinson, 2021). Another study by Suryana (2018) confirmed that implementing differentiation in an EFL context can reduce learning anxiety and enhance students' positive learning experiences (Gustian et al., 2023).

Other studies have emphasized the importance of students' perceptions of teaching methods, as these perceptions influence their motivation, participation levels, and academic success (Dörnyei, 2005). Previous research has shown that positive perceptions of flexible and inclusive teaching strategies can strengthen students' motivation to learn, while negative perceptions can hinder the learning process (Ogata, 2025).

Therefore, these previous studies support the finding that the effective implementation of differentiated instruction significantly impacts students' learning experiences, particularly in the context of learning English as a foreign language (Putri et al., 2025). The unstated hypothesis of this study states that the implementation of appropriate and positive

differentiation strategies has the potential to increase student motivation and perceptions during the teaching and learning process.

### **Concepts**

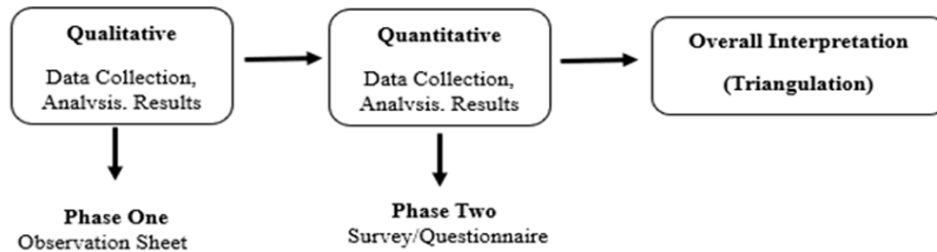
The main concept underlying this study is differentiated instruction. According to Tomlinson (2021), differentiation is the process of adapting aspects of learning, including materials, activities, and the learning environment, to suit the diverse characteristics and needs of students. The goal is for each student to receive an optimal learning experience tailored to their level of readiness, interests, and learning styles (Saputra et al., 2025).

In the context of learning English as a foreign language (EFL), differentiation is crucial due to the variation in language proficiency among students. Adjustments are made so that each student can achieve language competency according to their potential, while simultaneously reducing anxiety and increasing their self-confidence (Suryana, 2018). This concept supports the need to accommodate diversity in the learning process to ensure equity and effectiveness in the teaching and learning process (Chernigovtseva et al., 2026).

Student perceptions of teaching methods are also a key concept in this study. This perception refers to students' views and attitudes toward the teaching strategies implemented, which influence their motivation, participation, and learning success (Fadhilah & Warni, 2024). As stated by Dörnyei (2005), positive perceptions of flexible and inclusive teaching methods can strengthen learning motivation, while negative perceptions tend to diminish students' enthusiasm and learning outcomes (Astuti, 2013).

### **3. RESEARCH METHOD**

This research used a mix method, such as quantitative and qualitative (Sugiyono, 2009). This mix-method called as Sequential Exploratory Design. The qualitative used in this research to analyze, describe, and explain the results. In addition, this research used sequential exploratory design (Susanto et al., 2024). The sequence of the research methodology, which it can be described as follows:



Source: (Susanto et al., 2024)

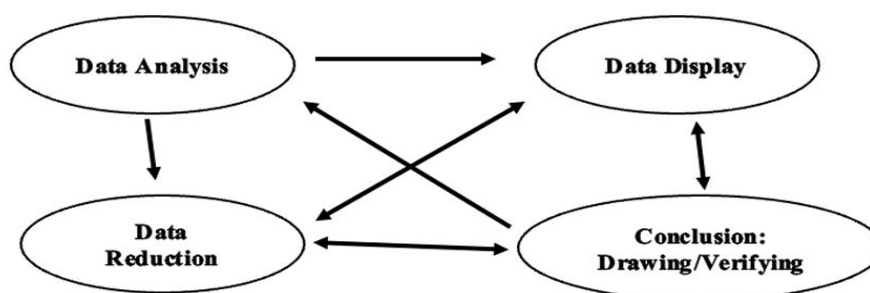
**Figure 1.** The Stages of Mixed Method.

1. In phase 1, the researcher used qualitative methods to collect observational data.
2. In phase 2, the researcher combined qualitative and quantitative methods. First, the researcher collected data through questionnaires, pre-tests, and post-tests.
3. Finally, the researcher triangulated the data. Furthermore, the researcher used Sugiyono's theory when conducting data triangulation. This triangulation involved several stages, including data collection, meetings with informants to assess data validity, and summarizing and interpreting all the data obtained.

Data collection techniques were conducted through classroom observations, questionnaire distribution, and interviews. The instruments used included observation sheets, questionnaires compiled based on Tomlinson (2021), and interview guides. Data analysis tools followed triangulation and descriptive analysis procedures, with instrument validity and reliability testing showing satisfactory results according to applicable standards (detailed test results and interpretations were not presented).

### **1. Qualitative Data**

The researcher implemented observation as the first stage throughout collecting the data. This research used the interactive data analysis model proposed by Miles & Huberman' Theory in 1994 to gain and examine data collection through observations(MatthewB. M, 2014). As outlined by Miles & Huberman (1994), this model is particularly 20 effective in handling data derived from observations, interviews, and artifacts. It involved four key stages: Data Collection, Data Reduction, Data Display, and Drawing/Verifying Conclusion.



Source: (Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, 2014)

**Figure 2.** The Data Collection Technique of Qualitative Data.

## 2. Quantitative Data

Quantitative analysis refers to data analysis in the form of numbers. Here, analysis was done for the data of students' perception. The quantitative data are obtained from the questionnaire. Data analysis used statistical analysis called Referenced Assessment, categorized into two (Candiasa, 2010). By using this formula, the student's readiness can be classified into "Positive" and "Negative". Quantitative analysis used to support the result of qualitative analysis. The two point Likert scale was adopted to answer the questionnaire: the degree of the implementation of Differentiated Instructions and students' perceptions (Syahira & Pursitasari, 2025). This scale includes two degrees of Likert Scale categorization, such as Positive and Negative. The data analyzed using the theory from (Widiastiningsih et al., 2021). The formula can be seen as follows:

Percentages	Category
81%-100%	Very Positive
61%-80%	Positive
41%-60%	Enough
21%-40%	Not Positive
0%-20%	Very Not Positive

Source: (Widiastiningsih et al., 2021)

**Figure 3.** The Referenced Assessment Criteria.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

This research was conducted over two months, from October 2025 to November 2025, at SD Negeri 1 Banjar Jawa, Buleleng Regency, Bali. Data collection was conducted through three main methods: classroom observations, questionnaires distributed to students and teachers, and in-depth interviews with English teachers. Observations were conducted four

times a week in October to directly capture the implementation of Differentiated Instruction (DI). Questionnaires were administered to all 37 fifth-grade students and to teachers throughout November to gauge their perceptions and readiness for DI implementation.

Based on the observations and questionnaire data collected, it was concluded that the implementation of DI in the classroom was quite effective. The questionnaire results indicated that the majority of students had positive perceptions of this method, particularly in increasing motivation and enjoyment of learning English.

No.	Items	Numbers of Items	Category	Percentage
1.	Students' Behaviour and Motivations toward EFL' Learning Process	5 items	Positive	100%
2.	Cognitive Readiness	5 items	Positive	90%
3.	Metacognitive Readiness	5 items	Negative	65%
4.	Emotional and Social Readiness	5 items	Positive	95%
5.	Technical and Learning Readiness	5 items	Negative	65%
6.	Behaviour Readiness in the Classroom	5 items	Positive	100%

Source: (Data has been summarized by the author, 2025))

**Figure 4.** The Results of Students' Perceptions toward the Differentiated Instructions of the Grade 5 Students at SD Negeri 1 Banjar Jawa.

The implementation of Differentiated Learning in the EFL learning process showed very positive results overall. All students demonstrated excellent interest, motivation, and behavior during the lesson, indicating that this strategy was effective in increasing student engagement. Furthermore, emotional and social readiness, which reached 95%, also indicated that the learning environment was more comfortable, collaborative, and supportive of interaction between students.

From a cognitive perspective, the majority of students (90%) were able to follow the lesson well within their abilities. However, in terms of metacognitive and technical readiness, each at 65%, several challenges persisted. This indicates that students still require further guidance, particularly in managing their learning process independently and in dealing with the technical aspects of learning (Syahira & Pursitasari, 2025).

## Discussion

The research results indicate that the implementation of Differentiated Learning in EFL instruction at SD Negeri 1 Banjar Jawa has been successful, smooth, and consistent. This approach has been proven to help students grasp new knowledge, insights, and skills more

easily. Based on observations, interviews, and questionnaires, students demonstrated very positive perceptions of the implementation of Differentiated Learning, as reflected in their high levels of motivation, engagement, and active participation throughout the learning process. Furthermore, this approach has had a significant impact on improving student learning outcomes, particularly in fifth grade students.

Grouping students based on abilities, interests, and learning needs is a key factor in the successful implementation of Differentiated Learning. This strategy allows teachers to provide more targeted treatment, making the learning process more effective and efficient. This finding aligns with Tomlinson (2021) theory, which emphasizes the importance of adapting learning to students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. It is also supported by Krashen's (1982) and Gardner's (1983) perspectives on the importance of grouping and diverse strategies in improving student competency (Lin & Cai, 2025).

Furthermore, flexible learning designed through various engaging activities such as games, icebreakers, group discussions, and role-playing creates a fun and interactive learning environment. This not only increases students' motivation to learn but also provides a space for them to express their abilities and interests (Hanaris, 2023). Consequently, students experience improvements in the four English language skills: speaking, writing, reading, and listening, and feel more comfortable and less stressed during the learning process.

Quantitatively, questionnaire results indicate that students' motivation and behavior aspects reached 100%, cognitive readiness at 90%, and emotional and social readiness at 95%, all of which are in the very positive category. However, several challenges were still identified in the metacognitive and technical readiness aspects, with some students experiencing difficulty managing their learning process independently and understanding the learning strategies applied. Therefore, more intensive guidance from teachers is needed to develop students' metacognitive abilities and technical understanding.

Overall, Differentiated Learning not only has a positive impact on students but also makes it easier for teachers to deliver material, even complex ones. Thus, this approach has been proven to be able to create a more effective, efficient, and student-centered learning environment in EFL learning in elementary schools.

## **5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

### **Conclusion**

Based on the research results, which included observations, questionnaires, and interviews, it can be concluded that the implementation of Differentiated Instruction (DI) in

fifth grade at SD Negeri 1 Banjar Jawa was effective and improved the English learning process. Teachers were able to implement the Differentiated Instruction strategy through various engaging activities, such as games, learning media, and group activities. Meanwhile, students' perceptions of the implementation of Differentiated Instruction were positive, as evidenced by high levels of student motivation and activeness, as well as positive responses to the activities.

Furthermore, the implementation of Differentiated Instruction provided a pleasant learning experience, improved student understanding of the material, and reduced fear or anxiety when learning EFL. However, there are still obstacles related to metacognitive readiness and technological aspects that need to be further developed to optimize the teaching and learning process.

### **Suggestions**

Based on these findings, the researcher makes the following recommendations:

#### **1. For Teachers:**

Teachers should continue to develop innovations in the implementation of Differentiated Instruction, for example by diversifying media and methods to make the learning process more engaging and effective. Teachers are also expected to improve their students' understanding of metacognitive aspects so they can become more independent and better able to manage their learning.

#### **2. For Students:**

Students are expected to be more active and enthusiastic in participating in diverse learning activities and to take advantage of opportunities to ask questions and actively participate to improve their English language skills.

#### **3. For Schools and Education Administrators:**

Schools are expected to provide full support for the implementation of Differentiated Instruction, such as training and professional development for teachers, providing supportive learning resources, and improving technological facilities that can assist the teaching and learning process.

#### **4. For Further Research:**

This research is recommended to be conducted continuously and include other aspects such as the effectiveness of Differentiated Instruction on learning outcomes and long-term student motivation, as well as the development of more innovative methods tailored to student needs.

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