



DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION ACROSS EFL CLASSROOMS: A CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

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Abstract

Because each student is unique, the diversity in their learning and speed of learning needs to be considered to help them achieve the best process and outcome. As experts propose differentiated instruction as the method for reaching out to the students' uniqueness, the present article will elaborate the definition and characteristics of differentiated instruction, as well as its design, strengths, and weaknesses in English for Foreign Language context, in order to highlight the strength and weakness of differentiated instruction as proven by previous studies. The present study employed George's (2008) model of library research. As the main argument, the present study adopted the concept of differentiated instruction from Tomlinson (1999, 2001, 2014), Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010), and Tomlinson and Moon (2013) to answer the present study's research questions, supported by other relevant sources. It is revealed that differentiated learning aimed to facilitate students' differences to allow them equal opportunities to achieve the learning goals through variations of the curriculum. While it is beneficial for the students, it also poses challenges for the teachers due to time constraints, increased workload, and possible misunderstanding due to the different treatments among the students. Thus, to benefit from differentiated instruction, EFL classrooms require a firm commitment from the teacher with solid support from the school management.

Keywords: *differentiated instructions, EFL classrooms, strength, weakness*

INTRODUCTION

The process of learning English as a foreign language can be complicated because of the different nature of the target language and the mother tongue of the students (Maheswari, Adnyani & Suwastini, 2020; Manik & Suwastini, 2020; Purnamasari, Putra, & Suwastini, 2016; Suwastini, Wiraningsih, Adnyani, 2020;



Suwastini & Yukti, 2017). This complication tends to be more severe when each student's unique characteristics are taken into account (Özer, 2018; Uzair-ul-hassan et al., 2019). Therefore, the learning process needs to be more sympathetic toward the students' unique characteristics. Such a learning process would place the students as the center of the instructional process (Matra, 2014), where the teacher mainly acts as a facilitator who strives to find the best methods and strategies to help the students throughout their learning process (Bahous et al., 2011).

It is in this context differentiated instruction can be a method that can help teachers in facilitating effective classroom management that would facilitate students' diversity in learning and put students at the core and center of learning process (Ortega et al., 2018; Stanford & Reeves, 2009; Tomlinson, 1999; Tomlinson, 2000; Tomlinson, 2014). Differentiated instruction believes that instruction is best conducted by adjusting the learning instruction to the students' needs to maximize all students' ability and potential (Tomlinson, 2000). It is a strategy that considers the students' diversity as a threat that can be converted into a strength when the differences in the students' way of learning and their speed of learning are facilitated so they can have the best process that suit the students' respective characteristics (Ismajli & Imami-Morina, 2018).

Many studies have purported the positive impacts of differentiated instruction in EFL classes (Subban, 2006). It has been proven to increase intellectual growth and interest in the subject, understanding of the significant concept of students as well as an effective approach that could facilitate all students to learn and students made better progress (Andini, 2016; Hung, 2015; Joseph et al., 2013; Valiandes, 2015). Karadag & Yasar (2010) found differentiated instruction positively affects the students' interest and attitudes towards the lessons being taught. In the context of English as Foreign Language, the implementation of differentiated instruction had been proven to be effective for fostering the participants' reading comprehension, speaking skill, listening comprehension, showing a positive effect on the students' vocabulary learning,



and has an effect on pupils' literacy skills (Alavinia & Farhady, 2012; Alavinia & Viyani, 2018; Aliakbari & Haghighi, 2014; Alonge et al., 2017; El-naggar & El-halim, 2019; Khan, 2017; Martínez, 2011). Magableh & Abdullah (2020) have proven that differentiated instruction is an effective instructional design to cope with classrooms with students of different ability levels. However, some studies have also shown concern about the weakness in implementing differentiated instruction (Aftab, 2016, Naka, 2018, Ismajli & Imami-Morina, 2018).

Considering the many proven benefits of differentiated instruction, the present study will explore the approach more closely in order to provide elaboration on what constitutes differentiated instruction, how to implement it, what factors affect the success of its implementation, as well as to weigh between the strength and weakness in the implementation of the approach across English as Foreign Language classrooms.

METHODS

The study was designed as library research by adopting the model from George (2008) into a conceptual review on definition, characteristics, implementation, strength, and weakness of differentiated instruction by deriving mainly from experts' opinions and previous studies on the topic. Below is the diagram illustrating the adoption of George's model of library research into the present study's research procedure, as adapted by Ariantini et al. (2021).

As illustrated in the diagram, the study was begun with identifying the topic to be researched, namely Differentiated Instruction in EFL Context. The second step was proposing the research questions, namely how Differentiated Instruction is defined, the principles in its implementation, and its strengths and weaknesses. The third step was determining the research plan, which included browsing and skimming for information related to the research questions, including reading books, articles, and websites. In the fourth step, three decisions were made. Firstly, the databases used for selecting the data sources were determined, namely Google Scholar. Secondly, the references used as sources of



data. Thirdly, the application used for retrieving the articles, namely Google Scholar.

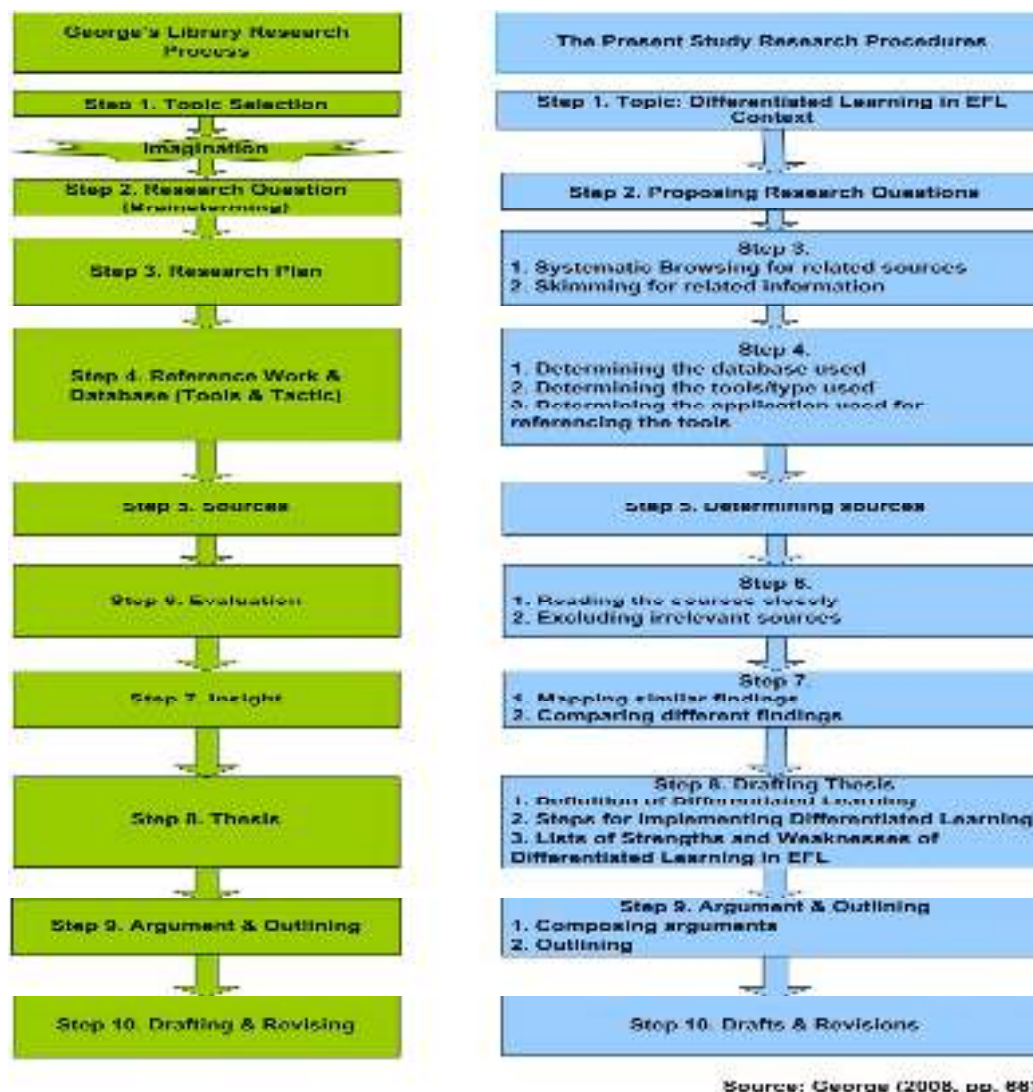


Figure 1. Research Procedure

The fifth step determined the criteria of the source referred to in this study. In this study, the concept of differentiated learning in this research was derived mainly from Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010), Tomlinson (1999, 2000, 2001, 2014), Tomlinson and Moon (2013). The arguments were then supported with previous studies published in research articles in international journals indexed (Scopus, Web of Science, and Copernicus), nationally accredited journals (indexed by SINTA), and other sources qualified to support arguments of the present study.



The keywords used for retrieving the articles were "Differentiated Instruction in EFL Context," "Differentiated Instruction Implementation," "Strengths of Differentiated Instruction," and "Weakness of Differentiated Instruction." These cyclic processes resulted in 32 supporting sources to answer the research questions and the six books used as the primary source in this study.

Table 1. Source of Data

No.	Type of Source	Remark
1.	Books	2
2.	International Journal Indexed by Scopus/WOS	18
3.	International Journal Indexed by Copernicus	1
4.	National Journal Indexed by SINTA	1
5.	Other sources (Unpublished dissertation, WEB Sources, articles published by reputable publisher, book chapter).	10

In the sixth step, the supporting sources were then critically read to gain insights. It is followed by the sixth step where arguments about definitions, aspect, designs, strength, and weakness of differentiated instruction in EFL context were summarized, activities in their respective implementations were mapped, and the benefits argued from each implementation were synthesized. After that, theses for answering the research questions were proposed in step eight. In the ninth step, an outline of elaborated arguments of the theses was formulated related to the definition of differentiated instruction, the principles in designing differentiated instruction, and the strength and weaknesses in the implementation. The outline was then developed into a draft of a research report in the form of this article, which was then revised according to further readings of the articles and suggestions from colleagues and reviewers.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Defining Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instructions are generally instructions designed with diverse variations to adjust the teaching-learning process with the different characteristics of the students. According to Tomlinson & Imbeau (2010: 13), differentiation is



“a set of instructional strategies” held as a way of thinking and a set of principles while planning and conducting a teaching and learning process, where ongoing reflections about how to deliver the learning content to students with different characteristics can be achieved best. Heacox (2014) emphasizes that differentiated instruction is an instruction that challenges students with their differences, essential for learning, allowing the students to choose their learning styles and learning assessment, and engaging the students in depth concept.

Tomlinson & Imbeau (2010) further listed seven critical elements of differentiated instruction. The first key is the belief that students are different, as they come to the class with different backgrounds, experiences, cultures, gender, interest, readiness, learning styles, and other differences. Believing that these differences affect the students' learning process is the second key element. Thus, as the third key element, the teacher is responsible for ensuring that all students, despite their differences, will master the learning content. Consequently, the teacher should continually develop strategies to connect with these different students, which is the fourth key element that is closely related to the fifth element: the teacher needs to match the nature of their students and the nature of the learning content. This requires the sixth key element, that is the flexibility of the approach in order to facilitate the students' unique differences. It leads to the seventh fundamental principle: the continual reflections on the part of the teacher to adjust what specific students need at a specific stage of the learning process and the strategies needed to make sure these different students will master the learning content.

Since an EFL classroom may consist of students with different abilities - usually known as a mixed-ability classroom – their differences have been observed to affect their readiness to learn a foreign language, and this, in turn, affects their participation in the learning process and their learning achievement (Al-Shammakhi & Al-Humaidi, 2015). Eventually, the needs of students at all levels should be taken into account to send the message that all students are expected to work at their highest potential. Simultaneously, a teacher has to



understand the students' level of knowledge and how students process, develop and demonstrate the concepts and skills during the learning (Logan, 2011). Due to the consideration of these differences, employing a *one-size-fits-all* pedagogical approach may be counterproductive, especially for students whose characteristics do not suit the approach chosen (Gregory & Chapman, 2013; Raza, 2018).

Differentiated instruction can be imagined as a learning triangle among teacher, content, and students, where all parts are needed to create and support the whole teaching and learning (Gregory & Chapman, 2013). It is essential to understand what should happen with the students, the teachers, and the content in a classroom to construct a comfortable learning environment that strengthens the learning triangle (Tomlinson, 1999). In the EFL context, it is crucial to understand why they want to learn English and how English can be beneficial for them to adjust how they design the aspects of English that they need to teach and how to teach them.

The main principles of differentiated instruction lay in respect toward the diversity of the students and their weaknesses and strength (Heacox, 2014). Therefore, teachers should accommodate creative learning, which is based on the students' level and needs. It means, an ideal differentiated instruction should be supported by the school management and the teachers. This support would allow all teachers to contribute in designing instructions that suit the students' different backgrounds, interests, learning profiles, and readiness. In this case, teachers need to be observant and creative to recognize the students' differences and creatively adjust their instructions to accommodate these differences. The fundamental tenet of differentiated instruction is student-centered learning, where the teacher often involve and participate along the learning process with the students in order to support the students' learning process (Ortega et al., 2018). In this case, EFL learning can be designed with possibilities of strategies and organizations of material to accommodate the different levels of English proficiency among the students, different learning styles of the learning, and different ways of expressing themselves. Teachers may consider using different modes of teaching, i.e., audio,



visual, audiovisual, and different modes for students to display their learning achievement, i.e., oral, written, direct or recorded presentation, schematic, infographic, or narratively. Such differentiation may be difficult to accept when teachers believe that students need to have equal proficiency across the four language skills. It is precisely where the teacher needs to believe that students are different, and their differences contribute to their learning process and results. With this belief, the teacher should accept the possibility that some students may be good at writing but perform less well at speaking, or some students do best in spontaneous discussions but perform less in structured ones.

As differentiated instruction believes that it is crucial to recognize the students' differences in terms of their prior knowledge and prior experiences, their readiness, their language, their cultures, their learning preferences, and their interests, no single teaching style should be considered as the best to accommodate every student (Suprayogi & Valcke, 2016). Thus, various teaching styles and strategies should be considered to meet the students' respective learning styles. It can be done by identifying the students' learning style, learning speed, prior knowledge, readiness, and interests. Students with relatively similar characteristics can be grouped together to design the teaching material and the instructional design to meet this group's characteristics (Chien, 2015).

This grouping can facilitate differentiated instruction to meet the students' best interests. For example, students who like learning from audiovisual media can be assigned to the same group and given material in the form of videos, while textual students can be asked to read a text of the same content. Likewise, students who prefer to respond orally can be assigned oral responses, while students who prefer to respond in written form can assign to the same group. Different texts (written or audiovisual) can be varied with different issues that meet the students' interests or cultural background.

The primary purpose of differentiating the instruction for different groups with different characteristics, the differentiated learning can be designed to engage the students equally, despite their differences. It is the critical difference between



differentiated learning with *one-size-fits-all* learning strategy, where student-teacher engagement may not exist evenly because engagement will mostly happen among students whose learning styles meet the preference of the teacher's teaching style (Uzair-ul-hassan et al., 2019). Engagement is a critical condition that teachers should aim because when the students are engaged with the learning process, they tend to comprehend the content of the learning; and at the same time, when the students understand the learning content, they would engage themselves better during the learning process (Tomlinson, 1999). For example, students familiar with their local folklore will be more engaged when the material is related to their folklore, be it in the form of reading text, listening tasks, or role-play. On the other hand, students interested in cross-cultural understanding will be more engaged when the material contains habits and taboos in other cultures. The right content variations with the proper variations of media and teaching strategies can engage the students in their learning process.

Designing Differentiated Instruction

The design of a differentiated instruction should be based on the unique characteristics of students in the intended classroom. Any design of differentiated instruction should rely on the thorough knowledge of the students' differences. Thus, the designing of differentiated instruction is always started with a pre-assessment of the students' differences (Andini, 2016; Borja et al., 2015; Logan, 2011; Ortega et al., 2018). Tomlinson & Imbeau (2010) group the students' differences into three categories: readiness, interest, and learning profile.

According to Tomlinson & Imbeau (2010), students' readiness to study is the students' condition and background knowledge at the start of the learning. It is the starting point from which the students can regularly improve due to the learning process. Differentiated instruction believes that students' readiness in learning will affect their learning achievement (Andini, 2016; Tomlinson, 1999; Tomlinson, 2000). A preliminary assessment of the student's English proficiency can help the teacher determine the EFL context's readiness. With this information,



the teacher can design the instruction to meet the students' different English proficiencies. A different set of learning materials can be designed, i.e., a set for those who are already fluent in speaking, another set for those who can speak well but not as fluently, and another for those who struggle to express themselves orally. For the students to have equal mastery of the material, different scaffoldings can be designed for each readiness group.

Students' interest concerns with aspects that can engage the students' attention and thus motivate them to learn the related content (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010). Identification of students' interest will make the teacher understand about what will and how to engage the students best, thus facilitating the teacher in designing lesson plan that accommodates the students' learning in the most effective way possible (Joseph et al., 2013; Naka, 2017; Tomlinson, 2000). For example, students who happen to like Japanese culture or have Japanese background can be given narrative from Japanese literature as the reading text in the narrative genre; while students who like English culture can be given stories written by English writers, and students who show great pride in their local culture can be given English texts adopted from their local culture. In this case, students' interests are used to facilitate the material design while facilitating the students' learning.

The students' learning profile is the third category of students' variation. This third category is related to the students' preferences in how they study, how they understand the content best, and how they express their understanding (Tomlinson and Imbeau, 2010). It is mentioned that the student's learning profile is shaped by their learning style, intelligence, gender, and culture. Closely related to the two other categories, differentiation in EFL class can be designed to meet the students' learning style. Differentiation of the instructional design can also be made by taking into account the students' learning styles. Students who like to move around can be assigned to a group that do field project; while introvert students can be assigned to a group that do archives study. Those who like to work in group can be grouped together, and those who like to work alone can be



given individual tasks. In speaking class, for example, those who like to read can be assigned to compile the material for a presentation, those who like ICT media can be assigned to create the presentation slides, while those who like to be under the spotlight can be assigned as the presenter. Related to learning content, the reader, the presentation maker, and the presenter have the same content exposure although they report their learning result in different ways. Differences in the students' intelligence can be accommodated by modifying the learning content into verbal-linguistics, numerical, logical, creative, and so forth (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010). In writing class, for example, students with verbal-linguistic intelligence can be assigned to write a story, while the logical students can be assigned to write cause and effect piece, those with spatial intelligence can be asked to describe a place, and the creative ones can be suggested to make a poster.

According to Tomlinson & Imbeau (2010), the adjustments of the instructional design can be made to the four curriculum-related elements, namely, content, process, product, and affect. Content of the curriculum contains the knowledge and skills that are aimed to be achieved by the students after they learn. In this phase, the teacher can make creative learning planning that contains different material according to students' ability and needs, as well as learning activities that would accommodate all students to learn and involve themselves in the learning process in order to achieve the learning goals (Aliakbari & Haghighi, 2014; Ismajli & Imami-Morina, 2018; Subban, 2006; Tomlinson, 2000). Ernest et al. (2011) argue that content in differentiated instruction can be varied, such as varying reading materials, varying content by students' interests, and varying the activities according to the students' learning profiles and readiness, including "skipping" particular student to the next level if these students happen to have passed that particular level. Albiladi & Alshareef (2019) view blended learning as a learning trend that varied learning methods, resulting in enhanced English learning processes, developed language skills, and improved learning environment.



The process is the real key of teaching and learning, where the main concern is how the students make sense of the content (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010). This process is the actual teaching of the content that has been made and planned. This phase is about how the teacher would manage the class, which always considered students' diversity and ability in learning (Baumgartner et al., 2003; Borja et al., 2015; Ortega et al., 2018). Strategies for flexible grouping can be designed to condition the learners to interact and work together to develop new content knowledge. This is where the students' grouping based on their readiness, interests, and learning profile can be very beneficial to facilitate the students' process. The learning activities can be provided in different forms and support to meet the need of each student, using tiered activities to incorporate the same skills (Jin, 2015; Leblebici, 2020; Valiandes, 2015). Different learning media can be used to suit the students' interests: audiovisual media can be used for students whose learning style are audiovisual, while for visual students, graphic organizers, concept maps, or charts can be applied, while the task sheets can also be varied with a different time allotment and support depending on the students' needs (Ernest et al., 2011; Fuad et al., 2016; Malacapay, 2019; Shih, 2010).

Product is the curriculum component that deals with assessing whether the students have mastered the learning content and demonstrate the intended skills (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010). Because the instruction is differentiated, the assessment is also differentiated so the students can demonstrate their knowledge and perform their skills in a way that meets their interests and profiles (Aliakbari & Haghghi, 2014; Ali, 2015; Ortega et al., 2018; Tomlinson, 2000). Assessment can be done by assessing individual or small groups' products that they create, providing encouragement for the individual or group's products, or providing expectations that allow variations in degrees of difficulty by providing rubrics that are developed based on varying skill levels (Ernest et al., 2011; Subekti, 2020).

The last element of the curriculum that can be varied, according to Tomlinson & Imbeau (2010), is affected. It deals with the "emotions and feelings" from their past experiences and current experiences and how they affect the



students' way in perceiving the learning process and their positions as learners. Positive attitude toward the learning content and themselves as learners can boost the students' learning and academic growth (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010). If the students believe that they need the learning content to prepare for their future careers, they can be motivated to learn. Likewise, students can be demotivated when the learning content reminds them of the bad experience. Recognizing the students' past experiences and their expectations of the future can help the teacher in differentiating the instruction to accommodate the students' feelings and visions. Students may be motivated to learn English because they want to travel to English-speaking countries. Choosing teaching material that is related to these countries may improve their motivation. Activities like asking for directions and other ordinary daily conversations in English-speaking countries will make the students build a positive perception of the learning process.

Other than the four curriculum elements, differentiation can also be facilitated by modifying the learning environment (Tomlinson, 2001; Vargas-Parra, 2018). It is a factor that the teacher can modify to assist students better. Tomlinson (2001) states that the learning environment is essential in promoting students' achievement. Differentiated classroom environment makes students feel engaged, and it encourages students to realize their potentials and advance to the following levels of their language proficiency improve their language abilities, while at the same time inspiring other students in the class to develop and be guided by the improvement and achievement attained by their more advanced classmates (Vargas-Parra, 2018). According to Ernest et al. (2011), variation of learning environment can also be done by differentiating the students' physical environment where they complete their assignments in their preferred conditions. These variations of learning environment can be in different places to do the assignments, where some students prefer quiet corner, while other students may study better when there is music in the background. Some other students even study better in cafés where the ambiance is relaxed, with meal and coffee



available. Likewise, students may also study better when they are in the physical presence of their friends, for whom group activities are the best.

The Strengths of Differentiated Instruction

Previous studies had professed various benefits of implementing differentiated instructions in EFL teaching and learning. It includes benefits for a mixed classroom regarding their general learning outcome, increased engagement and motivation on the part of the students, flexible instruction, improved students' self-awareness, responsibility, and cooperative and collaborative skills. For teachers, differentiated learning can also facilitate the reflexive process and fair assessment. and

First, different instruction is beneficial for facilitating all students with different abilities among high, moderate, and low ability students. It would involve students' active learning wherein all students are given different instruction based on their level and each student is taught to their learning style (Ortega et al., 2018; Stanford & Reeves, 2009; Tomlinson, 1999; Tomlinson, 2000; Tomlinson, 2014). Differentiated instruction offers the appropriate level of challenge based on student's readiness, with the possibility to vary themes and activities to meet the students' interest and learning profiles (Magableh & Abdullah, 2020). For example, in EFL class, students with high speaking proficiency can be given a more complicated topic to present, suitable for their interest. However, those who still struggle to express their ideas can be assigned to talk about something familiar in their daily life.

Second, this strategy would improve the general learning outcomes of the class because all students are motivated along the learning process. There will be no students left behind, and every student is learning (Hung, 2015). Students are taught with their style, preference, and ability to understand the material given because differentiated instruction proposes that each student will learn the same learning objectives and stay on the same page of learning, even when treated with different approaches (Naka, 2017). Ismail & Al Allaq (2019) argue that



differentiated instruction has been deemed to significantly improve classroom management, creating a class that motivates learners in a setting where students and teachers constantly interact to determine what is best for the students. There will always be alternative teaching strategies in differentiated instruction to best fit a given student (Magableh & Abdullah, 2020). In the EFL context, different learning preferences can be a challenge in developing specific language skills. For example, introverted students are hard to speak with. When the speaking skill becomes the learning objective, different strategies should be employed to prompt the student to speak. If speaking in front of the class discourages this kind of student, the teacher can let this student answer from his seat, or the teacher can come to the student to not feel the pressure to speak up.

Third, it would increase student-teacher engagement because the teacher comes as a facilitator who will guide, help, and facilitate his/her students and pays attention to what the students need along the process (Hung, 2015; Vargas-Parra, 2018). Engagement can be promoted when the students feel that they are accepted as they are. The teacher's role is changed from being the sources of knowledge to become a facilitator of learning place the students as the center of the instruction (Corley, 2005). Such treatment will make the students feel equally respected despite their different characteristics (Tomlinson, 2014). In the case of EFL, when the teacher differentiates the instructions or types of assignment based on the students' preference, the students would feel that the teacher pay attention to them, that they are respected, and this will motivate them to be more engaged in doing the assignments of the learning activities. If a student likes to tinker with visual editing, assignment in the forms recorded presentation or creative poster would engage them better than live impromptu presentation in the class.

Fourth, differentiated instructions would increase self-awareness and take on more learning responsibility for an individual because they are pushed to take responsibility for them to succeed in learning, understand the learning process deeper and learn flexibly (Tomlinson, 1999; Tomlinson, 2014). It is referred to as student-centered learning, where students can build their sense of autonomy



because they can choose what they want to learn and how they want to learn it. When students have the liberty to choose the level of the learning material and how they will learn about it, they will feel comfortable in their learning process. It is an excellent strategy to empower the students by establishing their learning ownership (Hung, 2015; Vargas-Parra, 2018). English assignments, for example, can be given in many options from which students can answer. A reading assignment can be varied between fantasy, science fiction, fairy tales, detective stories, or historical genres, and students can choose their reading subjects based on the genre they like.

Fifth, it eliminates teaching routines that make the students bored with the lesson because the teacher will design the creative learning plan to accommodate all students. Accordingly, teachers will be more creative in designing their classes to become comfortable learning environments. Besides, it would provide opportunities for communicative purposes in the English language, fostering students' language use, not just the theory of its usage. Furthermore, differentiated instruction can lead to more realistic and practical learning outcomes because it repudiates the traditional *one-size-fits-all* learning approach (Alavinia & Viyani, 2018). Instructions that rely on textbooks and are directed by the teacher in a single activity will bore an English class. Suppose regular communications between the teacher and the students are maintained to gain information about what types of activities would be interesting. In that case, learning activities are adapted to the student's interest and learning styles and create different variations of similar activities for each chapter. For example, writing can be switched from writing a letter to writing an email or direct messages through social media, which will meet the context of 21st-century learning.

Sixth, differentiated instruction promotes cooperation and collaboration skills (Hung, 2015; Vargas-Parra, 2018). Vargas-Parra (2018) argues that students will be more comfortable working in groups where members of their group have the same level of readiness. They will have less anxiety in performing their tasks because they do not feel nervous as they believe they may all make the same



mistakes. It is argued that this kind of learning boost the students' confidence and collaborative skills (Hung, 2015; Vargas-Parra, 2018). As collaboration becomes one of the primary 21st-century skills, more English assignments can be directed as group assignments where students can choose their team and decide on the project that the team is interested in, within the scope of the learning content of the instruction. Students who share an interest in environmental issues can work together to make a piece of writing or a documentary highlighting environmental issues around their lives, such as waste management, air pollution, or awareness of certain infectious diseases. Such a project will promote collaboration while involving complex language skills such as reading for sources, brainstorming ideas, conceptualizing arguments, writing down a report, and presenting it in a medium that they prefer.

Seventh, the differentiated instruction model promotes teachers to be reflective. To meet the students' profiles, the teacher needs to do continuous reflections to redesigns the instructions as the class progress and more challenges are identified (Vargas-Parra, 2018). Such reflective process can benefit English teacher in terms of their creativity in reinventing their teaching strategies. Teachers will find students' differences as a challenge that can be turned into opportunities instead of considering them a threat to classroom management. A teacher who keeps trying what is best for a particular student will keep learning in a never-ending process that will enrich their teaching experience.

Eighth, differentiated learning will promote more fair assessment to avoid negative perceptions of the students' learning process and outcomes. Differentiated classroom, the assessment is also differentiated to meet the students' learning process, believing that assessment is conducted to inform instruction (Tomlinson & Moon, 2013). With this belief, the teacher will use assessment results to improve the instruction to learn better. While the teacher can carefully ensure that the assessment can measure the students' different levels of achievement without making either the top-level students or the low-achieving students feel demotivated (Hung, 015). An English test can have variations of difficulty that



will allow even the best students to feel challenged but still make it possible for the students with lower achievement. For example, for the same reading comprehension test, less than average students can be given more literal questions with simple demands to recognize the information from the reading texts. However, more brilliant students can be given additional tasks to explain why they think the specific answer can be right or wrong about the reading text.

Lastly, differentiated instruction offers flexibility in learning (Siddiqui & Alghamdi, 2017). The curriculum and teaching-learning process is designed to achieve the goal without stressing each student's same process (Khan, 2017; Tomlinson, 1999). Therefore, it would be flexible for every student to understand the material with their learning style. Such flexibility can come in different degrees, depending on the students' variations within the same classroom. When an EFL class has some students who already achieve a high fluency, while most of the students still struggle with vocabularies and grammar in use, the class can be made more flexible with several alternatives. The fluent students can be given different learning activities that will advance their learning while the teacher engages the rest of the classroom in the necessary vocabulary building and conversation prompts. For example, in more student-centered learning at the college level, the fluent students can be placed as peer tutors to help other students learn grammar when these students.

The Weakness of Differentiated Learning

Apart from the strengths in implementing differentiated instructions into the EFL classroom, there are several considerations that teachers need to take into account when implementing differentiated instruction. They include school readiness, teachers' readiness, time constraints, increased workload for the teacher, more complex classroom management, and concerns with parents' perception.

First, it needs to consider the school's readiness to support implementing this learning philosophy (Ismajli & Imami-Morina, 2018). For a differentiated instruction to occur appropriately, both the school and the teachers need to be



strongly committed to its principles and implementation (Magableh & Abdullah, 2020). The school needs to be fully committed so that the school administration is supportive of the teachers' needs when they implement differentiated instruction in their class. It needs to accommodate workshops or any training for the teacher before conducting differentiated instructions in his/her classroom to give depth-understanding about the concept of differentiated instructions for the teachers.

Closely related to the first challenge, the second one focuses on the teacher's commitment to implementing differentiated learning. This teaching philosophy demands the teacher to constantly adapt their instructions to meet the students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. This strategy can be challenging for teachers who have the habit of using one strategy for all students (Alavinia, 2012; Khan, 2017; Naka, 2017; Santamaria, 2009; Suprayogi & Valcke, 2016). Such teachers need to change their teaching philosophy to make them more open-minded about the differences in their classroom. And when they are aware about these differences, they need to be fully committed to the constant adaptations in their instructions in order to facilitate all students in spite of their differences. They need to constantly assess their students and reinvent their instructions in order to ensure all students have equal opportunities of mastering the learning content despite their differences. Thus, a committed English teacher should have abundant teaching strategies to cope with the students' differences.

Time constrain is one of the most significant challenges in differentiated instruction (Aftab, 2016; Joseph et al., 2013; Roiha, 2014; Siddiqui & Alghamdi, 2017). The more varied the classroom is, the more preparation it takes before the instruction. Pre-assessment needs to be conducted to determine the students' different readiness, interest, and learning profiles. Following the result, the teacher needs to design the instruction to meet these differences (Aftab, 2016; Joseph et al., 2013; Siddiqui & Alghamdi, 2017). During the instruction, the teacher should also try different strategies to teach students with different readiness, interest, and learning profiles. Assessment of the students' learning outcomes should also facilitate these differences (Corley, 2005). These all will take time, and traditional



learning context often limits the time allocation for each class and the achievement of particular learning objectives. Thus, frequently, the teacher needs to spend extra time outside the classroom to facilitate these differences.

As the consequence of the third challenge above, the time constraint will influence teachers' workload, both before, during, and after the learning process, which is getting tough (Vargas-Parra, 2018). Suprayogi & Valcke (2016) mentioned this challenge would become more significant the more varied the class is. An EFL class with diverse cultural backgrounds would pose more workload for the teacher to meet the students' interests. An EFL class with students of a wide range of readiness will require the teacher to design more varied strategies and scaffoldings with varied assessments — the more varied the readiness range of the students, the more workload the teacher would have. Consequently, more differences in each aspect of the student's readiness, interests, and learning profiles will add to the teacher workload. Many teachers admitted that they feel frustrated when attempting to deal with learner variety. Thus some of them return to the *one-size-fits-all* approach to teaching (Suprayogi & Valcke, 2016).

Another challenge is also posed by big classroom in terms of its classroom management. This strategy is about group control and physical classroom management, which need to be concerned (Moreno & Moreno, 2015; Roiha, 2014; Tomlinson, 2014). Differentiated instructions commonly group the students or pair them in demonstrating a topic. It will be hard to control the group in a big class that involves more than 30 students in a class. Although Hung (2015) clarifies that students in a Differentiated Instruction classroom engage in various forms of group activities, a teacher needs to pay attention to each group and each activity, and this could be very challenging for teachers with big class especially when the big class has excellent variations among their students' profiles. To make the point clear, an EFL class can give the students a project of their interest and report the project in the media that they prefer. Hence, the class will have a group of students write a report; another group presents an oral presentation; another group decides to write a poster while another group wants to write a blog about it. Each group



will face different problems with their chosen media, and they will ask different technical problems. In a differentiated classroom, the teacher needs to pay attention to each group equally.

Another challenge identified by previous studies in implementing differentiated instruction is parents' perception about the instruction itself (Ismajli & Imami-Morina, 2018; Santamaria, 2009). In differentiated instruction class, students will have different learning process that is adjusted to their learning characteristics. Some parents may not understand why all students are not doing same instruction in learning. Teachers need to build a good communication with the parents about what their children do and why a specific child may do different things from what other children do. Thus, teachers need to make a collaboration with parents with this new instruction in order to maintain students' motivation in learning (Ismajli & Imami-Morina, 2018; Santamaria, 2009).

CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to elaborate the definition of differentiated instruction, the principles of its implementation, and its strength and weakness in the context of English as a Foreign Language. It can be argued that differentiated instruction is an instruction designed with the belief that students are unique, and teachers should accommodate these differences so that they all have the same opportunities to achieve the learning goals intended by the instruction. With such beliefs, the implementation of differentiated instruction should be started with a pre-assessment of the student's readiness, interest, and learning profiles, which allows the teacher to modify their curriculum in terms of the learning content, the learning process, and the learning product, as well as the intention of how the instruction should affect the students. These modifications aim to accommodate the students' differences so that by the end of the instruction, they all master the intended competencies assigned by the curriculum.

The principles of differentiated learning have been argued to offer EFL classrooms several benefits, especially for mixed-ability classrooms, improved



general learning outcome, increased engagement, and motivation, flexibility, raised self-awareness and responsibility, and building cooperation and collaboration among the students. For the teachers, differentiated learning offers endless opportunities for the reflexive process while opening prospects for fair assessments. However, these benefits do not come without drawbacks. Differentiate instruction needs commitment from the school management as well as the teachers. This instruction model is time-consuming and increases the teacher's workload: a workload that depends on the students' possible differences. The more varied the students' readiness, background, and learning profiles, the more workload the teachers will have with different complexity of classroom management for each class. To add this complication, the school and the teachers may have questions from the parents concerning their children's different treatment from the teachers in their classroom.

However, despite the challenges, differentiated instruction does offer benefits that can shape the students' learning experience and their future attitude toward their learning process and what they can achieve in the future. Thus, when the teachers are committed to the principles of differentiated instruction, a lot of opportunities could be attained from the learning process. It also includes calls for endless classroom action research where the teachers keep trying different strategies, method, and media for improving the students' general outcome.

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