

ABSTRACT

The diversity of students' English proficiency, abilities, and learning styles presents a significant challenge for teachers in implementing effective instruction. In response to this diversity, Differentiated Instruction (DI) offers a pedagogical approach that accommodates students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. With the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum as Indonesia's national framework in 2024, teachers are expected to adopt more flexible and student-centered strategies. This study explored how an English teacher implemented Differentiated Instruction and the challenges faced during its application in the Merdeka Curriculum context. Employing a qualitative case study design, the research involved one English teacher from a private junior high school, using classroom observations, interviews, and document analysis as the main instruments. The findings show that the teacher applied several differentiation strategies in three main stages: Entering Behavior, During Classroom, and Evaluation. In the Entering Behavior stage, the teacher conducted pre-assessments to identify students' initial reading and speaking abilities, which were then used to adjust materials and activities. During classroom activities, the teacher implemented content and process differentiation through various materials, flexible grouping, scaffolding, and modified tasks. However, product differentiation remained limited. In the evaluation stage, formative assessments and feedback were used to guide lesson adjustments. Overall, the study concludes that the teacher has begun to apply DI principles, showing flexibility and effort to address students' needs, though the implementation remains inconsistent and requires improvement in planning and documentation to ensure a more structured and sustainable practice.

Keywords: Differentiated Instruction, EFL teacher, Merdeka Curriculum, teaching strategies, classroom challenges

