

## **Students' Perception Towards Differentiated Instruction in English Reading Class**

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### **Abstract**

Differentiated instruction has emerged as a vital approach to meet the diverse needs of learners, particularly in inclusive classrooms. The objectives of this study are: (1) to explore how students perceive differentiated instruction in English reading class. (2) to investigate how students' perceptions of differentiated instruction influence their comprehension in English reading. The data of this case study are collected through observation, questionnaire, and interview. The sources of this data are: (1) research participants that consist of the students of Network Engineering class of Vocational School in Central Java; (2) events, that is, the reading activities in English classroom. The techniques used to analyze the data cover data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. The findings reveal that students generally have a positive perception of differentiated instruction, appreciating its inclusivity, flexibility, and the opportunity to engage with learning materials tailored to their interests and needs. Students reported increased motivation and better comprehension, particularly in identifying main ideas, understanding explicit content, and inferring meaning from context. However, some learners faced challenges with complex texts and unfamiliar vocabulary, highlighting the need for appropriate scaffolding. The study concludes that while differentiated instruction fosters improved engagement and comprehension, careful implementation is crucial to balance challenge and support. These insights underscore the importance of student-centered approaches in enhancing English reading instruction in Indonesian classrooms.

**Keywords:** Case study, differentiated instruction, reading comprehension, English language teaching and learning.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Differentiated instruction has become a fundamental approach in contemporary

education, highlighting the improvement of learner engagement and motivation. According to Tomlinson (2001, 2003), differentiated instruction is a method of tailoring the material, procedure, and final output to fit the readiness, interests, and learning profiles of the students. The customised approach has demonstrated a tangible enhancement in students' engagement and performance in disciplines such as reading. Small-Jacobse et al. (2019) assert that differentiated education acknowledges student diversity and effectively supports various learners, especially in language acquisition contexts. Their research indicates that while differentiated strategies positively influence engagement and learning outcomes, the effectiveness of these strategies can vary based on the quality of implementation.

In the context of student perceptions, Yin et al. (2024) examine the gradual adoption of differentiated instruction in Indonesian classrooms, revealing that challenges such as large class sizes and limited teacher training can hinder student engagement and reading performance. This underscores the necessity for effective implementation and adequate support for educators. Similarly, Smit and Humpert (2012) explore the perceptions of both teachers and students regarding differentiated instruction in inclusive settings, finding that while there is recognition of its potential benefits, practical barriers often limit its effectiveness, especially in resource-constrained environments.

Despite the benefits of differentiated instruction, its implementation in Indonesian classrooms faces significant challenges. Many teachers struggle with large class sizes, limited training, and insufficient resources, which hinder their ability to personalize lessons effectively. As noted by Sofiana et al. (2024), the incremental implementation of differentiated instruction in Indonesia has resulted in students' disengagement, thus influencing reading performance as well as motivation. Research indicates that when well-implemented, differentiated instruction can lead to improved student performance and engagement. Tomlinson (2001) suggests that this approach can enhance motivation and provide avenues for addressing diverse learning styles. However, there remains a gap in understanding how students perceive differentiated instruction and how these perceptions influence their engagement and comprehension in English reading classes.

In conclusion, more study is required to find out how students themselves view differentiated instruction in the context of Indonesian classrooms, even if it has enormous potential to raise student engagement and accomplishment. By providing insightful information on how varied instruction may be modified to accommodate the requirements of various learners, this study seeks to close that gap. In addition, this study sought to answer and investigate these following questions:

1. How do students perceive differentiated instruction in English reading class?
2. In what ways do students' perceptions of differentiated instruction influence their English reading comprehension?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Perception**

Perception is a multifaceted concept that varies according to different experts. According to Michael (1999), it is a conglomeration of thoughts and feelings that emerge during a process. This definition is broadened by Searle, who is quoted in Blake and Sekuler (2006), who claims that perception encompasses both conscious and unconscious emotions toward visual or auditory stimuli. The Oxford Dictionary (2007) defines perception as the act of noticing things through the senses, which include sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. Perception is basically the mechanism by which humans interpret sensory data and frequently respond automatically to environmental cues. Robbins (1997) explains that perception involves organizing and interpreting sensory experiences to derive meaning. This process can be broken down into three key components: absorption, understanding, and evaluation. Absorption refers to the initial reception of sensory information, while understanding involves interpreting and assigning meaning to that information. Evaluation is the final stage, where individuals assess the significance of the information based on personal beliefs and goals.

Perception indicators are divided into two categories by Robbins (2003): evaluations and acceptance. Acceptance pertains to how sensory information is received, while evaluation involves subjective assessments of that information. Hamka (2002) and Walgito (1990) further elaborate on these constructs, emphasizing the importance of understanding and evaluating sensory stimuli. By combining different viewpoints, the researcher intends to investigate how student accept, understand, and evaluate while offering a thorough framework for examining the cognitive and physiological components of perception.

### **Differentiated Instruction**

Differentiated instruction, as defined by Tomlinson (1999), is a student-focused teaching approach that differentiates instruction methods of instruction based on students' individual learning profiles, interests, and readiness. It is particularly crucial in reading and comprehension instruction.

Differentiated instruction is known to be advantageous, but it is still difficult to implement. Grander (1995) asserts that it might be challenging to adapt training to different learning styles, particularly for teachers used to traditional lecture schedules. According to Gibson & Hasbrouck (2008) and Marzano & Pickering (2003), classroom management is a significant difficulty that calls for collaborative learning and flexible grouping.

According to Smale-Jacobse et al. (2019), differentiated instruction involves adjusting content, processes, and products to meet various learning needs. This approach promotes inclusivity and flexibility, allowing for individualized learning experiences. Subban (2006) emphasizes the need to rethink classroom structure and management to accommodate diverse learning profiles, while Desinguraj & Ebenezer (2021) and Ouyang & Ye (2023) stress the importance of tailoring educational objectives

to meet individual student needs.

### **Reading Comprehesion**

Reading is a dynamic and engaging process where readers take an active role in interpreting and understanding information presented in a text. The process demands readers to reproduce the words mentally and orally in order to attempt to understand the content. Literacy scholars recognize reading as a sophisticated process encompassing comprehension, interpretation, and learning of information. According to Pretorius (2008) reading is about decoding the author's intended thoughts and meaning from printed text. The decoding is an essential process if the message is to be received. Reading involves receiving and interpreting information, highlighting the reader's cognitive abilities.

Another key indicator is vocabulary knowledge, which enables readers to understand words in context and infer the meaning of unfamiliar terms using context clues (Grabbe, 1991). Vocabulary breadth and depth are closely linked to comprehension success. In addition, Brown (2004) points to rhetorical forms, communicative functions, generalization, exemplification, scanning and skimming, discourse markers, and the activation of prior knowledge-schemata regarding the comprehension of a text.

Furthermore, Nuttall (2011) defines reading recognition as the process of knowing, identifying, and acknowledging a text. Alyousef (2005) views reading as an "interactive" process between a reader and a text, which leads to the automaticity of reading fluency. In this dynamic interaction, the reader engages with the text to elicit meaning, employing various types of knowledge, including linguistic or systemic knowledge (through bottom-up processing) and schematic knowledge (through top-down processing). These indicators are chosen based on their significance in evaluating students' ability to understand texts effectively and their relevance in assessing differentiated instructional approaches in reading classes.

### **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study examines the ways in which students read and understand texts within environments that are catered to support different learning needs. Utilizing a qualitative case study research approach, the present study investigates the impact of differentiated instruction on students' reading competence (Yin, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Case studies are particularly appropriate for studying the "how" and "why" of phenomena, especially when the boundary between a phenomenon and its context is not clearly demarcated.

The researcher collected data through classroom observations, questionnaires, and interviews. Observations were conducted over three sessions during face-to-face reading classes. This approach allowed the researcher to record information and study the actual behaviors of students and teachers in a natural learning environment, with a particular focus on the implementation of differentiated instruction and its relationship

to students' reading comprehension. Afterward, a questionnaire consisting of 30 items on the 5-Likert scale, consisting Strongly Agree (SS), Agree (S), Neutral (N), Disagree (TS), and Strongly Disagree (STS) was given to 20 students. The questionnaire was designed based on two main variables: reading comprehension of students and differentiated instruction.

Reading comprehension was assessed through indicators of determining the main idea, explicit information, implicit information, references, and contextual meaning. While the features of differentiated instruction were inclusivity, flexibility, and student engagement. The sections merged these indicators to find out how particular instructional approaches affected different facets of reading comprehension.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. How do students perceive differentiated instruction in English reading class

*Table 1 Students' Perception on Differentiated Instruction in English reading class*

| Perception                                          | Indicators    | Descriptor                                                         | Result      |
|-----------------------------------------------------|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Perception of Differentiated Instruction            | Understanding | Students' knowledge of Differentiated Instruction                  | 3.7         |
|                                                     |               | Students' feeling                                                  | 3.75        |
|                                                     | Evaluation    | Students' experience                                               | 3.9         |
| Differentiated Instruction at English Reading Class | Understanding | Students' knowledge of Differentiated Instruction in English class | 3.6         |
|                                                     | Evaluation    | Students' experience                                               | 3.8         |
| <b>Mean</b>                                         |               |                                                                    | <b>3.75</b> |

To address the first research question, the researcher employed questionnaires and interviews consisting of 20 items designed to explore students' perceptions of differentiated instruction and its implementation in English reading classes. Each item was constructed based on Walgito's (1990) perception indicators: acceptance, understanding, and evaluation. Quantitative data from questionnaires were complemented by qualitative results from interviews. The findings showed that the students' attitudes towards differentiated instruction were very positive, as shown by all the mean scores of indicators, which exceeded 3.75 based on a 5-point Likert scale.

Learners, as the informants in this research, admitted that they have positive perception towards differentiated instruction in English reading class. This is supported by the interview conducted by the researcher, where the informants stated:

*"Sorry, I'm not really sure. What is differentiated instruction?"*

*"Well, teacher usually delivers the lessons using different types of media. Sometimes she uses PowerPoint, sometimes pictures, and*

*sometimes videos from YouTube."*

Source: Informant DW

*"I really enjoy learning with differentiated instruction because it makes me feel involved and that my needs are being considered. The teacher doesn't deliver the material in a monotonous way."*

Source: Informant AM

*"The teacher always allows us to choose the texts we want to work on, as long as they match the type of text being studied. I really like sci-fi stories, and the teacher let me choose one for the narrative text assignment. I enjoyed working on the task because I already liked the text I had selected."*

Source: Informant AR

On the other hand, the other learner express concerns about the difficulty of the texts introduced by the teacher. These students find the reading assignments too challenging, leading to feelings of stagnation and disengagement. When materials exceed their capabilities, they often lose interest and motivation to participate actively in learning.

*"Actually, I like having the freedom to choose the text for the project, but I still struggle a lot to understand the content because it's in English. So, when I'm asked to read it aloud in front of the class, I still get a bit nervous, afraid I might forget how to pronounce some words. Especially since the text is a narrative because it's quite long."*

Source: Informant SY

Based on the interview above, the study found that students scored 3.7 on the "understanding" indicator of differentiated instruction, indicating a solid grasp of the concept as it relates to their English reading lessons. Students recognized the concept of differentiated instruction when described in other terms, such as the use of varied learning media or the ability to choose their own reading texts. For example, one participant noted that they appreciated the diverse media used in class, like PowerPoint and YouTube videos. Another participant mentioned having the freedom to select their own reading materials, such as a folktale during a lesson on Narrative Text. Students demonstrated familiarity with differentiated instruction strategies and a positive perception of their application in the classroom, indicating they met the "understanding" indicator.

Students reported that this level of flexibility allowed them to show their understanding in ways that were both comfortable and innovative, leading to higher levels of comprehension and richer learning outcomes. However, there were also some students who reported problems with very linguistically demanding material, particularly in longer texts for reading. This suggests that while differentiation is inclusive and motivational, it needs to be well-tuned so that material is not made too easy and loses the level of challenge it needs. Striking the balance of support with appropriate difficulty is critical in maintaining student motivation and guaranteeing consistent improvement academically.

The findings of this research indicate that learners have a positive perception of differentiated instruction in their English reading classes, as they appreciate the use of varied media and the opportunity to choose texts that align with their interests. Informants expressed that this approach makes them feel involved and that their individual needs are considered, which is consistent with previous studies highlighting the benefits of differentiated instruction in fostering student engagement and motivation (Tomlinson, 2001; Gentry & Owen, 2004).

## **2. How students' perceptions of differentiated instruction influence their comprehension in English reading.**

The researcher investigated the practice of differentiated instruction in English reading class and found it to be well-practiced and students are more motivated and involved in the reading process when the content feels familiar and relevant. The students stated that:

*"I find it easier to grasp the main idea of the story when the teacher presents the material using videos or images. Sometimes, when I only read the text, I get confused about what the main idea is. But when there's a visual explanation, it helps me picture the content of the story more clearly. It also makes learning less boring"*

Source: Informant AR

*"Yes, I feel more motivated to read when the text given matches my interests. At that time, I was free to choose the text, and I chose the sci-fi genre because I really like that kind of topic. It made me more eager to read it until the end and better understand the main idea, especially since the language wasn't too difficult either."*

Source: Informant AM

*"I feel that it really helps, especially when the material matches my interests. Since the words used are familiar, it becomes easier for me to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words by understanding the context."*

Source: Informant AR

*"I think the use of varied learning materials by the teacher is quite helpful, especially when the content is delivered in different ways, such as through videos, images, or interesting text examples. When the text doesn't state the meaning directly and contains many difficult or figurative words, I often get confused. But if the teacher provides learning materials that help explain the hidden meaning of the text, it becomes easier for me to understand and draw conclusions from it."*

Source: Informant AM

*"Honestly, I still find it quite difficult, especially when the word being referred to is far away in the text. Sometimes I have to read back and forth to make sure what the pronoun is referring to. It gets even harder when the sentence is long and uses pronouns like 'it' or 'they,' but the subject is unclear or there are multiple possible referents."*

Source: Informant SY

The students are more motivated and interested in the process of reading when the material is familiar and related to their experiences. The majority of the students provided a positive response towards learning through the method of differentiated instruction, particularly in the process of identifying the main idea. In their views, since it was simpler to identify the main idea when the subject of the reading is related to their own interests, they felt more focused and interested. However, some students consented that some of the readings were challenging, seeing this as an opportunity to become better at reading. They employed strategies such as reading the start and end sentence in a paragraph to identify the main idea and relied on teacher guidance to demystify their understanding. This indicates that, despite the challenge, the students were able to respond positively by embracing appropriate reading strategies. The interviews also showed that students read texts with clear and explicit details well, demonstrating the capability to interpret explicit information.

In addition, students found implicit information that needed to be interpreted in a deeper sense is very challenging. While some students appreciated the diverse study materials that facilitated their ability to derive implicit meanings, others experienced difficulties due to a lack of sufficient context or guidance. This observation underscores the critical importance of differentiated instruction in reading activities, as it is essential to provide varying levels of text difficulty and appropriate scaffolding strategies to support learners at all proficiency levels in developing the skill of processing inferred meanings. Furthermore, students' capacity to comprehend references, including demonstratives and pronouns, plays a vital role in enhancing reading comprehension. In conclusion, the ability to derive word meanings from context was found to be important, where students were able to make sense without resorting to a dictionary when learning materials were interest-related. This shows how differentiated instruction can trigger higher-order thinking and produce more independent reading for students.

The findings supports what Saleh (2021) point out that differentiated instruction fosters a more engaging and compassionate learning context. Moreover, allowing students to choose reading texts based on their own interests increased their motivation and comprehension, which supports Andini (2022) result that student choice increases reading engagement. A few students also expressed issues regarding the level of difficulty of some texts employed in teaching. The language barrier, especially in longer narrative texts, had the tendency to render it difficult for them to understand the content completely, thus decreasing their confidence and engagement. This resonates with the call for a balance between challenge and support in differentiated instruction. As Subban (2006) points out, while differentiation promotes inclusivity and participation, it is important that materials selected remain challenging but not to the point of overwhelming learners. Overall, the findings suggest that students are generally familiar with differentiated instruction strategies and are open to their utilization. To support long-term motivation and academic growth, though, teachers must take careful consideration of the linguistic demands and readability of texts in implementing differentiated instruction in the classroom.

## CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore how students react to the implementation of differentiated instruction in English reading classes and how their perceptions of this approach affect their reading comprehension skills. Based on data gathered from questionnaires and in-depth interviews, several significant conclusions were drawn.

Students generally expressed positive views regarding differentiated instruction. They acknowledged the freedom provided by teachers in selecting reading materials, varying assignment types, and utilizing diverse media such as videos, PowerPoint presentations, and visual aids. Although most students were not familiar with the term "differentiated instruction," they demonstrated a clear understanding of the practice through their classroom experiences, indicating that the principles of differentiation were effectively integrated and well-received.

The students demonstrated positive reactions as for reading comprehension in most areas. With differentiated instruction, they were able to comprehend better main ideas, identify explicit information, and make implicit meanings, such as making partial inferences from the texts. In addition, students indicated they were able to identify references in the text more easily using context, particularly because they had selected readings that were accessible and meaningful to them.

While most of the students were supported, a few still struggled, particularly when faced with more complex texts or unfamiliar vocabulary. This shows that while differentiated instruction is flexible and inclusive in character, teachers are still required to look at every student painstakingly for readiness and then properly scaffold so as to support their learning.

In summary, the findings of this study indicate that the implementation of differentiated instruction has a significant and beneficial impact on students' learning experiences in reading English texts. In addition to enhancing their cognitive skills in reading comprehension, it also fosters affective factors such as motivation, comfort, and self-confidence. Therefore, differentiated instruction may serve as a powerful and relevant strategy to address the challenges posed by classroom diversity in English education in Indonesia.

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