

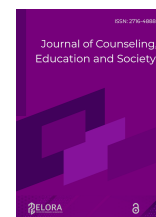


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Examining differentiated instruction dimensions in pre-service teachers' english lesson plans: a content analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study examined how differentiated instruction is represented in English lesson plans developed by pre-service teachers in an Indonesian English Language Education program. A qualitative document analysis design was employed using 20 secondary-school EFL lesson plans selected through purposive sampling based on predetermined criteria. The documents were analyzed through deductive qualitative content analysis using six dimensions of differentiated instruction: content, process, product, readiness, interest, and learning profile. Coding was conducted by the researcher using predefined indicators and repeated consistency checks. The findings showed that process differentiation was the most prominently represented dimension, particularly through flexible grouping, collaborative learning, scaffolding, differentiated guidance, and readiness-based support. Content and readiness differentiation were also strongly reflected through contextual materials and diagnostic assessment, whereas product and learning-profile differentiation were less consistently represented. The lesson plans also reflected pedagogical orientations associated with Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL), Problem-Based Learning (PBL), Social Emotional Learning (SEL), and Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT). These findings indicate that pre-service teachers were more prepared to differentiate instructional processes and readiness-based support than to design varied learning products and individualized learning-profile adaptations. The study contributes to EFL teacher education by identifying strengths and gaps in differentiated instructional planning and highlighting areas requiring further pedagogical support.



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Introduction

Differentiated instruction has become one of the most widely discussed approaches in contemporary education due to its emphasis on addressing students' diverse learning needs, readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, this approach is particularly important because students typically exhibit heterogeneous linguistic abilities, sociocultural backgrounds, and learning characteristics. Within this context, differentiated instruction enables teachers to adjust content, process, product, and learning environments to ensure equitable and meaningful learning experiences. As emphasized by (Carol A. Tomlinson, 2014), differentiated instruction is grounded in proactive planning that intentionally accommodates learner diversity through flexible instructional strategies and varied learning activities. Recent

studies further confirm that differentiated instruction plays a crucial role in improving engagement, achievement, and participation in EFL contexts (Sapan & Mede, 2022); (Sapkota 2025).

The need for differentiated instruction is further strengthened by ongoing educational reforms that prioritize student-centered learning, inclusive education, and competency-based curricula. In Indonesia, the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka encourages adaptive learning designs that respond to students' individual readiness levels. This curriculum also integrates pedagogical approaches such as Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL), Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), Social Emotional Learning (SEL), and Problem-Based Learning (PBL), which collectively require teachers to design flexible and contextual learning environments. Studies in teacher education contexts highlight that successful implementation of differentiated instruction requires not only pedagogical knowledge but also teacher adaptability and reflective practice (Devi et al., 2024; (Tomlinson et al., 2003)

However, despite policy expectations, many teachers and pre-service teachers still face difficulties in translating differentiated instruction into systematic instructional planning. Empirical evidence from Indonesia illustrates this discrepancy. In a study involving 175 Indonesian pre-service English teachers, nearly 90% of participants reported that limited instructional time hindered the implementation of differentiated instruction, approximately 70% identified classroom space as a constraint, and at least 60% experienced difficulties in finding appropriate differentiated learning materials (Sukarno et al., 2024). Similarly, (Nurbaeti & Setyarini, 2024) found that English teachers' overall perceived competence in implementing differentiated instruction reached 73.75%, while their understanding of differentiated learning theory was lower at 68.81%, with several assessment-related competencies ranging from approximately 65.1% to 68.6%. These findings indicate a measurable gap between the pedagogical expectations of differentiated instruction and teachers' preparedness to operationalize its principles in instructional practice. Research also suggests that teacher preparation programs may provide stronger theoretical exposure than practical support for translating differentiation into classroom-ready lesson plans (Mirawati et al., 2022). However, these findings primarily reflect teachers' perceived competence and implementation constraints, leaving limited evidence regarding how such challenges are manifested in the actual lesson plans designed by pre-service English teachers.

Previous studies have shown that differentiated instruction positively influences students' learning outcomes, engagement, and motivation. For instance, (Pozas et al., 2019) emphasize that collaboration and adaptive instructional strategies significantly enhance differentiated instruction effectiveness in inclusive classrooms . Similarly, (Suprayogi 2016) found that differentiated learning practices in Indonesian classrooms improve student motivation and interaction. (Smale-jacobse et al., 2019) further highlight that differentiated instruction supports inclusive education by accommodating diverse learner abilities. More recent evidence confirms that differentiated instruction improves autonomy, motivation, and language achievement in EFL contexts (Sapan & Mede, 2022) (Tajik et al., 2024).

In EFL contexts, differentiated instruction is commonly implemented through collaborative learning, flexible grouping, scaffolding, contextual materials, and multimodal resources. Among these, process differentiation tends to be more frequently applied than product differentiation because classroom interaction and scaffolding are more manageable in diverse settings. Recent qualitative findings also show that teachers frequently adjust content and learning processes based on student readiness, but less frequently differentiate learning products due to time constraints and assessment complexity (Ningtyas, & Lestari, 2024). Nevertheless, integrating culturally responsive teaching remains crucial, particularly in contexts where English learning is often perceived as detached from students' sociocultural realities (Gay & Helsel, 2020), (Hammond, 2021).

Despite these advantages, several challenges persist in implementation. Teachers often face difficulties in systematically designing differentiated lesson plans, especially in aligning content, process, and product differentiation (Tomlinson, C. A., & Moon, 2014; Rini et al., 2023). Studies in EFL contexts consistently report barriers such as time constraints, large class sizes, and limited instructional resources (Aftab, 2015; Ayuningtyas et al., 2023). In many cases, differentiation is limited to grouping strategies and scaffolding, while varied assessment products and individualized pathways remain underdeveloped.

Another gap concerns the integration of differentiated instruction with contemporary pedagogical frameworks such as TaRL, CRT, SEL, and PBL. Although these approaches are promoted in current educational policies, empirical studies examining their simultaneous integration in English lesson planning remain limited. Recent research suggests that teachers tend to implement these approaches separately rather than in an integrated instructional design framework (Fitria, 2026), (Saputra et al., 2025). Additionally, there is a lack of qualitative document-based studies examining how pre-service teachers translate differentiated instruction into instructional design artifacts.

Despite the growing emphasis on differentiated instruction, a clear gap remains between what is expected in instructional planning and what is commonly found in practice. Ideally, teachers should systematically accommodate students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles through differentiated content, process, and product (Evitarini et al., 2025). In practice, however, previous studies indicate that differentiation is often concentrated on more manageable strategies such as flexible grouping, scaffolding, and modification of learning activities, while product, interest, and learning-profile differentiation remain less consistently represented (Smale-Jacobse et al., 2019; Ningtyas & Lestari, 2024). This discrepancy indicates that differentiated instruction has not yet been translated equally across all dimensions of instructional design.

More importantly, much of the existing research has examined differentiated instruction through classroom implementation, teacher perceptions, implementation challenges, or student learning outcomes (Sapan & Mede, 2022; Sapkota, 2025). Comparatively less attention has been given to how pre-service teachers translate these principles into lesson-planning documents before entering actual classroom practice. Moreover, although TaRL, CRT, SEL, and PBL are increasingly promoted within contemporary Indonesian education, limited research has examined how these pedagogical orientations are reflected alongside differentiated instruction in English lesson plans. Therefore, the present study addresses this gap by examining how differentiated instruction is represented in lesson plans developed by Indonesian pre-service teachers, with particular attention to the dimensions that are most and least prominently incorporated.

To address these gaps, this study focuses on analyzing differentiated instruction as reflected in English lesson plans developed by pre-service teachers. Specifically, it examines six dimensions of differentiation: content, process, product, readiness, learning profile, and interest differentiation. It also explores how these dimensions are integrated with TaRL, CRT, SEL, and PBL within culturally contextualized lesson planning. Recent literature highlights that such multidimensional analysis is essential to understand the depth of instructional design practices beyond classroom observation alone (Sapkota 2025), (Saputra et al., 2025).

This study employs qualitative document analysis to examine English lesson plans developed by pre-service teachers (Lestari & Lestari, 2022). The lesson plans serve as the unit of analysis and are systematically analyzed through coding procedures based on six dimensions of differentiated instruction: content, process, product, readiness, interest, and learning profile (Abdillah et al., 2022). The analysis focuses on identifying how differentiated instruction is represented in instructional planning and determining which dimensions are most prominently reflected in the lesson plans. Accordingly, this study seeks to examine how differentiated instruction is represented in English lesson plans developed by pre-service teachers and to identify which dimensions of differentiated instruction are most prominently represented in these lesson plans.

The objective of this study is to investigate the implementation of differentiated instruction in English lesson plans and to identify the dominant dimensions of differentiation used in instructional planning. The hypothesis underlying this study is that process differentiation and readiness-based differentiation are more frequently implemented than product, interest, and learning profile differentiation due to practical classroom constraints (Tomlinson, C. A., & Moon, 2014); (Smale-jacobse et al., 2019).

Key terms used in this study include differentiated instruction, defined as a proactive instructional approach that adapts teaching to learner differences, and lesson plan, defined as a structured document outlining learning objectives, activities, and assessments. The findings of previous studies suggest that differentiated instruction enhances engagement and achievement (Maruf, 2023); however, limited research has examined how these practices are embedded in lesson planning documents. This study therefore contributes to a deeper understanding of instructional design practices in EFL teacher education by analyzing how differentiation is planned rather than only how it is implemented.

The findings of this study are expected to show that process differentiation remains the most dominant strategy in lesson planning, while product and learning profile differentiation are less frequently applied due to complexity and time constraints (Ningtyas & Lestari, 2024). These findings contribute to the broader field of EFL pedagogy by highlighting the gap between policy expectations and actual instructional planning practices.

In conclusion, although differentiated instruction is widely promoted, its systematic integration into lesson planning remains inconsistent. This study addresses this gap by examining how pre-service teachers design differentiated English lessons and how these designs reflect current pedagogical frameworks. However, this study does not examine classroom implementation or student outcomes, which opens opportunities for future research to investigate how planned differentiation translates into actual teaching practices and learner achievement.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to investigate the implementation of differentiated instruction in English lesson plans developed by pre-service teachers. This design was selected because it enables an in-depth exploration of educational phenomena in their natural context through systematic interpretation of document-based data. In addition, the study used qualitative content analysis as the primary analytical approach, which is appropriate for examining written documents containing both explicit and implicit instructional patterns (Krippendorff, 2018). This approach allowed the researchers to identify how differentiated instruction was operationalized within lesson planning artifacts.

Population and Sampling

The population of this study consisted of English lesson plans designed by pre-service English teachers in a teacher education program. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, selected based on specific inclusion criteria. The selected lesson plans had to: (1) be designed for secondary school EFL instruction, (2) explicitly or implicitly include differentiated instruction strategies, and (3) integrate contemporary pedagogical approaches such as Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL), Problem-Based Learning (PBL), Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), or Social Emotional Learning (SEL).

A total of 20 English lesson plans were selected as the final data corpus based on predetermined inclusion criteria. The selected documents were required to: (1) be designed for secondary school EFL instruction; (2) contain identifiable elements of differentiated instruction, such as flexible grouping, scaffolding, varied learning activities, differentiated materials, or alternative learning products; and (3) incorporate at least one contemporary pedagogical approach, including Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL), Problem-Based Learning (PBL), Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), or Social Emotional Learning (SEL). These lesson plans covered various English instructional topics, including procedure text, recount text, hortatory exposition, and grammar-focused materials such as degrees of comparison. The final corpus was considered appropriate for qualitative content analysis because it provided sufficient variation in instructional topics and pedagogical approaches to examine recurring patterns of differentiated instruction across the documents.

Data Sources and Research Context

The data were collected from pre-service teacher outputs in an English Language Education program at a university in Indonesia. The lesson plans were developed as part of their teaching preparation and microteaching courses. These documents represented authentic instructional planning practices and were used as the primary data source for analysis.

Research Instrument

The main instrument in this study was a coding framework (document analysis checklist) developed based on Carol Ann Tomlinson's theory of differentiated instruction. The framework categorized differentiation into six dimensions Content differentiation, Process differentiation, Product differentiation, Readiness differentiation, Learning profile differentiation and Interest differentiation

In addition, the coding instrument included instructional components such as learning objectives, learning activities, assessment strategies, grouping techniques, teaching media and classroom interaction patterns. Each indicator was operationally defined to ensure consistency in coding. For example, "process differentiation" was identified when lesson plans included varied instructional activities such as tiered tasks, flexible grouping, scaffolding, or differentiated learning routes.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted through document retrieval and systematic screening. The researchers collected lesson plan documents from the relevant course repository with permission from the course instructor. The procedure was conducted as follows (1) Collecting all available lesson plan documents from pre-service teachers; (2) Screening documents based on inclusion criteria; (3) Selecting 20 lesson plans that met the requirements; (4) Organizing documents according to teaching topic and instructional format; (5) Preparing documents for coding and analysis. The data collection and initial screening process was conducted over a structured academic period during the semester in which the lesson plans were produced.

Data Analysis Procedure

The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis with a systematic coding process. A deductive coding approach was employed because the initial coding categories were derived from Tomlinson's framework of differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, C. A., & Moon, 2014). Accordingly, the analysis began with six predefined dimensions: content, process, product, readiness, learning profile, and interest differentiation. These categories served as the analytical framework for identifying and interpreting differentiated instruction elements

within each lesson plan. The analysis was conducted in five stages Familiarization, Initial Coding, Categorization, Theme Development and Cross-Case Analysis.

Familiarization: All lesson plans were read repeatedly to gain a holistic understanding of instructional design patterns. **Initial Coding:** Relevant sections of the lesson plans were identified and coded according to differentiated instruction indicators. **Categorization:** Codes were grouped into predefined categories: content, process, product, readiness, learning profile, and interest differentiation. **Theme Development:** Broader patterns were developed to identify dominant forms of differentiation across lesson plans. **Cross-Case Analysis:** Comparisons were conducted across the 20 lesson plans to identify similarities, differences, and dominant instructional tendencies. No statistical tests were applied because the study used a qualitative descriptive framework. However, frequency counts were used to support interpretation of dominant categories.

Validity and Trustworthiness

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies were applied (1) Triangulation of data interpretation, by repeatedly reviewing the documents and cross-checking coding results; (2) Audit trail, by documenting all coding steps and category decisions; (3) Theoretical triangulation, by interpreting findings using Tomlinson's differentiated instruction framework and supporting EFL literature; (4) The coding process was conducted by the researcher using a predefined coding framework derived from Tomlinson's differentiated instruction framework. Because the study employed a single-coder approach, inter-rater reliability statistics such as Cohen's Kappa were not calculated. To enhance coding consistency, each lesson plan was reviewed repeatedly, coding decisions were checked against the operational definitions of each differentiation dimension, and all coding decisions were documented through an audit trail. Ambiguous excerpts were re-examined before final category assignment to minimize interpretive inconsistency. These strategies ensured that the analysis was consistent, transparent, and theoretically grounded. The overall document selection and analysis procedures are summarized in Figure 1.

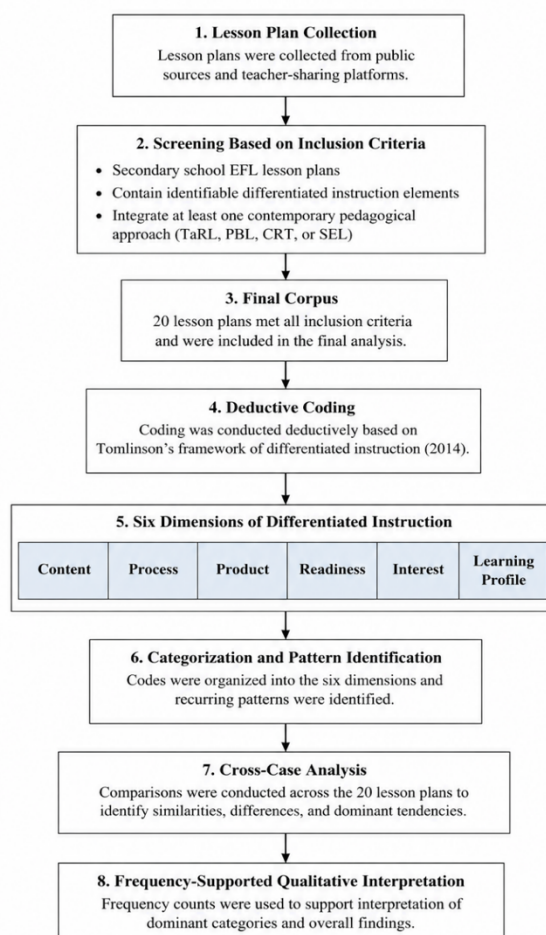


Figure 1. Research Design and Document Analysis Procedure

Assumptions

This study was based on several assumptions (1) Lesson plans accurately reflect the instructional intentions of pre-service teachers; (2) Differentiated instruction elements can be identified through textual analysis of planning documents; (3) The coding framework derived from Tomlinson is sufficient to capture major dimensions of differentiation in EFL contexts.

Scope and Limitations

The scope of this study is limited to the analysis of written lesson plans and does not include classroom observation or student learning outcomes. Therefore, the findings reflect planned instructional design rather than actual classroom implementation. In addition, the study is limited to 20 lesson plans from one institution, which may affect generalizability to other teacher education contexts. Despite these limitations, the study provides in-depth insight into how differentiated instruction is conceptualized and operationalized in instructional planning.

In the social and behavioral sciences, it is important to always provide sufficient information to allow other researchers to adopt or replicate your methodology. This information is particularly important when a new method has been developed or an innovative use of an existing method is utilized. Last, please avoid to make a sub section in Method.

Results and Discussions

The findings of this study were derived from the coding analysis of several English lesson plans developed by pre-service teachers. The analysis focused on identifying the implementation of differentiated instruction dimensions, namely content differentiation, process differentiation, product differentiation, readiness differentiation, learning profile differentiation, and interest differentiation. The coding process revealed patterns regarding how differentiated instruction was integrated into English language teaching lesson plans.

The results are presented based on the research objective, which aimed to investigate how differentiated instruction was implemented in lesson planning practices. The findings are organized into several categories to provide a systematic description of the implementation patterns.

Categorization of Differentiated Instruction Findings

The coding analysis indicated that differentiated instruction was integrated into the analyzed lesson plans through various teaching strategies, instructional approaches, assessment practices, and classroom activities. Table 1 presents the categorization of differentiated instruction found across the lesson plans.

Table 1. Categorization of Differentiated Instruction Findings

Dimension of Differentiated Instruction	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Indicators Found in Lesson Plans
Content Differentiation	17	85%	Different learning materials, videos, PowerPoint presentations, contextual texts, scaffolded worksheets, local culture-based materials
Process Differentiation	19	95%	Group discussion, collaborative learning, varied teacher guidance, flexible grouping, scaffolding, differentiated activities
Product Differentiation	11	55%	Oral presentations, written texts, recount texts, hortatory exposition writing, procedure text production
Readiness Differentiation	16	80%	Diagnostic assessment, readiness-based grouping, TaRL grouping
Learning Profile Differentiation	9	45%	Visual materials, auditory activities, collaborative learning
Interest Differentiation	12	60%	Local culture, tourism topics, traditional foods, personal experiences

Table 1 shows that process differentiation was the most frequently represented dimension, appearing in 19 of the 20 lesson plans (95%), followed by content differentiation in 17 lesson plans (85%) and readiness

differentiation in 16 lesson plans (80%). Interest differentiation was identified in 12 lesson plans (60%), while product differentiation appeared in 11 lesson plans (55%). Learning profile differentiation was the least frequently represented dimension, occurring in only 9 lesson plans (45%). These findings indicate that pre-service teachers tended to emphasize adjustments to learning activities, instructional support, and readiness-based grouping more strongly than differentiated products or learning-profile-based adaptations.

Implementation of Content Differentiation

The findings revealed that content differentiation was consistently implemented in almost all lesson plans. Teachers used contextual and culturally responsive learning materials such as local tourism sites, traditional foods, local culture, and students' personal experiences.

Several lesson plans integrated videos, PowerPoint presentations, pictures, and culturally relevant texts to support students' understanding. For example, the procedure text lesson plan used a video about "Sarabba," a traditional drink, while the recount text lesson plan incorporated local tourism content such as "Lembah Cilengkrang." Similarly, the hortatory exposition lesson plan discussed the preservation of Kaili culture as the main learning context.

The integration of local cultural contexts reflected the implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT). Through culturally relevant materials, students were encouraged to connect English learning with their own environment and experiences. This finding indicates that differentiated instruction was not only implemented academically but also socioculturally.

Another important finding was the use of scaffolded worksheets (LKPD) and tiered instructional materials. In several lesson plans, teachers prepared different worksheets and learning supports according to students' readiness levels. This practice helped students access learning materials based on their individual learning needs.

Implementation of Process Differentiation

Among all differentiated instruction dimensions, process differentiation appeared most frequently in the lesson plans. Teachers commonly used collaborative learning, group discussions, scaffolding, inquiry learning, and differentiated teacher guidance.

The implementation of flexible grouping based on diagnostic assessment was strongly evident in the analyzed lesson plans. Students were grouped into high, medium, and low readiness categories using the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach. This grouping system allowed teachers to provide differentiated learning support according to students' readiness levels. For example, in the procedure text lesson plan, students were grouped based on the results of the initial assessment. The teacher provided more intensive guidance to low-level groups, moderate support to medium groups, and minimal assistance to high-level groups.

Similarly, the hortatory exposition lesson plan demonstrated differentiated process instruction through varying levels of scaffolding (1) Low-level students received intensive teacher assistance; (2) Medium-level students received moderate guidance; (3) High-level students worked more independently.

This finding reflects Tomlinson's theory that differentiation can be implemented by modifying instructional processes to accommodate students' readiness levels. Collaborative discussion activities were also dominant across the lesson plans. Students frequently worked in groups to analyze texts, solve problems, discuss ideas, and create learning products together. These collaborative activities promoted active learning and student participation.

In addition, several lesson plans integrated Problem-Based Learning (PBL), which encouraged students to investigate problems, discuss solutions, and construct knowledge collaboratively. The integration of PBL strengthened the student-centered nature of differentiated instruction.

Implementation of Product Differentiation

Product differentiation was identified through students' learning outputs such as oral presentations, written texts, and collaborative writing projects. Students were asked to produce various text types, including procedure texts, recount texts, and hortatory exposition texts. Oral presentations were also frequently used as a means for students to demonstrate their understanding.

However, the findings showed that product differentiation was less varied compared to content and process differentiation. Most lesson plans focused primarily on written products and oral presentations. More creative and multimodal products such as videos, digital storytelling, posters, podcasts, or multimedia projects were rarely implemented. Although the lesson plans provided opportunities for students to demonstrate learning outcomes, the variation of product choices remained limited. This indicates that teachers still tended to use conventional assessment products in differentiated instruction practices.

Readiness Differentiation and Diagnostic Assessment

The findings revealed that readiness differentiation was systematically implemented through diagnostic assessment activities. Most lesson plans included diagnostic assessments at the beginning of instruction using tools such as Kahoot, Quizizz, Google Forms, and written tests. The diagnostic assessments were used to identify students' prior knowledge, readiness levels, and learning needs before the learning process began. Based on the assessment results, teachers grouped students into high, medium, and low categories. This practice aligned with the principles of the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach.

The readiness-based grouping enabled teachers to provide differentiated support and scaffolding. Students with lower readiness levels received additional guidance, simplified instructions, and closer monitoring during learning activities. The implementation of readiness differentiation demonstrated that teachers attempted to create inclusive learning environments where students could learn according to their current abilities.

Learning Profile Differentiation

The lesson plans also reflected learning profile differentiation through the use of visual, auditory, and collaborative learning activities. Visual learning preferences were accommodated through videos, images, slides, graphs, and contextual visual media. Auditory learning was supported through oral discussion, presentations, and teacher explanations. Collaborative learning activities supported students who preferred social interaction and peer learning. For example, teachers used videos, cultural images, and visual prompts to stimulate students' understanding before discussion activities. These multimodal instructional approaches helped students engage with learning materials through different learning preferences.

Although learning profile differentiation was identified, it was not as explicitly developed as process differentiation. Most lesson plans integrated multimodal learning activities generally rather than designing highly individualized learning profile strategies.

Interest Differentiation

Interest differentiation was evident through the integration of local culture, traditional foods, tourism, and students' personal experiences into learning activities. The lesson plans frequently used contextual topics closely related to students' daily lives and sociocultural backgrounds. For example Sarabba traditional drink, Kaili cultural preservation, Lembah Cilengkrang tourism site, Traditional foods and Students' personal experiences. The use of familiar and meaningful topics increased students' engagement and participation during learning activities. This finding supports the principle that differentiated instruction should consider students' interests to improve motivation and meaningful learning.

Cross-Case Analysis of Differentiated Instruction

A cross-case analysis was conducted to compare differentiated instruction implementation across the analyzed lesson plans.

Table 2. Cross-Case Analysis of Differentiated Instruction Implementation

Aspect	Procedure Text	Hortatory Exposition	Recount Text	Degree of Comparison	General Pattern
Content Differentiation	Strong	Strong	Strong	Strong	Frequently implemented
Process Differentiation	Strong	Very Strong	Strong	Very Strong	Most dominant
Product Differentiation	Moderate	Moderate	Strong	Moderate	Partially implemented
Diagnostic Assessment	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Consistently implemented
Readiness Grouping	Yes	Yes	Limited	Yes	Frequently implemented
Flexible Grouping	Yes	Yes	Limited	Yes	Frequently implemented
CRT Integration	Sarabba culture	Kaili culture	Lembah Cilengkrang	Traditional foods	Strong cultural integration
TaRL Implementation	Yes	Yes	Limited	Yes	Often implemented

The cross-case analysis showed that process differentiation was the most dominant dimension implemented across all lesson plans. Teachers frequently modified classroom activities, learning support, and guidance strategies according to students' readiness levels.

Content differentiation was also strongly implemented through contextual learning materials, culturally responsive teaching, and multimedia resources. In contrast, product differentiation appeared less consistently because most lesson plans relied mainly on oral presentations and written texts.

Discussion

The findings revealed an uneven distribution of differentiated instruction dimensions across the analyzed English lesson plans. Process differentiation was the most prominently represented dimension, appearing in 19 of the 20 lesson plans (95%), followed by content differentiation in 17 lesson plans (85%) and readiness differentiation in 16 lesson plans (80%). Interest differentiation was identified in 12 lesson plans (60%), while product differentiation appeared in 11 lesson plans (55%). Learning profile differentiation was the least frequently represented dimension, occurring in only 9 lesson plans (45%). These findings indicate that pre-service teachers tended to emphasize adjustments to learning activities, instructional support, and students' readiness more strongly than differentiated products or learning-profile-based adaptations. This pattern is consistent with previous studies showing that differentiated instruction in EFL contexts is frequently implemented through scaffolding, flexible grouping, task modification, and adaptation of learning materials rather than through extensive variation in learning products (Endeshaw, 2023; Ningtyas & Lestari, 2024; Tajik et al. 2024). Similar challenges have also been reported among Indonesian English teachers and pre-service teachers, particularly in translating differentiated instruction principles into comprehensive instructional practices (Nurbaeti & Setyarini, 2024).

Process differentiation emerged as the most prominent dimension, with 95% of the lesson plans incorporating strategies such as collaborative discussion, flexible grouping, scaffolding, differentiated teacher guidance, and varied learning activities. This finding is consistent with Tomlinson (2014) framework, which emphasizes adapting instructional processes according to learners' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. The prominence of process differentiation also supports previous empirical findings indicating that scaffolding, grouping, and modification of classroom activities are among the most practical differentiated strategies used in heterogeneous EFL classrooms (Abdel-Al Ibrahim et al., 2023; Endeshaw, 2023). One possible explanation is that process-oriented differentiation can be incorporated into existing classroom activities without requiring teachers to develop substantially different assessment products or individualized learning pathways. Therefore, the dominance of process differentiation in the present study may reflect not only pre-service teachers' awareness of learner diversity but also the relative practicality of adapting instructional processes during lesson planning.

Readiness differentiation was also strongly represented, appearing in 16 of the 20 lesson plans (80%). This dimension was primarily reflected through diagnostic assessment and readiness-based grouping using the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach. Diagnostic assessments were used to identify students' prior knowledge and current learning levels before assigning differentiated instructional support. This finding is consistent with (Wardhani, 2023), who found that diagnostic assessment in Indonesian EFL classrooms enabled teachers to identify students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles and subsequently differentiate content, process, and product. Ningtyas and Lestari (2024) similarly reported that English teachers used diagnostic assessment to identify learning needs and group students according to their abilities and learning preferences. Recent evidence on TaRL also indicates that instruction aligned with students' actual proficiency levels can enhance engagement, confidence, and conceptual understanding (Mansyur et al., 2025). These findings suggest that readiness-based differentiation may be relatively accessible to pre-service teachers because diagnostic assessment provides a concrete basis for determining the level of instructional support required by different learners. Nevertheless, readiness grouping should remain flexible rather than permanently categorizing students according to perceived ability, as differentiated instruction requires continuous adjustment to changes in learner performance and needs. The finding should therefore be interpreted as evidence of planned responsiveness to learner readiness rather than as support for fixed ability grouping.

Another significant finding was the integration of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) within differentiated instruction practices. Interest differentiation was identified in 12 of the 20 lesson plans (60%), with several plans incorporating culturally familiar topics such as Kaili culture, Sarabba traditional drink, traditional foods, local tourism, and students' personal experiences. These practices indicate that pre-service teachers attempted to connect English learning with learners' sociocultural backgrounds rather than relying exclusively on decontextualized language materials. This finding is consistent with (Siregar et al., 2023), who demonstrated that culturally responsive English teaching in Indonesia can integrate students' everyday experiences, local foods, traditions, and regional contexts into English instruction and support meaningful language learning. Similarly, Najah et al (2025) found that Indonesian pre-service English teachers perceived CRT as a meaningful approach for affirming learners' cultural identities, increasing engagement, and contextualizing English instruction, although its implementation was sometimes constrained by limited conceptual understanding and contextual resources. (Maulana et al., 2025) also reported that pre-service English teachers recognized the

importance of culturally responsive instruction but differed in their readiness to translate such principles into teaching practice. Taken together, these findings suggest that the incorporation of local culture in the present lesson plans reflects an emerging awareness of culturally responsive pedagogy among pre-service teachers. However, the fact that interest differentiation appeared in only 60% of the lesson plans indicates that culturally and personally relevant content was not yet systematically incorporated across all instructional designs.

In addition, several lesson plans integrated Problem-Based Learning (PBL), Social Emotional Learning (SEL), and Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) alongside differentiated instruction, indicating an effort to combine learner-centered approaches within instructional planning. The incorporation of PBL is particularly relevant because its emphasis on authentic problems, collaboration, discussion, and teacher scaffolding is compatible with process differentiation. Meta-analytic evidence from 36 empirical EFL studies showed that PBL had a large overall effect on students' language achievement (effect size = 1.067), although its effectiveness varied across language skills (Orhan, 2025). Similarly, the integration of SEL may complement differentiated instruction by creating learning environments that are responsive not only to students' cognitive differences but also to their emotional and interpersonal needs. (Fahkrunisa et al., 2024) found that SEL-oriented English instruction promoted supportive teacher-student relationships, peer collaboration, positive reinforcement, and emotionally safe learning environments, which were associated with greater motivation, willingness to communicate, and classroom engagement. The inclusion of TaRL further reinforces this adaptive orientation because instruction is adjusted to students' actual proficiency levels rather than relying solely on grade-level expectations. Mansyur et al (2025) similarly reported that TaRL-based EFL instruction increased students' clarity, motivation, self-confidence, and engagement when learning tasks were calibrated to their proficiency levels. Taken together, these findings suggest that the integration of PBL, SEL, and TaRL within the analyzed lesson plans may strengthen differentiated instructional planning by addressing cognitive, social-emotional, and readiness-related dimensions of learner diversity. However, their presence in lesson plans should be interpreted as evidence of planned pedagogical integration rather than proof of their effectiveness in actual classroom implementation.

However, product differentiation was less prominently represented than process, content, and readiness differentiation, appearing in only 11 of the 20 lesson plans (55%). Most lesson plans relied on conventional learning outputs such as written texts, worksheets, group assignments, and oral presentations, while more varied or multimodal products were less frequently planned. This finding is consistent with, Rahmani, et al., (2024) who reported that Indonesian EFL pre-service teachers attempted to provide multiple forms of assessment but experienced difficulties in assessing differentiated products, particularly because of time constraints, limited resources, and the complexity of accommodating diverse learner needs. (Suryati et al., 2024) similarly found that product differentiation in EFL classrooms was commonly represented through worksheets, group tasks, presentations, and differentiated questioning rather than through highly individualized or technologically varied products. Recent research on differentiated assessment also indicates that teachers tend to rely more strongly on diagnostic, formative, and conventional summative assessment practices, suggesting that designing varied assessment products remains an area requiring further development (Putri et al., 2026). These findings may explain why product differentiation was less frequently represented in the present lesson plans. Compared with modifying classroom activities or grouping arrangements, designing different learning products requires pre-service teachers to consider not only task variation but also assessment criteria, comparability of outcomes, and the practical management of multiple forms of student work.

Overall, the findings indicate that differentiated instruction was meaningfully represented in the analyzed English lesson plans, although its implementation across dimensions remained uneven. Pre-service teachers demonstrated stronger tendencies to differentiate instructional processes, content, and readiness-based support through flexible grouping, scaffolding, diagnostic assessment, contextual materials, and collaborative learning activities. In contrast, product and learning-profile differentiation were less consistently represented, suggesting that translating differentiated instruction into more individualized and varied learning outcomes remains challenging at the lesson-planning stage. This pattern highlights an important implication for teacher education programs: pre-service teachers may require more explicit modeling, guided practice, and feedback in designing differentiated products, multimodal assessment options, and learning experiences that respond not only to readiness but also to students' interests and learning profiles.

These findings also suggest that the ability to incorporate differentiated instruction into lesson plans should be viewed as an important component of pedagogical readiness before classroom practice. Strengthening this competence during teacher preparation may help bridge the gap between theoretical understanding of learner diversity and the practical design of responsive EFL instruction. Nevertheless, the findings should be interpreted within the boundaries of the study. The analysis was based on 20 lesson plans from a single teacher education context and therefore may not fully represent the instructional planning practices of pre-service English teachers

in other institutions or regions. In addition, the use of a single coder may introduce interpretive bias, while document analysis itself captures planned instruction rather than actual classroom implementation. Future studies should therefore involve broader institutional samples, independent double coding with inter-rater reliability measures, and classroom observation or interview data to examine the extent to which differentiated lesson planning is translated into actual teaching practices.

Conclusions

This study identified clear patterns of differentiated instruction represented in English lesson plans developed by pre-service teachers. Across the six dimensions analyzed, process differentiation was the most prominently represented, particularly through collaborative learning, flexible grouping, scaffolding, differentiated guidance, and readiness-based instructional support. Content and readiness differentiation were also strongly reflected in the lesson plans, whereas product and learning profile differentiation appeared less consistently. The lesson plans further showed the incorporation of pedagogical orientations such as Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL), Problem-Based Learning (PBL), and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) within differentiated instructional planning. The contribution of this study lies in providing a document-based account of how pre-service English teachers translate differentiated instruction principles into instructional planning. Rather than demonstrating the effectiveness of differentiated instruction, the findings reveal patterns in how learner diversity is anticipated and addressed at the lesson-planning stage. In particular, the study highlights a stronger emphasis on process-oriented and readiness-based differentiation than on varied learning products and learning-profile-based adaptations. These findings may provide useful insights for English teacher education programs in identifying aspects of differentiated lesson planning that require further instructional support and guided practice. The findings should, however, be interpreted within the methodological boundaries of the study. The analysis was limited to 20 lesson plans from a single teacher education context and therefore cannot be generalized to all pre-service English teachers or teacher education institutions. In addition, lesson plans represent intended instructional practices rather than enacted classroom practices. Consequently, the presence of differentiated strategies in planning documents does not necessarily indicate that these strategies were implemented consistently or effectively during actual teaching. The use of a single coder may also introduce interpretive bias, despite the use of predefined coding criteria and repeated review procedures. Future studies should therefore examine the relationship between planned and enacted differentiated instruction by combining lesson plan analysis with classroom observation, video-based analysis, teacher interviews, and reflective teaching data. Replication studies involving larger and more diverse institutional contexts are also recommended to examine whether similar patterns of differentiation appear across different teacher education settings. In addition, future research may investigate how product differentiation, learning profile differentiation, and technology-supported differentiation are developed in actual EFL classrooms and whether these practices influence student engagement, language learning, and participation.

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