

Differentiated Learning Instruction in the Cultural Studies Classroom: EFL Students' Experiences

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Article history: Received Apr 30, 2023

Revised may 6, 2024

Accepted May 20, 2024

ARTICLE

ABSTRACT

*Learning Instruction,
Differentiated Learning
Instruction,
EFL Students'
Experiences,*

Learning experience particularly performed by students. Learning outcomes influenced by students' learning experience. This study aims to explore EFL students' experiences through differentiated learning instruction, which focuses on readiness, interest, and learning environment aspects in the Cultural Studies classroom. This research applied the qualitative method with a narrative inquiry approach. To collect the data, the researcher used a semi-structured interview to consider the narration of English Language Education 6th semester in English Language Education Department at Universitas PGRI Adi Buana Surabaya. The results of the study showed that some EFL students experiences by using differentiated learning instruction improved their readiness in having self-esteem for their knowledge and English language skills, improved their interest in the form of students' attitude and teacher's roles, and learning environment by showing their comfortable situation in expressing opinions in discussion. Furthermore, the study found that there were several impacts by using differentiated learning instruction for EFL students. This study recommended for the students to help each other in the learning process. In addition, the researcher also suggested the teacher to overcome student's problems or what the student's needs by using differentiated learning instruction.

INTRODUCTION

Learning is defined as an instructional process that includes a teacher and a student. Creating alive classroom atmosphere needs teacher knowledge and ideas (Octavia et al., 2023). Furthermore, the students who are motivated to learn demonstrate interest, attention, concentration, perseverance, and a goal-oriented behavior, showcasing their dedication to the learning regardless of experiencing ennui in

learning process (Puspita Prasta Situmorang & Dian Andanty, 2023). Each student had learning experience based on their own learning process. Additionally, the similar type of learning not determined that every student can be has similar processing their knowledge and learning experience. Through the learning experiences, the student known what their interest learning as well as individual or group. Definition of learning experience concern what the student reaction in learning. To support the learning experience for students, needed the certain learning plan. Learning experience planning offers learning outcomes which related to skills, giving information, alters attitudes and so on (Ma'rifah et al., 2020). In Cultural Studies class, the researcher revealed issues that relate with students' experiences for the students of English Language Education 6th semester on B Class of 2020. The issues are differencing the abilities to think and showing how students react for subject tend to inactive class. One of the recommendations to solve the problems is using differentiated learning instruction.

Based on a knowledge of how people learn, instructional science is concerned with the logical creation of instructional design methodologies. Effective instructional material design stimulates appropriate cognitive processes in learners, resulting in more successful learning outcomes. The five principles of instruction on learning process include engaging learners in real-world problem-solving, activating existing knowledge, demonstrating new knowledge, applying knowledge, and integrating knowledge into the learner's world (Khalil & Elkhider, 2016). In this study, learning instruction refers to differentiated learning instruction that aims to optimize each student's progress by recognizing that students differ not just in cognitive ability or interests, but also in learning abilities, learning strategies, and metacognitive skills (Haelermans, 2022). It can be concluded that learning instruction is learner understanding process which used certain instruction to get more successful learning outcomes.

Differentiated instruction is teaching approach which involves accommodating instruction to suit the situation in the classroom and diversity of needs for students (Maruf, 2023). Differentiated instruction enables students from diverse backgrounds to showcase their knowledge, comprehension, and skills, while acknowledging the unique worth and importance of each individual student (Naka, 2017). In differentiated classrooms, teacher do highlight each student's unique academic style and needs by utilizing a range of adjusted teaching formats, including small groups, pairs, individual instruction, and entire group education. To accommodate the demands of the most advanced students, educators modify the material they cover and the method they use to deliver the material and the desired result (Magableh & Abdullah, 2020). When adapting instruction according to students' readiness, an educator modifies the difficulty and complexity of assignments to engage learners across different skill levels. This approach ensures that all students are provided with appropriately challenging experiences (Argyropoulou & – Nina Zafiri, 2021).

English teacher assumes that EFL students has low level for readiness during English learning. Therefore, EFL student readiness be most notable aspect to consideration for differentiation instruction (Şaban & Atay, 2023). According to Tomlinson (1999), argued that English teachers in differentiated classrooms emphasize the importance of students competing with themselves rather than with others. Through customized instruction, teachers strive to facilitate comprehensive and rapid learning experiences, acknowledging the distinct learning paths of each student. To create a personalized learning environment, English teachers employ flexible time allocation, diverse teaching approaches, and encourage collaboration with students. In differentiated learning instruction, English teachers search for new methods to connect with students' need such as different stage of readiness, interest, and learning profile. So as that, the teacher serves the content, process and product based on students need (Alzahrani et al., 2022).

The concept of differentiated instruction involves the strategic planning of educational activities to accommodate the individual differences present within a classroom setting. These differences, stemming from the diverse student population, significantly influence the manner in which students comprehend instructional content, engage with the learning process, and exhibit their newly acquired knowledge and skills (Ortega et al., 2018). Teachers are empowered to customize their teaching strategies based on the subject matter, methodology, outcome, or learning environment by adjusting their lesson plans accordingly. This approach allows them to effectively meet the diverse needs of students, thus

enhancing the quality and relevance of their learning experiences. Teachers are empowered to customize their teaching strategies based on the subject matter, methodology, outcome, or learning environment by adjusting their lesson plans accordingly. This approach allows them to effectively meet the diverse needs of students, thus enhancing the quality and relevance of their learning experiences (Borja et al., 2015). Several the impact of differentiated learning are students' high motivation learning English, increasing efforts to learn English and self-confidence for their learning (Aliakbari & Haghighi, 2014).

Tomlinson (2017) asserts that differentiated learning encompasses three key dimensions of guide planning, namely readiness, interest, and learning profile. In terms of readiness, the teacher strives to propel students slightly beyond their comfort zone, thereby presenting them with challenges during the learning process. Consequently, students may perceive their academic tasks as slightly more difficult than what they students get usually. Thus, differentiated learning instruction on the term of interest relate with the student's skill that influenced by the teacher roles. When teachers are passionate about the subject, it can be arising the students' interest during learning process. Even, some students have similar interesting. It expresses that differentiated learning instruction support students' competency. In addition, the learning profile is shaped by four factors such as learning style, intelligence preference, gender, and culture, within the framework of differentiated learning instruction. Learning style refers to the specific way in which individuals prefer to learn, ensuring an optimal learning experience. Intelligence preference shows different predispositions of the human brain towards education. For culture, teachers should not assume that all or most learners with a common cultural background will learn the same way. Additionally, it makes sense that gender also can influence some of the same behaviors that we consider to be culturally influenced, as cultural norms and preferences are established and reinforced.

Several studies concerned for differentiated learning instruction. According to Naka (2018), explained that implementation differentiated learning instruction for learning English as foreign language are not easy to apply because lecturers are more likely to focus on designing a curriculum than what students need in learning. Furthermore, the study found that students expect learning instruction to be implemented for the learning process. The students argue that the differentiated learning instruction had the positive impact to the students.

The second research accomplished by Komang Arie Suwastini (2021) about differentiated learning instruction for students who learn English as a foreign language. In this study, the research method was library research to explain differentiated instruction. The research mentioned many benefits of implementing differentiated learning instruction, especially for student learning experiences. Therefore, teachers need to analyze the requirements to implement differentiated learning instruction to obtain maximum results for students.

Another research was carried out by (Maulana & Oktavia, 2023). This research focused on implementation the differentiated learning instruction in learning English as a foreign language based on the perception of high school students in Indonesia. Additionally, this study recommends the implementation of differentiated learning instruction especially learning English as a foreign language in Indonesia, because many benefits obtained by students. Using differentiated learning instruction makes students feel comfortable and motivated to study.

The latest research related to the current research comes Zulhermindra et al., (2023), who discussed the students' understanding of the benefits of differentiated learning instruction in EFL classrooms. This research also supported by the guidelines for applying differentiated learning instruction to the Merdeka Curriculum. Based on the results of this study, it can be found the students have positive and negative perceptions of differentiated learning instruction. It can be understood differentiated learning instruction is not entirely beneficial to students because there is still a negative perception of students.

Based on the previous related studies, the researchers concluded that differentiated learning instruction tend to have benefits for students, especially in learning English as a foreign language. Furthermore, the previous researchers focused only on student perceptions, therefore they could not dig deeper into the implementation of differentiated learning instruction. In the current study, the researcher more explore about students experiences rather than students' perspective for differentiated

learning instruction. This research aims to explore EFL students' experiences and the impacts of differentiated learning instruction for EFL students in Cultural Studies classroom

METHOD

This research used the qualitative method with a narrative inquiry approach. Creswell, John W. Poth, (2018), mentioned that narrative inquiry is a type of qualitative design that understands a spoken or written text that gives an account of an event or action chronologically. The data obtained by the statements of EFL students' experiences. The source of data were students of English Language Education 6th semester in B Class of 2020 with a total of nine students at Universitas PGRI Adi Buana Surabaya. Besides that, the source of data captured based on the qualifications of respondents were the students who studied in Cultural Studies classrooms; (1) tended to be active in the learning process (2) having the availability to tell stories about experiences gained during study in the Cultural Studies classroom. Therefore, the source of data used for the current study was three students such as Fredi (F), Marla (M), and Nanda (N).

The statements of EFL students' experiences were collected through semi-structured interviews to dig into EFL students' experiences about differentiated learning instruction. Furthermore, this study applied narrative analysis to analyze the statements of EFL students' experiences chronologically. The processes for carrying out this research include concentrating on three EFL students. When the respondents share about their experiences and lives, there is a temporal transition that is expressed in narrative analysis. The respondent may speak about their history, present, or future (Widiati, Utami, Kadarisman A. Effendi & Irawati, 2018). Based on the results of semi-structured interviews, this study validated the data with Tomlinson's theory and Jennifer Fox and Whitney Hoffman's theory. It is used to understand differentiated learning from a broad perspective.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This article discovered how EFL students' experiences based on readiness, interest and learning profile for differentiated learning instruction in the Cultural Studies class and the impact differentiated learning instruction for EFL students.

EFL Students Experiences

Readiness

In differentiated learning instruction, the teacher match for students' skill and engage the students to faced challenges. Here is the statement of students' experience showed the readiness aspect:

Self-Esteem

Nanda mentioned students experience which refers to self-esteem especially for confidence. As the following the statement below:

“Differentiated learning encourage me to face the challenge of expressing my opinion and that with confidence. Because previously in other classes, I didn't feel confident. I lacked confidence, then I lacked the courage to be nervous. Because Cultural Studies class encourages us to have a free opinion....” (N)

Based on the statement, it was clear that the students had less confident in expressing their opinions in previous studies, while in Cultural Studies classes students felt free in giving opinions. This research approved that learning strategy had influence for student self-esteem.

Interest

The interest level refers to developing the student's competency on what the student interest and showing the teacher roles to arise the students interest. Here is the statement of students' experience connected to interest aspect:

Students' Attitude

The researcher found that students maximized their ability to argue. Students understood the role when discussing, whether to be on the pro or against side. In the Cultural Studies class, students were enthusiastic and motivated to argue because they were supported by learning situations.

“Because the learning process can spark students to be more courageous in expressing opinions according to their respective parts. For example, the pros are more active in supporting the argument, while the cons dismiss the argument. Well, in that situation I am encouraged to always give opinions according to my part. When I am in pro, I maximize in pro, and vice versa.” (F)

Another experience of learning showed that students not only encouraged to express their opinions. However, students had the initiative to master the topics that will be discussed before the discussion begins in the Cultural Studies class. Mastery of the material increased the student's self confidence in delivering arguments when discussing and make other students better understand related topics being discussed. It was conveyed by Marla statement in the interview.

“My involvement, usually there will be this about group work, discussion. First of all, I have to prepare the material first or master the material first. So that later when we want to discuss or we can give an opinion that we are sure, we have really mastered it. So that it doesn't make us, I don't master anymore to hesitate and not be brave or inferior. Well, because for me, mastery of the material first so that we want to deliver the material can be achieved, can be sure that the audience can listen well. Well, from there, my involvement is that we also have to learn, I learned to be able to express my opinion....” (M)

Teacher Role

The learning experience of student was not far from how the role of teachers during the learning takes place in the classroom. The following were the learning experiences perceived by students based on the role of teacher:

“During this Cultural Studies learning, this lecturer always gives us a discussion to the students. Then, our lecturer acts as a moderator. And we are given the freedom to discuss with friends, express opinions to other friends. Then if there are difficulties about this topic, which we do not know, maybe in terms of language it is too high or what, this lecturer, who teaches us, will tell the difficulties we face in this Cultural Studies topic and provide advice.” (N)

Discussions became the main activity which often done in the learning process of Cultural Studies. Students learned to give opinions according to topic in discussion. Marla mentioned that the lecturer acted as a moderator and helped students who had difficulty understanding English vocabulary.

“The lecturer's role is as a moderator and facilitator during discussions, and he also provides feedback that is in accordance with the topic of discussion.” (F)

In addition to the role of a lecturer as a moderator, the lecturer also had a role as a facilitator of

the learning process in the Cultural Studies class. The lecturer also gave feedback on the topic of the discussion, which was supported by the statement of Fredi above.

“In my opinion, the lecturers here play a very active role in the classroom, especially when there are discussion classes, why? I see from the lecturer's side, it gives good, positive feedback to the students. Also, the lecturers themselves teach us to be like this when debating, like this when expressing our thoughts. I remember that the lecturer once said that no one is wrong and no one is right, because everyone has a different opinion.....” (M)

Based on the statement of respondents 2, it can be seen that the lecturer had an active role in learning. Teachers gave students the freedom to express their opinions, teachers assumed that there was nothing wrong or right about the opinions expressed by students, because everyone has their own way of dealing with things.

Learning Profile

One of the factors to shape the learning environment is learning style. In differentiated learning instruction, learning style also influenced how students learn. Here is the statement of students' experience related to learning profile:

Learning Environment and Students' Achievement

In Cultural Studies, students were not required to use English fully. Most importantly, students gave their opinions when discussing and listening to other students' opinions.

“..... in the learning process, he actually has to use English, but since the lecturer is allowed to use Indonesian, he uses more Indonesian even though there is a little use of English. Now with that little use of English, I really take advantage of it to memorize my vocabulary and practice my vocabulary.” (N)

Limited use of English led students to take advantage of the situation to improve their vocabulary. Based on the statements of the respondents above, it can be seen that students learned little by little to memorize English words. Thus, not maximum English uses were not entirely detrimental to students in the learning process.

“Yes, I have improved in terms of pronunciation in English, then there is also an improvement in the ability to argue, then I can also increase my vocabulary because I found new vocabulary.” (F)

Furthermore, this research found some improvements for EFL students in English skills. Enhanced English skills had a good impact on the student experience. Fredi experienced improvement in English language skills in terms of pronunciation and vocabulary.

“Yes, so at each meeting there is usually one student, one student who makes a presentation according to the hat set by the lecturer, then later the lecturer divides the remaining students into two groups, namely the pro and contra groups which will later argue with each other. Well, during the presentation and discussion the lecturer recommends using English, meaning that you can argue according to your understanding of the topic discussed during the discussion. Yes, but as

far as this discussion is concerned, indeed most students use Indonesian. I think yesterday maybe this is an evaluation for students in the future, we are an English study program, so use full English, if possible, but at least use 70% English. “(M)

Contrary to previous respondents' statements, Marla stated that an evaluation of the use of English in Cultural Studies classes should be carried out. As a student of English education, students should be able to use English fully or at least use English around 70% for communication. So, it could be concluded that Marla showed dissatisfaction with the learning environment for students.

The Impact Differentiated Learning Instruction for EFL Students

Positive Impact

The impact refers to the beneficial for EFL students such as improving their skills and making learning process meaningful.

Enhancing The Ability of Arguing

In the Cultural Studies class, each student got a turn to give an opinion based on certain topics on group discussion. As mentioned in the statements below:

“As I recall, every meeting we are required to make a presentation, one person to present a topic about Cultural Studies and then after the presentation we are formed into pro and con groups. So, after the presentation we form a group then we study what the student presented, then we are free to express our opinions about the topic that the student presented and the lecturer will provide advice when they have difficulty in their understanding of the material or in terms of language. “(N)

Nanda's statement cited more details which related to the learning process of Cultural Studies. The learning activities that have been carried out by students among them presented percentages related to topics related to Cultural Studies. The topic of the presentation was determined by the lecturer. There were two groups, the pros and cons, who will argue or express each other's opinions on a topic that has been presented by one of the students who got the turn to make a presentation. The process of inter-group argument ended with conclusions and suggestions given by the lecturer. In this study, the researchers found several statements from respondents that showed the positive impact experienced by students in the Cultural Studies class:

“The positive impact can increase students' perspectives on cases that occur, improve their ability to debate arguments between two groups...” (F)

“Okay, from the positive impact, it increases the ability of students to argue, to express opinions....” (M)

“Okay, the first one, that's the first one. Improve our ability as students to argue related to the topic being discussed. “(N)

Based on the above conversation, the three Fredi mentioned that the first positive impact that students gained after attending the Cultural Studies class was an improvement in their ability to give an opinion. It was supported by the application of differentiated learning instruction that value the

differences in understanding and opinion of each student.

Improving English Language Skills

The next positive impact related to the student's English language skills. Nanda mentioned that improving English language skills were felt by students especially in terms of pronunciation, speaking, and listening.

“Then it trains us in our English skills, our skills in what I said earlier, pronunciation, speaking, and listening. “(N)

“Then the positive impact is to train students' English language skills according to their respective levels and according to their respective levels. “(M)

Based on the Marla's statement, it can be seen that each student tends to have a different level of English proficiency. It turned out that applying differentiated learning instruction in Cultural Studies classes can also helped to train students' English language skills based on students' level of proficiency.

An Active and Interactive Classroom Environment

One of the reasons the active and interactive in the learning process was the application of learning strategies that according to what students need. Marla mentioned that group formation makes the classroom environment more interactive. Every student in a group was encouraged to give an opinion in the discussion. As following the statement which supported to Marla:

“Continue, keep making classes more interactive yes, because the classes are usually held according to the group.....” (M)

"The class feels more active and more effective because of the learning of this kind of meetings that are always held discussions and presentations....." (N)

Based on the above statement, Nanda mentioned that the Cultural Studies classroom environment was more active and more effective. The learning process of Cultural Studies involved students to make presentations and give opinions in discussions. Based on previous discussions about students' experiences in the Cultural Studies class, each group gave their opinions, both for and against. The action of expressing opinions and the emergence of differences in understanding before making opinions was valued in the Cultural Studies class because it was supported with applying differentiated learning instruction. The main thing to pay attention in the learning process was what the student needs or how the student's level of understanding which related to Cultural Studies.

Understanding The Topic Before Learning

Another positive impact of applying differentiated learning instruction was encourage the students to understand the topics that will be discussed in the Cultural Studies class. As stated by Marla below:

"Once again, this can encourage us students to understand the topics to be discussed....." (M)

Giving argument which did not means that each group can give an opinion as much as they want, even if according to their respective parts. Since each opinion was valued in the Cultural Studies class,

then every student in the group was encouraged to find out more in the related topics discussed. Besides on that, difference understanding could be added to the student's insight.

Negative Impact

The impact shows disadvantage of using differentiated learning instruction that can make the student uncomfortable with learning process.

Spending a Lot of Time for Giving Assignment

Differentiated learning instruction adapted to the needs of students, the level of students' understanding to the student's learning style. In this study, it was found that not entirely such strategies benefit students.

".....the lecturer in giving the task is time-consuming because it is necessary to adjust the assignment of the task to the understanding of the student." (F)

"Then in terms of the granting of the job yes. This is less effective given the task because this docent has more to determine first what they are what, according to their ability, their literacy, and it takes a lot of time....." (N)

Based on the above statement, it was clear that adjustment of assignment can be detrimental to other students. As mentioned by the two respondents above, they felt the time was wasted when the lecturer began to give the student a task by adjusting the level of understanding of the student.

Off-Topic Tendencies

The further negative impact can be seen from the complaint statements related to the discussion of the topic below:

"Yes, it's also because this is a discussion that also spends a lot of time and sometimes goes out of the topic." (M)

In earlier discussions, Marla mentioned that differentiated learning instruction could be encouraged students to understand the topics to be discussed in the Cultural Studies class. On the other hand, each student's level of understanding was different. Therefore, sometimes there was occurred discussion out of the topic. It caused a lot of time to be wasted for learning process in the Cultural Studies class.

CONCLUSION

Differentiated learning instruction paid attention for the teacher to prepare the lesson planning address the student of understanding. The lesson planning made the successful and meaningful learning process. In this study, teacher used differentiated learning instruction that connect to readiness, interest and learning profile for EFL students in Cultural Studies class. Based on the analysis above, the researcher concluded EFL students' experiences were; (1) Self-esteem which related to readiness level (2) There are two EFL students' experiences such us students' attitude and teacher role that related to interest level (3) Learning profile level referred to learning environment and students' achievement.

Beside on that, this research stated there were two impacts of differentiated learning which consist of positive and negative impacts. In this study, the positive impact mentioned the students benefits; (1) enhancing the ability of arguing (2) improving English language skills (3) showing an active

and interactive classroom environment (4) the students understanding the topic before learning. Furthermore, the negative impact of differentiated learning instruction showed disadvantage for the student learning process; (1) spending a lot of time for giving assignment (2) off-topic tendencies. Therefore, the differentiated learning instruction was not fully beneficial for EFL students in Cultural Studies class.

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