



Understanding Instructors' Perspectives on Differentiated Education: Insight and Practical Approaches from a Comprehensive Literature Review

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze teachers' perceptions and implementation of differentiated instruction (DI) and to identify the key barriers and implications for improving DI within the Indonesian education system. The study adopted a systematic review approach based on the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Articles were retrieved from Scopus, Google Scholar, and Semantic Scholar using Boolean search operators. Of the 151 articles initially identified, 15 empirical studies published between 2022 and 2026 met the inclusion criteria. The selected studies were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings indicate that Indonesian teachers generally hold positive perceptions of differentiated instruction, recognizing its potential to address learner diversity, enhance student engagement, and promote inclusive learning. However, the implementation of DI remains inconsistent and largely superficial. Although content differentiation is widely implemented, process differentiation, product differentiation, and systematic diagnostic assessment receive considerably less attention. Major barriers to effective implementation include limited instructional time, large class sizes, inadequate learning resources, insufficient diagnostic assessment literacy, limited professional development opportunities, and varying levels of teacher readiness. This study contributes to the literature by synthesizing recent empirical evidence on teachers' perceptions and implementation of differentiated instruction in Indonesia and highlighting priority areas for policy, teacher professional development, and future research.

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Introduction

To facilitate a more meaningful and inclusive learning experience, effective teaching should take into account the diversity among students in terms of their needs, skills, and learning styles. Student-centered learning involves adjusting the teaching-learning process according to the strengths and needs of individual learners to encourage engagement by providing appropriately challenging learning experiences (Woodcock et al., 2022). It is accomplished through differentiated education, which takes into account variations in the readiness, interests, and learning profiles of students (Silmi et al., 2025). In Indonesia, this is well-suited for implementation, considering the Merdeka Curriculum adopted in the country, which encourages student-centered and adaptive learning.

While DI has a solid theoretical basis and receives adequate policy support, the implementation of this pedagogy continues to vary in educational practice. Research studies show that teachers have a lot of difficulties with DI implementation owing to limited instructional time, lack of sufficient resources, and problems with learner identification in large classes (Pratiwi et al., 2026). Time-consuming lesson preparation and different levels of



student engagement also pose problems to DI implementation (Tundreng et al., 2025). In this regard, while DI is theoretically developed for learner diversity, its implementation continues to be partial and sporadic (Halil et al., 2024).

The problem of implementation is further strengthened due to the inability of teachers to implement DI in practice. Even though teachers know about the basics of differentiated instruction, putting their knowledge into action in the classroom poses a problem (Putri & Mangunsong, 2024). Teachers face issues related to determining the strengths of the students along with their learning needs (Putra, 2023).

To overcome these problems, earlier research points out the need to build up the competency of teachers through professional development efforts that involve training sessions, mentoring and collaboration facilitated by leadership and technological involvement (Tando, 2025). Moreover, moving towards student-centered teaching methods is viewed as key to raising teachers' skills in handling diverse learners (Rachmadtullah et al., 2024). As far as pedagogic concerns are concerned, teachers need to understand how to provide equitable learning experiences to all students (Handiyani & Muhtar, 2022). Individualized instruction is known to foster holistic development of learners when carried out properly (Istiqomah & Apoko, 2025).

While more literature on differentiated instruction is emerging, previous studies on this topic are still limited because they tend to focus on only one of the two aspects, namely teachers' perspectives or pedagogical practices, without considering both aspects at once. Since some authors highlight the benefits of implementing differentiated instruction in the teaching process (Digna et al., 2023; Efendi et al., 2024; Sari et al., 2024), while other scholars highlight issues related to its implementation (Tundreng et al., 2025; Pratiwi et al., 2026; Maruf, 2023), the prior literature is also marked by inconsistent results. Furthermore, very few scholars make an effort to compile the empirical findings of earlier investigations (Fajrina et al., 2024; Sukarno et al., 2024; Laksono et al., 2024).

Considering these deficiencies, a systematic review becomes necessary to integrate the perceptions of the teachers, classroom practices, and barriers to differentiated instruction. The lack of integrated research findings makes it crucial to close the gap between theory and practice while also impeding the development of effective pedagogical and policy-wise remedies tailored to the particular situation. Although the importance of differentiated teaching as a way to provide educational equity and consider the diversity of learners cannot be overstated (Goyibova et al., 2025), its application in the Indonesian context has not yet been examined in the most recent study synthesis.

Research Method

Empirical publications were chosen for the analysis using the systematic review design. The review was made clearer and more methodical by using the PRISMA 2020 methodology (Page et al., 2021). Three scientific databases, including Scopus, Google Scholar, and Semantic Scholar, were used to locate the papers. The search strategy used the Boolean operators and keywords related to the perspectives of teachers and differentiated instruction. These consisted of the use of such key terms as "teacher perceptions," "teacher beliefs," "teacher attitudes," "teacher perspectives," and "teacher views," together with "differentiated instruction," "differentiated learning," "Indonesia," or "Indonesian."

The criteria for inclusion were as follows: (a) peer-reviewed articles in English; (b) empirical research on teachers' perceptions and classroom practices of differentiated instruction; (c) empirical research done in formal educational settings such as primary,



secondary, and higher education; and (d) empirical research done in 2022–2026. The articles that did not meet any of these criteria were not used in the review.

The selection process was conducted according to the PRISMA phases of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. In the first phase, 151 articles were selected, and among them, 15 empirical studies fulfilled the inclusion criteria for analysis. The flowchart of study selection using PRISMA is presented in Figure 1 below.

Table 1. Keywords for Article Selection

No.	Operator	Keywords	Number of Article
1	OR	"Teacher Perceptions" OR "Teacher Beliefs" OR "Teacher Attitudes" OR "Teacher Perspectives" OR "Teacher Views"	Scopus: 12
2	OR	"Differentiated Instruction" OR "Differentiated Learning"	Google Scholar :100
3	OR	"Indonesia" OR "Indonesian"	Semantic Scholar: 39
4	OR & AND	"Teacher Perceptions" OR "Teacher Beliefs" OR "Teacher Attitudes" OR "Teacher Perspectives" OR "Teacher Views" AND "Differentiated Instruction" OR "Differentiated Learning" AND "Indonesia" OR "Indonesian"	

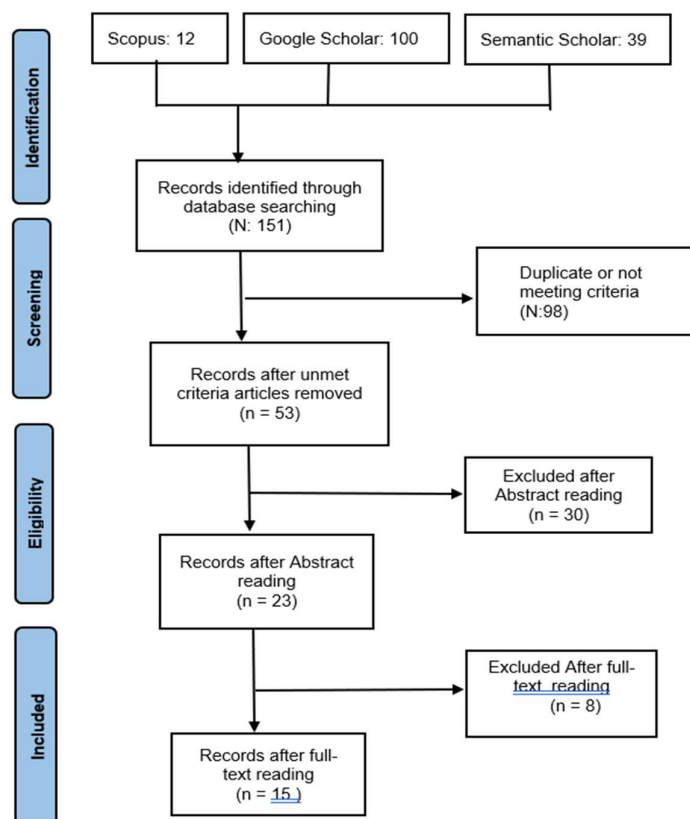


Figure 1. PRISMA Flowchart of Selection Study Process



Screening was done to identify relevant literature on teachers' perspectives on differentiated instruction in Indonesia. In title and abstract screening, 98 irrelevant records were excluded. Thirty articles were also excluded in abstract screening, while eight more articles were excluded in full-text screening. Content analysis was used to synthesize the selected studies and identify recurrent themes associated with differentiated instruction in Indonesia. The included studies are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The Selected Journal Articles

No	Author(s) & Year	Study Title	Research Method	Journal	Index
1)	Santoso, Istiyono, & Haryanto (2022)	Physics teachers' perceptions of differentiated learning environments: A case for the implementation of technology	Qualitative (semi-structured interviews)	Education Sciences	Scopus Q1
2)	Hidayat & Patras (2024)	Education transformation in Indonesia requires the implementation of differentiated learning	Mixed methods	International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education (IJERE)	Scopus Q2
3)	Maknun, Zamzani, & Jamilah (2024)	Leveraging technology-based AFL and AAL within the framework of English differentiated instruction in Indonesia	Qualitative	Teaching English with Technology	Scopus Q1
4)	Winarto et al. (2024)	Science teachers' perceptions of differentiated learning: A survey study	Quantitative survey	Multidisciplinary Science Journal	Scopus Q1
5)	Padauleng et al. (2025)	Differentiated instruction in a public junior high school: EFL teachers' perceptions and practices	Qualitative (case study)	World Journal of English Language	Scopus Q1
6)	Jufrianto, Basri, & Iskandar (2025)	A mixed-methods framework for assessing differentiated instruction implementation barriers in EFL secondary education	Mixed methods	MethodsX	Scopus Q1
7)	Digna, Minsih, & Widyasari (2023)	Teachers' perceptions of differentiated learning in Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools	Mixed methods	International Journal of Elementary Education	SINTA 2
8)	Efendi et al. (2024)	The effectiveness of differentiated instruction in elementary school subject: Teachers' perceptions	Quantitative survey	Jurnal Pendidikan Progresif	SINTA 2
9)	Sari et al. (2024)	Measuring teachers' perceptions of differentiated instruction:	Research and Development (R&D)	Jurnal Kependidikan	SINTA 2



		A combination of Guttman scale and item response theory			
10)	Tundreng, Yawan, & Marhamah (2025)	Implementing differentiated instruction in Indonesian secondary schools: Opportunities and challenges	Qualitative case study	English Review: Journal of English Education	SINTA 2
11)	Pratiwi, Balqis, & Prasodjo (2026)	EFL teachers' views on differentiated instruction in Kurikulum Merdeka	Mixed methods	Panyonara: Journal of English Education	SINTA 2
12)	Maruf (2023)	The interplay of teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and implementation of differentiated instruction in Indonesian EFL contexts	Quantitative correlational	English Review: Journal of English Education	SINTA 2
13)	Fajrina et al. (2024)	Project-based learning and differentiated instruction practices in biology learning	Sequential mixed methods	Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan IPA	SINTA 2
14)	Sukarno et al. (2024)	Pre-service English teachers' perceptions of differentiated instruction	Quantitative survey	Diksi	SINTA 2
15)	Laksono, Laksono, & Endang (2024)	Challenges of Indonesian EFL teachers in implementing differentiated instruction	Qualitative case study	Panyonara: Journal of English Education	SINTA 2

Table 2 lists 15 articles on differentiated instruction (DI) in Indonesia, covering issues such as teachers' perceptions of DI, DI practice in the classroom, barriers to implementing DI, and the effects of DI. Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches have been used in these studies. The majority of articles were published in peer-reviewed and nationally accredited journals listed in databases like Scopus, SINTA, Google Scholar, and Semantic Scholar.

Results and Discussion

Findings for this section are based on a systematic review of 15 empirical articles (2022-2026) that investigate DI in Indonesia's educational settings, specifically in English language teaching (EFL) contexts. Findings will be presented using a synthesis table (Table 3), which summarizes findings at the article level against three research questions: (RQ1) Teachers' perception of DI; (RQ2) DI implementation in the classroom; and (RQ3) Barriers to DI implementation. Another table, the Thematic Analysis Table (Table 4), will also be provided.

Synthesis of the Reviewed Studies

Table 3 synthesized the findings of the 15 reviewed studies across the three research questions. As shown below, three recurring patterns emerge: the near-universal positivity of teachers' orientation toward DI, the predominance of content-based differentiation over



process- and product-based differentiation, and a recurring set of structural barriers to implementation.

Table 3. Synthesis Table

No.	Author & Year	Teachers' Perceptions	Implementation	Barriers
1)	Jufrianto, Basri & Iskandar (2025)	Adequate DI knowledge, but implementation seen as the main barrier.	Strong technology use; weak process differentiation and grouping.	Large class size, time, and institutional constraints.
2)	Winarto et al. (2025)	Willing to teach DI, though only half show full conceptual grasp.	DI used but inconsistently applied.	Limited training, facilities, and misconceptions about DI.
3)	Pratiwi, Balqis & Prasodjo (2026)	Consistently positive perceptions across English skill areas.	Content differentiation most common; autonomy least applied.	Time pressure, large classes, and rural resource gaps.
4)	Dea Digna, Minsih & Widyasari (2023)	High enthusiasm but weak conceptual understanding.	Very limited implementation; diagnostic assessment largely missing.	Inadequate training and misconceptions about DI.
5)	Maknun, Zamzani & Jamilah (2024)	Positive toward DI and digital assessment, especially among younger teachers.	AaL more widely used than AaL.	Time, class size, connectivity, and digital literacy gaps.
6)	Laksono, Rohimah & Fauziati (2024)	Seen as essential for managing diversity and motivation.	Focus mainly on material adaptation, not full DI.	Material adaptation difficulty and time constraints.
7)	Maruf (2023)	Positive beliefs strongly linked to implementation likelihood.	Self-reported implementation, not classroom verified.	Limited professional development access.
8)	Sukarno, Riyadini, Jinabe & Lestari (2024)	Strong belief in DI's importance among pre-service teachers.	Self-reported use across content, process, and product.	Time, class size, and limited classroom exposure.
9)	Santoso, Istiyono & Haryanto (2022)	Seen as necessary but understood informally.	Differentiated assessment recognized but applied unsystematically.	Workload, subjectivity, and limited ICT access.
10)	Tundreng, Yawan & Marhamah (2025)	Clear, nuanced DI understanding among Guru Penggerak teachers.	Full content, process, and product differentiation observed.	Preparation time, engagement, and parental support.
11)	Fajrina et al. (2024)	Perceived as highly effective within Project-Based Learning.	Implemented via mixed-ability grouping and scaffolding.	Limited formal DI training implied.
12)	Hidayat & Patras (2024)	Seen as essential but teachers feel underprepared.	Classroom enactment falls short of expectations.	Lack of mentorship and uneven information access.
13)	Sari et al. (2024)	Mixed perceptions; concerns over classroom control and autonomy.	Limited confidence in flexible grouping and adaptive tasks.	Uncertainty and curriculum overload.
14)	Efendi et al. (2024)	Near-universal agreement that DI improves outcomes.	Implemented via varied media and diagnostic assessment.	Weak diagnostic accuracy and high student-teacher ratios.
15)	Padauleng et al. (2025)	Initial misconceptions shifted toward viewing DI	Applied through planning, implementation, and	Assessment selection difficulty, time,



as equitable.

evaluation stages.

funding, and class size.

Despite consistently positive teacher attitudes, the synthesis reveals an enduring dissonance between perception and classroom practice. Content-based differentiation is the most frequently implemented from DI, whereas process-based differentiation, which requires diagnostic assessment and sequenced instruction, remains the most difficult to enact. A notable exception is found among Guru Penggerak-trained teachers (Tundreng et al., 2025), where all three forms of DI, content, process, and product, were implemented concurrently, suggesting that structured training can substantially narrow this gap.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was conducted to identify cross-cutting patterns in the data. Four themes were derived, capturing the structural characteristics and contradictions underlying DI practice in Indonesian EFL education: favorable teacher beliefs, inconsistent implementation, and the structural and pedagogical constraints that connect them. These themes are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Thematic Analysis

No	Theme	Main Meaning	Supporting Studies
1)	Positive but Conceptually Uneven Perceptions	Teachers generally hold favorable attitudes toward DI, but these attitudes often coexist with incomplete or misconceived understanding of the concept.	Jufrianto, Basri & Iskandar (2025); Winarto et al. (2025); Pratiwi, Balqis & Prasodjo (2026); Dea Digna, Minsih & Widyasari (2023); Maruf (2023); Santoso, Istiyono & Haryanto (2022)
2)	Selective and Incomplete Implementation	DI implementation tends to be partial, concentrated on content or technology-based adaptation while process differentiation and diagnostic assessment remain underdeveloped.	Jufrianto, Basri & Iskandar (2025); Winarto et al. (2025); Maknun, Zamzani & Jamilah (2024); Laksono, Rohimah & Fauziati (2024); Santoso, Istiyono & Haryanto (2022); Sari et al. (2024); Hidayat & Patras (2024)
3)	Structural Constraints Limiting Practice	Time pressure, large class size, and limited resources function as the most binding obstacles preventing consistent DI enactment.	Jufrianto, Basri & Iskandar (2025); Pratiwi, Balqis & Prasodjo (2026); Laksono, Rohimah & Fauziati (2024); Maknun, Zamzani & Jamilah (2024); Sukarno, Riyadini, Jinabe & Lestari (2024); Efendi et al. (2024); Padauleng et al. (2025); Sari et al. (2024)
4)	Professional Development as the Bridge Between Belief and Practice	Adequate, structured training mediates whether positive teacher beliefs are translated into comprehensive and validated DI practice.	Maruf (2023); Dea Digna, Minsih & Widyasari (2023); Hidayat & Patras (2024); Tundreng, Yawan & Marhamah (2025); Fajrina et al. (2024); Padauleng et al. (2025)

Positive but Conceptually Uneven Perceptions

Across the reviewed studies, teachers generally expressed favorable attitudes toward DI, as they consider it relevant for catering to learners' differences and improving instructional outcomes (Jufrianto et al., 2025; Pratiwi et al., 2026; Santoso et al., 2022). However, this positivity often conceals the lack of a coherent concept of DI. Several research studies have revealed that teachers confuse DI with either complete individualization or



general differentiation, without proper pedagogical training (Winarto et al., 2025; Dea Digna et al., 2023). Maruf (2023) further states that positive beliefs, although predictive of intentions to implement the technique, do not reflect correct procedural knowledge of the technique. It can be concluded from all of the above that there is no conceptual readiness in teachers along with attitudinal readiness, which means that belief is only a necessary, not sufficient, condition.

Selective and Incomplete Implementation

Patterns of implementation in the research show a clear preference for differentiation based on content and technological aspects, whereas differentiation of the process and the use of diagnostic assessment are largely ignored (Jufrianto et al., 2025; Maknun et al., 2024; Laksono et al., 2024). Such selectivity suggests that teachers usually use easier components of DI, such as adapting materials/media, and avoid activities that require teacher cognitive and pedagogical skills, such as sequencing instructions based on learners' needs diagnosed through assessment. In addition, several studies highlight that teachers report their practices, suggesting that the real-life application of DI may be lower than it appears at first glance (Sukarno et al., 2024; Santoso et al., 2022). Hidayat and Patras (2024) state the same about the underperformance of DI in meeting class expectations regarding what is expected of a curriculum.

Structural Constraints Limiting Practice

Structural factors have been identified as the most frequently cited impediment to DI adoption in the reviewed literature. Time limitations and large class size are virtually always described as factors that hinder teachers' ability to design and implement differentiated instruction (Jufrianto et al., 2025; Pratiwi et al., 2026; Sukarno et al., 2024). Other structural factors, such as a shortage of teaching materials, curriculum overburdening, and insufficient infrastructure development in the countryside, contribute to the aforementioned difficulties (Pratiwi et al., 2026; Padauleng et al., 2025). Importantly, some research indicates that these factors have an independent effect on DI implementation, regardless of the teacher's motivation and attitude towards it (Laksono et al., 2024; Sari et al., 2024).

Professional Development as the Bridge Between Belief and Practice

The quality and nature of the professional development are what separate the cases of the comprehensive use of DI from those of partial and superficial use of DI. In all cases where the teachers were not adequately trained or their training did not meet DI criteria, the teachers held positive beliefs but still had misconceptions and poor implementation of the instructional strategy (Dea Digna et al., 2023; Maruf, 2023). On the other hand, all studies that included adequate training, such as the Guru Penggerak training and the Project-Based Learning training, reported the comprehensive and classroom-based use of DI across the content, process, and product components (Tundreng et al., 2025; Fajrina et al., 2024). The same case is observed in Hidayat and Patras (2024), and Padauleng et al. (2025).

Generally, this research shows that, rather than teacher resistance, the main problem in DI in Indonesian EFL classes is the discrepancy between positive attitudes and classroom practice. Most teachers understand the benefits of DI, but its application in classrooms is limited to simpler techniques, such as content modification, technology use, and grouping. In contrast, the more complex ones, such as diagnostic assessment, process differentiation, and product differentiation, are less frequently used.

This discrepancy results from both pedagogical and structural issues. Lack of knowledge of DI theory, insufficient teacher training, large class sizes, limited time, and limited resources limit teachers' capacity to apply DI successfully. Still, some studies with



structured teacher training, for example, with Guru Penggerak teachers and those based on Project-Based Learning, show that DI can be implemented in its totality.

Conclusion

A systematic literature review has revealed that teachers' perception of differentiation is largely positive in the Indonesian educational context, yet the execution of differentiation is shallow and inconsistent in terms of instructional fidelity. The existence of the gap between theory and practice highlighted in 15 studies under review stems from a combination of several factors, including a lack of professional development opportunities, structural obstacles, conceptual confusion, inadequate diagnostic assessments, and the current policy framework promoting differentiation.

Content differentiation has been found to be the most widely used strategy in research. In contrast, process differentiation has received less attention, and diagnostic assessment has been identified as the biggest hurdle to the successful implementation of DI. To solve this problem, it is important to design a set of interventions that will operate on several levels—from educational policy and teacher training programs to school administration and classroom management. Rather than trying to foster only positive attitudes toward differentiated instruction, it is necessary to develop the necessary skills and conditions for its implementation.

Recommendation

Several recommendations could be suggested based on the findings of this research in terms of the implementation of DI in Indonesia. First, continuous improvement of training programs is required to make sure that teachers acquire the necessary knowledge and techniques for applying DI in their teaching practices. The application of DI should consider its consistency with learning goals, assessment results, and responsive strategies, among others. Second, issues related to resource allocation and classroom management, including reduction of class size and provision of adequate instructional materials for DI, should be addressed. Third, the policy framework should be established and standardized by educational stakeholders to offer clear guidance for DI implementation. Fourth, further research should concentrate on long-term evaluations of professional development, assessment models, and classroom systems for the effect on DI implementation.

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