

chapter 1

introduction

1.1.background of study

the Indonesian education system has undergone significant changes over the past few decades. One of the crucial aspects of this transformation is the curriculum for students (Zidan, 2023). The Indonesian government attempts to transform the curriculum that focuses on students' needs based on the context and characteristics, which is believed to increase Indonesian education competence for an innovative and competitive nation. Therefore, the transformation of the curriculum is undeniable. Tarihoran, Nafan (2021) stated that a good curriculum is a curriculum that is able to adapt to its era. The curriculum should be dynamic and continue to be developed or adapted based on the term. The existence of demands from the times makes it necessary to improve the curriculum.

There are various factors of curriculum change. Alterations in the curriculum are logical consequences of changes in the political, socio-cultural, economic, and science and technology systems in the society of the nation and state. The curriculum needs to be developed dynamically by the demands and changes that occur in society, as a concept that must be able to answer all challenges where the curriculum is implemented (Nugraha, 2022). It is adjustments in educational curricula that reflect and respond to evolving societal demands and conditions.

another factor is the changes due to the pandemic in indonesia (kusuma & hamidah, 2020; maulana & hamidi, 2020). the rapid spread of the covid-19 virus has made the minister of education and culture (mendikbud) implement a learning policy to be carried out online from the homes of their respective students. learning activities carried out remotely certainly experience many difficulties, even from various factors such as geographical conditions, the economy, the initial state of the schools before the pandemic, and applicable policies (donnelly & patrinis, 2022).

furthermore, another factor in the changed curriculum is the results of document evaluation and implementation of the 2013 curriculum of the education standards, curriculum, and assessment agency of the ministry of education; the 2013 curriculum competencies were too broad, difficult to understand, and to be implemented by teachers. starting from the less flexible curriculum structure, the lesson hours are determined per week, and the material is too dense, so there is not enough time to carry out in-depth learning according to the stage of development of students. furthermore, teachers are busy preparing the learning process in the classroom. teachers also have to make a very detailed and complicated lesson plan (rpp), thus, curriculum development needs to be considered as a determinant of the nation's future (ekawati, 2018).

the ministry of education, culture, research, and technology made efforts to change this curriculum to overcome problems that occurred in education units, such as teachers having difficulties in assessing student learning readiness, books for students not yet available, lcds supporting

curriculum implementation did not exist, and interest in teaching and learning activities was lacking.

the change in curriculum is inseparable from the growth of an era that has been completely digital (uslan et al., 2021). ministry of education and culture is making efforts to reform learning by designing a *merdeka belajar* curriculum that gives schools, teachers, and students the freedom to be free to innovate, free to learn independently and creatively (sherly et al., 2020).

the ministry of education and culture (kemendikbud) issued a *merdeka belajar* to carry out educational transformation for the realization of superior indonesian human resources with a pancasila profile. *merdeka belajar* curriculum liberates, in essence, learning in favor of student-centered. student-centered, which has been developed by ki hajar dewantara since 1922 at the *taman siswa* college. then, *merdeka belajar* curriculum related to the concept stems inspiration from the education system of education pioneer ki hajar dewantara (l. hidayati & sujarwati, 2023).

the government is developing a *merdeka belajar* curriculum as a more flexible curriculum framework while focusing on essential materials and developing the character and competence of students. there are 3 main characteristics of the *merdeka belajar* curriculum, namely: 1) project-based learning for the development of soft skills and character according to the profile of pancasila students; 2) focus on essential materials so that there is sufficient time for deep learning for basic competencies such as

literacy and numeracy; 3) flexibility for teachers to carry out differentiated learning according to student abilities (miftakhuddin *et al.*,2022; sumaludin, 2022).

it is hoped that with this *merdeka belajar* curriculum, students can more freely express themselves, and be able to develop national defence characteristics such as the pancasila student profile, and increase knowledge and competence in the learning process. one of the learning concepts in the *merdeka belajar* curriculum is that learning supports the holistic development of students' competence and character; one point addresses the usage of learning methods or models. according to one point, the *merdeka belajar* curriculum directs teachers to employ a number of different learning models and to help students build competencies such as inquiry-based, project-based, problem-based, and differentiated learning when carrying out learning in the classroom (kemendikbud, 2022).

focus on differentiated instruction learning models in one of the *merdeka belajar* curriculum's project activities is closely related to the adjustment of learning to the needs of students. the characteristics and profiles of students who come from english backgrounds result in different learning needs (n. hidayati *et al.*, 2022; nuril lubaba & alfiansyah, 2022; nuril lubaba & alfiansyah, 2022). furthermore, differences in students' levels of intelligence require teachers to adopt varied instructional treatments. it is the students with all their differences that make it necessary to apply differentiated learning in the classroom. differentiated

learning is learning that gives students the freedom to learn comfortably, according to their potential, uniqueness, and conditions, so that children feel comfortable in the learning climate created by the teacher (fitra, 2022; lestariningrum, 2022).

the government's ministry of education and culture (kemendikbud) is actively promoting the differentiation technique as a learning and teaching strategy. the government has conducted training for teachers for approximately one month through in-house training (iht) activities. the government has assisted education units monthly through school-level operational management workshops and working groups (pmo). even the government has held monthly workshops with various materials related to implementing the *merdeka belajar* curriculum, including material on the application of differentiated learning.

in the application of differentiated learning in the *merdeka belajar* curriculum, the government has adapted tomlinson's theoretical model. this can be seen in the government's differentiated learning guidebook with the theme of developing differentiated learning in a flexible curriculum as a form of independent learning in 2021. the guidebook was distributed to all educational units implementing the *merdeka belajar* curriculum as a reference for implementing differentiated learning. the dissemination of the differentiated learning guidebook is facilitated by government-appointed driving school facilitators, who play a crucial role in ensuring the consistent and sustainable implementation of differentiated learning across educational institutions.

based on tomlinson's theoretical model, which was adapted in the differentiated instruction guidebook. tomlinson *et al.* (2003) distinguished four aspects in controlling differentiated learning, such as content, process, product, and the learning environment or climate in the classroom. teachers can determine how these four aspects will be implemented in classroom learning. teachers have the opportunity and ability to change content, process, product, and the learning environment and climate in their respective classrooms according to the profile of students in the classroom. the four aspects of differentiated instruction can be seen in fig. 1.1.

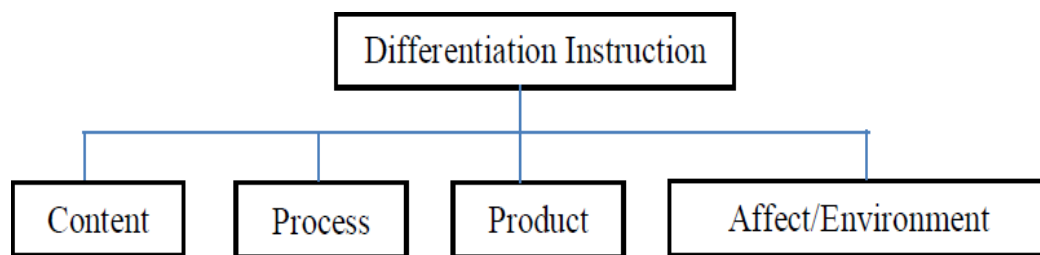


figure. 1.1 model on differentiated instruction (tomlinson, 2013)

although tomlinson's theoretical model provides a comprehensive framework, its implementation across the four aspects has not yet been free from various practical constraints. this is based on the results of a previous study conducted by digna & widyasari (2023) titled "teachers' perceptions of differentiated learning in *merdeka* curriculum in elementary schools". the findings indicate that teachers demonstrate a high level of enthusiasm for learning the new curriculum and show relatively strong participation in *merdeka belajar* curriculum training; however, this engagement is not directly proportional to their level of understanding of

differentiated learning. only a few teachers already understand differentiated learning, and most must implement it in their classes. in line with it, the previous studies about differentiated learning included the research by yunike sulistyosari, herman maurits karwur, & habibi sultan (2022) titled "penerapan pembelajaran ips berdiferensiasi pada kurikulum merdeka belajar". the research showed that the teachers still find confusion when differentiating materials that must be given to various students. teachers are still confused about the concept of proper process differentiation. teachers' misunderstandings in understanding the concept of process differentiation make teachers unable to implement it optimally. in addition, marlina, elisa efrina & grahita kusumastuti (2019) titled "model pembelajaran berdiferensiasi untuk peningkatan keterampilan sosial anak berkebutuhan khusus di sekolah inklusif." the research showed that teachers had difficulties promoting differentiated learning at inclusive schools because of a lack of model recognition.

furthermore, drawing on the researcher's experience as a driving school facilitator, approximately one year of mentoring educational units in the implementation of the merdeka belajar curriculum has provided critical insights into its practical enactment. the researcher has conducted discussions and interviews with several school supervisors, headmasters, and some subject teachers. the results of discussions and interviews related to differentiated learning that teachers in the learning process have carried out are as follows: first, based on the opinion of school supervisors, there are still many junior school educational units and

subject teachers still confused about applying the differentiated learning model in the classroom. not only applying differentiated learning model in the classroom but also the preparation of learning objectives flow (lof) and teaching modules that were in accordance with the needs and characteristics of students which are obstacles for some subject teachers.

the second is based on the results of discussions and interviews with some headmasters of state junior high schools. according to headmaster that there are several varieties of problems of the implementation of differentiated instruction in the *merdeka belajar* curriculum, the variations of problems as follows; (1) teachers had difficulty in arranging different learning methods according to student needs, different learning strategies according to student characteristics, facing students with diverse learning models, (2) all teachers did not yet have a good understanding of differentiated learning, (3) teachers still have difficulty determining the teaching materials that will be used to meet student learning needs, especially in the application of process/product differentiation, (4) timing problems in fulfilling students' learning needs, (5) the large number of students in the class so that teachers find it difficult to manage all student learning needs, (6) complex classroom management, managing a class with students with diverse need and learning at different levels can be a challenge, (7) teachers feel overwhelmed in meeting the diversity of student learning needs in the classroom.

the third is based on discussions and interviews with some subject teachers. there are several variations in problems faced by

teachers as follows; (1) some teachers still experienced difficulties in developing diagnostic assessment instruments or initial learning tests capable of accurately capturing the full range of students' learning styles, (2) teachers were still overwhelmed with preparing differentiated learning due to ineffective use of time, (3) students often changed learning styles not according to diagnostic results but based on their close friends, (4) differentiated assessment instruments did not cover learning outcomes as a whole, (5) teachers still lacked references and sources of inspiration for differentiated learning, (6) some teachers were still confused about the technical implementation of differentiated learning. as it was mentioned previously, this research is intended to find out whether tomlinson's theory is still relevant to the conditions and situations of the needs of education units in indonesia, especially for the south sulawesi region. changes in student habits may cause differences in student learning, especially when discussing students' social and cultural knowledge and perspectives. the researcher hopes that this research is useful for education units, especially learning committees who are aware of social and cultural differences in each student, so that subject teachers can understand and implement differentiated learning in the learning process in the classroom.

therefore, this study extends tomlinson's theoretical model of differentiated learning by introducing an additional aspect to the four foundational dimensions originally proposed by tomlinson namely, content, process, product, and learning environment or school climate. then the

researcher develops the theory by adding one aspect model, namely the social-cultural aspect. to form the development of theory in the application of differentiated learning in the learning process in the classroom. so, if this one-aspect model is added, it will become an aspect model in applying differentiated learning. the five aspect models of differentiated instruction can be seen in fig. 1.2.

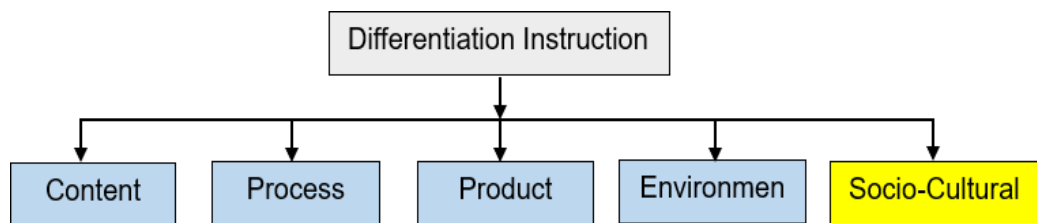


figure. 1.2. integrating sociocultural aspects in tomlinson's theoretical model

furthermore, the development of this theory aims to answer the concerns of subject teachers in applying differentiated learning in the classroom. so far, teachers have only applied differentiated learning by referring to four aspects that have been prepared by the government, both through the independent teaching platform (pmm) and in differentiated learning guidebooks, with the main reference being tomlinson's theoretical model. even though other aspects need to be considered when teachers want to apply differentiated learning in the classroom, namely the social and cultural aspects of students.

these two aspects need to be understood by every teacher because each student has a different social and cultural background. by paying attention to this aspect, teachers can ensure that all students have equal

opportunities to learn and develop. so that teachers can create learning materials that are more relevant and interesting for students. this can increase learning motivation and student involvement in the learning process. social and cultural aspects can also influence students' learning styles. by understanding students' learning styles, teachers can tailor learning approaches to meet individual needs and different learning styles. kia and sitepu (2021) stated that culture is the way humans connect socially and varies from region to region. the curriculum needs to connect students and people from other cultures and regions. furthermore, parmiti *et al.*, (2021) also state that the local culture is a strategy to create a learning environment and design a learning experience as a part of the learning process, by optimizing local cultural values in the learning process, students can link cultural to their daily lives to construct new learning knowledge and students also have the opportunity to explore the cultures that exist in their daily lives.

after extending tomlinson's theoretical framework by integrating sociocultural aspects into differentiated learning within the merdeka belajar curriculum, this study provides a more comprehensive approach to addressing learner diversity in contemporary educational contexts. the model will be implemented in the differentiated learning process to determine the influence of the model on the understanding of education units, especially subject teachers, in implementing differentiated learning in the learning process in the classroom. in line with duane kiley, (2011) states that teaching the heterogeneous student populations at the high

school level is difficult to address without differentiation.

in light of the aforementioned context, this study focuses on the development and adaptation of tomlinson's differentiated learning model within the framework of the *merdeka belajar* curriculum. developing a differentiated learning model by adding social and cultural aspects of students can be one solution for teachers in implementing learning in the classroom. by paying attention to the social and cultural aspects of students in implementing differentiated learning, teachers can create a more meaningful, relevant, and inclusive learning experience for all students in the classroom. the primary product of this research is a learning module on differentiated instruction that integrates sociocultural dimensions. the module is developed for teachers who implement differentiated learning in the classroom. in addition, the reconstruction of schema theory in this study is derived from empirical data collected through systematic classroom observations and structured questionnaires.

1.2.scope of the problem

the central focus of this study is to examine how english teachers design differentiated instructional models by integrating sociocultural aspects within the framework of the *merdeka belajar* curriculum.

the findings reveal that the majority of subject teachers from various junior high schools in the soppeng district encounter multiple challenges in implementing differentiated instruction in their classrooms. this phenomenon is largely attributed to the complex challenges associated with implementing differentiated instructional models within the *merdeka*

belajar curriculum. fajar novtian (2023) mentions that several key issues present significant challenges for teachers in implementing differentiated instruction within the *merdeka belajar* curriculum. first, students' learning conditions are often inconsistent, which hinders the smooth operation of differentiated instructional models. second, differentiated learning requires teachers to design learning sequences that align with students' diverse needs, readiness levels, and interests, an expectation that demands considerable pedagogical expertise. third, the status of english as a foreign language adds an additional layer of difficulty, as many students have limited prior exposure to english, making differentiation more complex. fourth, the need to provide learning media that are both pedagogically appropriate and responsive to students' sociocultural backgrounds requires teachers to invest substantial time and effort in preparing relevant instructional materials. together, these challenges highlight the urgent need to strengthen teachers' capacity in designing and implementing sociocultural ly responsive differentiated instruction.

mastur (2023) states that the teachers face the problems referred to *merdeka belajar* curriculum including (1) the limited competence of teachers, (2) the lack of optimal implementation of differentiation learning according to the objectives of the independent curriculum, (3) the lack of use of it in learning the implementation of the independent curriculum. furthermore, muhafid & retnawati (2023) reveal that teachers face several challenges in applying the differentiated learning model in the independent curriculum implementation, such as ; (1) lack of supporting tools, (2) lack

of teacher motivation and competence, as well as lack of support from the school ecosystem and various parties in organizing the independent curriculum, (3) teachers had not been able to find the right method for each student, and (4) teachers still had limited time to accommodate student learning according to student learning styles.

therefore, this study investigates the challenges encountered by english subject teachers in developing the competencies required to implement differentiated learning models that integrate sociocultural aspects within the *merdeka belajar* curriculum. the purpose of this inquiry is to identify strategic approaches that can effectively support english teachers in addressing these challenges and enhancing their capacity to design and deliver sociocultural ly responsive differentiated instruction.

1.3.the research question

the research questions outline the key issues that this study seeks to address throughout the research process. they become the guidance and main concerns of this research. to develop the design of this research, the research questions are formulated as follows;

1. how do the english teachers address sociocultural factors while implementing differentiated instruction within the *merdeka belajar* curriculum?
2. how is a differentiated learning module based on sociocultural actors to be developed to increase teachers' understanding in implementing differentiated learning?
3. to what extent do sociocultural factors affect teachers' social

competence in teaching performance of differentiated instructions within the *merdeka belajar* curriculum?

4. what is the impact of integrating sociocultural factors into differentiated instructions on students' academic performance and engagement in the *merdeka belajar* curriculum compared to tomlinson's theoretical framework?

1.4.the research purposes

this research aims to develop tomlinson's theoretical framework to apply the differentiated learning model in the *merdeka belajar* curriculum that can help the teachers find strategies for arranging different learning approach based on sociocultural factors in soppeng regency of south sulawesi. the research objectives are as follows;

1. to find out how the english teachers address sociocultural diversity while implementing differentiated instruction within the *merdeka belajar* curriculum.
2. to create a differentiated learning module based on sociocultural factors to increase teachers' understanding in implementing differentiated learning.
3. to find out the effect of teachers implementing sociocultural factors on teachers' social competence in teaching performance of differentiated instructions within the *merdeka belajar* curriculum
4. to find out the impact of integrating sociocultural factors into differentiated instructions on students' academic performance and engagement in the *merdeka belajar* curriculum compared to

tomlinson's theoretical framework

1.5. the research significances

this research is expected to contribute to both theoretical significance and pedagogical significance aspects.

1. theoretical significance

this research is expected to contribute to developing knowledge on designing tomlinson's theoretical model of applying differentiated instruction in the *merdeka belajar* curriculum by sociocultural factors. by referring to the design of this research, namely to develop a set of teaching strategies to apply the differentiated learning model, the theoretical significance is expected to support the strategies of applying the differentiated learning model in the *merdeka belajar* curriculum. what is more, the main goal of this study is to support the policy makers (ministry of education, culture, research and technology, directorate general of teachers and education, and great teacher mobilization hall of south sulawesi), educational units, and subject teachers.

2. pedagogical significance

there are four important points of pedagogical significance of this research. the three formulated as follows;

- a) english teachers, who will be teaching and getting in touch directly with students during the semester, applying the differentiated a learning model in their classes.
- b) the learners in soppeng regency, who are learning material in the class that is involved in the *merdeka belajar* curriculum, can learn the

material by applying the differentiated learning model based on the topic. this is also to solve the problem faced by the learners in the learning process.

- c) *balai* besar guru penggerak (bbgp) as a policy maker in implementing differentiated learning in education units in 24 districts and cities in south sulawesi.
- d) other researchers may use this study to conduct other research related to the issue.

1.6. the research limitation

the research limitation describes the subject or object, its location, and the focus of the research. the determination on those matters is necessary to avoid excessive data and to ensure time effectiveness. this research designs a model for applying differentiated instruction by integrating sociocultural in the *merdeka belajar* curriculum. differentiated instruction was first introduced by tomlinson (2003) and adapted by the government in the book on the development of curriculum and learning tools within the framework of the principles of developing differentiated learning in the flexible curriculum as a form of *merdeka belajar* (2021).

this research is limited to being implemented in education units that implement the *merdeka belajar* curriculum in south sulawesi, especially in soppeng regency. apart from designing and implementing the model, this model is also measured to see its effect on the teacher's abilities to implement differentiated instructions within the *merdeka belajar* curriculum framework through sociocultural factors.

the integration of socioculture factors in this research is limited to local sociocultural factors in south sulawesi, including the bugis, makassar, toraja, and many others. each ethnic group has its own distinct language, customs, and traditions. traditional social structures in south sulawesi often revolve around kinship ties and hierarchical relationships. respect for elders and community leaders is highly valued, and social interactions are governed by codes of conduct rooted in local customs and traditions.

this limitation is also applied in determining schema theory. tomlinson's adaptation theory, namely content, process, product, affect/environment, is used to analyze whether differentiated learning schemes influence students' socio-culture in planning and implementing differentiated learning. by taking these social-cultural factors into account, teachers can create inclusive and effective learning environments for all students.

1.7. research novelty

the research to be carried out has a form of novelty with pre-existing research. the novelty of this research is stated because research that discusses integrating sociocultural factors in the implementation of differentiated instructions in the *merdeka belajar* curriculum: revisiting tomlinson's theoretical framework has never been researched so far, several studies that discuss the application of differentiated instruction in the *merdeka belajar* curriculum are only in terms of teacher and student perceptions related to the effectiveness of applying differentiated

instructions.

research on the effect of differentiated learning strategies on student learning outcomes has been conducted by many experts and researchers before. one of the studies is the influence of differentiated learning problem-based learning models on student science learning outcomes. the results of these studies are in the form of articles, papers, theses, and dissertations that highlight various aspects of the model in the application of differentiated learning in the *merdeka belajar* curriculum and problems related to the influence of the application of differentiated learning, but no research has ever been conducted on integrating socio-culture factors in the implementation of differentiated instructions in the *merdeka belajar* curriculum: revisiting tomlinson's theoretical framework.

the novelty of research is expressed by showing that the research problem has never been studied by previous researchers or by stating the differences between the research conducted and previous research. this research is categorised as research that has *novelty* because it is based on searches that have been carried out exploratively, both off-line and online, using search engine applications; <https://www.scopus.com/home.uri>, www.perpusnas.go.id/, www.academia.edu/, www.researchgate.net/, <https://scholar.google.com>, <https://harzing.com>, open access journal (doaj), web of science (wos), which was further analysed using the nivo-12, and <https://smartpls.com/> application. the researcher concluded that research on integrating sociocultural factors in the implementation of differentiated instructions in the *merdeka belajar* curriculum: revisiting

tomlinson's theoretical framework had never been conducted by previous researchers. thus, the results (findings) of this study will have a high level of originality because it is an initial research that is the *first step stone* in nature, which is expected to inspire language education researchers to conduct further research.

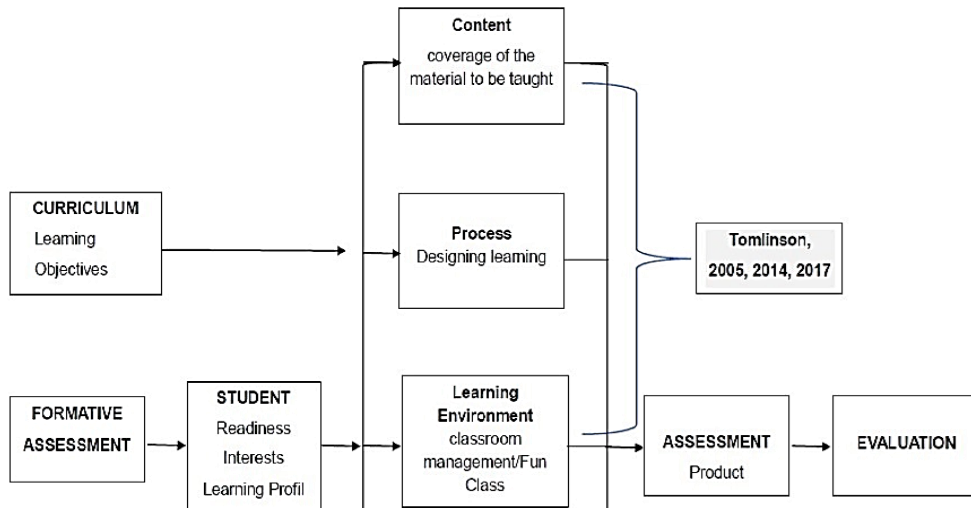


figure 1.3 tomlinson's theoretical framework

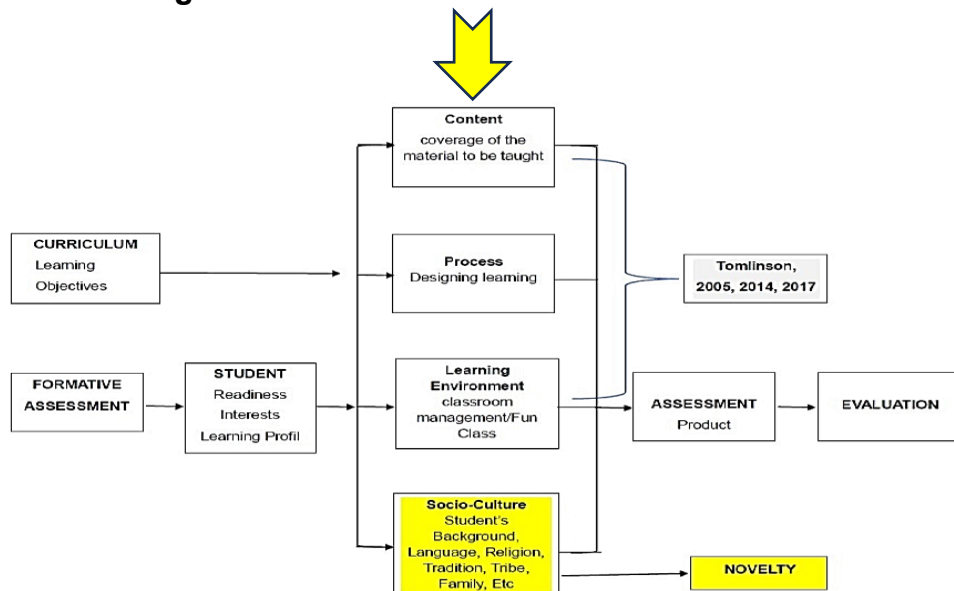


figure 1.4 additional aspect for tomlinson's theoretical framework

chapter II

implementing socioculturally-informed differentiated instruction in efl learning: teachers' strategies and classroom realities

2.1 abstract

this study examines the implementation of sociocultural approaches in differentiated instruction, with a focus on the practices and perceptions of efl teachers. the research examines the impact of these strategies on student engagement, motivation, and cultural awareness. data were collected through interviews and focus group discussions with efl teachers from two junior high schools in soppeng, south sulawesi. the participants were efl teachers who had implemented differentiated instruction through the *merdeka belajar* indonesian government program. the findings indicate that key aspects of the efl teachers' implementation included grouping students, strengthening relevance and understanding, using differentiated teaching methods, connecting cultural storytelling, and utilizing a teaching guide. however, some challenges were identified during the implementation of the sociocultural approach, including matching the material, increasing knowledge, requiring extra time for preparation, differentiating students' english abilities, and accommodating diverse sociocultural backgrounds. despite these challenges, the advantages included increased student engagement, cultural awareness, and cultural preservation. teachers emphasized the need for training, discussion forums, and updated sociocultural content to improve teaching effectiveness and inclusivity, fostering a more dynamic and engaging efl classroom. overall, the research demonstrates that sociocultural approaches, when combined with differentiated instruction, enhance learning outcomes, foster inclusivity, and cultivate a more culturally responsive learning environment.

keywords: sociocultural approaches, differentiated instruction, efl classroom

2.2 introduction

in terms of the educational landscape, there is a need for effective teaching strategies that help learners in learning. this study aims to investigate how english teachers implement differentiated instruction with a sociocultural approach in the english language teaching (elt) classroom. the integration of differentiated instruction within the framework of the *merdeka belajar* curriculum is particularly significant, as it emphasizes student-centered learning and acknowledges the diverse backgrounds of students.

differentiated instruction, which incorporates justification and urgency, is a pedagogical approach that modifies teaching methods to address the diverse needs of students, thereby improving their learning experiences and outcomes (m. tomlinson & jackson, 2021; smale-jacobse et al., 2019; jorgensen & brogaard, 2021; markey et al., 2023). the diversity in classrooms is increasing, and teachers need to know how to reach all learners in a culturally responsive manner; thus, this research is timely. sociocultural factors that influence student learning, including engagement and achievement, have been extensively researched in recent studies (gonzales, 2022; ialuna et al., 2024). therefore, understanding how english teachers incorporate these factors into their differentiated instruction processes is crucial in fostering an equitable learning environment.

theoretical framework: the theoretical foundations of differentiated instruction can be traced back to constructivist learning paradigms, which suggest that learners create knowledge through their experiences and

interactions with the world (pozas et al., 2020; wibowo et al., 2025; vygotsky, 1989). indeed, such a view is congruent with the sociocultural approach. this combination of practices can help create a more inclusive and effective learning environment that acknowledges, respects, and celebrates the diverse backgrounds of students.

culturally relevant education: culturally relevant education is an approach that has gained popularity in recent years as classrooms have become increasingly diverse. research indicates that students who see themselves reflected in the curriculum engage more meaningfully with the content (byrd, 2016; ladson-billings, 1994; gay, 2002). such an engagement is vital to language learning, where an underspecified culture can have a profound impact on understanding and communication. these strategies must be aligned with students' cultural contexts and differentiated for stages of learning, as english teachers may not always find themselves in the most favourable environments for achieving targeted learning outcomes.

related work prior studies have suggested that differentiated instruction can lead to greater engagement and success among students. for example, smith & jones (2024) found that teachers who implemented differentiation reported increased levels of student motivation and engagement. share on social media. related academic success, cultural background, instructional design, and instructional design and cultural factors theory note that in designing instruction, attention to students' cultural backgrounds can dramatically boost learning outcomes (kieran &

anderson, 2019; ai-yen chen et al., 2004; aronson, 2020). despite the valuable insights these studies offer regarding differentiated instruction and sociocultural factors, a clear gap remains in understanding how these factors specifically integrate in the elt context.

research gap. although differentiated instruction has gained attention in recent years, it is still gradually being recognized in english fields, and more empirical evidence has begun to accumulate. studies on english teachers practicing differentiated instruction, especially those examining sociocultural aspects related to differentiated instruction, are surprisingly limited. existing studies have either examined differentiated instruction as a phenomenon or have looked at sociocultural issues in isolation, as the intersection of these two variables in the context of the elt classroom has not been investigated yet. overall, however, there is a significant gap between this and investigating the day-to-day activities teachers were undertaking, as well as the struggles associated with those approaches. therefore, researchers aim to investigate how efl teachers implement and perceive differentiated instruction with a sociocultural approach in the elt classroom. the study aims to explore the strategies employed by teachers and the sociocultural factors they took into consideration, as well as the challenges they encountered in their instructional practices.

2.3 theoretical framework

the theoretical framework for this study is grounded in two primary educational theories: **constructivism** and **sociocultural theory**. these theories provide a comprehensive lens through which to examine the implementation of differentiated instruction in the english language teaching (elt) classroom, particularly in the context of the merdeka belajar curriculum.

2.3.1. constructivism

constructivism is an approach to learning that states that individuals foster their own understanding and learning of the world through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences. according to piaget (1973), this theory focuses on the learner as an active agent in the learning process instead of a mere receiver of information. thus, based on constructivist principles, sound teaching should take into account the different learning styles and needs of students and provide them with opportunities to interact with material in ways that are meaningful to them. constructivism, particularly in the context of differentiated instruction, emphasizes that teachers need to adjust their instructional approaches to accommodate the different needs of their students. not only does this strategy create active engagement for students, but it also encourages a deeper understanding of information and knowledge retention taber, (2006). additionally, tomlinson (2021) claims that differentiated instruction remains centered on constructivist tenets, offering varied pathways for students to access and study content while also demonstrating that learning took place in the construction of knowledge.

2.3.2. sociocultural theory

socialcultural theory, as proposed by lev vygotsky (vygotsky, 1978), explains that the learning process involves social interactions and cultural contexts. according to vygotsky, the process of cognitive development is fundamentally social and is mediated through collaboration and dialogue with more knowledgeable others (e.g., teacher, peers). thus, this theory explains the importance of cultural factors in shaping the learning experiences and outcomes of students.

in keeping with a sociocultural approach to differentiated instruction that recognizes and values the multiple cultures in the classroom, this method encourages teachers to build inclusive learning environments that are responsive to students' identities and experiences. it has been argued that sociocultural theory has the potential to increase student engagement and achievement through culturally responsive teaching (bateman, 2024; dallas, 2013). incorporating sociocultural factors into their pedagogical practices creates a more inclusive environment that better meets the specific needs of their students, which leads to a sense of belonging and academic success.

2.3.3. integration of theories

constructivism and sociocultural theory can be integrated to offer a solid theoretical foundation from which the elt teacher can interpret differentiated instruction. teachers who understand that broader concepts of learning show students the opportunities they have to diversify their education with their previous experiences relevant to the world around

them can create relevant and engaging instruction. this emphasizes the implications of both theories on the methods that teachers use in their instruction, as well as the dynamics that are present in the classroom setting.

the theoretical framework that guides this study is built upon constructivist and sociocultural theories, which highlight the active role of learners and the importance of cultural contexts in the learning process (as discussed in the following sections). these bandings can determine the focus of the inquiry into how english teachers use a sociocultural approach of differentiated instruction, contributing to making a practice more visible, supporting a better interpretation of effective teaching practices in diverse, changing classrooms.

2.4 previous research

2.4.1 culturally responsive teaching and differentiation

bennett et al. (2025) advanced the discourse on culturally responsive pedagogy by empirically demonstrating that when teachers integrate students' cultural backgrounds into classroom instruction, learner motivation and engagement increase significantly. their findings enrich the theoretical foundation of culturally responsive teaching (crt) by emphasizing cultural congruence as a determinant of academic success. however, while their study situates culture as an affective and motivational catalyst within pedagogy, it primarily addresses classroom engagement in general education contexts rather than within the domain of english language teaching (elt). in contrast, the present research moves beyond

examining motivation to develop and validate a pedagogical model—a *differentiated learning module*—that operationalizes sociocultural responsiveness within elt practice. where gonzalez and darling-hammond identify **why** culture matters, this study demonstrates **how** sociocultural values can be systematically embedded into lesson design, classroom activities, and teacher decision-making within the *merdeka belajar* framework.

moreover, their study focuses on teacher behaviors and student affect, whereas this research evaluates both instructional products and outcomes, combining expert validation and classroom implementation data. thus, the present study extends gonzalez and darling-hammond’s insights by transforming theoretical awareness of cultural responsiveness into a context-specific, empirically tested instructional tool that aligns differentiated instruction with indonesia’s multilingual and multicultural realities.

2.4.2. teacher perceptions and practices

zaier (2002) contributes to the body of differentiated instruction (di) research by emphasizing the psychological and belief-oriented dimension of teachers’ practices in culturally diverse english classrooms. his qualitative findings reveal that teachers who consciously recognize sociocultural diversity tend to design more responsive and inclusive learning activities, suggesting that pedagogical differentiation is inseparable from teachers’ cultural awareness and attitudes. while this aligns closely with the philosophical premise of the present study—that

culture and differentiation must coexist—zaier’s work primarily explores teacher cognition and perception, not the design or empirical validation of instructional materials. in contrast, the current research advances beyond perceptual analysis to develop and test a structured learning module that operationalizes sociocultural sensitivity into concrete instructional stages following the addie model. where zaier identifies *beliefs as antecedents* to effective differentiation, this study provides a systemic framework that translates those beliefs into actionable, context-specific classroom practices within the *merdeka belajar* curriculum. moreover, the integration of validation and field-testing phases in this research distinguishes it from zaier’s descriptive orientation, offering not only insight into teachers’ understanding but also an empirically verified solution for classroom implementation. thus, this study extends zaier’s conceptual foundation by transforming attitudinal awareness into a tangible pedagogical model adaptable to indonesia’s multilingual and multicultural elt contexts.

2.4.3. student-centered approaches

isaacs (2023) significantly contributes to differentiated instruction (di) literature by demonstrating that student-centered differentiation, when harmonized with sociocultural responsiveness, leads to measurable improvements in english language learners’ (ells) performance. their findings validate the pedagogical synergy between differentiation and cultural inclusivity, offering empirical proof that sensitivity to linguistic and cultural diversity enhances language acquisition and engagement. however, while their case study confirms the *outcomes* of such integration,

it stops short of developing a replicable instructional framework or module for classroom application.

in contrast, the current research advances this discourse from demonstration to systematic design and validation. it not only supports the proposition that culturally attuned differentiation benefits learners but also constructs, tests, and refines a concrete module—integrating cultural, linguistic, and contextual elements—within the *merdeka belajar* curriculum. where isaacs emphasizes student achievement as an indicator of effective differentiation, this study extends their work by operationalizing *how* teachers can achieve those results through an empirically validated sociocultural di model. thus, this research transforms the evidence of potential.

2.4.4 challenges in implementation

lavania et al., (2023) broadened the discourse on differentiated instruction (di) by revealing the systemic and institutional barriers that hinder teachers' capacity to implement culturally responsive differentiation effectively. their findings—insufficient resources, inadequate professional training, and time limitations—underscore that even when teachers conceptually value sociocultural integration, the lack of institutional scaffolding can prevent its realization.

this perspective is invaluable because it shifts attention from classroom-level practices to structural conditions that shape pedagogical agency. however, brown et al.'s study remains primarily diagnostic, offering an important critique of policy and professional development gaps

without translating those insights into a tested pedagogical model. the present research moves beyond identifying constraints to providing a concrete instructional solution: a validated differentiated-learning module that embeds sociocultural principles within the *merdeka belajar* framework. by developing and field-testing this module, the current study operationalizes what brown et al. called for—systemic support through accessible tools and guided implementation strategies. in this way, while brown et al. expose the “**why**” of difficulty, this research advances to demonstrate the “**how**” of possibility, transforming structural critiques into a practical framework for teacher empowerment and context-responsive pedagogy in indonesian classrooms.

2.4.5 implications for current research

these recent studies highlight the need to investigate how differentiated instruction with a sociocultural perspective is executed by elt teachers in the classroom. they emphasize that further research is needed on the strategies teachers use, the sociocultural contexts they are sensitive to, and the obstacles that they must navigate. by doing so, our research can fill these gaps and provide valuable insights into effective teaching practices that promote equity and inclusivity in diverse educational settings.

2.5. research method

this study employs a qualitative research design to gain a deep understanding of the practices and experiences of english teachers. the primary data were collected directly from participants through interviews, forum group discussions (fgds), and observations. this research was conducted in february 2025 in two junior high schools in soppeng, south sulawesi. researchers used purposive sampling to select participants. researchers deliberately select people and locations to discover or understand a key phenomenon (r. dale wilson, 1973; pei et al., 2013; john w. creswell, 2017). the subjects are selected based on the following criteria: english teachers who have implemented differentiated instruction through the merdeka belajar curriculum, and teachers at the research site. the researchers chose the schools because they are fully implementing the merdeka belajar curriculum, and primarily observed the schools and teachers as part of the school facilitator programs. therefore, researchers had a connection to do research in these schools. the total number of participants is three efl teachers.

the researchers employed qualitative interviews and focus group discussions (fgds) as the primary data collection methods. an open-ended question was used to collect the efl teachers' perceptions of implementing sociocultural in differentiated instruction. the researchers also conducted fgd to gain additional data. the results from the interview and fgd are transcribed into a computer file for analysis. the data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, which involves identifying, analysing,

and reporting patterns (themes) within the qualitative data. this technique is particularly suitable for this study as it allows for the exploration of complex phenomena, such as the interplay between differentiated instruction and sociocultural factors.

2. 6 findings and discussions

this study aimed to answer the research question of how english teachers implement and perceive differentiated instruction with a sociocultural approach for the elt classroom. the findings illustrate a structured approach to integrating sociocultural aspects into differentiated instruction within an english language teaching (elt) classroom. it outlines key components, such as efl teachers' implementation and their perception. the findings indicate that there are five practices of efl teachers in implementing sociocultural approaches in differentiated instruction in the elt classroom. moreover, in terms of efl teachers' perceptions, three main findings are identified: challenges in implementation, advantages of implementation, and areas for improvement. to visualize these findings, please refer to the figure below.

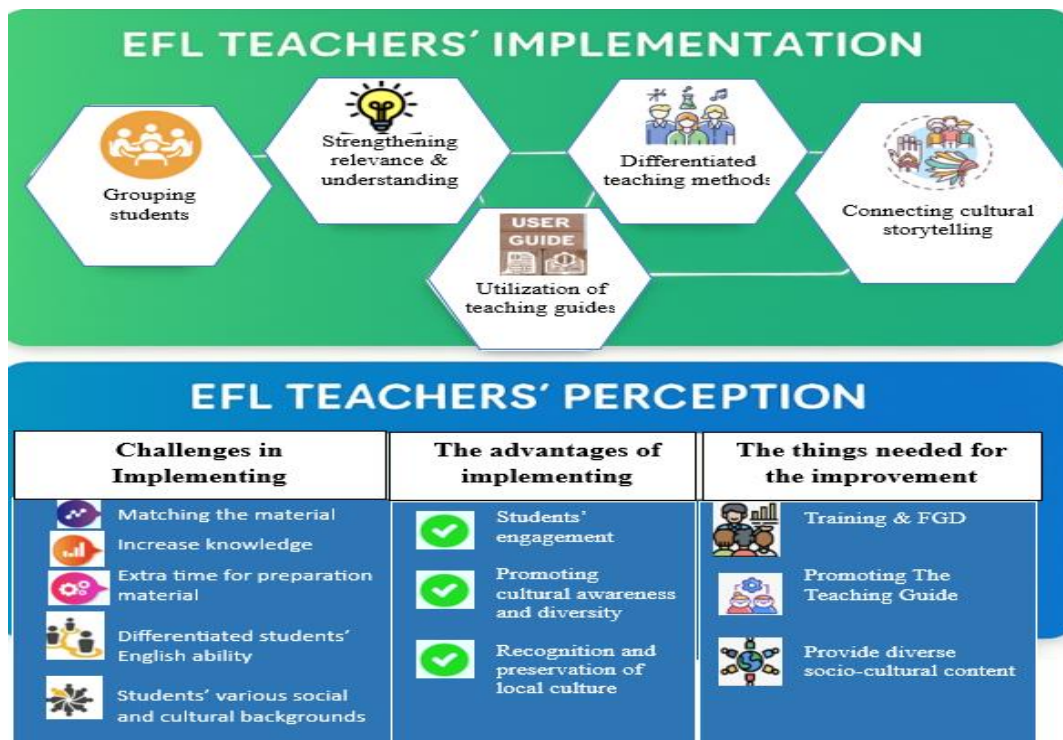


figure 2.1: benefits and improvement priorities of implementation

2. 6. 1 findings

2.6.1.1 efl teachers' implementation

a. grouping students

in identifying teachers' application of differentiated instruction with a sociocultural approach, teachers used grouping students based on understanding or ability level as one of the approaches to understand.

sometimes i also divide the students into groups based on their level of understanding. for example, i group those with a high level of understanding with those with a low level so that they can discuss and solve problems together, (g105-interview).

sometimes i divide the students into groups with different levels of understanding, for example, those who have experience teaching english with differentiation, so i feel that with this differentiation, i can better understand the abilities of the children, where i group those with high abilities with those with low abilities so that they can discuss and solve problems, (g104-interview).

these data indicate that teachers frequently use grouping as a strategy to manage the diverse abilities of students within the classroom. by grouping students with different levels of understanding, teachers foster peer-to-peer learning. more advanced students can assist those with lower comprehension, fostering a collaborative environment where students learn from one another.

however, not only do teachers group students based on their understanding and level of ability, but they also adjust the grouping based on specific needs, aiming to meet students where they are in their learning process.

i usually provide the material after first analysing the characteristics and needs of the students. as we know, each student has different characteristics and needs, (g105-interview).

this is particularly beneficial for students with varying abilities, as it enables teachers to provide targeted support and opportunities for growth tailored to each student's characteristics and needs.

b. strengthening relevance and understanding

it focuses on teachers' attempts to connect the material they teach in class. as two respondents stated below

g104 stated that by linking the material taught to the students' daily experiences, teachers find it easier to deliver lessons. this approach also increases students' motivation to follow lessons, as the material presented is relevant to their diverse experiences (g104-fgd).

g303 emphasized that the sociocultural aspects help students relate the subject matter to their personal experiences. this is expected to improve students' understanding of the material being taught, as they can see the relevance between learning and their daily lives (g303-fgd).

the integration of sociocultural aspects into lessons helps students relate to the subject matter by contextualizing it within their personal experience. when students can see the relevance of what they are learning in the context of their own lives and cultures, it deepens their understanding and makes the material more meaningful.

c. differentiated teaching methods

the use of varied teaching methods in terms of teaching english by using a sociocultural approach in differentiated instruction. as teachers stated

so, with the implementation of this method, children are also more active, because the distribution can be done through video and audio, (g104-interview)

the teacher's differentiated methods, as highlighted by the data, include the incorporation of multimedia—specifically video and audio—into the learning process. this method actively engages students by providing content in different formats that cater to various learning preferences (e.g., auditory and visual learners).

while other teachers highlighted the data, the structured approach to lesson planning is outlined below. the teacher follows a precise sequence: starting with an opening, motivating students, linking previous lessons to current content, presenting the learning objectives, and explaining the lesson. this structure ensures that all students can follow the lesson, regardless of their initial knowledge level or learning preferences.

as you saw earlier, when i conducted the learning process in the classroom, i first started with an opening, then motivated the students, after which i linked yesterday's material with today's, then showed the objects we would be learning about today, and after

that, i explained the lesson we would be learning today. at that time, i explained the learning objectives, which i had listed in the third learning objective, stating that the students would be able to present them. earlier, i administered a procedural test, a procedural test, (g303-interview).

teachers incorporate local legends and cultural narratives, such as the "nenek pakande" legend, to enrich students' understanding of their cultural heritage while also enhancing their language learning experience. additionally, the teacher noted that incorporating local folklore and stories familiar to students, particularly those passed down through generations, encourages students to become more engaged and emotionally invested in the lesson. by allowing students to share their own stories, teachers create an environment where students feel comfortable expressing themselves and valuing their cultural heritage.

e. utilization of teaching guides

the use of teaching guides can also help teachers to implement sociocultural practices in their english classes.

this teacher's guide provides significant benefits in english language learning, especially in procedural text material, (g104-fgd).

the teaching guide is particularly beneficial when it includes specialized teacher guides, such as those related to specific content areas like procedural texts in english. these teacher guides help teachers focus their lessons and adapt the material to better suit the needs of their students. moreover, this respondent also emphasizes that incorporating local culture helps make the content more relatable and engaging for students. when the material is linked to students' cultural backgrounds, it enhances their

connection to the subject matter, making learning more enjoyable and deepening their understanding. as stated below.

although students had previously discussed this topic in other lessons, the use of a guidebook that links the material to local culture is very helpful for both teachers and students. with this approach, students become more familiar with traditional culture, especially in the context of english language learning, (g104-fgd).

2.6.1.2 efl teachers' perception

2.6.1.2.1 challenges in implementing

a. matching the material

the results of the data also reveal teachers' perceptions of challenges in implementing english class. one of the challenging parts is matching the material with the subject.

the challenge i face in implementing differentiated learning is perhaps only matching the material, because we know that not all material is suitable for students, as we know that our students have different habits and characters and therefore their own culture, in my opinion, (g105-interview).

teachers face additional difficulty in selecting materials that are culturally relevant for students with diverse backgrounds. the cultural diversity within the classroom means that what resonates with one group of students might not be engaging or meaningful for others. this requires teachers to carefully select materials that are not only pedagogically sound but also culturally inclusive, so that all students can relate to the content.

b. increase knowledge

another challenge in implementing this sociocultural approach in english teaching is the necessity to explore knowledge to provide a

sociocultural context for the students, as one of the respondents stated during the fgd.

g303 also mentioned that another challenge faced was the need to increase knowledge before entering the classroom in order to provide learning that was appropriate to the students' sociocultural context (g303-fgd).

teachers face the challenge of continually expanding their knowledge and staying informed about the diverse sociocultural backgrounds of their students. this is especially critical in the context of efl teaching, where understanding the cultural nuances of students is essential for effective lesson planning and engagement. teachers must be equipped with the necessary knowledge, not only of the english language but also of their students' cultural identities and experiences, to deliver relevant and inclusive content.

c. extra time for preparation material

time-consuming in preparation, the lesson also poses a concern for the teacher in implementing sociocultural practices in class.

g303 also emphasizes the importance of thorough preparation before teaching, including deepening knowledge of relevant cultures in order to effectively relate lesson material to students' experiences (g303-fgd).

teachers acknowledge that effective teaching, especially in an efl context, requires substantial preparation, particularly when the material must be adapted to students' sociocultural contexts. teachers need to deepen their knowledge about relevant cultures and integrate these insights into their lessons. this preparation extends beyond typical lesson planning and

requires additional time to ensure that the content resonates with students and is culturally relevant.

d. differentiated students' english ability

another challenge faced by teachers in the classroom is the varying level of language proficiency, which requires teachers to adapt, as one of the english teachers highlighted during the fgd.

g104 stated that the challenges in classroom learning stemmed from the diversity of students' english language abilities. many students had limitations in english, which became an obstacle in the learning process (g104-fgd).

the variation in students' english proficiency levels is a key challenge in efl classrooms. teachers report that many students have significant limitations in their english language skills, which hinders their ability to fully engage with and understand the material. this creates an obstacle for teachers who need to ensure that all students, regardless of their proficiency, can succeed in learning english.

e. students' various social and cultural backgrounds

the diverse social and cultural backgrounds of students in a class also challenge teachers to adapt to the varying social and cultural backgrounds of their students.

g104 also stated that differences in student backgrounds also affect classroom dynamics, so teachers need to create effective and relevant teaching materials and methods for all students (g104-fgd).

the differences in students' social and cultural backgrounds have a significant impact on how they engage with the learning material and interact within the classroom. teachers report that the diversity in students' cultural experiences and socio-economic contexts makes it challenging to

create teaching materials and methods that are universally effective. as students come from varying backgrounds, they may have different prior knowledge, experiences, and learning preferences, which influence their engagement with the lesson.

2.6.1.2.2 the advantages of implementing

a. students' engagement

in terms of the advantages of implementing this sociocultural approach in english classes, teachers believe it enhances students' positive engagement.

g104 stated that student response to the learning teacher's guide was very positive, with a significant increase in student interest and engagement. students felt more motivated when the material taught was related to local wisdom or things they encountered in their daily lives. this shows that the relevance of the material to students' daily experiences can increase the effectiveness of learning, (g104-fgd).

teachers report that introducing differentiated learning that incorporates sociocultural aspects has led to positive student responses. students appear more motivated and engaged when they see that the content is tailored to their backgrounds and interests. this personalized approach allows for greater student participation and enthusiasm. additionally, teachers report that sociocultural approaches significantly enhance student engagement by making the material more relatable and connected to students' daily lives and cultural contexts. by linking learning to students' personal experiences and cultural backgrounds, students feel more invested in the content, leading to higher levels of participation and interest.

supporting the development of understanding and appreciation of students, then inviting them to understand the lesson, (g104-interview).

teachers also highlight that the application of sociocultural methods helps foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of the material. when students recognize the relevance of the content to their lives and communities, they are more likely to engage meaningfully with the lesson and develop a stronger connection to the subject matter.

b. value of cultural awareness and diversity

another advantage of this implementation is that it helps students value their local culture, which is closely linked to language learning.

with this approach, students become more familiar with traditional culture, especially in the context of learning english, and it is very effective in helping students to better appreciate the cultural diversity of each individual, (g104-fgd).

teachers also note that by incorporating traditional cultural elements into english lessons, students become more familiar with and appreciative of their cultural heritage. this approach helps students to see the relevance of cultural knowledge in the context of learning english and deepens their engagement with the language. by linking english language learning with students' traditional cultures, teachers provide students with a deeper, more contextualized understanding of both language and culture. this helps students see language as a living, evolving tool deeply connected to cultural expression and communication. it also demonstrates the value of integrating cultural content into language learning, making the process more relevant and engaging.

c. recognition and preservation of local culture

other advantages that students can gain with this approach are recognition and preservation of local culture.

g104 stated that this approach was very effective in helping students to better appreciate the cultural diversity of each individual. it demonstrates significant benefits in english language learning, particularly in procedural text materials. by covering social and cultural aspects, this teacher's guide helps students understand various cultures from english-speaking countries, thereby broadening their horizons. alhamdulillah, this approach has increased students' understanding of the importance of cultural preservation (g104-fgd).

the integration of cultural aspects into lessons is not only aimed at enhancing students' knowledge of other cultures but also at fostering an appreciation for cultural diversity. when students learn about different cultural practices and values, they develop a sense of respect and understanding for people from various backgrounds. teachers observe that by incorporating cultural lessons into the curriculum, students not only gain a better understanding of global cultures but also learn the importance of preserving their cultural heritage. this approach encourages students to appreciate the value of their traditions while learning about others, leading to a deeper connection to both their personal and global identities.

2.6.1.2.3 the things needed for the improvement

a. training & fgd

one of the suggestions, as the teacher stated, to improve this approach in the future is to provide training and a discussion forum for teachers to enhance their understanding.

i would like to see further discussion and training to help teachers understand and explore the material more thoroughly, even though they have read the teacher's guide, teachers believe that discussion forums will be very useful for improving understanding, (g303-fgd).

teachers also recognize the value of discussion forums, training, and peer collaboration in improving their understanding of sociocultural content. even after reading the material or attending training, teachers believe that structured discussions allow them to share insights, clarify doubts, and explore the material more thoroughly. these forums offer teachers an opportunity to exchange ideas, discuss best practices, and receive feedback from their peers. teachers acknowledge that learning is a continuous process, and they require access to ongoing resources and opportunities for professional growth to continually improve their practice.

b. promoting the teaching guide

another suggestion from the teacher is to promote the teacher's guide to reach a wider audience and encourage its implementation in the class.

my suggestion is to promote this teacher's guide more, then create materials that include inclusive content, (g104-interview).

teachers suggest that the promotion of the learning teachers' guide should be expanded to ensure that more people are aware of its benefits. they also emphasize the importance of creating materials that include inclusive content, ensuring that the teaching materials reflect a variety of perspectives and cultural backgrounds to cater to the diverse needs of students.

c. provide diverse sociocultural content

the teacher also suggested adding material to the sociocultural approach teacher's guide, as stated below.

g104 suggests improving the learning teacher's guide by providing more diverse and continuously updated content. this is intended to make the material taught more relevant and interesting to students, as well as universally applicable across various subjects, (g104-fgd).

teachers suggest that the learning teacher's guide should include more diverse content that reflects a broad spectrum of cultures, ideas, and experiences. this would make the content more relatable and engaging for students, ensuring that it resonates with their own experiences and backgrounds. additionally, updating the content regularly is considered essential for keeping lessons fresh, interesting, and aligned with current cultural trends and societal changes. teachers also emphasize the need for content that is universally applicable across different subjects, rather than being confined to language learning. by integrating sociocultural content into various subject areas, the teaching material becomes interdisciplinary, broadening students' understanding and encouraging critical thinking about cultural issues in multiple contexts.

2. 6. 2 discussion

the findings of this research highlight how efl teachers apply various strategies to create significant benefits of implementing sociocultural approaches in differentiated instruction in the efl classroom. first, teachers reported that by grouping students based on their abilities and incorporating multimedia resources, they were able to engage students

with diverse learning styles and proficiency levels, thus promoting active participation (c. a. tomlinson, 2001; d'amico & gallaway, 2010; shaari & matore, 2019).

second, strengthening the relevance between the sociocultural approach in lessons encourages them to appreciate the diversity of cultures both within and outside the classroom. by linking learning to students' cultural contexts, teachers fostered an environment that was not only engaging but also supportive of inclusive education. this method aligns with gay's culturally responsive teaching (esteban-guitart et al., 2019; gregory, h., gayle, & chapman, 2013), which emphasizes the importance of incorporating students' cultural identities into the curriculum. the positive impact of this approach was evident as students showed greater enthusiasm and understanding when they saw their own cultures reflected in the material. as a result, the integration of sociocultural content not only enriched the students' learning experience but also contributed to the creation of a more inclusive classroom environment, promoting intercultural understanding and respect.

third, the use of differentiated teaching methods combined with a sociocultural approach significantly contributes to a more engaging, inclusive, and effective learning experience in efl classrooms, as it allows students to engage with the content in a way that is personally relevant and culturally meaningful. this approach is strongly supported by established educational frameworks, such as those proposed by tajik et

al., 2024, gay, 2018, and c. a. tomlinson, 2014 all of which advocate for instruction that adapts to the diverse needs and backgrounds of students.

furthermore, integrating local cultural stories into lessons by connecting cultural storytelling allowed students to connect the content to their own cultural experiences, which fostered cultural pride and a deeper understanding of the subject matter. this approach is consistent with vygotsky's sociocultural theory (vygotsky, 1989), which emphasizes the significance of cultural context in learning. it suggests that when students connect learning to their lived experiences, they gain a richer, more personal understanding of the material.

in addition, teachers also highlighted the effectiveness of teaching guides in structuring lessons and incorporating culturally relevant content, ensuring that the material was not only academically rigorous but also culturally meaningful (c. a. tomlinson, 2005 ; gregory, h, gayle & chapman, 2013). overall, the research indicates that sociocultural approaches, when integrated with differentiated instruction, contribute to an engaging, inclusive, and effective learning experience in efl classrooms. these findings underscore the importance of tailoring teaching methods to accommodate students' diverse learning styles, backgrounds, and proficiency levels.

the second finding highlights the critical challenges, advantages, and necessary elements for improving the implementation of sociocultural approaches in differentiated instruction in the efl classroom. teachers reported significant challenges in matching the material to the diverse

cultural contexts of students, which is a key concern in vygotsky's sociocultural theory (vygotsky, 1989). according to vygotsky, learning is deeply influenced by the cultural context in which it occurs, and therefore, materials need to reflect students' cultural identities. teachers also recognized that, in order to effectively implement differentiated instruction, they needed to invest time in understanding their students' backgrounds, which would allow them to create lessons that are culturally relevant and engaging (c. a. tomlinson, 2017). this aligns with gay's culturally responsive teaching (gay, 2018), which emphasizes the importance of incorporating students' cultural references into the learning process to enhance engagement and comprehension. additionally, teachers faced the challenge of balancing the academic needs of students with their sociocultural aspects, a task that requires ongoing professional development and collaboration, supported by vygotsky's social learning theory (1989), which emphasizes that peer collaboration enhances the learning experience.

despite these challenges, the research revealed several advantages to implementing sociocultural and differentiated teaching methods. teachers observed increased student engagement, motivation, and a greater appreciation for cultural diversity when lessons were tied to both global and local cultural contexts. vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1989) supports this by suggesting that when learning connects to students' lived experiences, their engagement and understanding are enhanced. the integration of cultural preservation also allowed students to appreciate the

significance of their cultural identities, fostering cultural pride and self-identity. this method aligns with gay's culturally responsive teaching (2018), which emphasizes the importance of culturally relevant content in fostering cultural empathy and global citizenship. additionally, the use of multimedia resources addressed various learning styles, supporting gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (fetherson, 1998; hani morgan, 2019), which argues that students learn in different ways. teachers also noted the importance of teaching guides in organizing lessons and ensuring that the content is both academically rigorous and culturally inclusive, a practice consistent with tomlinson's differentiated instruction (c. a. tomlinson & imbeau, 2023; setambah et al., 2025).

lastly, to enhance the effectiveness of the sociocultural approach, efl teachers emphasized the importance of a training course on sociocultural content and collaborative learning, aiming to support teachers' ability to effectively implement the sociocultural approach. in addition, a diverse sociocultural teaching guide aligns with the principles of culturally responsive teaching (sobkowiak, 2021; shi, 2017; gregory, h, gayle & chapman, 2013). promoting the teaching guide enables the materials and diverse sociocultural content to support inclusive teaching, reaching a wider audience and ultimately ensuring that a greater number of educators can implement these strategies in their classrooms.

2.7 conclusion

the primary aim of this study was to explore the efl teachers' implementation and perceptions of sociocultural approaches in efl classrooms, with a particular focus on the teachers' perceptions of these methods. the results reveal that integrating sociocultural content significantly enhanced student engagement and motivation, fostering a deeper connection between students and the material by linking it to their cultural backgrounds. teachers observed improvements in students' cultural empathy, self-identity, and understanding, indicating that these approaches contribute to a more inclusive, dynamic, and culturally responsive learning environment. additionally, differentiated instruction—such as grouping students by their abilities and incorporating multimedia resources—was effective in addressing the diverse learning needs of students, allowing for better participation and understanding across proficiency levels.

the research contributes to the field by demonstrating how sociocultural approaches in differentiated instruction can improve student learning outcomes and enhance cultural awareness. it highlights the importance of continuous professional development and training for teachers to effectively implement these strategies. the study also highlights the need to regularly update instructional materials and make them culturally relevant to ensure engagement and inclusivity. these findings offer practical implications for the development of inclusive teaching practices that can better meet the diverse needs of students in efl

classrooms, ultimately promoting a more culturally aware and supportive educational environment.

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