

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The following chapter discusses the background of the study, research questions, purpose of the study, scope of the study, and significance of the study.

1.1. Background of the Study

The twenty-first century has reshaped what it means to teach and to learn. Driven by globalisation and the rise of a knowledge-based economy, education systems face growing pressure to develop learners who are adaptable and self-directed (Onyishi, 2022). Meeting this expectation requires teaching approaches that are flexible and responsive to individual learners rather than designed around a single standard (Widayanti et al., 2024).

These demands are particularly pressing in Indonesia, where English Language Teaching has become increasingly important as a gateway to academic knowledge and global participation (Fitria, 2026). The COVID-19 pandemic widened existing gaps in student ability, leaving teachers with classrooms more diverse than before (Onyishi, 2022; Sari & Muamaroh, 2024). Teacher readiness to respond to this diversity, however, remained uneven (Saputri et al., 2024), and the resulting pressure contributed to a major curricular reform.

Indonesia responded with the Merdeka Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka), introduced nationally from the 2022/2023 academic year. Its guiding principle, Merdeka Belajar (freedom to learn), repositions the teacher

as a facilitator and grants students greater agency over their learning (Efendi & Ariyanto, 2025; Kurniawan, 2024). The curriculum also embeds pembelajaran berdiferensiasi (differentiated learning) as a core pedagogical expectation (Rani & Asfihana, 2025). Phase F, covering Grades 11 and 12, marks the final stage of senior high school, where English learning outcomes are aligned with CEFR B1 and English is framed as essential for life skills and global access (Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan [BSKAP], 2024).

To support differentiated planning, the curriculum replaces the earlier lesson plan format with the teaching module (modul ajar), a comprehensive planning document in which teachers record how instruction will be adjusted for diverse students (Mairoza et al., 2024; Ni'mah et al., 2024). The module therefore carries the differentiation mandate in written form. Translating that mandate into concrete planning decisions, however, is far from straightforward (Saputri et al., 2024; Sari & Muamaroh, 2024).

The difficulty begins with the classrooms themselves. Students in the same Indonesian EFL class often differ markedly in readiness, interests, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and motivation to engage with English (Suwastini et al., 2021; Tomlinson, 2001), and they arrive with widely different levels of prior exposure to the language (Fitria, 2026). Classroom practice has nonetheless leaned toward uniform instruction, an approach that research consistently shows fails to serve mixed-ability classrooms (Magableh & Abdullah, 2020; Naka, 2017).

Differentiated Instruction (DI) offers a principled alternative. DI is a philosophy of and model for teaching and learning rather than a fixed set of

procedures, in which the teacher accepts that learners differ and adjusts instruction so that every student can grow (Hockett, 2018; Tomlinson, 2001). Two features separate DI from ordinary good teaching. First, DI is proactive: the teacher plans several routes to learning in advance rather than delivering a single plan and repairing it once it fails for some students (Tomlinson, 2001). Second, DI is rooted in assessment, since decisions about how to adjust instruction follow from what the teacher learns about students. Learning goals themselves remain constant for the whole class; what varies is the route by which students reach them (Hockett, 2018).

Within this way of thinking, Tomlinson (2001) specifies where adjustment may occur and on what basis. Teachers may adjust three curricular elements, namely content (what students take in), process (how students make sense of it), and product (how students demonstrate learning), in response to three student characteristics, namely readiness, interest, and learning profile. This structure rests on Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, which holds that instruction set slightly beyond a learner's current level is most effective in promoting development (Shabani et al., 2010), and it is especially relevant in EFL settings where learners differ in prior language experience and proficiency (Ojong, 2023).

DI and DI strategies, however, are not the same thing. DI names the philosophy and the model, whereas a DI strategy is a concrete instructional form through which that model is put into practice, such as tiered tasks, jigsaw, graphic organisers, learning menus, choice grids, interest centres, or small-group instruction (Hockett, 2018). Hockett (2018) states explicitly that

differentiation goes beyond strategies and that good teaching is not automatically differentiated. A strategy therefore counts as a DI strategy only when it is used to make a proactive adjustment to content, process, or product in response to a pattern in students' readiness, interest, or learning profile (Hockett, 2018).

This distinction carries a practical consequence for research. A teaching philosophy is held internally and is difficult to observe directly, whereas strategies are named, sequenced, and written down. Strategies are thus the visible trace that differentiation leaves in a planning document, and they are what an analysis of teaching modules can reasonably examine. Evidence indicates that DI can improve language learning outcomes, but its benefits depend on how carefully it is carried out (Mujiono & Fatimah, 2025).

That condition is precisely where many teachers struggle. A considerable number of EFL teachers demonstrate conceptual awareness of DI, yet only a minority consistently vary their instruction in response to learner differences (Ahmed, 2022). The obstacle is largely one of workload and capacity, since designing tiered tasks, adapting materials, and monitoring individual progress demand far more preparation time than uniform instruction, a burden that is difficult to sustain in large classes with heavy administrative loads (Ginja & Chen, 2020). In Indonesian EFL classrooms, teachers frequently report insufficient planning time for differentiation and fall back on standard textbook coverage (Mardhatillah & Suharyadi, 2023).

Because the obstacle is located in preparation, the planning document deserves attention in its own right. If DI is proactive by definition, the adjustments that make instruction differentiated must be decided before the lesson begins, and the teaching module is where those decisions are recorded (Abdillah et al., 2022; Tomlinson, 2001). Examining DI only at the point of delivery therefore observes the outcome of a decision that was already made, or already omitted, at the planning stage. A strategy absent from the plan is unlikely to appear spontaneously in a crowded classroom under time pressure, so thin differentiation in a module indicates where differentiation is likely to be thin in practice.

The module also matters for reasons that extend beyond a single classroom. Under the Merdeka Curriculum, the module is the official instrument through which the differentiation mandate is intended to reach students (Mairoza et al., 2024), which means the extent to which that mandate is being met can be read from the modules themselves. Modules published on Ruang GTK are curated and openly accessible, allowing them to circulate as reference models that other teachers consult and adapt (Hijriani et al., 2024). Their differentiation content therefore shapes planning well beyond the teacher who wrote them. Planning documents are also directly revisable, which makes evidence drawn from them immediately usable for module templates, curation criteria, and teacher training.

Despite these reasons, several gaps remain in the literature. First, the Indonesian EFL context under the Merdeka Curriculum, and Phase F in particular, is underrepresented in empirical research. Second, although

Tomlinson (2001) describes DI as inherently proactive, most studies examine classroom practice rather than the planning that precedes it. The single study that analysed teaching modules (Maryani et al., 2025) addressed only content differentiation among pre-service teachers, leaving process and product differentiation by in-service teachers unexamined. Third, no study has mapped the distribution of DI strategies across all three curricular elements and all three student characteristics in Phase F modules on Ruang GTK. Taken together, these gaps leave the planning stage of differentiation largely undocumented at the very level where senior high school English instruction is designed.

The present study addresses this combination of gaps by examining how DI strategies are manifested in English teaching modules for Phase F available on Ruang GTK. Phase F is a deliberate choice, since the quality of instructional planning carries particular weight at the final stage of senior high school (BSKAP, 2024). Ruang GTK, in turn, provides an authentic and officially curated collection of teachers' planning documents.

The analysis focuses on the learning activities sections of these modules and applies the framework developed by Tomlinson (2001) and operationalised for secondary education contexts by Hockett (2018). On this basis, the study builds a systematic profile of which DI strategies teachers include in their planning documents and how those strategies are distributed across curricular elements and student characteristics, including the areas where differentiation planning is thin or absent. Because the existing literature documents such gaps almost entirely at the implementation stage, locating them in planning documents allows the study to consider where they may originate, before

instruction reaches the classroom. These considerations give rise to the research questions that guide the present study.

1.2. Research Questions

Based on the background presented above, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How are differentiated instruction strategies manifested in English teaching modules for Phase F available on Ruang GTK?
 - a. What types of differentiated instruction strategies are present in the modules?
 - b. How are these strategies distributed across the curricular elements (content, process, product) and student characteristics (readiness, interest, learning profile)?

1.3. Purpose of the Study

This study aims to identify the types of differentiated instruction strategies present in Phase F English teaching modules on Ruang GTK and to analyse their distribution across the Tomlinson–Hockett 3×3 matrix. The study focuses on the planning stage rather than classroom implementation.

1.4. Scope of the Study

This study focuses on English teaching modules for Phase F (Grades 11–12) available on Ruang GTK. The analysis concentrates on the learning activities sections of these modules, where differentiation strategies are most

likely to appear. Teaching modules were selected on four criteria: designation for Phase F English (Grades 11–12), a clearly identifiable learning activities section, completeness of core components, and official curation by Kemendikdasmen.

The analytical framework is Tomlinson's (2001) model of differentiation as operationalised by Hockett (2018) for secondary education contexts. The study does not examine actual classroom implementation or student outcomes, and its claims are limited to what is documented in the planning materials.

1.5. Significance of the Study

This study holds significance for several groups involved in Indonesian English education. For teachers, the findings offer concrete examples of how DI strategies can be incorporated into the design of teaching modules.

For curriculum developers and those responsible for Ruang GTK, the results indicate which aspects of differentiation are well represented in current modules and which require further guidance. For policymakers, the study identifies specific gaps in teachers' differentiation planning that targeted professional development could address.

For educational researchers, this study contributes to the limited body of literature examining DI at the planning stage rather than at the implementation stage, particularly within the Indonesian context and in senior high school English education. More broadly, the study supports efforts to

improve the quality and responsiveness of English instruction for diverse Phase
F learners across Indonesia.

