



The Implementation of Differentiated and Deep Learning to Grade 10 Students of SMKN 1 Tapalang Barat and Its Impact on Interest in Learning English

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026-05-11 Revised: 2026-09-11 Accepted: 2026-09-15 Keywords: <i>differentiated instruction; deep learning; English learning interest; vocational school; student-centered learning</i> DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i2.10529 Corresponding Author: Safri Th SafriTh52@guru.smk.belajar.id English Language Education Study Program, English Department, Faculty of Languages and Literature, Universitas Negeri Makassar	<i>This study investigated the implementation of differentiated instruction and deep learning among Grade 10 students at SMKN 1 Tapalang Barat and its impact on students' interest in learning English. The study was motivated by the low level of student participation and interest in English learning, as preliminary data showed that fewer than 20% of students actively participated in classroom activities. Many students perceived English as difficult, irrelevant to their daily lives, and less engaging due to limited personalization and insufficient opportunities for deep knowledge processing. This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the implementation process, students' perceptions, teachers' perceptions, and the challenges faced during implementation. Data were collected through classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. The findings show that differentiated instruction was implemented through diagnostic assessment, flexible grouping, tiered assignments, learning autonomy, and adaptation of materials to students' readiness and interests. Deep learning was integrated through authentic projects, global issues, contextual learning, reflective activities, and problem-solving tasks. Students generally perceived the approach positively because it made English more meaningful, challenging, and relevant to their lives. Teachers viewed the approach as effective in increasing engagement but requiring careful planning and classroom management. The main challenges included limited time, varied student abilities, unequal participation, resistance to categorization, task complexity, and the need for stronger scaffolding. The study concludes that differentiated and deep learning can increase students' interest in learning English when implemented with balanced personalization, intellectual challenge, contextual relevance, and continuous teacher guidance.</i>

1. Introduction

Education is a conscious and systematic effort to develop students' potential so that they can become knowledgeable, skillful, independent, and responsible individuals. In Indonesia, education is not only expected to transfer knowledge but also to shape students' character, competence, and readiness to face social, technological, and professional changes. The National Education System Law emphasizes that education should create a learning atmosphere that enables students to actively develop their potential. Therefore, the learning process in schools should not be limited to the delivery of content but should provide meaningful experiences that help students grow intellectually, socially, and emotionally.

In the current educational context, English has become one of the most important subjects because it supports global communication, digital literacy, international cooperation, and workplace readiness. For vocational high school students, English is particularly important because they are prepared to enter professional and industrial contexts after graduation. English proficiency can help vocational students understand technical information, communicate in workplace situations, access digital resources, and improve their competitiveness in the labor market. Therefore, English learning in vocational schools should be relevant, practical, and connected to students' future needs.

English learning in vocational education should be designed to meet students' academic, communicative, and professional needs. Vocational students need English not only to pass examinations but also to support workplace communication, digital literacy, and career readiness. Richards (2015) argues that language teaching should be connected to learners' communicative purposes and real-life contexts so that students can see the practical value of the language they learn. In the vocational school context, this means that English learning should be aligned with students' future professional fields and should provide opportunities for authentic communication.

Students' interest in learning English is closely related to how meaningful and relevant the learning process is to their personal and future goals. Harmer (2015) explains that students are more motivated when classroom activities are engaging, purposeful, and connected to their experiences. Similarly, Dörnyei and Ushioda (2021) state that motivation in language learning is shaped by learners' goals, classroom environment, teacher support, and the perceived usefulness of the language. Therefore, low interest in learning English may occur when students do not see the relevance of English to their lives, future work, or personal development.

The implementation of differentiated instruction is important because students enter the classroom with different levels of readiness, learning preferences, interests, and language abilities. Tomlinson (2017) emphasizes that differentiated instruction allows teachers to respond to learner variance by adjusting content, process, product, and learning environment. This approach is particularly relevant in English classrooms because students may differ in vocabulary mastery, confidence, speaking ability, reading comprehension, and willingness to participate. Through differentiation, teachers can provide multiple learning pathways so that students can access the same learning goals through different levels of support and challenge.

Deep learning also has a strong connection with meaningful English learning. Fullan, Quinn, and McEachen (2018) explain that deep learning encourages students to develop the six global competencies: character, citizenship, collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking. These competencies are highly relevant to English learning in vocational schools because students need to use English not only for language accuracy but also for communication, collaboration, problem-solving, and self-expression. When

English learning is connected to authentic projects and real-world issues, students may become more interested because the learning feels useful and meaningful.

The combination of differentiated instruction and deep learning can support the goals of the Independent Curriculum. The Independent Curriculum emphasizes student-centered learning, contextual learning, student agency, and competence development. This aligns with differentiated instruction, which responds to students' diverse needs, and deep learning, which promotes meaningful understanding and real-life application. Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) argue that effective learning environments should provide meaningful tasks, collaboration, feedback, and opportunities for students to connect knowledge with real-life situations. Therefore, implementing differentiated and deep learning in English classes can be a strategic effort to increase students' interest, participation, and engagement.

However, English learning in many vocational schools still faces serious challenges. Students often consider English difficult, abstract, and unrelated to their daily lives or career goals. This perception may reduce their interest, confidence, and participation in classroom activities. When students are not interested in learning English, they tend to become passive, avoid communication, hesitate to ask questions, and show low persistence in completing learning tasks. Learning interest is important because it influences students' attention, motivation, engagement, and willingness to continue learning. Students with high interest are more likely to participate actively, explore learning materials, and develop better language competence.

The problem of low interest in English learning was found at SMKN 1 Tapalang Barat. Preliminary findings in the thesis showed that fewer than 20% of Grade 10 students actively participated in English learning activities. Many students hesitated to participate in discussions, were less active during classroom tasks, and perceived English materials as less relevant to their lives. English teachers also stated that the learning methods used in the classroom had not fully accommodated differences in students' abilities, interests, and learning needs. As a result, the learning process was less effective and students' motivation remained low.

This situation indicates that the problem of students' interest in English learning is not caused by one factor only. It is related to the interaction between teaching strategies, classroom atmosphere, student readiness, learning relevance, and opportunities for active engagement. If the learning process is monotonous and uniform, students with different abilities and interests may not receive learning experiences that match their needs. Some students may find the material too difficult, while others may feel that the task is not challenging enough. This condition can reduce learning interest and weaken students' confidence in using English.

One approach that can respond to this issue is differentiated instruction. Differentiated instruction is a pedagogical approach that adapts content, process, product, and learning environment according to students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. Tomlinson (2005) explains that differentiation allows teachers to provide multiple pathways for students to access learning, process information, and demonstrate understanding. In differentiated instruction, teachers do not teach all students in exactly the same way. Instead, they identify students' needs and design learning experiences that are flexible, inclusive, and responsive.

In the context of English learning, differentiated instruction can be implemented in several ways. Teachers can provide different texts according to students' reading levels, design tiered speaking or writing tasks, offer varied project options, use flexible grouping, and allow students to demonstrate learning through different products. For students with

limited vocabulary, the teacher may provide simpler texts, guided worksheets, or vocabulary support. For students with higher readiness, the teacher may provide more complex tasks, open-ended questions, or creative projects. This approach helps students feel that learning is accessible and meaningful.

Differentiated instruction is closely related to the principle of student-centered learning. Student-centered learning positions students as active participants in the learning process. Instead of receiving information passively, students are encouraged to ask questions, explore ideas, collaborate, make decisions, and construct understanding. In this approach, the teacher functions as a facilitator who provides guidance, feedback, and learning support. Student-centered learning is also consistent with the Independent Curriculum, which emphasizes contextual learning, competence development, student agency, and learning experiences that respond to students' needs.

Another relevant approach is deep learning. Deep learning in education refers to learning that emphasizes meaningful understanding, reflection, analysis, problem-solving, and the application of knowledge in real-world contexts. Deep learning is different from surface learning, which focuses mainly on memorizing information for short-term achievement. In deep learning, students are encouraged to connect new concepts with prior knowledge, examine issues critically, collaborate with others, and apply knowledge to authentic situations. This process helps students understand not only what they learn but also why the knowledge matters.

Deep learning is highly relevant to English language learning. English should not be taught only as grammar rules, vocabulary lists, or textbook exercises. It should be taught as a tool for communication, problem-solving, self-expression, and participation in global contexts. Through deep learning, students can use English to discuss real issues, create projects, solve problems, present ideas, analyze texts, and reflect on their learning experiences. This makes English more meaningful and increases students' motivation because they can see the connection between English and their lives.

The integration of differentiated instruction and deep learning offers a strong pedagogical response to low interest in English learning. Differentiated instruction ensures that learning is adjusted to students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles, while deep learning ensures that learning is meaningful, challenging, and connected to real-world situations. When these two approaches are combined, students are not only given tasks that match their levels but are also encouraged to think deeply, collaborate, and apply English in authentic contexts. This combination can increase students' interest because it gives them both accessibility and intellectual challenge.

In vocational schools, this integration is especially important. Vocational students need English learning that is practical, contextual, and related to their future professions. They may become more interested when English activities involve workplace communication, global issues, digital projects, or tasks connected to their vocational field. For example, students can create presentations, conduct role plays, discuss environmental or social issues, design posters, or complete projects using English. These activities can help students see English as useful rather than merely compulsory.

Previous studies have shown that differentiated instruction can increase students' motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes. Studies reviewed in the thesis indicate that differentiated instruction has a positive impact on students' motivation and academic achievement across different subjects and educational levels. Similarly, deep learning has been reported to increase students' interest, curiosity, participation, and engagement because it connects learning with real-life contexts and encourages active thinking.

However, most previous research has focused on either differentiated instruction or deep learning separately. Research that explores both approaches together in the context of vocational English learning remains limited.

This gap is important because the success of English learning in vocational schools requires more than one instructional strategy. Students need personalization, relevance, meaningful challenge, and supportive classroom interaction. Differentiated instruction provides personalization, while deep learning provides depth and relevance. Therefore, examining how these approaches are implemented together can provide useful insights for English teachers, vocational schools, and curriculum developers.

Based on this background, the present study investigated the implementation of differentiated instruction and deep learning among Grade 10 students at SMKN 1 Tapalang Barat and its impact on students' interest in learning English. The study focused on four research questions: how differentiated instruction and deep learning were implemented, how students perceived the approaches, how teachers perceived the implementation, and what challenges emerged during the process. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of more effective, contextual, inclusive, and student-centered English learning practices in vocational education.

2. Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach because the research focused on understanding classroom implementation, participants' experiences, and the meaning constructed by students and teachers during the learning process. Creswell and Poth (2018) explain that qualitative research is suitable for exploring a phenomenon in depth within its natural setting, especially when the researcher seeks to understand participants' perspectives. In this study, the qualitative approach allowed the researcher to examine how differentiated instruction and deep learning were implemented in English learning at SMKN 1 Tapalang Barat and how students and teachers perceived the process.

The descriptive qualitative design was appropriate because the study aimed to present a detailed description of classroom practices rather than to test a statistical hypothesis. Ary, Jacobs, Irvine, and Walker (2019) state that descriptive qualitative research helps researchers describe educational situations, classroom interactions, and participants' responses systematically. Therefore, this design supported the purpose of the study, which was to describe the implementation of differentiated instruction and deep learning, students' perceptions, teachers' perceptions, and the challenges encountered during the learning process.

Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observation was used to obtain direct information about classroom activities, teacher strategies, student participation, flexible grouping, task variation, authentic projects, and reflective learning. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018), classroom observation is useful in educational research because it enables researchers to examine real behavior and interaction in the learning environment. In this study, observation helped the researcher understand how differentiated and deep learning occurred in practice.

Semi-structured interviews were used to explore students' and teachers' perceptions more deeply. Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) explain that interviews allow researchers to understand participants' lived experiences and interpretations of a phenomenon. Through interviews, students were able to express their feelings, challenges, and interest in English learning, while teachers were able to explain their instructional decisions, perceived benefits, and implementation difficulties. Documentation was also used to support the

findings by examining lesson plans, learning materials, student tasks, and other relevant classroom documents.

The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Data condensation was conducted by selecting and focusing important information from observations, interviews, and documents. Data display was carried out by organizing the findings into themes related to implementation, perception, impact, and challenges. Conclusion drawing was conducted by interpreting patterns across data sources. To strengthen the trustworthiness of the data, triangulation was applied. Patton (2015) explains that triangulation increases credibility by comparing information from different sources or methods. In this study, observation, interview, and documentation data were compared to obtain a more valid understanding of the research phenomenon.

3. Result

The findings of this study are presented based on the four research focuses: the implementation of differentiated instruction and deep learning, students' perceptions, teachers' perceptions, and the challenges of implementation.

The first finding shows that differentiated instruction and deep learning were implemented through several classroom strategies. The teacher began the learning process by identifying students' readiness, interests, and learning needs. Diagnostic assessment was used to understand students' initial ability and to guide instructional decisions. Based on this information, the teacher applied flexible grouping so that students could work with peers according to their readiness, task needs, or learning objectives. This grouping was not fixed; it changed according to the activities and students' progress.

Differentiated instruction appeared in the use of varied materials, tiered assignments, and flexible learning products. Students were not always given identical tasks. Some students received simpler guidance, while others were encouraged to complete more challenging activities. The teacher adjusted learning activities so that students with different levels of ability could participate. In this way, students who usually felt left behind were given accessible learning support, while students who were more confident were given opportunities to explore deeper tasks.

The teacher also gave students a certain level of autonomy. Students were encouraged to choose learning paths, participate in group activities, and express ideas through different forms of output. This autonomy helped students feel more responsible for their learning. It also reduced the impression that English learning was only controlled by the teacher. Students became more involved because they had opportunities to make decisions, collaborate with peers, and connect learning with their own interests.

Deep learning was implemented through authentic projects and global issues. Instead of focusing only on memorizing vocabulary or grammar, the teacher connected English learning with real-life contexts. Students were invited to discuss topics related to their environment, daily experiences, vocational needs, and broader global issues. Through these activities, students were encouraged to analyze information, express opinions, solve problems, and reflect on the meaning of the learning material. This made English learning more contextual and meaningful.

The implementation of deep learning also encouraged higher-order thinking. Students were not only asked to answer simple questions but also to explain, compare, interpret, and present ideas. Project-based activities encouraged students to work collaboratively and use English for meaningful purposes. Although students' language proficiency was still developing, the opportunity to use English in authentic tasks increased

their willingness to participate. This shows that deep learning can support both cognitive engagement and language practice.

The second finding concerns students' perceptions. In general, students showed positive perceptions toward differentiated instruction and deep learning. Many students appreciated learning activities that were more varied, contextual, and connected to their lives. They felt that English became more interesting when the teacher used examples related to real situations and allowed them to work with peers. Students also felt more confident when tasks were adjusted to their ability levels. This helped reduce anxiety and encouraged participation.

Students with positive perceptions showed increased attention, participation, enthusiasm, and confidence. They paid more attention to the teacher's explanation, participated more actively in group activities, and showed greater willingness to complete tasks. The use of authentic projects and meaningful topics helped them understand why English was useful. These students perceived the approach as challenging but helpful because it allowed them to learn English in a more practical way.

However, not all students responded in the same way. Some students showed neutral perceptions. They recognized that differentiated and deep learning could help them understand English better, but they also felt that some activities required more effort and time. These students appreciated the benefits of the approach but still needed more guidance, especially when dealing with complex tasks or group projects. This indicates that differentiated and deep learning should be supported by clear instructions and continuous scaffolding.

A few students showed negative perceptions, especially related to task complexity and grouping. Some students felt uncomfortable when they were grouped based on ability or when tasks appeared too challenging. They were concerned that categorization might make them feel less capable than others. This finding shows that differentiation must be implemented carefully so that students do not feel labeled or compared. Teachers need to explain that differentiated tasks are designed to support learning, not to rank students.

The third finding concerns teachers' perceptions. Teachers perceived differentiated instruction and deep learning as valuable approaches for improving students' interest in English. From the teacher's perspective, differentiated instruction helped address differences in students' abilities and learning needs. It allowed the teacher to provide more suitable tasks and reduce passive learning. Deep learning helped make English more meaningful because students could connect classroom material with real-life issues and future needs.

Teachers also perceived that the approaches increased classroom engagement. Students who were usually passive became more willing to participate when tasks were relevant and adjusted to their level. Group work and project-based activities encouraged students to interact, exchange ideas, and use English more actively. Teachers believed that this approach helped students see English as a useful communication tool rather than only a school subject.

At the same time, teachers recognized that the implementation required careful planning. Designing differentiated tasks, preparing contextual materials, managing groups, and guiding project-based learning took more time and effort than conventional teaching. Teachers needed to balance autonomy and guidance. If too much freedom was given, some students became confused. If too much control was applied, students' autonomy and interest decreased. Therefore, successful implementation required the teacher to orchestrate learning carefully.

The fourth finding concerns challenges. The first challenge was limited instructional time. Differentiated instruction and deep learning require time for diagnosis, grouping, explanation, discussion, project work, reflection, and feedback. In regular English class schedules, the available time was often insufficient. This made it difficult for teachers to fully implement all stages of the approach.

The second challenge was the variation in students' abilities. Grade 10 students had different levels of vocabulary, confidence, comprehension, and communication skills. Some students needed basic support, while others were ready for more complex activities. This diversity made planning more demanding. The teacher had to prepare multiple forms of tasks and ensure that all students could participate meaningfully.

The third challenge was classroom management. Flexible grouping and project-based learning created more active classroom dynamics. While this increased engagement, it also required stronger management. Some students were highly active, while others remained dependent on peers. Teachers needed to monitor participation so that group work did not result in unequal contribution.

The fourth challenge was cognitive load. Some deep learning tasks required students to analyze issues, discuss ideas, and produce outputs in English. For students with limited language ability, these tasks could feel difficult. Without adequate scaffolding, challenging tasks could reduce confidence. Therefore, teachers needed to provide vocabulary support, examples, guided questions, and step-by-step instructions.

Overall, the findings show that differentiated instruction and deep learning had a positive impact on students' interest in learning English. The approaches made learning more personalized, contextual, meaningful, and interactive. However, the success of implementation depended on careful planning, teacher guidance, appropriate scaffolding, and sensitivity to students' emotional responses.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study support the view that differentiated instruction can increase students' interest because it responds to learner diversity. Students at SMKN 1 Tapalang Barat had different levels of English ability, confidence, and participation. Through diagnostic assessment, flexible grouping, and tiered assignments, the teacher could provide learning activities that matched students' readiness and learning needs. This finding is consistent with Tomlinson (2017), who argues that differentiation helps students learn more effectively because it provides appropriate levels of challenge and support. It also supports Hall, Strangman, and Meyer's (2019) view that differentiated instruction can improve engagement when students are given accessible learning materials and meaningful task options.

The findings also show that student autonomy contributed to increased learning interest. When students were allowed to choose tasks, work collaboratively, and express their ideas through different products, they became more involved in the learning process. This supports Deci and Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory, which states that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are important factors in developing intrinsic motivation. In this study, differentiated instruction supported students' sense of competence because tasks were adjusted to their ability levels, while collaborative activities supported relatedness through peer interaction.

Deep learning also played an important role in increasing students' interest in English. Students became more interested when English learning was connected to authentic projects, global issues, and real-life contexts. This finding is aligned with Fullan et al. (2018), who argue that deep learning becomes powerful when students use knowledge to solve real

problems and produce meaningful work. In the context of vocational education, deep learning helped students see English as a useful tool for communication and future work rather than only as a school subject. This relevance made students more willing to participate and engage in classroom activities.

The integration of differentiated instruction and deep learning also reflects the principles of constructivist learning. Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes that learning occurs through social interaction and scaffolding, while Piaget (1970) views students as active constructors of knowledge. In this study, students constructed understanding through discussion, group work, project-based tasks, and reflection. The teacher provided scaffolding through guidance, examples, vocabulary support, and feedback. This shows that meaningful English learning requires both active student participation and structured teacher support.

However, the findings also reveal that the implementation of differentiated and deep learning requires careful management. Some students felt challenged by complex tasks, while others resisted ability-based grouping. This indicates that differentiation must be implemented sensitively so that students do not feel labeled or separated based on ability. Heacox (2018) suggests that grouping in differentiated instruction should be flexible, temporary, and purposeful. Teachers should explain that grouping is designed to support learning rather than to classify students. In this study, flexible grouping was useful, but it needed careful communication and classroom management.

The challenge of cognitive load also appeared in the implementation of deep learning. Some students needed more guidance when they were asked to analyze issues, discuss ideas, and complete authentic projects in English. Sweller, Ayres, and Kalyuga (2011) explain that learning tasks can become difficult when students' cognitive load exceeds their current capacity. Therefore, teachers need to provide scaffolding, examples, vocabulary lists, guiding questions, and step-by-step instructions. In this study, deep learning was effective when intellectual challenge was balanced with appropriate support.

Overall, the discussion suggests that differentiated instruction and deep learning can positively affect students' interest in learning English when they are implemented with clear planning, contextual materials, student autonomy, and continuous scaffolding. The findings confirm that students' interest is not only influenced by the content of English lessons but also by how the lessons are designed, delivered, and connected to students' lives. For vocational schools, English learning should be personalized, meaningful, collaborative, and connected to future professional contexts.

5. Conclusion

This study explored the implementation of differentiated instruction and deep learning among Grade 10 students of SMKN 1 Tapalang Barat and its impact on students' interest in learning English. The findings show that the approaches were implemented through diagnostic assessment, flexible grouping, tiered assignments, student autonomy, contextual learning, authentic projects, global issues, reflection, and problem-solving activities. These strategies made English learning more personalized, meaningful, and student-centered.

The implementation had a positive impact on students' interest in learning English. Students became more attentive, active, enthusiastic, and confident when the learning activities were adjusted to their readiness and connected to real-life contexts. Differentiated instruction helped students access learning according to their abilities, while deep learning encouraged them to understand English more deeply through meaningful

tasks. Students generally perceived the approach positively, although some needed more guidance and time to adapt.

Teachers also perceived differentiated instruction and deep learning as useful approaches for increasing engagement and improving classroom interaction. However, the implementation required careful planning, varied materials, classroom management, and continuous scaffolding. The main challenges included limited time, diverse student abilities, unequal group participation, resistance to categorization, and the complexity of deep learning tasks.

In conclusion, differentiated instruction and deep learning can be effective strategies for increasing vocational students' interest in learning English when implemented carefully and consistently. The success of these approaches depends on the teacher's ability to balance personalization, intellectual challenge, student autonomy, and structured guidance. Future studies are recommended to involve more participants, use mixed-method designs, and examine the long-term effects of differentiated and deep learning on English proficiency and learning motivation.

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