



Teachers' Differentiated Instructional Strategies to Accommodate Gifted and Non-Gifted Students' Characteristics in Learning English at Dyatmika Elementary School

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Pendidikan Ganesha, Bali**Abstract**

The current study aimed at analysing the teachers' differentiated instructional strategies to accommodate gifted and non-gifted students' characteristics in Learning English at Dyatmika Elementary School. Qualitative approach was adapted in the form of case study concerning the students' characteristics, implementation of differentiated instructional strategies, and the challenges faced by the English teachers in implementing the strategies for gifted and non-gifted students. There were two English teachers involved as research sample by using total sampling technique. The data were collected through observation, interview, check-list, and open-ended questionnaire survey. The instruments were observation sheet, interview guide, check-list, and open-ended questionnaire. The data were analyzed by conducting Qualitative Data Analysis consisting of three steps; data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings show that; differentiated instructional strategies are systematically implemented in second-grade English classrooms to address the distinct characteristics of gifted and non-gifted students. Teachers adjust content, process, product, and learning environment to accommodate differences in motivation, pace, creativity, and independence; however, the implementation remained challenging due to time constraints, limited resources, pacing differences, and classroom management complexity. These findings highlight both the necessity and the practical challenges of sustaining differentiated instruction in mixed-ability classrooms.

1. Introduction

English is commonly perceived as an introductory stage of acquiring foreign language in primary school level (Lesia et al., 2021; Prošić-Santovac & Savić, 2022). Primary students are trained for their vocabulary recognition, simple sentence construction, pronunciation accuracy, and highly structured language exercise (Nufus, 2019). Establishing basic linguistic competence forms an instructional model prioritizing accuracy and repetition that inadvertently restricts students' opportunities for exploration, creativity, and higher-order language use (Purnomo, 2025). As a result, learning experiences become less challenging and motivating, particularly for primary school students with above-average abilities (Nazarova, 2024). It indicates that the dominance of accuracy-oriented, repetitive instructional practices in primary school highlights the need for more adaptive, student-centered approaches, manifested in instructional strategies that support students' English learning process.

In fact, learners have diverse backgrounds, interests, learning styles, and levels of readiness within a single room. It means that teachers are supposed to consider all those components in implementing a certain instructional strategy (Leona et al., 2021). Differentiated instructional strategies are an instructional model that employs a student-centered approach by acknowledging students' diverse ways of understanding concepts (Ahmed, 2022). It is added that differentiated instruction is a meaningful approach to delivering challenging content by meeting students' needs and appropriate levels, thereby supporting maximum growth (Tyrou & Mylonas, 2023). Consequently, differentiated instruction is a pedagogical responsibility that recognizes the complex diversity of students, including their cognitive, affective, physical, cultural, linguistic, creative, and exceptional characteristics, which often overlap within individual students (Celik, 2019; Haelermans, 2022).

However, addressing the needs of diverse students through differentiated learning remains a challenge for many primary school teachers. Although they are specifically trained to teach English to young learners, many teachers still encounter constraints in effectively implementing instructional models that align with individuals' abilities, learning preferences, and developmental needs (Yuniawati, 2024). A preliminary observation shows that a relevant issue is found at Dyatmika Elementary School in Bali, where classroom practices still emphasize structured mastery of basic language skills with noticeable variations in students' engagement and participation.

As a national-plus school implementing a bilingual curriculum in a multicultural and inclusive environment, Dyatmika offers both opportunities and challenges for English language education. While some students demonstrate sustained enthusiasm and the ability to learn independently despite repetitive instructional practices, others show reduced engagement when learning activities lack variety or rely heavily on repetition. These differences indicate that a one-size-

fits-all approach to English language instruction is no longer sufficient. Teachers are increasingly required to design learning experiences that simultaneously provide appropriate intellectual challenges.

In a foreign-language context, heterogeneous primary classrooms often exhibit variation in students' engagement and learning pace, which is particularly pronounced between gifted and non-gifted students (Snickers-Mommer et al., 2024). Gifted students demonstrate advanced cognition, rapid language acquisition, and a demand for greater intellectual challenge, which contrasts with repetitive and accuracy-oriented instructional practices (García-López et al., 2025). Meanwhile, non-gifted students require structured support, scaffolding, and a gradual progression to develop their basic language skills (Al & Alarfaj, 2023). In an inclusive English classroom, these contrasting characteristics require teachers to apply instructional strategies that support both gifted and non-gifted students (Heidari, 2025). It is essential for teachers to recognize their unique learning differences to employ effective learning strategies.

Many studies have framed differentiated instruction as an effective strategy to address student diversity in English classrooms. It is revealed that differentiated instructional strategy aims to accommodate students' differences and provide students with equal opportunities to achieve the learning objectives (Suwastini et al., 2021). Another finding indicates that differentiated instructional strategies place students at the center of the learning process, thereby encouraging them to improve their English proficiency (Mardhatillah & Suharyadi, 2023a). It was also found out that students not only experience English skills improvement but differentiated instructional strategy enhances their learning motivation as well as collaboration skills (Purnamaningwulan & Purwanto, 2025). These findings extensively highlight that differentiated learning is effective in EFL classrooms.

Despite the extensive evidence, existing studies largely focus on general classroom outcomes, leaving limited exploration of how differentiated instruction is specifically designed and implemented in English learning contexts, given the diverse characteristics of gifted and non-gifted students in English language learning. By drawing on empirical issues identified at Dyatmika Elementary School. This study aims to fill the gap regarding how differentiated instruction can be practically implemented to balance cognitive challenge and instructional support for gifted and non-gifted students in an inclusive primary EFL setting. The study analyses classroom practices within the differentiated instruction framework.

2. Method

The current study employed a qualitative approach because the data were collected in a naturalistic context and no special treatment was applied to the research subjects. The research setting was Dyatmika Elementary School in which the second-grade students were involved as research subjects. Two English teachers were also selected as research subjects. Both teachers and students were

selected by using a total sampling technique. The data were obtained through classroom observations, teacher interviews, checklists, open-ended questionnaires, and document analysis.

The research instruments were an observation sheet, a checklist, a questionnaire, and an interview guide. The data were analyzed using Qualitative Data Analysis, comprising three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was a step of filtering the data, in which unwanted data were eliminated to focus on answering the research questions. Data display was the step of presenting the data in the form of a table and a description. Drawing a conclusion was the last step, where triangulation was conducted to ensure the data were reliable.

3. Result

The current study revealed three findings related to the implementation of a differentiated instructional strategy in Dyatmika Elementary School. Those were the characteristics of students as seen through teachers' lenses, the differentiated instructional strategies applied by English teachers, and the challenges faced by English teachers when they adapted the strategy for gifted and non-gifted students.

The Characteristics of Second-Grade Students at Dyatmika Elementary School Based on Gifted and Non-Gifted Characteristics

The characteristics of second-grade students were first identified in the current study through teachers' lenses. They were asked about students' characteristics based on the framework of gifted and non-gifted students. An open-ended questionnaire was administered to the teachers, and the results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The Characteristics of Second-Grade Students at Dyatmika Elementary School

Dimensions	Description
Learning Motivation	Gifted students had high self-motivation reflecting from their learning consistency in the classrooms Non-gifted students moderately showed self-motivation since they were not as enthusiast as the other students.
Learning Pace	Gifted students learned faster and grasp new material easily Non-gifted students tended to require more time and practice in learning.
Creativity in Language Use	Gifted students often displayed originality in English task Non-gifted students tended to follow given models without trying to create something different or new.
Classroom Participation	Gifted students actively engaged and volunteered themselves in discussions. Non-gifted students had less engagement during the learning

		process.
Need for Teacher Assistance		Gifted students were able to work independently.
		Non-gifted students tend to depend more on teachers' assistance and guidance.
Response to Challenging Tasks		Gifted students enjoyed complex activities
		Non-gifted students preferred to work in simpler tasks
Persistence in Learning		Gifted students had higher persistence and more self-directed in overcoming difficulties.
		Non-gifted students had lower persistence and faced difficulty in solving the problem.

Table 1 illustrates the difference between gifted students and non-gifted students in terms of their learning characteristics. In terms of learning motivation, the findings showed that gifted students demonstrated high levels of self-motivation, reflected in their consistent engagement in learning activities, whereas non-gifted students showed moderate self-motivation with less enthusiasm for learning. Regarding learning pace, non-gifted students often require more time and practice to understand the lessons, while gifted students tend to learn quickly by grasping new materials easily.

Differences were also found in creativity in language use, with gifted students frequently showing originality in completing English tasks, whereas non-gifted students mainly copied the provided models without attempting to be creative. In addition, it was found that gifted students actively participated in the discussion and worked independently on their learning. It contrasted with non-gifted students, who still relied on teachers' assistance and guidance. They tended to participate rarely in discussions and preferred simpler tasks.

The gifted students preferred to work on more challenging tasks with greater persistence and were self-directed in overcoming difficulties, while the non-gifted students had lower persistence and often struggled to solve the problems. These findings clearly showed a distinction between gifted and non-gifted students across multiple learning characteristics.

The Implementation of Differentiated Instructional Strategies in Accommodating Gifted and Non-Gifted Students in English Classrooms

Based on learning characteristics, three students were categorized as gifted, and 24 were identified as non-gifted in the second grade at Dyatrmika Elementary School. This distinction led the English teachers to focus on students' learning readiness, interests, and learning styles before implementing differentiated instructional strategies. Each aspect was presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The Key Aspects of Differentiated Instructional Strategies

Aspects	Gifted Students	Non-Gifted Students
Learning Readiness	High readiness; learning quickly with minimal support.	Moderate to low readiness.
Learning Interest	Engaged in project-based learning.	Participated in fun learning activities (drawing, singing, and games)
Learning Style	Enthusiast in visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning.	Attracted to simplified learning activities covering multisensory and kinesthetic learning.

Table 2 presents the key concerns of English teachers before implementing differentiated strategies for second-grade students at Dyatmika Elementary School. It was found that there was a distinction between gifted and non-gifted students in terms of their learning readiness, learning interest, and learning style. Gifted students were provided with more challenging, open-ended, and independent learning tasks to accommodate their higher readiness, stronger intrinsic motivation, and advanced cognitive abilities.

In contrast, non-gifted students received scaffolded instruction, simplified materials, and structured guidance to support their foundational language development and build confidence. Interest-based activities and multisensory learning experiences were used for both groups; however, they were adapted differently to match students' levels and needs. Overall, these findings indicated that differentiation was systematically applied to ensure equitable learning opportunities, enabling both gifted and non-gifted students to engage meaningfully and progress in English learning according to their strengths and abilities.

To address students' diversity, the teachers implemented differentiated instructional strategies through four key components. Those were: content, process, product, and learning environment. Each component was presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The Key Components of Differentiated Learning Strategies.

Components	Gifted Students	Non-Gifted Students
Content	Streamlined and extension	Scaffolded and visual
Process	Fast pace, and enrichment	Guidance and support
Product	Complex output	Structured output
Environment	Flexible and autonomous	Structured and supportive

As presented in Table 3, it was found that the differentiated instructional strategies were implemented consistently across content, process, product, and learning environment to address students' diverse readiness levels. In terms of content, gifted students received concise input, short instructions, condensed texts, and extension materials, enabling them to progress efficiently, while non-gifted students benefited from step-by-step explanations, visual aids, worksheets, and systematic scaffolding to support comprehension.

Process differentiation was reflected in instructional pacing and grouping, with gifted students engaging in faster-paced enrichment tasks through independent or same-ability grouping, whereas non-gifted students participated in guided practice within mixed-ability groups under sustained teacher support. Product differentiation further demonstrated this contrast, as gifted students produced more complex and extended writing compositions, while non-gifted students completed structured writing tasks using templates and guided frameworks.

Additionally, the learning environment reinforced these practices by providing flexible spaces and digital tools that supported autonomy for gifted students, alongside structured spaces, visual supports, and interactive activities that facilitated learning for non-gifted students. Overall, these findings indicate that differentiation was intentionally embedded in daily classroom practices to ensure equitable access and meaningful learning for all students.

In addition, another finding revealed that there was differences in the English learning performance of gifted and non-gifted students at Dyatmika Elementary School. Gifted students demonstrated accelerated learning patterns, characterized by rapid acquisition of vocabulary and grammatical structures, minimal reliance on scaffolding, and strong higher-order thinking skills. They were able to analyse texts critically, generate inferences, and synthesize information independently.

Their written work frequently reflected creativity and complexity, including extended compositions and well-developed ideas. As one teacher noted, *"Gifted students tend to grasp the material very quickly. They often complete tasks ahead of time and require more challenging activities to remain engaged."* Another teacher added, *"If we only provide standard tasks, they become less motivated. They need enrichment and opportunities to explore topics more deeply."* It showed that

In contrast, non-gifted students showed more gradual progress in mastering English language skills. Their learning required repeated exposure, structured reinforcement, and consistent teacher guidance. Observations indicated that these students benefited significantly from scaffolded instruction, including sentence starters, graphic organizers, visual aids, and step-by-step modeling. A teacher explained, *"Some students need clear examples and guided practice before they feel confident to write independently."* Similarly, another teacher stated, *"When we break the task into smaller steps and provide support, they participate more actively and*

show steady improvement.” These findings suggest that structured support enhances both confidence and engagement among non-gifted learners.

Despite challenges such as time constraints, mixed-ability classroom management, and limited instructional resources, teachers reported intentionally implementing differentiated strategies to address diverse learning needs. As one teacher reflected, *“Managing different ability levels in one classroom is challenging, but flexible grouping and tiered tasks help us ensure that every student can access the lesson.”* Overall, the findings indicated that while gifted students thrive when provided with autonomy, enrichment, and intellectual challenge, non-gifted students achieve optimal progress through structured, scaffolded instruction. These results underscored the critical role of systematic differentiated instruction in promoting equitable and meaningful English language learning for all students.

The Challenges Experienced by The Second-Grade English Teachers at Dyatmika Elementary School in Implementing Differentiated Instructional Strategies for Gifted and Non-Gifted Students

The current finding also presented the challenges face by the English teachers who taught the second-grade students while implementing differentiated instructional strategies. The challenges emerged due to the different characteristics of the students considering that gifted and non-gifted students were identified in the class. The challenges were presented in Table 4.

Table 4. The Challenges of Implementing Differentiated Instructional Strategies for Gifted and Non-Gifted Students

Identified Challenge	Description
Time Constraints	Extensive preparation and limited class time for addressing different ability levels.
Lesson Pacing Differences	Differences in learning speed between gifted and non-gifted students.
Limited Teaching Resources	Insufficient levelled materials and instructional supports.
Classroom Management Complexity	Difficulty managing simultaneous activities in a mixed-ability classroom.
Allocation of Teacher Attention	Balancing support for non-gifted students and enrichment for gifted students.

The findings revealed several key challenges in implementing differentiated instruction in Grade 2 English classrooms. The most prominent issue was time constraints, as teachers needed extensive preparation to design tiered assignments, modified materials, and enrichment activities while also managing limited instructional time during lessons. As Teacher A expressed, *“Sometimes I feel overwhelmed because I need to prepare activities for different ability levels at the*

same time. I want every student to feel engaged, but it takes a lot of planning." Similarly, she added that preparing tiered tasks and enrichment activities was time-consuming and often extended beyond school hours.

Another significant challenge concerned lesson pacing. Observations indicated clear differences in learning speed between gifted and non-gifted students. Gifted students typically completed tasks more quickly and sought additional challenges, while non-gifted students required repeated explanations and structured guidance. Teacher B explained, *"Even during lessons, it's hard to give attention to both groups. Gifted students finish tasks quickly and look for more challenging work, while some non-gifted students need repeated explanations. Balancing both can be tricky."* This disparity often created tension in maintaining lesson flow and curriculum coverage.

Limited teaching resources also constrained effective differentiation. Teachers reported insufficient access to levelled reading materials, visual aids, and digital tools to support multiple ability levels simultaneously. As Teacher B noted, *"Sometimes we don't have enough advanced reading books or interactive resources for gifted students, and at the same time, non-gifted students need extra visual aids. We have to improvise a lot with what we have in the classroom."* Consequently, teachers frequently relied on self-developed materials, increasing their workload.

In addition, classroom management posed ongoing challenges. Managing simultaneous activities in a mixed-ability classroom required constant monitoring, flexibility, and quick instructional adjustments. Teacher A reflected, *"Even with flexible grouping and rotation stations, it's hard to make sure that every student stays focused. Some students lose interest quickly if the activity isn't suited to their level."* Finally, allocating attention fairly between gifted and non-gifted students remained a delicate balancing act. As Teacher B stated, *"I want to challenge the gifted students, but I also need to make sure the others are not left behind. It's a constant balancing act."* These findings highlighted the complex demands placed on teachers when striving to implement differentiated instruction effectively in diverse classroom settings.

4. Discussion

The present study reveals clear distinctions between gifted and non-gifted students in terms of learning motivation, learning pace, creativity, classroom participation, need for assistance, persistence, and response to challenging tasks. These findings strongly align with the theoretical framework of differentiated instruction emphasizing students' differ in readiness, interest, and learning profile (Ahmed, 2022). The differences identified in this study particularly reflect variations in readiness and learning pace, where gifted students demonstrated accelerated learning patterns and higher independence, while non-gifted students required structured guidance and repeated reinforcement.

It is relevant to the previous study showing that gifted students tend to have high-ability, and high learning performance which leads them perceiving differentiation in learning positively (Nicholas et al., 2024) Meanwhile several findings have revealed that non-gifted students are characterized with lack of problem solving skills (Arabacı & Baki, 2023; Heidari, 2025). It is similar to the characteristics of non-gifted students at Dyatmika Elementary School where they depend on teachers' assistance in solve or handle difficult case during learning English. Overall, these findings confirm that understanding students' diverse characteristics is essential for designing responsive differentiated instruction, ensuring that both gifted and non-gifted learners receive appropriate support and meaningful learning opportunities.

The findings also support the notion that differentiated instruction addresses four key components; content, process, product, and learning environment (Mardhatillah & Suharyadi, 2023a, 2023b; Yuniawati, 2024). Teachers modify content by providing extension materials for gifted students and scaffolded resources for non-gifted students. Process differentiation is evident in varied pacing, grouping strategies, and guided practice. Product differentiation is reflected in the complexity of students' outputs, while the learning environment is adjusted to promote autonomy for gifted students and structured support for non-gifted learners.

This systematic application confirmed Tomlinson's argument that differentiation is not merely about giving different tasks, but about intentionally designing instruction to ensure equitable access to learning (Krishan & Al-Rsa'I, 2023; Kupchyk & Litvinchuk, 2020; Tomlinson, 2011).

The challenges identified in the current study arise during the implementation of differentiated instructional strategies, given that gifted and non-gifted students have different characteristics. The findings reveal that English teachers face difficulties with time constraints, differences in pacing, limited resources, complex classroom management, and the allocation of attention. These findings are consistent with recent research highlighting similar implementation barriers. Oktari (2025) reports that limited instructional time and insufficient supporting resources hinder teachers from optimally applying differentiated strategies in classroom practice.

Similarly, Gastama et al. (2025) point out that teachers implementing differentiated learning under the Merdeka Curriculum experience difficulties in managing diverse student abilities while coping with limited time and resources. It is noted that preparation time and uneven student readiness levels pose challenges to adjusting instructional pacing. Parallel findings are also reported in Barkat (2025), noting that inadequate resources, limited technological access, and insufficient professional training contribute to the complexity of differentiated instruction.

Therefore, these converging findings suggest that although differentiated instructional strategies are pedagogically appropriate for addressing the diverse needs of gifted and non-gifted students, their effective implementation requires adequate time allocation, sufficient resources, continuous professional development, and institutional support to ensure that instructional adjustments can be carried out optimally and sustainably.

Despite these challenges, the findings confirm that differentiated instruction remains essential in promoting equitable and meaningful learning. As emphasized by differentiation, the aim is to ensure fairness in learning opportunities rather than identical instruction for all students. The current study demonstrates that when differentiation is systematically implemented, both gifted and non-gifted students benefit through increased engagement, confidence, and academic growth. Overall, the findings reinforce existing theories and empirical studies on differentiated learning, highlighting that while implementation demands time, resources, and instructional flexibility, it plays a crucial role in accommodating diverse learner characteristics and fostering inclusive English language classrooms.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the present study demonstrated that implementing differentiated instructional strategies in a second-grade English classroom at Dyatmika Elementary School is both necessary and systematically practiced accommodating the distinct characteristics of gifted and non-gifted students. Clear differences in learning motivation, pace, creativity, participation, independence, and persistence require teachers to thoughtfully adjust content, process, product, and learning environment to ensure equitable learning opportunities. While gifted students benefit from enrichment, autonomy, and higher-level challenges, non-gifted students progress more effectively through structured, scaffolded support and guided practice.

However, despite teachers' consistent efforts, implementing differentiation remains challenging due to time constraints, pacing gaps, limited resources, complex classroom management, and the need to balance attention among diverse learners. Therefore, sustained institutional support, adequate resources, and ongoing professional development are essential to optimize the effectiveness and sustainability of differentiated instruction in mixed-ability classrooms.

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