Indonesian EFL teachers’ attitudes toward the differentiated curriculum in junior high schools and factors contributing to their attitudes

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Abstract

The implementation of differentiated curriculum (DC) in junior high schools has been gaining momentum in recent years as a means to address the diverse needs of students. However, more information about how English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers perceive this change is needed. This study explored English teachers’ attitudes and factors that affected the introduction of DC in junior high schools. Data were collected through DC questionnaire administration and interviews using a mixed-method approach. The quantitative data were statistically analyzed using SPSS 23, while the qualitative data were thematically analyzed. The participants were the EFL teachers who actively participated in the MGMP (Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran, or Subject Teacher Forum) of English Subject at the junior high school level in Batu City, East Java, Indonesia. The findings showed that all participants depicted a positive attitude toward DC implementation. However, they found some support needed from all related parties due to some challenges they met during their attempts to implement DC. This study suggests that EFL teachers’ positive attitudes drive increased efforts in successfully implementing DC. However, identified challenges necessitate collaborative support from educators, administrators, and policymakers,
including professional development and resource provision, for successful DC integration in EFL classrooms.

**Keywords:** differentiated curriculum (DC); differentiated curriculum (DC) integration; EFL teachers’ attitude; emancipated curriculum (EC), factors contributing to attitude; junior high school

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**Introduction**

The field of education is in a constant state of evolution, responding to changing trends, such as the increasing need to place learners at the center of the learning process (Kandiko et al., 2021). Recently, the concept of a differentiated curriculum (DC) has gained prominence as a means to address students’ diverse learning styles, abilities, and interests (Smale-Jacobse et al., 2019). The DC aims to provide tailored instruction and learning experiences to meet the unique needs of each learner, promoting meaningful engagement and enhancing learning outcomes (Bondie et al., 2019; Fitra, 2022; Kashdan et al., 2018; Smale-Jacobse et al., 2019). Hence, some studies, i.e., conducted by Fitra (2022), Subban (2006), Syarifuddin and Nurmi (2022) encourage schools to adopt and adapt this curriculum to gain better learning outcomes for each differentiated learner, including in English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching context.

The need for a differentiated curriculum becomes even more crucial in the EFL context, where students learn English as a non-native language (Naka, 2017). EFL classrooms often consist of learners with varying proficiency levels, backgrounds, and learning preferences (Han, 2021). A one-size-fits-all approach to instruction may not effectively cater to the diverse needs of EFL students (Bondie et al., 2019), potentially hindering their language acquisition and overall educational development. Incorporating a differentiated curriculum in EFL teaching can address this challenge by providing opportunities for individualized instruction,
personalized learning experiences, and targeted support (Borja et al., 2015; Mardhatillah & Suharyadi, 2023).

Adopting a differentiated curriculum in the Indonesian education system is significant, especially at the junior high school level (Fitra, 2022; Syarifuddin & Nurmi, 2022). As a country with a large and culturally diverse population, Indonesia's education system faces the task of providing equitable access to quality education for all students. Implementing a differentiated curriculum aligns with the broader educational reform efforts in Indonesia, particularly the Kurikulum Merdeka or Emancipated Curriculum (EC) (Gusteti & Nevyarni, 2022; Marlina, 2019). EC emphasizes student-centered learning, critical thinking skills, and the development of 21st-century competencies. By incorporating a differentiated curriculum, the Indonesian government aims to create an inclusive and learner-focused education system that caters to every student's diverse needs and potential.

Some studies have discussed the implementation of DC in Indonesia's junior high school context. Fitra (2022) states that the implementation of DC effectively leveraged the comprehension of 'Solar System' materials by junior high school students. She found that differentiated learning effectively establishes an EC. Similarly, Gusteti and Nevyarni’s (2022) study explains that DC implementation enhances learning outcomes and can be integrated with some learning models, such as project-based learning (PJBL). Wahyuningsari et al. (2022) explain that DC could accommodate each student's personal needs in learning. It increased the students' motivation and provided a more supportive learning environment. Hence, due to DC implementation benefits, some studies highlighted the positive attitude of EFL teachers at various levels toward the implementation of DC as shown in some studies (Fitra, 2022; Gusteti & Nevyarni, 2022; Maruf, 2023; Wahyuningsari et al., 2022), though some other studies found DC implementation promotes challenges (Altun et al., 2022; Endeshaw, 2023; Suprayogi & Valcke, 2016).

Reviewing the aforementioned previous studies, limited research has specifically examined the attitudes of EFL teachers toward its implementation in Indonesian junior high schools, especially in the context of EFL teachers who actively join MGMP (Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran, or Subject Teacher Forum). This study seeks to address this gap in the literature by investigating the EFL teachers' attitude toward DC implementation and the factors contributing to this attitude, including how they perceive the DC benefits and the possible challenges and supports of DC implementation. By examining their attitudes, this research sheds light on the factors that may influence the successful adoption and implementation of a DC in the EFL context (Fishman et al., 2021).
Against this backdrop, the research problem addressed in this study can be formulated as follows:
(1) What are the attitudes of EFL teachers in Indonesian junior high schools toward the DC?
(2) What factors contribute to the EFL teachers’ attitudes?

Literature review

The Kurikulum Merdeka or Emancipated Curriculum (EC)

The Kurikulum Merdeka, or Emancipated Curriculum (EC) in Indonesia, is an educational initiative introduced to reform Indonesia’s education system (Puad & Ashton, 2022). It aims to produce more independent, creative, and adaptable graduates who can better cope with the changing demands of the modern world (Wahyuningsari et al., 2022). In other words, the goal of EC is to make education more relevant to the needs of students, society, and the workforce (Kristiani et al., 2021; Puad & Ashton, 2022). It encourages a shift away from rote memorization and standardized testing toward a more holistic and contextual approach to learning (Westbroek et al., 2020). The curriculum was first introduced in 2020 as part of broader educational reforms.

According to Rizaldi and Fatimah (2022), the principles of EC encompass project-based learning, technology integration, critical thinking, and character development. The curriculum strongly emphasizes project-based learning, which encourages critical thinking, problem-solving, and the development of practical skills by engaging students in real-world projects relevant to their lives. Additionally, recognizing the importance of technology in the modern world, the curriculum encourages the use of technology in education, not only teaching students how to use technology but also how to integrate it into their learning process. EC emphasizes the development of critical thinking skills, encouraging students to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information rather than merely memorize facts, preparing them to adapt to changes in technology and the environment. Furthermore, character education is a significant component of EC, instilling values such as integrity, empathy, leadership, and courage alongside academic knowledge to shape well-rounded individuals who can contribute positively to society.

In junior high schools in Indonesia, EC is implemented through a variety of methods and resources. Teachers play a crucial role in designing and delivering lessons that align with the curriculum's principles. The assessment also differs from traditional methods. Instead of relying solely on exams, assessments may
include performance evaluations, portfolios, and presentations that demonstrate students' practical skills and understanding of the material (Adnyana, 2023).

Overall, EC represents a significant shift in Indonesia's education system by promoting a more student-centered and practical approach to learning. Its implementation at the junior high school level aims to better prepare students for the challenges of the modern world, equipping them with the skills, knowledge, and values they need to succeed in the 21st century.

**Differentiated curriculum (DC) for differentiated learning**

Differentiated curriculum (DC) within the context of EC in Indonesia is essential for several reasons, particularly when teaching EFL in junior high schools. According to Tomlinson (2017), DC drives the teaching and learning process in which students study subject matter served based on their talents, preferences, and individual requirements so that they are not frustrated or fail in their learning journey. In other words, differentiation means tailoring instruction to meet students' diverse needs, interests, and abilities (Kashdan et al., 2018).

The implementation of a DC in the EFL context offers several compelling reasons. Firstly, it caters to the diverse needs of students in junior high school, acknowledging variations in background, English proficiency, and learning styles, thus ensuring equitable access to quality instruction (Kandiko et al., 2021). Secondly, by tailoring teaching methods and materials to individual students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles, differentiated instruction has the potential to enhance learning outcomes, allowing students to progress at their own pace and achieve improved understanding and retention of the English language (Fitra, 2022). Additionally, incorporating students' interests and choices in the learning process through differentiated instruction can significantly increase engagement and motivation, which is particularly crucial in the EFL context, where enthusiasm strongly influences language acquisition (Wahyuningsari et al., 2022). Lastly, differentiated instruction supports inclusive education by better-accommodating students with learning disabilities (Subban, 2006), aligning with the core principle of EC.

According to the key points of implementing DC in the EFL teaching and learning context above, the teachers must grasp and accept that there is no single technique, method, or strategy for studying a subject in diversified learning (Bondie et al., 2019). EFL Teachers must create instructional materials, daily activities, tasks, in-class, and at-home assignments, and final assessments based on students' readiness to learn the subject matter, their interests, what they like to learn, and how to deliver lessons that align with their student's learning profiles (Fitra, 2022).
To guide the EFL teachers in applying DC, Tomlinson (2017) states that teachers can implement differentiation in three aspects to boost their students' learning outcomes. The aspects are the content or materials of teaching, the teaching process or meaningful activities that students will engage in throughout the learning, and the assessment, which focuses more on the creation of a product that reflects the students' learning achievement and accomplishment of learning objectives. Differentiated learning varies from individualized learning, which is used to teach special needs children (Lindner & Schwab, 2020). Teachers do not address each student individually in differentiated learning to ensure that they grasp what is being taught. Students can learn in large or small groups or work individually (Pozas et al., 2020).

**Key principles in DC**

The implementation of the DC would be successful if the EFL teachers believed that each student could grow their learning potential to reach their best through optimizing their capacities (Ismajli & Imami-Morina, 2018). This positive belief, then, leads to the development of five key principles to establish DC based on Tomlinson and Moon’s (2014) theory. The principles require teachers and institutions to pay attention to the learning environment, quality curriculum, sustainable assessment, responsive teaching, and good teaching-learning management.

The learning environment includes the physical building and the positive relations between EFL teachers and students (Rusticus et al., 2023). The infrastructure of the school should support the needs of each student’s learning styles, strategies, and materials to gain optimal learning achievement (Muslimin & Suhartoyo, 2024). Some students may learn better visually, which requires the school to provide the classroom with an LCD projector to visualize the learning materials. Some others may enjoy learning cooperatively, which encourages EFL teachers to adjust the sitting arrangement into a grouping model. It means that the classroom chairs are prepared to be customizable. Then, a good academic climate would exist in the school if the teachers have a good relationship with the students (Ismail et al., 2020). The relationship will help EFL teachers understand their students’ challenges in learning, conduct discussions and share solutions, and gain better trust to optimize learners’ achievement.

The next principle is attending the quality curriculum (Goodman, 2008). It deals with the capability of the curriculum to grab all student's learning objectives (Wijngaards-de Meij & Merx, 2018). In this research context, DC does not pay attention only to the high achievers but also to the low achievers. DC aids teachers in elevating the potential of both types of learners (Yaduvanshi & Singh, 2019).
curriculum helps the lower achiever to reach a higher level of comprehension through special pedagogies and content. While the high achievers, learn a step ahead to train their higher critical thinking and problem-solving after successfully comprehending the learning target.

Principle number three is the sustainable assessment, meaning that the assessment will not only end with the summative test but is more on formative assessment for both their teaching performance and students' progress (Dong & Xu, 2022). The EFL teachers can operate formative assessment throughout instruction to improve their teaching and determine whether students understand the subject matter being addressed. Formative assessments are not graded and are purely used for diagnostic purposes, identifying the difficulties students have in terms of what they find difficult to grasp, what remains unclear to them, and what teachers may do to help students improve their comprehension (Schildkamp et al., 2020). Formative assessment, as part of the learning process, also allows for student monitoring, allowing for continual observation and evaluation of their competency improvement. This kind of dialogic feedback helps both teachers and students to keep progressing for better teaching and learning outcomes.

The fourth principle of DC implementation is responsive teaching. It deals with the EFL teachers' willingness to respond to the result of conducting formative assessment, considering the current education policy and trend, and students' conditions (Zeng & Huang, 2021). The student's current condition may vary across their learning readiness, learning interest, and self-profiling based on the student's final evaluation (Fitra, 2022).

The last key principle is good teaching-learning management. The EFL teacher should manage the class well by preparing authentic materials, providing clear classroom instruction, providing feedback and motivation, attending various teaching strategies, and being a good model (Sieberer-Nagler, 2016). These management attempts are directed to develop an effective and efficient teaching and learning process.

Method

Research design

This study employed a mixed-method research approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods, to address the research question effectively (Östlund et al., 2011). The choice of a mixed-method approach was driven by the desire to provide a comprehensive understanding of English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' attitudes towards the differentiated curriculum (DC) in junior high
schools. Creswell (2016) explains that qualitative research focuses on exploring and understanding complex social phenomena, typically through methods such as interviews and content analysis. It seeks to uncover underlying meanings, motivations, and experiences, that provide rich descriptive data (Cresswell, 2016). This study used ethnography to explore participants' experiences with DC implementation, enriching the quantitative data by providing deeper insights and context. On the other hand, quantitative research included steps such as collecting and analyzing numerical data through structured surveys and statistical analysis (Cresswell, 2016). Then, the survey design was chosen for its efficiency and participant receptiveness, enabling this research to uncover data patterns and relationships through quantification. Hence, combining both qualitative and quantitative data allowed researchers to gain a more comprehensive exploration of the research problem. While quantitative data provided numerical insights into the prevalence of attitudes, qualitative data uncovered the underlying reasons and nuances behind those attitudes (Creswell & Plano, 2018).

This study adopted an explanatory sequential research method. This research began with the collection and analysis of quantitative data through a questionnaire survey, followed by interviews with participants. The survey would cover participants' responses about their attitudes toward DC implementations and the factors that contributed to their attitudes. Then, the interviews were used to explain, confirm, and elaborate upon these quantitative survey results. Combining an online questionnaire and interviews allowed for data triangulation, enhancing the validity and depth of the research findings (Yeasmin & Rahman, 2012).

**Participants**

The participants in this study comprised twelve EFL teachers from junior high schools in Batu City, East Java, Indonesia. The sample was selected from a larger group of twenty EFL teachers who actively participated in the MGMP (Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran, or Subject Teacher Forum) of English subjects at the junior high school level in Batu City, East Java, Indonesia. The participants were chosen based on their willingness to participate in the study and availability during the data collection period (Palinkas et al., 2015). The research adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring informed consent from the participants. Confidentiality of the participants' data was maintained, and they were given the option to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. According to the participants' responses, nine participants had more than nine years of EFL teaching experience, and three had around 0-3 years of teaching experience (Figure 1). The responses showed that four teachers possessed a Master’s degree, and eight had a Bachelor’s degree (Figure 2).
Instruments

The present study employed two instruments, namely online DC questionnaires, and interviews protocol. The online structured questionnaire was developed to gather quantitative data on EFL teachers' attitudes toward the DC, which was adopted from Onyishi and Sefotho’s (2020) study which had been tested for its validity. According to the present researchers' analysis, the face validity of the instrument was obtained through the suitability of this research objective with the available instrument. The content validity had been achieved as it comprised all components of the research contents (the EFL teachers’ attitudes and factors that
affected it). Then, the construct validity was shown by the fulfillment of the acceptance model framework which includes perceived ease of use (PEU), perceived usefulness (PU), and intentional behavior to use (IBU) (Gupta et al., 2016). The questionnaire covers eight questions with some points including the participants' knowledge of DC (PEU), participants' efficacy on DC (IBU), participants' belief of DC benefits (PU), and participants' challenges on DC implementation (PEU). The questionnaire included Likert-scale items (from 1-5, of which '1' indicated 'strongly disagree' and '5' indicated 'strongly agree') to assess the level of agreement or disagreement with statements related to the DC. This instrument was developed for online sharing through applying Google Docs. Hence, the present study researchers could send the survey link to the participants.

The second instrument is the interview (Creswell, 2016). To maintain the validity of this instrument, the present researcher applied it in a pilot study (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The interview protocol contains open-ended questions to confirm the participants' answers in the survey. Hence, the interview protocol development had been based on the components of the DC questionnaire covering the participants' knowledge of DC (PEU), participants' efficacy on DC (IBU), participants' belief of DC benefits (PU), and participants' challenges on DC implementation (PEU). Moreover, it opens the possibility of unveiling participants' responses which are also essential and connected to this study's objectives and to be discussed in the study. Therefore, at the end of the interview protocol, it was provided open-ended questions on the participants' suggestions regarding better DC implementation in the context of teaching EFL in junior high school settings. The six interview questions are as follows: (1) Can you briefly introduce yourself, your teaching experience, and your background in English language education? (2) How would you define a DC in the context of EFL teaching? Is it important in the junior high school EFL setting? (3) What factors do you believe contribute to the development of your attitude towards the DC? (4) What challenges, if any, do you face when trying to implement the DC in your EFL classes? (5) Are there specific strategies or methods you find effective in tailoring instruction to meet the diverse needs of your students? And (6) Is there anything else you would like to share regarding the implementation of the DC in EFL teaching in junior high school level?

Data collection

The data collection process was conducted by operating two research instruments, namely the DC questionnaire which was adapted from Onyishi and Sefotho (2020) and interview that was adapted from Corbin and Strauss (2015), in which the specifications of each instrument had been described in the instruments sub-
theme. The DC questionnaire was used to collect data through a survey and the interview protocol was applied to help the present researchers to collect data during the interview. Then, following the research method applied in the present study, an explanatory sequential method, the data collection process was initiated by surveying before conducting the interview.

The survey was conducted a week before the MGMP of English subjects at the Junior High School level meeting was held in the first week of August 2023. It was done to make sure that the participants who were willing to be interviewed were ready to join the interview. The DC questionnaire was shared online by sending the survey link through WhatsApp to the leader of the MGMP of English subjects. The leader was requested to share the link to the MGMP WhatsApp group and to suggest all the group members filling the survey. At the beginning of the questionnaire, the participants had been informed that their responses would be used as data in the present research and they were asked for willingness or consent to join one or both data collection processes (the survey and or the interview). All the participant's responses were gathered in the spreadsheets of the Google Docs which later were analyzed statistically since the data contains numerical responses. Then, it was found that only twelve participants joined the survey.

After doing the survey, the interview was conducted to grab the qualitative data (McGrath et al., 2019). It was used to confirm the participant's responses in the survey as well as deepen the understanding of the issue through open-ended questions. The type of interview applied in the present study was a semi-structured interview to maintain consistency in the topics discussed during each interview. Semi-structured interviews are a type of interview that combines pre-planned questions with the flexibility to pursue new topics as needed (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This method provides uniformity in the questions asked while allowing for some variation in the conversation. Then, from the responses to the survey regarding the participant's willingness to join the interview, there were only four English subject teachers agreed to join it. So, the interview participants' selection was based on the willingness that was stated in the survey (Knapik, 2006).

The interview process commenced with face-to-face interviews at the end of the MGMP meeting for English subject teachers at the junior high school level meeting in the first week of August 2023. Each interview was recorded with the participant's consent. Prior to each interview, the participants were briefed on their rights to answer or refrain from answering questions, including the option to withdraw the provided information. The interviews utilized an interview protocol consisting of six key open-ended questions. These questions covered the participants' introduction, their understanding of DC from its benefits, the factors
influencing their attitude toward DC implementation, the challenges of applying DC, their strategies for applying DC to meet diverse student needs, and their recommendations or comments regarding DC implementation. A pilot study of the initial interview protocol was conducted to ensure its validity (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Each interview session lasted between ten to fifteen minutes, and efforts were made to keep the conversation as natural as possible, including in Indonesian.

**Data analysis**

The quantitative data obtained from the survey were analyzed statistically using the SPSS 23 version which resulted in descriptive statistics, such as mean, standard deviation, and maximum-minimum distributions (Creswell & Plato, 2018; Rahman & Muktdar, 2021) which are presented in Table 1. The descriptive presentation was set into the display of each survey question response from the twelve participants to notice the tendency of participants’ attitudes on DC implementation. After the quantitative analysis was done, the qualitative data gathered through interviews was analyzed. The qualitative data analysis was started by transcribing the interview result, professional creating code of the data seen in the transcription, and then grouping the code into themes (the attitude and the factors affecting the participant’s attitudes including how they perceive the DC benefits, and possible challenges and supports) (Naeem et al., 2023). For example, participant 1 responded, “I can serve the individual learning needs of each pupil, I guess.” This response was coded as ‘Benefit’. Then, all participants’ responses related to ‘Benefit’ were gathered into a theme namely ‘Factors’. Similarly, all participants’ responses in relation to factors affecting their attitude on DC implementation, were themed into ‘Factors’ i.e., participant’s responses about challenges (see Table 1). Moreover, during the interview, the researcher found more exploration related to the factors affecting the participants’ attitudes toward DC implementation. The researcher found that participants promoted a new theme which was suggestions for better DC implementation.

**Findings**

The findings of this study are presented following the objectives of the present study which elaborate on the EFL teachers’ attitudes toward DC implementation and the factors that contribute to their attitudes.
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview responses</th>
<th>Keywords</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I can serve the individual learning needs of each pupil, I guess.” (P1)</td>
<td>Serving individual learning needs</td>
<td>Benefit of DC</td>
<td>Factors contributed to the participants’ attitude (Factors)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The students can be served with the teaching and learning process as they need and in their capacity.” (P2)</td>
<td>Meeting learners’ needs and learning capacity.</td>
<td>Benefit of DC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It takes more time to prepare the materials.” (P2)</td>
<td>Takes more time</td>
<td>Challenges to implementing DC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“There should be adequate curriculum, adequate teachers, and supportive students.” (P4)</td>
<td>Adequate curriculum, the adequate teachers, and the supportive learning students</td>
<td>Sources availability</td>
<td>Suggestion for better DC implementation (new theme)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Hold such kind of workshop that is related to that curriculum.” (P2)</td>
<td>Workshop</td>
<td>Teacher professional development (TPD)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The attitudes of EFL teachers in Indonesian junior high schools toward DC implementation

The survey resulted in the participant's responses in the form of quantitative data. The data was analyzed statistically using SPSS version 23. The descriptive statistics analysis was conducted and the results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

The results of the quantitative data descriptive statistics analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.5000</td>
<td>.52223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.5000</td>
<td>.52223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.7500</td>
<td>.45227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.0000</td>
<td>.73855</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.2500</td>
<td>.45227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6</td>
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<td>3.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.2500</td>
<td>.86603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.2500</td>
<td>.86603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.2500</td>
<td>.86603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N (listwise)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 shows the participants’ responses to the DC questionnaire administration. Each of the questions was presented by its mean score to show the items that the participants agreed more. To comprehend better the participants’ agreement on the questionnaire items, the data is described in Figure 3.

**Figure 3**
The participants’ attitudes toward DC

The differentiated curriculum requires adjustments to existing teaching materials and resources.
The differentiated curriculum promotes inclusion and equal opportunities for all students.
The differentiated curriculum effectively addresses students’ varying language levels.
The differentiated curriculum improves students’ overall language proficiency.
The differentiated curriculum accommodates students’ diverse learning needs.
Implementing the differentiated curriculum requires significant time and effort.
The differentiated curriculum allows for more personalized instruction.

Figure 3 describes that all participants perceived the benefits of applying DC in EFL teaching positively to all questionnaire items. Especially they found DC provided more privilege to each student to learn EFL meeting their personal needs (4.8 scores or very close to 5). The lowest score response appears from their perception that the DC application could enhance their students’ overall language proficiency. Then, some high-score responses explain that the participants should strive to develop their teaching plan before implementing DC since it needed more time and effort, including adjusting teaching materials with the teaching objectives.

The factors contribute to the EFL teachers’ attitudes

The attitudes of the EFL teachers toward DC implementation was affected by various factors. Figure 3 exposes findings that the participants had a positive attitude toward DC implementation because they found some benefits i.e., DC accommodates students’ diverse learning needs and DC allows more personalized learning. Similarly, the participants’ responses in the interview support their positive attitude toward DC implementation.
P1: I can serve the individual learning needs of each pupil, I guess.

P2: The students can be served with the teaching and learning process as they need and in their capacity.

P3: The ways to treat the students based on their interests and diversities. However, it is hard to make sure students’ productive skills improve as much as their receptive skills due to time allotment.

P4: It addresses a student to get what they need the most in learning so that they will be able to afford the optimum levels they could reach in learning in the EFL classroom. Furthermore, it will raise their confidence in facing learning situations that come what may, and this is the turning point for them to face the next learning levels they may come to confidently.

The above excerpts indicate that all the participants had already had favorable responses regarding the ultimate goal of the DC application for teaching. They knew that DC focuses on the variety of needs among learners individually. Two participants view the benefits of their position as teachers, which should humanize the EFL learners by providing more personal teaching scenarios. The other two focus on sharing the DC application benefits from the lens of the student’s learning progress. Due to DC benefits, consequently, most of the participants showed their attempts to implement DC in their EFL classroom as reflected by the following excerpts.

P1: I have no idea.

P2: I give them chances to do the task so they can finish them

P3: By mapping to know their language levels and mostly by doing group work or collaborative learning and doing the language projects, by doing such things we can assist and teach based on their needs

P4: I make groups of the same language level and learning needs in the EFL classroom so that I can implement different learning processes for each group to fulfill students’ needs in learning.

The responses showed that P3 and P4 exhibit more reasonable attempts to address various levels of EFL learners’ language proficiencies. Then, although P2 had already administered tasks to the students, P2 needed to consider the diversity of the learners. Moreover, P1 did not reflect the ability to respond to the mentioned case.
Another factor that contributed to the participants’ positive attitude toward DC implementation was the emergence of support to implement DC. These findings appear in Figure 4.

Figure 4

The participants’ perceived challenges and supports

Figure 4 shows that the help of peers was really supportive of enhancing their DC application skills. Also, the school administration supported them in implementing DC. Nevertheless, the participants met some challenges that also contributed to their attitude toward DC implementation. Figure 4 depicts the DC application that requested them to adjust not only the teaching materials but also all teaching stages, including the assessment and evaluation. Hence, the challenges were still met due to limited DC training and adequate resources (the lowest response score). These challenges were also mentioned by participants in the interview as shown in the following excerpts.

P1: Time to arrange the preparation.

P2: It takes more time to prepare the materials.

P3: I have to share more efforts in preparing different teaching methods and materials based on their needs and capabilities. Especially when I had to make sure that my students should be able to speak, listen, write, and read at the same teaching time. Also, I must be patient in preparing as it is very time-consuming. But the results of this are absolutely very amazing.
P4: To get the support systems to implement this because the differentiated curriculum has rarely been implemented on an extensive education scale.

The participants' responses showed that seventy-five percent considered that applying DC was time-consuming and required effort to prepare the materials. Then, one of them said that the educational systems, including the school, would not provide more significant support as he/she thought it had not yet impacted the more comprehensive educational settings.

After delivering questions regarding EFL teachers' attitudes toward DC implementation and the factors contributing to their attitudes, the last interview question about the participants' suggestions or comments regarding DC implementation for EFL teaching at the junior high school level triggered a new theme. The participants promoted suggestions for better DC implementation as shown in the following excerpts.

P1: I do not have any idea. Maybe, the help of colleagues is really meaningful.

P2: The schools should hold such kinds of workshops that are related to that curriculum.

P3: The teacher should be creative by applying any kind of teaching sources and materials to meet diversified teaching methods. It could be from textbooks, magazines, newspapers, the internet, and many more. Moreover, training to implement it effectively is needed.

P4: There should be an adequate curriculum, adequate teachers, and supportive students. Teachers must bravely address a circumstance to implement a differentiated curriculum. Teachers should also be brave to get a support system to implement this.

The above excerpts show that the existing additional supports such as the help of colleagues, availability of teaching and learning resources as well as resources to comprehend DC to improve EFL teachers' DC efficacy, the supportive students to implement DC, and the teacher professional development (TPD) program related to DC implementation are needed. Additionally, the teachers' self-resilience to face challenges as stated by P4 also impacted their DC implementation.

Discussion

The differentiated curriculum (DC) is initiated with the core intention to accommodate the needs of students in learning activities (Han, 2021; Kandiko
Howson & Kingsbury, 2021; Smale-Jacobse et al., 2019; Tomlinson, 2017). The teacher pays attention to the unique characteristics of students who are different so that they cannot be given the same treatment between one student and another student who has different characteristics (Puad & Ashton, 2022). In implementing differentiated learning, teachers need to provide reasonable actions in responding to differences in student characteristics. Differentiated learning does not mean giving different treatment to each student or discriminating between smart and less intelligent (low achiever) students. Implementation of DC is expected to stimulate children in maximizing the comprehension of knowledge in learning (Fitra, 2022; Tomlinson, 2017), and the participants of this research had exposed similar responses about it (see Figure 3). The ultimate impact of applying this DC includes; every student with various characteristics feeling welcomed and valued, the teacher teaching for the success and development of students, and the learning needs of students being facilitated as a real form of fairness in the treatment of learning, there is teacher and student collaboration (Wahyuningsari et al., 2022). The students enjoy learning in various working models such as in groups, pairs, or individually (Lindner & Schwab, 2020). The teachers’ decision to apply teaching pedagogies is also based on their attempts to assess formatively the teaching for class outcome improvement (Tomlinson & Moon, 2014).

In Indonesia’s education context, the need to implement DC has been started widely together with the command to apply the Kurikulum Merdeka or Emancipated Curriculum (EC) from the Indonesia Minister of Education in 2022 (Lingga, 2022). This idea has also been supported by Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the Indonesia National Education System, the curriculum at all levels and types of education is developed with the principle of diversification based on educational units, regional potential, and students (Wulandari et al., 2022). According to the article, a differentiated curriculum is intended so that the adjustment of educational programs in educational units with the conditions and potential characteristics that exist in the region can accommodate the various variations that exist, including students. Therefore, all educational systems in Indonesia, including the junior high schools, should apply DC for all subjects of teaching, one of which is EFL teaching.

To implement the DC, the curriculum should consider its aspects, namely content, process, product, and learning environment (Tomlinson, 2017; Wahyuningsari et al., 2022). As shown by participants’ responses in Figure 3, the EFL teachers should adjust the materials or contents of teaching to each student’s needs and learning interests. It is in line with the development of a quality curriculum that should accommodate any type of EFL student (Tomlinson & Moon, 2014). During EFL teaching, the teachers should manage the learning
process with various teaching strategies, methods, and techniques to facilitate each learning style (Kashdan et al., 2018). In addition, EFL teachers should develop a supportive learning environment through maintaining good relationships with students to understand learning challenges, finding solutions, and giving motivation. Also, the evaluation process should align with the contents and learning process that students experience (Adnyana, 2023; Rizaldi & Fatimah, 2022). Teachers should continuously monitor their students’ learning progress through any model of formative assessment as well as evaluate their teaching performance meeting the students’ current teaching profile (Schildkamp et al., 2020; Tomlinson & Moon, 2014). Finally, the EFL teachers should employ the existing facilities and infrastructure to support the DC implementation. However, meeting all of the aspects to establish DC in EFL teaching took work (Altun et al., 2022; Endeshaw, 2023; Suprayogi & Valcke, 2016).

Based on the findings, the majority of the participants perceived the benefits of DC implementation. They had a position belief that DC could accommodate their students’ personalized needs for EFL learning which in the end improved the students’ learning achievement. However, the participants admitted that they doubted whether DC implementation could leverage their students’ overall language proficiency (see Figure 3). A participant said that teaching English productive skills (i.e., speaking and writing) required him/her to spend more time than English receptive skills (i.e., reading and listening) since he/she should assess the students individually. Ismajli and Imami-Morina (2018) said that DC could not be applied optimally to a class with too heterogeneous students and more personalized and intensive language skill learning. Indeed, teaching EFL in junior high school in Indonesia is not separated into skills but integrated into a single subject which is ‘English subject’ with only limited meetings per week (once or twice a week with 60-80 minutes per meeting) (see P3’s excerpts).

Discussing the participants’ challenges, the findings show that they should spend a lot of time preparing for EFL teaching based on DC (it is time-consuming) (Mardhatillah & Suharyadi, 2023). They should conduct diagnostic tests to assess individual students’ characteristics, including learning style, learning needs, and initial language proficiencies (Maryono & Lengkanawati, 2022). The teachers should map the student’s potential by observing one-by-one performance. Moreover, the teachers found finding resources or teaching materials that suit each student’s needs and interests difficult since the institution or schools have not fully supported them (Altun et al., 2022). The teachers, again, should spend more time to seek for the material at any time and place and employ their own internet access. Moreover, the limited training to develop and implement DC requires EFL teachers to be more autonomous in developing their DC professionalism (Smets &
Struyven, 2020). They should actively mingle and collaborate with peers. Moreover, they request more opportunities and access to relevant teachers' professional development (TPD) workshops that can leverage their professionalism (Maruf, 2023; Muslimin et al., 2023; Suprayogi & Valcke, 2016).

Instead of the external factors that may support the EFL teachers’ DC professionalism (i.e., the availability of resources, infrastructure, TPD programs, and colleagues to share), they should also develop their resilience. Some participants said that they need patience and autonomy. The participants believed that the positive potentials (Endeshaw, 2023; Fitra, 2022; Gusteti & Neviyarni, 2022; Wahyuningsari et al., 2022) of DC implementation could be valuable capital to keep their engagement with DC learning and keep autonomously seeking the knowledge of DC. The overall positive attitude of all participants in this research could lead to the success of EFL teaching with the DC integration (Abdulrezapour & Ghanbari, 2021; Maruf, 2023; Sieberer-Nagler, 2015). Then, P3 and P4 depict that EFL teachers with more resilience, better DC comprehension, and autonomy would share more effort to implement DC to gain better teaching outcomes (see the interview responses). Finally, this study suggests a different on relationship between the DC knowledge and the participants’ attitudes as shown in Maruf (2023). This study shows that EFL teachers’ attitude promotes autonomy to grasp DC knowledge for implementation. Reflecting on the above discussion and the participants’ professional context, in which they are active members of the MGMP (Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran, or Subject Teacher Forum) of English Subject, it is interesting to exhibit the fact that some of them still require more TPD program related to DC. At the same time, they are in-time obligatorily to apply the EC. Then, how about the EFL teachers who are not actively joining the MGMP. Hence, the findings require all parties that play a role in Indonesian educational systems to hand-in-hand to at least fulfill the EFL teachers’ need for knowledge in order to prepare them to implement DC in their classes. Moreover, the well-established DC implementation systems, including the guidelines, policies, and massive practices with the government’s guidance, would incline the EFL teachers’ optimism and resilience to keep implementing the DC (Hascher et al., 2021; Suprayogi & Valcke, 2016). Finally, this study captures the EFL junior high school teachers to keep supporting the Indonesian education program through overall positive attitudes.

Conclusion

Introducing a new curriculum to every education level, including the junior high level in Indonesia, would also challenge the teachers. Henceforth, this study
unveils the EFL teachers’ attitude toward the new Indonesian educational policy to implement a differentiated curriculum (DC) as a component of the Kurikulum Merdeka or Emancipated Curriculum (EC), as well as depicting the factors that might affect their attitude toward it. The findings show that the participants showed positive attitudes toward the Indonesian government’s policy to implement DC due to some factors such as the DC implementation benefits and supports as well as their noble intention to increase their teaching outcomes. The EFL teachers with good resilience and autonomy showed more efforts to implement DC as proof of their positive attitude to DC. Nevertheless, policymakers and educational institutions need to provide more support for aiding obstacles i.e., limited TPD programs related to DC implementation, unavailable practical DC implementation guidelines, and the availability of supporting facilities. Also, the participants wish to have knowledgeable colleagues to help them implement DC.

The results of this study could benefit the EFL teachers who attempt to apply DC by providing insight to overcome DC implementation challenges. Also, it provides reflections from the EFL teachers' voices to show their attitudes and the challenges they encounter during DC implementation. These reflections could aid academic institutions and policymakers in establishing further evaluation and support. This study also suggests several recommendations for the betterment of DC implementation. Theoretically, this study's findings can be referenced in the issue of DC implementation for EFL teaching at the junior high school level. Practically, the findings could contribute to evaluation for better DC implementation.

This study is limited in terms of the participants, which only covers a few numbers of EFL teachers at the MGMP (Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran, or Subject Teacher Forum) of English subjects in one city in Indonesia. This study is also limited to the participants’ attitudes toward DC implementation and the factors that contributed to their attitudes. Therefore, future study is recommended to cover wider research participants and settings, as well as employing another variable of DC implementation i.e., the academic institution policy and support, to elaborate more comprehensive understandings of DC implementation. In the Indonesian context, such research endeavors might focus on EFL teachers' attitudes toward DC implementation at various levels of education in various Indonesian areas. In the global context, the research may investigate the DC implementation in various countries and its impacts on EFL teachers by including some factors such as each country’s educational policy.
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Disclosure statement

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