



## **Navigating Diversity: Process-Focused Differentiation Through Project-Based Learning in English Classrooms Under the School Zoning System**

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**Abstract.** This paper examines the techniques of English teachers in conducting process-focused Differentiated Instruction using a Project-Based Learning approach in zoning-based English classrooms. The introduction of the zoning system has increased heterogeneity among the classrooms, where teachers need to manage issues such as students' varying English proficiency levels, motivation, readiness, participation, and self-confidence. This paper employs a qualitative research design where two English teachers at one public senior high school in Kartasura are involved as participants. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and lesson plan analysis. The study revealed three major findings. First, English teachers implemented several process-focused differentiation practices, including heterogeneous grouping, differentiated task distribution, flexible pacing, scaffolding, continuous monitoring and feedback, collaborative learning, and student autonomy. Second, the implementation of process-focused differentiated instruction in the classroom faced several challenges, such as varying levels of English proficiency, difficulties in addressing diverse learning needs, low student motivation and readiness, unequal participation in group work, and differences in students' confidence. Third, teachers addressed these challenges through adaptive strategies, including scaffolding, task differentiation, flexible instruction, active monitoring, direct intervention, and constructive classroom interaction.

**Keywords:** *differentiated instruction; English classroom; process differentiation; project-based learning; zoning system*

**Abstrak.** Tulisan ini membahas teknik-teknik yang digunakan guru bahasa Inggris dalam melaksanakan Pengajaran yang Dibedakan (*Differentiated Instruction*) berorientasi proses dengan menggunakan pendekatan Pembelajaran Berbasis Proyek di kelas-kelas bahasa Inggris yang menerapkan sistem zonasi. Sistem zonasi telah meningkatkan heterogenitas di antara kelas-kelas, sehingga guru dituntut untuk mengelola berbagai masalah seperti perbedaan tingkat kemahiran bahasa Inggris, motivasi, kesiapan, partisipasi, dan kepercayaan diri siswa. Studi kualitatif ini melibatkan dua guru bahasa Inggris di salah satu SMA Negeri di Kartasura sebagai peserta. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur, observasi kelas, dan analisis rencana pelajaran. Studi ini mengungkapkan tiga temuan utama. Pertama, guru bahasa Inggris menerapkan beberapa praktik diferensiasi yang berfokus pada proses, termasuk pengelompokan heterogen, pembagian tugas yang terdiferensiasi, kecepatan pembelajaran yang fleksibel, scaffolding, pemantauan dan umpan balik berkelanjutan, pembelajaran kolaboratif, dan otonomi siswa. Kedua, penerapan pengajaran diferensiasi yang berfokus pada proses menghadapi tantangan seperti tingkat kemahiran yang bervariasi, kesulitan dalam memenuhi kebutuhan belajar yang beragam, motivasi dan kesiapan siswa yang rendah, partisipasi yang tidak merata dalam kerja kelompok, serta perbedaan tingkat kepercayaan diri. Ketiga, guru mengatasi tantangan tersebut melalui strategi adaptif, termasuk scaffolding, diferensiasi tugas, pengajaran yang fleksibel, pemantauan aktif, intervensi langsung, dan interaksi kelas yang konstruktif.

**Kata kunci:** *pembelajaran yang disesuaikan; kelas bahasa Inggris; diferensiasi proses; pembelajaran berbasis proyek; sistem zonasi*

## INTRODUCTION

The implementation of the school zoning policy in Indonesia has reshaped the characteristics of students in public schools. By assigning students based on residential proximity rather than academic achievement, the policy aims to promote equal access to education and reduce the concentration of “favorite schools” (Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019; Primadani, 2020). However, this policy has also increased classroom heterogeneity, requiring teachers to address diverse levels of academic readiness, motivation, learning needs, and sociocultural backgrounds (Hapsari & Budiraharjo, 2019; Primadani, 2020).

These challenges are particularly evident in English classrooms, where students are expected not only to understand learning materials but also to communicate actively through speaking, writing, discussion, and collaborative activities. In zoning-based classrooms, some students can easily follow instructions and express ideas in English, while others still struggle with basic vocabulary and sentence construction. Such diversity makes uniform instruction less effective because students require different forms of support and learning experiences (Deunk et al., 2018; Smale-Jacobse et al., 2019).

Differentiated instruction has been widely recognized as an approach for addressing learner diversity. Tomlinson (2014) explains that differentiated instruction involves adjusting content, process, product, and learning environment according to students’ readiness, interests, and learning profiles. Among these dimensions, process-focused differentiation is particularly relevant in heterogeneous English classrooms because it emphasizes variations in learning activities, interaction patterns, pacing, and instructional support to help students participate actively in the learning process (Hall et al., 2003; Heacox, 2012). In this context, project-based learning (PBL) can support process-focused differentiation by engaging students in collaborative and meaningful tasks that allow multiple ways of participation and learning (Bell, 2010; Krajcik & Blumenfeld, 2006).

Previous studies have examined zoning policy, differentiated instruction, and project-based learning from different perspectives. Hapsari and Budiraharjo (2019) focused on English teacher identity under the zoning policy, while Primadani (2020) discussed differentiated instruction as a general response to classroom heterogeneity. Recent studies have also explored differentiated instruction in English classrooms (Diananseri & Yaslina, 2024; Mairoza et al., 2024; Religioni et al., 2024). However, these studies mainly discuss differentiated instruction broadly, with greater attention to content, product, or general teaching strategies. Research specifically examining process-focused differentiation in zoning-based English classrooms remains limited. In addition, although project-based learning has been widely associated with active and collaborative learning, little attention has been given to how English teachers integrate process-focused differentiated instruction through project-based learning in heterogeneous classrooms shaped by the zoning policy.

Therefore, this study aims to explore how English teachers implement process-focused differentiated instruction through project-based learning in zoning-based classrooms. Specifically, the study investigates the strategies used by teachers, the challenges encountered during implementation, and the solutions applied to manage classroom diversity. The study addresses the following research questions: (1) What strategies do English teachers use in implementing process-focused differentiated instruction through project-based learning in zoning-based classrooms? (2) What challenges do teachers face in implementing process-focused differentiated instruction

through project-based learning in zoning-based classrooms? (3) How do English teachers address the challenges encountered during the implementation process?

## METHODS

The present study used a qualitative approach because it sought to investigate teachers' techniques, problems, and solutions in using a process-focused differentiation instruction for teaching through project-based learning. This was because the investigation focused on teachers' practices, decision-making skills, and adaptation of instruction in an authentic context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2018).

This study was conducted at selected high school in Kartasura, located in Sukoharjo, Central Java. The participants were two English teachers, identified as T1 and T2, who had experience teaching heterogeneous classrooms under the school zoning system. The participants were selected purposively because they actively implemented project-based learning and differentiated instructional practices in their English classes.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and lesson plan analysis. Each teacher participated in two semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 30–45 minutes. The interviews explored teachers' instructional practices, challenges in managing heterogeneous classrooms, and strategies for implementing process-focused differentiated instruction through project-based learning. Classroom observations were conducted during English learning activities and focused on instructional processes, student participation, classroom interaction, grouping strategies, scaffolding practices, and teacher feedback. Observation data were recorded using field notes and observation sheets. In addition, lesson plans were analyzed to identify how differentiated instructional processes and project-based learning activities were designed and implemented.

The data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles et al. (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. First, the interview transcripts, observation notes, and lesson plans were organized and reduced into meaningful units related to instructional strategies, challenges, and adaptive practices. Second, the data were categorized and displayed to identify recurring patterns across participants and data sources. Finally, themes were interpreted and verified through data triangulation by comparing findings from interviews, observations, and documents to enhance the credibility of the study.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### ***1. Teacher Strategies in Process-Focused Differentiation***

The findings revealed that teachers implemented several interconnected strategies to manage learner diversity in zoning-based English classrooms. Rather than functioning as isolated techniques, these strategies were applied adaptively throughout the learning process depending on students' readiness, participation, and classroom interaction. The strategies included heterogeneous grouping, differentiated task assignment, flexible pacing, scaffolding, continuous monitoring and feedback, peer collaboration, and student agency.

One prominent strategy was heterogeneous grouping. Teachers intentionally distributed students with different proficiency levels across groups to encourage peer assistance and prevent passive classroom interaction. T1 explained, "*Kalau yang pintar-pintar semua jadi satu, yang lain tidak jalan.*"

Similarly, T2 stated, “*Pengelompokan siswa mempertimbangkan variasi kemampuan akademik... sehingga mereka dapat saling membantu. Dalam satu kelompok diupayakan siswa dengan kemampuan berbeda.*” Grouping was arranged based on students’ abilities so that stronger students could support peers who experienced difficulties. Classroom observations supported these statements. During the “Introducing Others” project, higher-proficiency students often helped peers construct sentences and organize presentations. Lower-proficiency students contributed through simpler tasks such as reading short texts, preparing visual materials, or arranging presentation sequences.

However, the observations also showed that heterogeneous grouping did not automatically produce balanced collaboration. In several groups, higher-achieving students dominated discussion and decision-making, while weaker students relied heavily on them. This suggests that heterogeneous grouping was effective only when accompanied by teacher monitoring and structured participation. Therefore, peer interaction required active facilitation rather than relying solely on mixed-ability grouping. This finding partially supports cooperative learning theory, which emphasizes positive interdependence and collaborative interaction among learners (Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Slavin, 1995).

Another important strategy was differentiated task assignment. Although students worked on the same project, teachers adjusted the complexity of tasks and the level of support according to students’ readiness. Stronger learners were encouraged to produce longer and more detailed descriptions, whereas struggling students received sentence starters, vocabulary lists, and model sentences. For example, one higher-proficiency student produced the sentence: “She is a very diligent teacher who always supports her students.” Meanwhile, a lower-proficiency student produced a simpler sentence: “She is very kind. She is a teacher.”

Although both students worked toward the same learning objective, the linguistic demands differed considerably. The data suggest that differentiation in this context focused less on changing learning goals and more on modifying learning pathways and support systems. This finding reflects Tomlinson’s (2014) view that differentiated instruction promotes equitable learning opportunities through varied instructional approaches rather than identical tasks.

Flexible pacing also emerged as an important instructional adjustment. Teachers allowed groups to progress at different speeds depending on their understanding and project completion. Slower groups were given additional time and guidance, while faster groups were encouraged to elaborate on their work or assist peers. Observation data showed that this strategy reduced pressure among struggling learners and prevented advanced students from becoming disengaged.

The data further suggest that flexible pacing was particularly important during project-based activities because students required different amounts of time for planning, drafting, revising, and presenting. Rather than strictly following predetermined schedules, teachers adjusted classroom pacing according to students’ responses and progress. This finding indicates that flexibility played an important role in maintaining participation within heterogeneous classrooms.

Scaffolding appeared to be one of the most consistently applied strategies throughout the learning process. Before students completed independent project tasks, teachers first introduced vocabulary, modeled sentence construction, and guided students through structured practice activities. During observations, students initially

practiced vocabulary such as occupation, hobbies, helpful, and friendly before moving to sentence construction and descriptive paragraphs.

Compared to peer support, scaffolding appeared more effective during the early stages of learning because lower-proficiency students still depended heavily on teacher modeling and guided explanation. Peer collaboration became more productive only after students developed sufficient confidence and understanding to participate independently. This suggests that teacher guidance functioned as an essential foundation before collaborative learning could operate effectively. The findings align with Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, where learners perform beyond their independent ability through structured assistance.

Continuous monitoring and feedback were also central to classroom interaction. During project activities, teachers frequently moved around the classroom to observe progress, correct mistakes, and provide immediate feedback. Observation data showed that teachers often intervened when students became confused, passive, or overly dependent on peers.

Importantly, monitoring was not limited to correcting language errors. Teachers also used monitoring to maintain participation balance and classroom engagement. For example, when one student dominated group discussion, teachers redirected questions toward quieter students. This suggests that feedback functioned not only as academic correction but also as a strategy for regulating participation and interaction. In this context, formative feedback became closely connected to classroom management and differentiated support.

Student agency was another observable feature of the learning process. Students were given opportunities to choose presentation formats, project roles, and the individuals they wanted to introduce. Some students preferred speaking roles, while others contributed through visual preparation or written work. The findings suggest that allowing limited choices increased participation among students who lacked confidence in oral English performance.

Overall, the data indicate that process-focused differentiation involved continuous adjustment of interaction, pacing, support, and participation rather than merely modifying instructional materials. Teachers consistently adapted classroom processes in response to students' academic and affective needs throughout project-based activities.

**Table 1.** Strategies in Process-Focused Differentiation

<b>No</b>	<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Evidence Source</b>	<b>Classroom Example</b>	<b>Analytical Implication</b>
1	Heterogeneous grouping	Interview, Observation	Higher-proficiency students assisted peers during sentence construction	Effective for peer support but required monitoring to prevent domination
2	Differentiated task assignment	Interview, Observation, Lesson Plan	Students completed the same project with varying levels of linguistic complexity	Differentiation focused on support and process rather than learning goals
3	Flexible pacing	Observation, Interview	Slower groups received additional time and guidance	Reduced pressure and maintained engagement in heterogeneous classrooms

No	Strategy	Evidence Source	Classroom Example	Analytical Implication
4	Scaffolding	Observation	Teachers modeled vocabulary and sentence construction before independent tasks	More effective during early learning stages when students needed structured guidance
5	Monitoring and feedback	Observation	Teachers redirected passive students and corrected misunderstandings	Feedback regulated both learning progress and classroom participation
6	Peer collaboration	Observation	Students assisted peers during group discussions	Collaboration required active facilitation to function effectively
7	Student agency	Observation, Interview	Students selected roles and presentation formats	Increased participation and reduced anxiety among less confident learners

## 2. Challenges in Implementing Process-Focused Differentiation

The findings showed that the implementation of process-focused differentiated instruction through project-based learning involved multiple interconnected challenges. These challenges were not limited to academic differences but also included motivational, social, and affective factors. The data suggest that diversity in zoning-based classrooms was multidimensional and continuously influenced classroom interaction and participation.

One major challenge was the wide gap in students' English proficiency. T1 explained, "*Hanya sekitar sepuluh hingga dua belas siswa yang dapat menggunakan bahasa Inggris secara aktif, sementara banyak siswa lainnya masih kesulitan dengan kosakata dasar.*"

Similarly, T2 noted that some students were able to construct sentences independently, whereas others still depended heavily on teacher explanation and repetition. Observation data confirmed this disparity. During group discussions, higher-proficiency students often completed tasks more quickly and led classroom interaction, while lower-proficiency students tended to wait for direct assistance before participating.

Importantly, the proficiency gap affected not only students' language performance but also classroom participation patterns. Students with limited vocabulary were generally less confident in expressing ideas, especially during speaking activities and collaborative discussions. The findings therefore suggest that academic diversity simultaneously shaped interaction, confidence, and engagement in classroom activities.

Another challenge involved balancing different learning needs within the same classroom. Teachers were expected to support struggling students while maintaining sufficient challenges for higher-achieving learners. T2 stated, "*Jika penjelasannya terlalu cepat, siswa yang lemah akan tertinggal. Tetapi jika terlalu lambat, siswa yang lebih mahir akan merasa bosan.*"

Observation data reflected this dilemma during project work. While some groups required repeated guidance and vocabulary explanation, others were already

prepared to move to presentation preparation. As a result, teachers frequently shifted attention between groups with different levels of readiness.

The data suggest that differentiated instruction required teachers to make continuous instructional adjustments rather than following a fixed teaching sequence. However, maintaining this balance was difficult because classroom time and teacher attention were limited. This finding reflects the central challenge of differentiated instruction identified by Santangelo and Tomlinson (2012), namely balancing remediation and enrichment simultaneously.

Low student motivation and learning readiness also emerged as significant challenges. Several students perceived English as a difficult subject and showed passive behavior during learning activities. T1 explained, "*Sebagian siswa hanya menunggu instruksi karena takut membuat kesalahan.*"

Observation data showed that passive students often avoided speaking activities, remained silent during discussions, or depended heavily on peers. Interestingly, passivity did not always indicate lack of ability. In some cases, students possessed sufficient vocabulary but hesitated to participate because they lacked confidence.

This finding suggests that participation in heterogeneous classrooms was influenced not only by academic competence but also by students' emotional readiness and self-confidence. Therefore, process-focused differentiation required teachers to address affective barriers alongside linguistic difficulties.

Unequal participation in collaborative learning became another recurring challenge. Although heterogeneous grouping encouraged peer support, observations revealed that higher-achieving students frequently dominated discussions and decision-making processes. Lower-achieving students sometimes became passive followers rather than active contributors. For example, during one observed discussion session, one student completed most of the sentence construction while other group members waited for instructions. Teacher intervention was necessary to redistribute participation by assigning speaking and presentation roles to quieter students.

These findings indicate that heterogeneous grouping alone did not automatically produce effective collaboration. Without structured accountability and teacher facilitation, collaborative learning risked reinforcing participation inequality rather than reducing it.

Differences in confidence also affected classroom interaction. T2 explained, "*Beberapa siswa sebenarnya mengetahui kosakata tersebut, tetapi mereka takut berbicara karena kurang percaya diri.*"

Observation data supported this statement. Several students were willing to participate during small-group discussion but became hesitant when asked to speak in front of the class. The findings suggest that students' self-confidence significantly influenced their willingness to engage in English communication activities.

Overall, the data indicate that the challenges of process-focused differentiation were interconnected rather than isolated. Academic diversity influenced motivation, participation, confidence, and classroom interaction simultaneously. As a result, teachers were required to continuously adjust instructional processes in response to changing classroom conditions.

**Table 2.** Challenges in Implementing Process-Focused Differentiation

No	Challenge	Evidence Source	Classroom Example	Analytical Implication
1	Wide proficiency gap	Interview, Observation	Some students produced complex sentences while others struggled with basic vocabulary	Academic diversity affected both participation and confidence
2	Balancing learning needs	Interview, Observation	Teachers shifted attention between advanced and struggling groups	Differentiation required continuous instructional adjustment
3	Low motivation and readiness	Interview, Observation	Passive students waited for instructions and avoided participation	Affective readiness influenced classroom engagement
4	Unequal participation	Observation	Higher-achieving students dominated discussions and task completion	Heterogeneous grouping required structured facilitation
5	Confidence differences	Interview, Observation	Students participated in groups but hesitated during presentations	Self-confidence influenced willingness to communicate

### 3. Teachers' Solutions as Adaptive and Contextual Practices

To address the challenges encountered during classroom implementation, teachers applied several adaptive and contextual practices. These solutions included scaffolding, differentiated task support, flexible instruction, active monitoring, direct intervention, and the creation of a supportive classroom climate. Rather than functioning as fixed procedures, these practices were continuously adjusted according to classroom situations and students' responses.

One of the most frequently applied solutions was scaffolding combined with differentiated task support. Teachers simplified learning stages by introducing vocabulary, modeling sentence construction, and providing sentence starters before students completed independent project tasks. T1 explained, "*Siswa tidak dapat langsung membuat deskripsi lengkap. Mereka perlu berlatih kosakata dan kalimat sederhana terlebih dahulu.*"

Observation data showed that lower-proficiency students became more willing to participate after receiving guided examples and structured support. During early project stages, scaffolding appeared more effective than peer collaboration because students still depended heavily on teacher guidance to build basic understanding.

However, the effectiveness of scaffolding depended on continuous teacher involvement. In larger groups, some students still relied excessively on teacher assistance even after peer support was available. This suggests that scaffolding functioned effectively as an initial support mechanism but required gradual transition toward student independence.

Flexible instruction also became an important adaptive practice. Teachers adjusted pacing, project duration, and instructional focus according to classroom progress. Slower groups were allowed additional time, while advanced groups were encouraged to elaborate on project content or assist peers.

Observation data suggest that flexibility reduced pressure among struggling learners and prevented advanced students from disengaging. However, flexible pacing also increased the complexity of classroom management because teachers had to monitor multiple learning progressions simultaneously. This indicates that flexibility supported differentiated learning but also demanded high instructional responsiveness from teachers.

To improve motivation and readiness, teachers designed contextual and familiar project activities. In the “Introducing Others” project, students described people they already knew, such as friends or family members. According to T2, “*Para siswa menjadi lebih aktif ketika proyek tersebut berkaitan dengan orang-orang terdekat mereka.*”

Observation data showed that contextual topics reduced students’ hesitation during speaking and discussion activities. Passive students appeared more willing to contribute when they could connect learning tasks to personal experiences. The findings therefore suggest that contextualization supported not only comprehension but also emotional engagement.

Teachers also used active monitoring and direct intervention to address unequal participation. During group discussions, teachers circulated around the classroom, redirected questions toward passive students, and occasionally assigned specific roles to group members. For example, when one student dominated discussion, the teacher asked quieter students to read sentences, organize presentation materials, or answer follow-up questions. Observation data suggest that direct intervention was necessary to maintain balanced participation, particularly in heterogeneous groups where stronger students naturally assumed leadership roles.

To address students’ lack of confidence, teachers attempted to create a supportive classroom climate by tolerating mistakes, providing verbal encouragement, and allowing gradual speaking opportunities. Students first practiced in pairs or small groups before presenting in front of the class.

The findings suggest that this gradual participation process helped reduce anxiety among lower-confidence learners. However, confidence development remained uneven because some students still avoided oral participation despite repeated encouragement. This indicates that affective barriers could not always be resolved through short-term instructional adjustments alone.

Overall, the data indicate that teachers’ solutions were adaptive rather than standardized. Teachers continuously modified support, pacing, participation structures, and classroom interaction according to students’ immediate needs and classroom dynamics. The findings further suggest that process-focused differentiation relied heavily on teachers’ situational judgment and responsiveness during classroom interaction.

**Table 3.** Adaptive Solutions in Process-Focused in Differentiation

No	Solution	Evidence Source	Classroom Example	Analytical Implication
1	Scaffolding and differentiated support	Interview, Observation	Teachers provided vocabulary lists and sentence starters	Effective during early learning stages but required gradual independence
2	Flexible instruction	Observation, Interview	Slower groups received extended	Supported engagement but increased management

No	Solution	Evidence Source	Classroom Example	Analytical Implication
3	Contextual project activities	Interview, Observation	time and guidance Students introduced family members and friends	complexity Familiar contexts improved motivation and participation
4	Active monitoring and intervention	Observation	Teachers redirected questions toward passive students	Participation balance required continuous facilitation
5	Supportive classroom climate	Interview, Observation	Students practiced in groups before class presentation	Gradual participation reduced anxiety but confidence differences remained

**4. *Synthesis: Navigating Diversity through Process-Oriented Teaching***

The relationships among the identified strategies, challenges, and adaptive solutions suggest that managing diversity in zoning-based English classrooms was a dynamic and responsive process rather than a fixed instructional procedure. Throughout classroom activities, teachers continuously adjusted pacing, interaction patterns, grouping arrangements, scaffolding, and feedback according to students’ participation and learning progress.

The data suggest that adaptive teaching played an important role in this context because teachers frequently modified instructional processes in response to classroom situations rather than strictly following predetermined procedures. For example, when students struggled during project discussions, teachers simplified instructions, provided additional vocabulary support, or temporarily shifted from independent work to guided explanation. Conversely, when groups progressed more quickly, teachers encouraged elaboration and peer assistance. These findings indicate that process-focused differentiation relied heavily on teachers’ situational judgment and responsiveness during classroom interaction (Parsons et al., 2018).

The findings also suggest that project-based learning supported differentiated instruction by providing flexible opportunities for participation and task variation. Within the same project, students could contribute through different roles, levels of linguistic complexity, and presentation formats. Higher-proficiency students often managed sentence construction and explanation, whereas lower-proficiency students participated through simpler speaking, reading, or visual-support tasks.

However, the data further indicate that project-based learning did not automatically produce equitable participation. In several observed classroom situations, higher-achieving students tended to dominate collaborative activities, while lower-achieving students became passive observers. Productive collaboration occurred more consistently when teachers actively structured participation through scaffolding, monitoring, questioning, and role distribution. Therefore, the findings suggest that the effectiveness of project-based learning depended not only on the project itself but also on the quality of instructional facilitation and differentiated support.

Another important pattern emerging from the findings was the gap between lesson planning and classroom implementation. Although teachers demonstrated adaptive differentiated practices during instruction, these adjustments were not always

explicitly documented in lesson plans. Observation data showed that many differentiated responses emerged spontaneously during classroom interaction rather than through detailed written planning.

For example, lesson plans generally included collaborative project activities and broad learning objectives, but they rarely specified differentiated pacing, alternative support strategies, or participation adjustments for students with different proficiency levels. During classroom implementation, however, teachers frequently modified instructions, simplified tasks, extended learning time, and provided additional scaffolding according to students' immediate needs.

This finding suggests that differentiated instruction in this context was often enacted through teachers' tacit pedagogical knowledge and classroom experience rather than systematic written planning. While this adaptive responsiveness supported classroom management in practice, the limited documentation of differentiation may reduce instructional consistency and make reflective evaluation more difficult. Similar findings were reported by Mairoza et al. (2024), who noted that teachers often understood differentiated instruction conceptually but experienced difficulties translating it into formal teaching documents.

Overall, the data indicate that process-focused differentiation in zoning-based English classrooms functioned as an ongoing negotiation between planning, classroom realities, and students' diverse needs. Rather than applying fixed differentiation procedures, teachers continuously adapted instructional processes based on emerging classroom conditions and learner responses.

**Table 4.** Comparison between Lesson Plans and Classroom Implementation

No	Aspect	Lesson Plan Evidence	Observed Classroom Practice	Analytical Implication
1	Group work activities	Collaborative discussion activities were planned	Teachers reorganized participation and balanced group interaction during implementation	Differentiation emerged dynamically during classroom interaction
2	Task implementation	Same project objectives for all students	Teachers adjusted task complexity and support based on students' readiness	Differentiation focused more on process than written task variation
3	Time allocation	General time allocation was stated	Teachers extended or shortened activities depending on classroom progress	Flexible pacing was largely responsive rather than formally planned
4	Scaffolding	Basic instructions were included	Teachers provided additional vocabulary, modeling, and guided explanation spontaneously	Scaffolding relied heavily on situational teacher judgment
5	Participation support	Participation procedures were minimally described	Teachers directly intervened when students became passive or dominated discussion	Classroom participation management was more visible in practice than in planning

## CONCLUSION

This study found that English teachers implemented process-focused differentiated instruction through project-based learning using several interconnected

strategies, including heterogeneous grouping, differentiated task assignment, flexible pacing, scaffolding, continuous monitoring and feedback, peer collaboration, and student agency. Rather than functioning as separate techniques, these strategies were continuously adjusted according to students' readiness, participation, motivation, and confidence. The findings suggest that process-focused differentiation in zoning-based English classrooms relied heavily on adaptive instructional practices throughout the learning process.

The study also identified several interconnected challenges, including disparities in English proficiency, difficulties in balancing diverse learning needs, low motivation and readiness, unequal participation in collaborative activities, and differences in students' confidence. These findings indicate that diversity in zoning-based classrooms extended beyond academic ability and involved affective and social dimensions that influenced classroom interaction and participation. Therefore, differentiated instruction in this context required teachers to address not only learning outcomes but also the processes through which students engaged in classroom activities.

To address these challenges, teachers applied various contextual and adaptive practices, such as scaffolding, differentiated task support, flexible instruction, contextual project-based activities, active monitoring, direct intervention, and supportive classroom interaction. However, many of these differentiated practices were implemented implicitly and were not always systematically documented in lesson plans.

The findings therefore suggest that differentiated instruction may become more sustainable and consistent when adaptive classroom practices are translated into explicit instructional planning. Teacher training and professional development should place greater emphasis on how teachers design scaffolding, role assignment, pacing, participation structures, and differentiated support within lesson plans rather than relying solely on spontaneous classroom adjustment.

Overall, the study suggests that process-focused differentiated instruction through project-based learning can support learning in heterogeneous zoning-based English classrooms when instructional processes remain flexible and responsive to students' diverse needs. At the same time, the findings indicate that differentiated instruction appears to function more effectively when it is treated as a deliberate instructional design rather than merely an informal teacher response to classroom diversity.

Although this study focused on two English teachers within one school context, the findings provide a transferable analytical framework for examining process-focused differentiation in other heterogeneous English classrooms. Future research may involve multiple schools, include students' perspectives, or compare different instructional settings to generate broader insights into differentiated instructional processes within diverse learning environments.

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