



Students' Perspectives on Differentiated Instruction in English Classes in Relation to Inclusive and Effective Learning

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ABSTRACT

Differentiated instruction in English classes involves tailoring teaching methods, materials, and assessments to meet students' diverse abilities, interests, and learning needs. This study explored junior high school students' perspectives on differentiated instruction and its relationship to inclusive and effective learning environments. Using a descriptive correlational design, 120 students from a university in Misamis Occidental completed three 20-item researcher-made questionnaires. Mean, standard deviation, frequency, percentage, and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson r) were employed in the study. The study found that junior high school students perceived differentiated instruction positively, and this perception was significantly associated with inclusive and effective learning, particularly through learner engagement, instructional clarity, and language skill development. Differentiated instruction in junior high school English classes effectively promotes inclusivity, engagement, motivation, skill development, and meaningful learning outcomes. It is recommended that junior high school English teachers implement clear, inclusive, and differentiated instructional strategies to enhance student engagement, motivation, language development, and overall learning effectiveness.

KEYWORDS: *differentiated instruction, effective learning, English classes, inclusive learning, junior high school*

INTRODUCTION

In today's heterogeneous classrooms, meeting students' varying learning needs has been a prominent theme of inclusive and effective instruction (Beronilla & Natividad, 2025; Farooqi et al., 2024; Goyibova et al., 2025). With varying learners' backgrounds, readiness levels, and learning styles, educators face the challenge of creating environments that promote equity and accommodate all learners. Differentiated instruction has emerged as a pedagogy aimed at addressing this diversity by modifying content, process, and assessment to meet individual students' needs (Goyibova et al., 2025; Mogale, 2025; Qorib, 2024; Rajak & Dey, 2025). Apart from advocating for equity, the approach improves students' engagement and performance, hence supporting inclusive and efficient learning. Clarifying the students' views regarding these practices is thus essential to streamlining their delivery and maximizing effectiveness (Abidin, 2024).

Adolescents in junior high school are at a developmental stage whose self-concept, motivation, and learning style have significant impacts on academic achievement (Barbre, 2024; Mistry et al., 2024; Qi, 2025). When teachers implement differentiated instruction in English language classes, it is critical to examine students' experiences with these practices and how they influence their learning (Osae & Papadopoulos,

2024). Students' reactions offer valuable information about whether such approaches foster inclusivity and acknowledge diverse needs (Debasu & Yitayew, 2024; Lapidot-Lefler, 2025; Lapidot-Lefler et al., 2025). Exploring these views can also reveal obstacles and determine what inspires or slows down active engagement in differentiated activities (Nikou, 2024). This information can be used to drive more student-focused practices that align with the needs of young adolescents.

Rahmaniar et al. (2024) have previously identified teachers' perceptions of challenges and advantages of introducing differentiated instruction in junior high schools. Their research highlights how teachers use assessments, modify activities, and incorporate technology to meet the needs of diverse learners. Although such research is valuable, it merely captures educators' views and practices. Yet a substantial research gap remains in students' subjective opinions and attitudes toward differentiated instruction. It is critical to investigate students' own experiences to construct truly inclusive and prosperous learning environments (Rahmaniar et al., 2024). Rahmaniar et al. (2024) also emphasized teacher consciousness and deliberate planning in differentiation. However, little research exists on how students themselves view the fairness, relevance, and motivational effects of such measures. This absence of student-centered understanding constrains deeper understanding of the effectiveness of

differentiated instruction from the learner's point of view (Bhardwaj et al., 2025; Ellerbee, 2025; Stingo, 2024).

Although previous studies, e.g., Rahmaniar et al. (2024), have made valuable contributions to understanding teachers' practice, the student voice has been underrepresented. The shortfall is in analyzing learners' opinions, particularly in junior high school English classrooms, on differentiated instruction in terms of fairness, inclusivity, and motivational issues. Without this, the image of its effectiveness in advocating inclusive and effective learning is incomplete. In response to this, the current study aims to examine students' perceptions, experiences, and attitudes toward differentiated English instruction. The emphasis is on informing teachers to develop pedagogical approaches that better align with students' needs and promote more inclusive classroom practices.

Aside from theoretical relevance, examining students' perceptions has pragmatic implications for enhancing instruction. By learning from students' lives, teachers can embrace differentiation in a more empathetic, effective, and responsive manner to ensure students' safety and engagement (Khattak et al., 2025; Makweya & Sepadi, 2025; Zainudin, 2025). It also enables the detection of potential misconceptions or learning obstacles, leading to more effective instructional planning and communication. Above all, amplifying students' voices reinforces efforts to construct inclusive, supportive, and student-focused learning communities in junior high English classrooms (Nurtiati et al., 2025). Therefore, this study fills an essential gap by centering students' views, which are underexplored in research on differentiated instruction.

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive correlational research design to examine junior high school students' perspectives on differentiated instruction and its relationship to inclusive and effective learning in English classes. This design allowed the researcher to describe students' perceptions while determining the strength and direction of relationships between differentiated instruction and key indicators of inclusivity—accessibility of instructions, student participation and voice, teacher responsiveness and attitude, and sense of belonging and acceptance—as well as indicators of effective learning, including learner engagement, instructional clarity, student motivation, and language skill development (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The study was conducted in a junior high school program at a university in Misamis Occidental, providing a context with diverse learners in terms of readiness, interests, and backgrounds. A total of 120 students were purposively selected as respondents, ensuring representation of varied perspectives and experiences with English language instruction. Data were gathered through three sets of researcher-made questionnaires corresponding to the variables of differentiated instruction, inclusive learning,

and effective learning, each using a five-point Likert scale to measure students' perceptions.

Ethical procedures were rigorously followed throughout the study. Prior to data collection, approval was obtained from the Dean of the Graduate School and the university administration, and the research proposal was reviewed by the Misamis University Research Ethics Committee. Informed consent was obtained from both students and their parents or guardians, with clear communication about voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw without penalty. Data collection included questionnaires, audio-recorded interviews, and field notes, with all information securely stored in compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173). For data analysis, descriptive statistics were used to summarize respondents' profiles and perceptions, weighted means determined the levels of perception across constructs, and Pearson's correlation coefficient assessed the relationships among differentiated instruction, inclusive learning, and effective learning, providing empirical evidence to inform instructional practices and student-centered approaches in English language teaching.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Level of Students' Perception of Differentiated Instruction

The findings indicate that students perceive differentiated instruction as very evident across all key indicators, with weighted means ranging from 4.36 to 4.53. Perceived fairness received the highest rating (WM = 4.53), demonstrating students' strong agreement that differentiated instruction promotes equitable learning opportunities, while instructional clarity and relevance (WM = 4.51) and perceived inclusivity (WM = 4.47) reinforce that lessons are clear, purposeful, and inclusive (Bieler, 2021; Lopez, 2023; Shields, 2018). Learning engagement (WM = 4.36) also reflects active student involvement in classroom tasks tailored to their abilities and interests (Osae & Papadopoulos, 2024; Qi, 2025). Overall, the results show that differentiated instruction is consistently recognized and experienced as inclusive, engaging, fair, and clear, supporting a classroom environment aligned with Rawls' Social Justice Theory (Rawls, 1971; Fraser, 1997; Young, 1990).

These findings are reinforced by previous research highlighting the benefits of tailoring content, processes, and assessments to diverse learners (Assefa & Zenebe, 2024; Lapidot-Lefler et al., 2025; Nurtiati et al., 2025). High perceptions of fairness, engagement, and instructional clarity suggest that differentiation enhances student motivation, participation, and confidence, creating equitable learning conditions (Nikou, 2024; Debasu & Yitayew, 2024; Khattak et al., 2025; Makweya & Sepadi, 2025). Consequently, effective differentiated instruction supports both academic and social-emotional growth by accommodating diverse needs, fostering inclusivity, and promoting justice-oriented

teaching practices that benefit all students in junior high school classrooms.

Level of Students' Perception of Inclusive Learning

Students perceive inclusive learning as evident across all measured constructs, with teacher responsiveness and attitude receiving the highest ratings (WM = 4.56), followed closely by instructional accessibility (WM = 4.47) (Khattak et al., 2025; Nurtiati et al., 2025; Bieler, 2023). Student participation and voice (WM = 4.33) and sense of belonging and acceptance (WM = 4.32) also reflect positive experiences, suggesting that learners feel encouraged to express ideas, contribute meaningfully to classroom decisions, and be part of a supportive learning community (Nikou, 2024; Otermans et al., 2025; Saikia & Ranjan, 2025). The overall weighted mean of 4.42 demonstrates that inclusive practices are strongly implemented, fostering accessibility, engagement, teacher support, and emotional security.

The results align with Social Justice Theory (Rawls, 1971; Fraser, 1997; Young, 1990), as students perceive equitable and supportive learning environments in which individual needs are addressed and all voices are valued (Bieler, 2021; Lopez, 2023). Existing literature confirms that accessible instructional materials, teacher responsiveness, and opportunities for student voice enhance engagement, motivation, and a sense of belonging (Bieler, 2023; Hameed et al., 2024; Lapidot-Lefler et al., 2025; Zainudin, 2025). These findings emphasize the importance of embedding inclusive pedagogy in classroom practices, ensuring that all learners feel capable, valued, and empowered to succeed academically and socially.

Level of Students' Perception of Effective Learning

Students rated all aspects of effective learning as very evident, with an overall weighted mean of 4.55. Instructional clarity achieved the highest score (WM = 4.71), indicating that students find the learning goals, expectations, and assessment criteria well communicated and comprehensible (Khattak et al., 2025; Nikou, 2024). Learner engagement and student motivation both received a WM of 4.28, reflecting active participation and perception of meaningful, fair classroom practices (Barbre, 2024; Qi, 2025; Saikia & Ranjan, 2025). Language skill development was also highly rated (WM = 4.44), suggesting that differentiated instruction and authentic activities effectively support growth in reading, writing, listening, and speaking abilities (Ab Hajis & Othman, 2024; Makweya & Sepadi, 2025; Nurtiati et al., 2025). Collectively, these findings indicate that differentiated and inclusive instructional strategies contribute to holistic and effective learning experiences in junior high school English classrooms.

These results are consistent with Cognitive Load Theory, which posits that well-structured, clear instruction helps students focus on meaningful learning tasks while managing cognitive resources (Sweller, 1988; Choi et al., 2022; Paas & van Merriënboer, 1994). The significant

correlations between instructional clarity, engagement, and language skill development suggest that students perceive greater effectiveness when tasks are scaffolded, clearly communicated, and aligned with their readiness levels (Ab Hajis & Othman, 2024; Makweya & Sepadi, 2025; Khattak et al., 2025; Nikou, 2024). Supporting literature highlights that student-centered and differentiated strategies improve engagement, motivation, and skill acquisition while fostering inclusivity and confidence (Assefa & Zenebe, 2024; Osae & Papadopoulos, 2024; Lapidot-Lefler et al., 2025). Therefore, effective learning is maximized when instructional clarity, engagement, motivation, and language development are intentionally addressed in responsive classroom practices.

Significant Relationship between the Level of Students' Perceptions Toward Differentiated Instruction and Inclusive Learning

The study found a strong and significant relationship between students' perceptions of differentiated instruction and inclusive learning in junior high school English classes. Constructs such as learner engagement, instructional clarity, and language skills development were highly correlated with perceived inclusivity and fairness, indicating that students who experience tailored, engaging, and clear instruction also perceive their classrooms as inclusive and supportive (ranging from $r = 0.502$ to $r = 0.723$, all $p = 0.00^{**}$) (Assefa & Zenebe, 2024; Mogale, 2025; Lapidot-Lefler et al., 2025; Nurtiati et al., 2025). While student motivation showed weaker or non-significant correlations with some indicators, engagement and clarity emerged as key drivers of inclusivity. These findings align with Rawls' Social Justice Theory, emphasizing that educational practices tailored to students' diverse needs foster equity, belonging, and active participation (Rawls, 1971; Fraser, 1997; Bieler, 2021; Lopez, 2023). Differentiated strategies such as flexible grouping, tiered assignments, and multimodal activities, when perceived as fair and responsive, strengthen engagement, confidence, and participation, highlighting the integral role of differentiation in promoting an inclusive learning environment (Barbre, 2024; Osae & Papadopoulos, 2024; Qi, 2025; Ab Hajis & Othman, 2024).

Significant Relationship between the Level of Students' Perceptions Toward Differentiated Instruction and Effective Learning

The study found a significant relationship between students' perceptions of differentiated instruction and effective learning, particularly regarding learner engagement, instructional clarity, and language skills development. Students who perceived instruction as clear, relevant, and tailored to their readiness levels reported higher engagement and better growth in English proficiency ($r = 0.438$ – 0.498 , $p = 0.00^{**}$) (Osae & Papadopoulos, 2024; Khattak et al., 2025; Qi, 2025; Ab Hajis & Othman, 2024; Makweya & Sepadi, 2025). Instructional clarity was especially critical in guiding participation and maintaining focus, while motivation showed a smaller but meaningful relationship with language skill development. These results support

Cognitive Load Theory, which posits that learners benefit when tasks are structured to manage cognitive demands and minimize confusion (Sweller, 1988; Choi et al., 2022; Paas & van Merriënboer, 1994). Overall, the findings suggest that differentiated instruction enhances effective learning by providing equitable, engaging, and clearly communicated tasks that promote active participation, motivation, and measurable gains in language skills, reinforcing the value of student-centered, inclusive teaching practices in junior high school English classrooms.

CONCLUSIONS

Students' perceptions reveal that differentiated instruction and inclusive learning are highly effective in junior high school English classrooms, creating engaging, fair, and clearly structured learning environments that address diverse student needs. Inclusive practices foster accessibility, active participation, supportive teacher-student interactions, and a strong sense of belonging, while differentiated instruction enhances engagement, clarity, motivation, and language skill development. Moreover, differentiated instruction is closely linked to both inclusive and effective learning, as tailoring teaching strategies to students' abilities, interests, and readiness promotes equity, participation, and meaningful academic growth, highlighting the critical role of student-centered approaches in fostering holistic learning outcomes.

Recommendations

Teachers, school heads, and curriculum planners can enhance differentiated, inclusive, and effective learning by designing clear, engaging, and flexible instructional activities tailored to students' diverse needs and abilities. This includes providing accessible materials, promoting student voice and participation, modeling responsive and supportive attitudes, and incorporating scaffolded tasks, interactive exercises, and multimodal strategies to foster engagement, motivation, skill development, and a strong sense of belonging. Ongoing professional development, collaborative planning, and regular student feedback are essential to support these practices, while future research can further explore how integrating differentiated instruction, inclusive learning, and effective teaching strategies affects student outcomes, considering factors such as fairness, teacher responsiveness, and participatory classroom environments.

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