Analysis of English Teachers' Assessment Strategies Within a Differentiated Learning Context in EFL at SMP Negeri 4 Singaraja

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to analyze English teachers' assessment strategies within a differentiated learning context and to identify the challenges encountered in implementing differentiated assessment in EFL classrooms. A qualitative research design was employed at SMP Negeri 4 Singaraja, involving three English teachers from different grade levels. Data were collected through classroom observations and unstructured interviews and analyzed using an interactive qualitative data analysis model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings revealed that teachers applied five main assessment strategies: gamification, reading assignments, writing tasks, speaking performances, and storytelling activities. These strategies predominantly reflected assessment for learning and assessment of learning, while assessment as learning was not observed. Differentiated learning was evident in instructional processes and products; however, assessment criteria were frequently applied uniformly across students. Differentiated assessment was consistently implemented only in speaking performance and storytelling activities, where assessment criteria were adjusted to students' ability levels. The study also identified several challenges that hindered the implementation of differentiated assessment, including large class sizes, limited instructional time, and teachers' limited understanding of differentiated assessment concepts. Overall, the findings indicate a partial alignment between differentiated learning and assessment practices, highlighting the need for improved assessment literacy and structural support to enhance equitable assessment in EFL classrooms. In order to manage large classes and provide the best possible individual attention, teachers can first think about flexible grouping tactics or peer tutoring. Also, effective time management and preparation are essential.

INTRODUCTION

Assessment plays a central role in the teaching and learning process because it provides systematic information about students' learning progress, achievement, and needs (Amelia et al., 2023). In educational contexts, assessment is not merely a mechanism for measuring learning outcomes but also a continuous process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to

support learning improvement (Widayanti et al., 2024). Through assessment, teachers can identify students' strengths and weaknesses, evaluate instructional effectiveness, and provide feedback that promotes meaningful learning. Black and Wiliam (1998) emphasize that assessment becomes pedagogically valuable when it is used to inform instructional decisions and enhance students' learning processes rather than simply to assign grades. Therefore, assessment holds a strategic position in shaping both instructional quality and student development.

In Indonesia, the implementation of the Emancipated Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) reinforces the importance of assessment as an integral part of learning. According to Susanti et al. (2024), this curriculum promotes student-centered learning and grants teacher's greater flexibility to adapt instructional and assessment practices according to students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. Assessment within this curriculum is designed to be continuous and formative, allowing teachers to monitor learning progress and provide constructive feedback throughout the learning process. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2023) similarly highlights that modern assessment systems should support teaching, monitor student progress, and guide future learning decisions. Consequently, assessment is no longer viewed as a final evaluative act but as an ongoing process that supports educational transformation and learning equity. Within the Emancipated Curriculum, assessment is commonly framed through three complementary approaches: Assessment as Learning (AaL), Assessment for Learning (AfL), and Assessment of Learning (AoL) (Padmadewi & Artini, 2019). Assessment as Learning emphasizes students' active involvement in monitoring and reflecting on their own learning, thereby fostering metacognitive awareness and learner autonomy (Earl, 2013). Assessment for Learning focuses on formative feedback that guides students toward learning goals and supports instructional adjustments (Black & Wiliam, 2009). Meanwhile, Assessment of Learning serves a summative function by evaluating learning outcomes and reporting student achievement to stakeholders (Stiggins, 2002). When implemented coherently, these assessment approaches enable teachers to balance formative support and summative accountability, ensuring that assessment contributes meaningfully to student learning.

Despite the theoretical clarity of these assessment approaches, empirical studies indicate that assessment practices in English language teaching often remain limited in scope. Previous research has predominantly focused on specific assessment types or language skills, such as vocabulary assessment (Priscilla et al., 2021), writing assessment (Silalahi et al., 2022), and competency-based assessment (Hagenimana et al., 2023). While these studies provide valuable insights into classroom assessment practices, they reveal that many assessments still emphasize lower-order thinking skills and conventional techniques, often due to time constraints, large class sizes, and limited assessment literacy among teachers. Moreover, these studies rarely address how assessment practices respond to individual learner differences, which is a key principle of the Emancipated Curriculum.

The need to address learner diversity has brought differentiated learning to the forefront of contemporary educational discourse. Differentiated learning is an instructional approach that adapts content, process, product, and learning environment to accommodate students' diverse readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles (Tomlinson, 2014; Noman & Kaur, 2014). In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, differentiated learning enables teachers to provide equitable learning opportunities by recognizing that students learn in different ways and at different paces. Research suggests that differentiated instruction can enhance student engagement, motivation, and academic achievement when it is implemented thoughtfully and consistently (Widayanti et al., 2024). Assessment within differentiated learning must also be responsive to student diversity. Differentiated assessment involves designing assessment tasks and procedures that allow students to demonstrate their learning through varied modes aligned with their strengths and learning preferences (Tomlinson, 2014; Özüdoğru, 2022). Popham (2017) argues that assessment should provide a comprehensive picture of student development rather than relying on uniform measures that may disadvantage certain learners. Empirical evidence indicates that

differentiated assessment can foster higher student engagement, support independent learning, and promote fairness in evaluation (King-Sears, 2009; Safawi & Akay, 2022). Thus, assessment in differentiated learning functions not only as a measurement tool but also as a pedagogical strategy that supports inclusion and learning equity.

Preliminary observations at SMP Negeri 4 Singaraja, a junior high school implementing the Emancipated Curriculum, indicate that English teachers have received training in differentiated learning and generally understand the basic principles of assessment within the curriculum. Teachers employ various learning activities, such as group-based web games, differentiated assignments, essays, presentations, and creative projects. Assessment practices observed include the use of Assessment for Learning to provide continuous feedback and Assessment of Learning to evaluate final competencies. Nevertheless, the implementation of differentiated assessment appears inconsistent. While some teachers adapt assessment tasks to students' abilities and interests, others apply uniform assessment methods, which may not fully capture individual learning development. As a result, not all students receive assessments that align with their learning profiles, and instructional decisions based on assessment data may not be optimally informed. This condition reflects a gap between the conceptual expectations of the Emancipated Curriculum and classroom realities. Although differentiated learning has been introduced, the extent to which assessment strategies truly reflect differentiation remains underexplored, this can be the novelty of this research. Previous studies have not specifically examined assessment strategies within the context of differentiated learning, particularly in local Indonesian EFL settings. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by exploring how English teachers at SMP Negeri 4 Singaraja implement assessment strategies within differentiated learning and identifying the challenges they encounter in practice.

The primary purpose of this study is to describe English teachers' assessment strategies within differentiated learning and to examine whether these strategies reflect principles of differentiation. Additionally, the study aims to identify challenges faced by teachers in implementing such assessment practices. The significance of this research lies in its contribution to both theory and practice. Theoretically, it enriches the discourse on assessment by integrating assessment approaches with differentiated learning principles in the context of the Emancipated Curriculum. Practically, it provides insights for teachers and educational institutions to improve assessment practices that are fair, inclusive, and responsive to student diversity. Ultimately, this study is expected to contribute to the development of assessment practices that support meaningful learning and equitable educational outcomes in EFL classrooms. Thus, the research questions of this study are what are the English teachers' assessment strategies within differentiated learning employed in teaching and learning process at SMP Negeri 4 Singaraja, also what are the challenges of teachers in employing the assessment strategies within differentiated learning at SMP Negeri 4 Singaraja.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Assessment is widely recognized as a fundamental component of the teaching and learning process because it provides essential information about students' learning progress, achievement, and instructional needs. Rather than functioning solely as a tool for measuring outcomes, assessment is understood as a systematic and continuous process that supports learning improvement and instructional decision-making (Testa et al., 2019). Through assessment, teachers are able to collect, analyze, and interpret evidence of student learning, which allows them to evaluate instructional effectiveness and adjust teaching strategies accordingly (Laborda et al., 2015). This perspective positions assessment as an integral part of pedagogy rather than a separate evaluative activity. In educational contexts, assessment is closely related to evaluation, although the two concepts serve different purposes. According to Yambi (2018), evaluation focuses on judging the extent to which learning objectives have been achieved by comparing outcomes against predetermined criteria, whereas assessment emphasizes the collection and use of

information to improve learning processes and future performance. This distinction highlights that assessment is primarily formative and developmental in nature, while evaluation tends to be summative. Contemporary educational theory emphasizes that effective learning environments require continuous assessment practices that provide timely feedback and guide students toward improvement (Howard & Donaghue, 2015).

The implementation of assessment has gained increased importance in the context of Indonesia's Emancipated Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka), which promotes flexibility, student-centered learning, and responsiveness to learner diversity. Within this curriculum, teachers are encouraged to design assessment practices that align with learning objectives and accommodate differences in students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles (Amelia et al., 2023; Juniardi, 2023). Assessment is expected to be conducted continuously throughout the learning process and supported by diverse techniques such as written tests, projects, presentations, observations, and the integration of technology. This approach reflects a shift from traditional assessment models toward more holistic and meaningful assessment practices that support learning rather than merely certifying achievement. Assessment in the Emancipated Curriculum is commonly framed through three interrelated approaches: Assessment as Learning, Assessment for Learning, and Assessment of Learning. These approaches provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the role of assessment in supporting student learning. Assessment as Learning emphasizes students' active involvement in monitoring and reflecting on their own learning processes, fostering metacognitive awareness and self-regulation (Earl, 2013). From a constructivist perspective, learners actively construct knowledge and must be aware of their own understanding in order to progress (Bruner, 1961). Empirical studies have shown that strategies such as self-assessment and peer assessment enhance learner autonomy, motivation, and engagement (Adiguna et al., 2023; Sari et al., 2024; Konita et al., 2024).

According to Black & Wiliam (1998), assessment for Learning, often associated with formative assessment, focuses on the use of assessment evidence to provide feedback and guide instructional adjustments. This approach is closely linked to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, particularly the concept of the zone of proximal development, in which learners progress through guidance and scaffolding provided by teachers and peers (Vygotsky, 1978). Assessment for Learning enables teachers to identify students' learning needs, provide timely feedback, and support the development of higher-order thinking skills. Research indicates that formative assessment practices significantly improve student achievement when feedback is used to inform both teaching and learning (Heritage, 2010). Assessment of Learning serves a summative function by measuring learning outcomes at the end of an instructional period and reporting achievement to stakeholders (Stiggins, 2002). Summative assessments commonly include final examinations, standardized tests, projects, and presentations, often supported by rubrics to ensure objectivity and consistency (Stiggins et al., 2004). Although Assessment of Learning is essential for accountability and reporting, scholars emphasize that it should be balanced with formative approaches to avoid reducing assessment to grading alone (Atmanegara, 2024). When integrated effectively, the three assessment approaches complement one another and provide a comprehensive picture of student learning.

The growing emphasis on learner diversity has led to increased attention to differentiated learning as an instructional approach. Differentiated learning is grounded in the recognition that students differ in readiness, interests, learning styles, and learning profiles, and therefore require varied instructional strategies rather than uniform teaching methods (Tomlinson, 2014). Differentiated instruction involves modifying content, process, product, and learning environment to ensure that all students have equitable opportunities to learn and succeed (Suwastini et al., 2021). Empirical evidence suggests that differentiated learning enhances student engagement, autonomy, and academic achievement when implemented thoughtfully (Nurjannah et al., 2024; Langelaan et al., 2024). Despite the pedagogical benefits of differentiated assessment, numerous studies have documented challenges in its implementation. Teachers often face constraints related

to large class sizes, limited instructional time, and insufficient assessment literacy (Tomlinson, 2014). Research indicates that teachers may rely on standardized rubrics and summative assessments due to practical limitations and limited training (Ali, 2015; Suryati et al., 2023). Additional challenges include difficulties in designing varied assessment tasks, developing appropriate rubrics, and managing time effectively during formative assessment activities (Meldia & Melani, 2022). Social and cultural factors, such as an overemphasis on grades, also hinder the adoption of alternative and differentiated assessment practices (Nadhifah et al., 2023).

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore English teachers' assessment strategies within differentiated learning in the context of the Emancipated Curriculum. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to obtain an in-depth understanding of teachers' perceptions, experiences, and classroom practices related to assessment as learning, assessment for learning, and assessment of learning. The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 4 Singaraja, a junior high school located in Buleleng Regency, Bali, Indonesia, because it has implemented the Emancipated Curriculum and English language instruction at the junior secondary level. In addition, English teachers at this school had received training related to differentiated learning and assessment in the new curriculum paradigm, making the site relevant to the objectives of the study. The population of the study consisted of all English teachers at SMP Negeri 4 Singaraja. Using purposive sampling, three English teachers were selected as the research participants with different grade levels (Grades 7, 8, and 9).

The instruments used to collect data in this study were classroom observation sheets and unstructured interview guidelines. Classroom observation sheets were used to document teachers' assessment strategies as implemented during instructional activities. Also, unstructured interviews were conducted to obtain deeper insights into teachers' perspectives, rationales, and challenges related to assessment within differentiated learning. This type of interview allowed flexibility for probing and follow-up questions, enabling participants to elaborate on their experiences in their own words. Data analysis was carried out using an interactive qualitative data analysis model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification, as proposed by Miles and Huberman (2014). The researchers are confident that the data has been analyzed reliably and validly because to enhance the credibility of the findings, data triangulation was applied by combining multiple data collection methods and sources.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Findings
Assessment Strategies Used in the Teaching and Learning Process by English Teachers in Differentiated Learning

The findings revealed that English teachers employed five main assessment strategies within differentiated learning, namely gamification, reading assignment, writing task, speaking performance, and storytelling team. These strategies were implemented across different stages of instruction, including main activities and post-activities. The assessment practices reflected both assessment for learning and assessment of learning, although assessment as learning was not identified in the observed classrooms. In the gamification strategy, differentiated learning was applied through process differentiation, where instructional activities were adapted to students' diverse learning needs. Students were grouped heterogeneously based on ability levels, and learning activities were conducted through collaborative, game-based tasks using a web-based platform. This strategy encouraged peer interaction, cooperation, and active participation among students with varying abilities. However, despite the differentiated learning process, the assessment itself was not differentiated. All students were assessed using the same criteria based on general observations of activeness and cooperation, without considering individual roles, contributions, or ability differences. The absence of specific assessment instruments, such as

rubrics or individual performance records, resulted in uniform scoring for all students regardless of their level of participation or contribution. Consequently, the gamification strategy reflected differentiated learning but not differentiated assessment.

Similarly, in the reading assignment strategy, differentiated learning was implemented through process differentiation by providing tasks with varying levels of cognitive demand. Students with intermediate abilities were given simpler tasks in the form of true-or-false questions, while students with higher abilities were assigned essay questions requiring deeper analysis of the text. Although the task formats were differentiated according to students' abilities, the assessment criteria remained the same for all students. The teacher applied a uniform scoring system and rubric, without adjusting the assessment standards to reflect the differences in task difficulty or cognitive complexity. As a result, the assessment practice did not fully align with the principles of differentiated assessment, despite the differentiated instructional approach.

In the writing task strategy, differentiated learning was implemented through product differentiation. Teachers allowed students to demonstrate their understanding through varied writing products. In one implementation, students were given freedom to choose the topic of their announcement text, enabling them to express ideas aligned with their interests and backgrounds. In another implementation, students with intermediate abilities were asked to rewrite a short message, while students with higher abilities were required to compose an original message independently. These variations showed teachers' awareness of students' differing ability levels and learning readiness. However, assessment practices remained general and standardized, as all students were evaluated using the same rubric focusing on content, organization, linguistic features, and mechanics. The assessment did not take into account the differing levels of task complexity or individual learning progress, indicating that differentiated assessment was not applied in this strategy.

In contrast, speaking performance was one of the strategies in which differentiated assessment was clearly implemented. Teachers acknowledged that students possessed varying levels of speaking proficiency and confidence. Consequently, assessment criteria were adjusted according to students' abilities. Students with higher proficiency were assessed based on technical aspects such as fluency, grammar, and pronunciation, while students with lower proficiency were assessed more on effort, confidence, and willingness to perform. Additionally, students were given flexibility in choosing learning resources and performance modes, such as live presentations or recorded videos. This approach ensured that assessment was fair and responsive to individual differences, allowing all students to demonstrate their learning in ways that suited their abilities and comfort levels.

The storytelling team strategy also applied differentiated assessment within differentiated learning. This strategy was implemented as a final assessment after students completed narrative text instruction. Students worked in pairs or small groups and were allowed to choose their presentation format, either through live performance or video. Assessment was divided into individual and group components, with individual assessment focusing on content mastery, fluency, pronunciation, gestures, and characterization, while group assessment emphasized collaboration, readiness, and cohesiveness. The assessment rubric was intentionally flexible to accommodate differences in students' abilities and performance styles. This strategy valued both the learning process and the final product, ensuring that students with varying strengths had equitable opportunities to succeed.

The Challenges Teachers Face When Using Assessment Strategies in Differentiated Learning

This section presents the findings related to the challenges faced by English teachers in employing assessment strategies within differentiated learning at SMP Negeri 4 Singaraja. The results indicate that teachers encountered several significant challenges that affected their ability to implement differentiated assessment optimally. These challenges include the large number of students in each class, limited instructional time, and teachers' limited understanding of the

concept and practice of differentiated assessment.

One of the primary challenges identified was the large number of students in a single classroom. Classes at SMP Negeri 4 Singaraja typically consisted of approximately 38 to 40 students. This condition made it difficult for teachers to fully understand each student's individual characteristics, including their abilities, learning styles, and learning needs. In differentiated learning, assessment ideally requires teachers to recognize individual differences and adjust assessment strategies accordingly. However, the large class size limited teachers' capacity to observe, monitor, and assess students individually. As a result, assessments tended to be generalized rather than personalized. Teachers found it challenging to provide in-depth interaction and individualized feedback during the assessment process, which reduced the effectiveness of differentiated assessment practices.

Another major challenge faced by teachers was limited instructional time. English subjects were allocated only four hours per week, with an effective duration of approximately 45 minutes per session. Teachers perceived this time allocation as insufficient to cover dense instructional materials while simultaneously implementing differentiated learning and assessment. In many cases, teachers had to repeat basic materials for students who lacked foundational English skills, which further reduced the time available for differentiated instructional activities. Moreover, designing and implementing differentiated assessments required additional time, including preparing multiple assessment formats, ensuring alignment with students' ability levels, and providing meaningful feedback. Due to these time constraints, teachers often resorted to using general assessments that were more practical and time-efficient. In addition to time limitations, teachers also identified the time-consuming nature of differentiated assessment design as a barrier. Creating assessments tailored to different student ability levels required teachers to prepare more than one form of assessment and carefully evaluate their suitability. Teachers acknowledged that while differentiated assessment was ideal, the limited time available for both preparation and classroom implementation made it difficult to apply consistently. Consequently, teachers prioritized completing instructional content and meeting curriculum demands rather than implementing fully differentiated assessment practices.

The third challenge identified was teachers' limited understanding of the concept and practical implementation of differentiated assessment. Differentiated learning was perceived as a relatively new approach, and some teachers admitted that their understanding, particularly in relation to assessment, was still minimal. Teachers often believed that their assessment practices were appropriate, but later realized that these practices did not align with the principles of differentiated assessment. As a result, teachers tended to use the same assessment rubrics for all students, without adapting criteria to individual differences in ability or learning readiness. This limited understanding was further exacerbated by frequent curriculum changes, which placed teachers in a continuous adjustment phase. Teachers expressed the need for professional development opportunities, such as workshops or training programs, that specifically focused on differentiated learning and assessment practices. Without sufficient guidance and training, teachers found it difficult to translate the theoretical concept of differentiated assessment into effective classroom practices.

Discussion

This study reveals that English teachers at SMP Negeri 4 Singaraja employed various assessment strategies within differentiated learning; however, the depth of their implementation and alignment with differentiation principles varied considerably. Overall, teachers predominantly applied assessment for learning and assessment of learning, while assessment as learning was largely absent. This pattern partially aligns with Tomlinson's (2014) view that assessment should be continuous and responsive to students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. However, the findings also indicate a gap between theoretical expectations and classroom practices, particularly in terms of student involvement and reflective assessment processes.

The dominance of assessment for learning practices suggests that teachers recognized the importance of monitoring students' progress during instruction. Teachers frequently used classroom questioning, verbal feedback, and observation during activities such as gamification, reading assignments, speaking performances, storytelling, and writing tasks. These practices are consistent with the formative assessment cycle proposed by Black and Wiliam (1998), which emphasizes the collection of evidence of learning to inform instruction. However, in the present study, formative assessment was often implemented in a generalized manner and did not consistently lead to differentiated instructional follow-up. This indicates that while teachers gathered information about student learning, they did not always use it to adapt assessment criteria or instructional strategies according to individual learner needs.

From a theoretical perspective, this limited responsiveness suggests that Vygotsky's (1978) concept of scaffolding within the Zone of Proximal Development was not fully realized. Although teachers identified students' strengths and weaknesses, they rarely adjusted assessment expectations to support learners at different developmental stages. Empirical studies support this finding. Singh et al. (2022) reported that ESL teachers frequently employed formative assessment techniques but struggled to apply them systematically in differentiated contexts. Similarly, Sujana et al. (2020) found that while formative assessment increased student engagement, its effectiveness was constrained by teachers' limited assessment literacy and classroom constraints. These findings also resonate with Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes that meaningful feedback should support learners' autonomy and competence. In this study, assessment for learning existed but was generally uniform, limiting its potential to foster personalized learning and motivation.

Assessment of learning was most evident in speaking performance, writing tasks, gamification, storytelling, and reading assignments, where teachers employed standardized rubrics focusing on accuracy, fluency, organization, and completeness. While such rubrics provided transparency and consistency, they were applied uniformly across students, even when task complexity and learning readiness varied. This practice contrasts with Biggs' (1996) principle of constructive alignment, which emphasizes that assessment criteria should align with differentiated learning objectives. It also diverges from Wiggins' (1998) concept of authentic assessment, which encourages flexible performance expectations to allow multiple pathways toward demonstrating mastery.

Empirical evidence supports this interpretation. Priscilla et al. (2021) found that vocabulary assessment practices often relied on summative measures with limited differentiation, while Silalahi et al. (2022) reported that teachers struggled to ensure fairness when applying uniform criteria to diverse learners. Padmanabha (2021) further explains that teachers tend to maintain standardized assessment practices within differentiated instruction because modifying criteria is perceived as complex and time-consuming. In the present study, although summative assessments were conducted systematically, they lacked adaptive criteria that could accommodate learners' diverse abilities and learning profiles. Notably, assessment as learning was absent from the observed practices. Students were not engaged in self-assessment, peer assessment, reflective journals, or student-led evaluation activities. This absence is significant because assessment as learning plays a crucial role in developing learner autonomy and metacognitive awareness (Stiggins, 2002). According to Earl (2003), assessment as learning positions students as active agents who monitor and regulate their own learning. Similarly, Zimmerman's (2002) model of self-regulated learning emphasizes reflection and self-evaluation as essential components of academic development. The lack of such practices in this study indicates that assessment had not yet functioned as a tool for learner empowerment.

This finding aligns with previous studies. Fitriyah et al. (2023) reported that peer and self-assessment were the least practiced components of assessment, despite teachers acknowledging their pedagogical value. Mtshali and Masonto (2025) similarly found that teachers lacked training and confidence in facilitating reflective assessment practices in multilingual contexts. Sa'ida

(2023) further noted that teachers often avoid assessment as learning due to uncertainty about implementation strategies. Within the context of the Emancipated Curriculum, which emphasizes student autonomy, the absence of assessment as learning highlights a critical gap between policy expectations and classroom realities.

Regarding differentiated assessment, the findings indicate partial differentiation in content, process, and product, but not in the learning environment. Differentiation in content appeared in speaking performance and storytelling activities, where students were allowed to choose topics aligned with their interests and readiness. This practice aligns with Tomlinson's framework and the Universal Design for Learning principle of providing multiple means of representation (Hall et al., 2003). Empirical studies by Utama (2025) similarly found that teachers adjusted materials intuitively to accommodate student needs. However, in the present study, content differentiation was applied inconsistently and without systematic assessment alignment. Differentiation in the assessment process was evident through varied activity formats such as oral storytelling, gamification, reading tasks, and writing assignments. These variations allowed students to demonstrate learning through multiple modalities, aligning with Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences. However, within each activity, students followed the same assessment process, limiting differentiation based on cognitive readiness. This finding echoes Hagenimana et al. (2023), who observed that teachers often assessed similar cognitive levels across learners despite varied instructional activities.

Product differentiation was observed through multiple output formats, including written texts, oral performances, and creative storytelling. This aligns with performance-based assessment principles (Wiggins, 1998) and supports learner expression. However, all products were evaluated using identical criteria, which limited the effectiveness of differentiation. This finding supports Silalahi et al. (2022), who reported that while teachers diversified student outputs, differentiated evaluation criteria remained difficult to implement. Importantly, learning environment differentiation was absent. Teachers did not adjust assessment settings, grouping arrangements, emotional support, or scaffolding tools to accommodate student differences. This contradicts Tomlinson's (2014) assertion that the learning environment is a fundamental component of effective differentiation. Sociocultural theories further emphasize that assessment should reflect learners' contexts and affective needs. Mtshali and Masonto (2025) similarly found that assessment practices often failed to address learners' sociolinguistic and emotional contexts.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that differentiated assessment was present in differentiated learning practices, but not all differentiated learning practices employed differentiated assessment. Teachers successfully diversified instructional activities but relied on standardized assessment criteria. This misalignment reflects the theoretical concerns raised by Biggs (1996) and Wiggins and McTighe (2005), who argue that assessment must align with instructional intentions. Empirical studies by Priscilla et al. (2021), Silalahi et al. (2022), and Singh et al. (2022) similarly indicate that teachers find it easier to differentiate instruction than assessment. This study extends previous research by situating these challenges within the context of the Emancipated Curriculum, where differentiation is encouraged but assessment literacy is still developing.

The second major finding highlights three interrelated challenges that hindered the implementation of differentiated assessment: large class size, limited instructional time, and teachers' limited understanding of differentiated assessment. Large class sizes restricted teachers' ability to conduct individualized assessment and meaningful interaction, a challenge widely documented in previous studies (Singh et al., 2022; Fitriyah et al., 2023). Time constraints further limited opportunities to design varied assessments and provide feedback, consistent with Brookhart (2013) and Tomlinson (2014). Finally, limited teacher understanding, compounded by frequent curriculum changes, resulted in reliance on generalized assessment practices, echoing findings by Black and Wiliam (1998) and Mtshali and Masonto (2025).

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined English teachers' assessment strategies within differentiated learning and the challenges encountered in implementing differentiated assessment in junior high school English classrooms. The limitations of this study are examining the different assessment techniques used by English teachers in differentiated instruction, determining whether the assessment was differentiated, and discussing the difficulties English teachers encountered when implementing these techniques in SMP Negeri 4 Singaraja. In addition, the findings demonstrate that teachers employed a variety of assessment strategies integrated into differentiated instructional practices, including gamification, reading assignments, writing tasks, speaking performances, and storytelling activities. These strategies reflected teachers' efforts to address students' diverse abilities and learning needs; however, the degree to which assessment practices aligned with differentiated learning principles varied across strategies. Overall, assessment practices were predominantly oriented toward assessment for learning and assessment of learning, while assessment as learning was notably absent. Although differentiated learning was evident in instructional activities through variations in process and product, assessment criteria were often applied uniformly. Only speaking performance and storytelling activities consistently incorporated differentiated assessment by adjusting criteria and expectations to students' ability levels. This indicates a partial alignment between differentiated instruction and assessment, suggesting that differentiation was more readily implemented in teaching activities than in assessment design.

The study also identified key challenges that limited the effective implementation of differentiated assessment, namely large class sizes, limited instructional time, and teachers' limited understanding of differentiated assessment concepts. These constraints influenced teachers' reliance on generalized assessment practices despite their awareness of student diversity. Consequently, assessment practices tended to prioritize practicality and efficiency over responsiveness to individual learner differences. In conclusion, the study highlights the need for stronger alignment between differentiated learning and assessment practices. Enhancing teachers' assessment literacy, particularly in relation to assessment as learning and differentiated assessment design, is essential to ensure equitable and meaningful evaluation of student learning. Institutional support, targeted professional development, and manageable classroom conditions are critical to enabling teachers to translate differentiated learning principles into effective and sustainable assessment practices.

Teachers can benefit from a number of implications based on the findings. In order to manage large classes and provide the best possible individual attention, teachers can first think about flexible grouping tactics or peer tutoring. Second, effective time management and preparation are essential, such as setting aside extra time to create exams or including assessment tasks throughout several sessions. Third, teachers' capacity to apply differentiated assessment can be enhanced by training and professional development that covers practical techniques, the use of rubrics, and the application of self- and peer assessment. Furthermore, the suggestion from this study is encouraging teacher collaboration, so schools can improve the overall quality of learning by exchanging techniques and best practices for conducting differentiated assessment.

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