



Challenges and Opportunities of Implementing Personalized Instruction in Large English Classrooms: Teacher Perceptions

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v12i1.6388>

Abstract

Personalized instruction is a critical approach in English language teaching, particularly in large classrooms, where teachers face diverse student needs. This study explores the challenges English teachers face in implementing personalized instruction at public senior high schools (SMAN) across West Lombok, Indonesia. The research adopts a qualitative approach, conducting in-depth interviews with 12 English teachers to examine their perceptions of personalized instruction. The study reveals key challenges including large student-to-teacher ratios, limited access to technological resources, and a lack of professional development opportunities. The findings suggest that overcoming these barriers requires systemic support, including better access to technology, teacher training, and classroom management strategies. This research contributes to understanding the challenges of personalized instruction in large classrooms and offers insights into ways to support teachers in adapting to individual student needs.

Keywords: *Personalized Instruction; Challenges; Teacher Perceptions; English Language Teaching; Large Classrooms*

Introduction

The increasing demand for personalized learning in English language education presents challenges for teachers, especially in large classrooms. Personalized instruction involves tailoring teaching methods to suit individual students' learning styles, interests, and needs. It is grounded in theories such as Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (2016) and Tomlinson's Differentiated Instruction (2014), which stress the importance of scaffolding and adapting teaching to students' unique abilities. However, in large classrooms, teachers face numerous obstacles such as high student-to-teacher ratios, limited access to technology, and insufficient training on how to implement personalized strategies effectively.

Research has shown that large class sizes and inadequate resources in rural settings present a significant barrier to personalized instruction (Darling-Hammond, 2019). While there is growing interest in personalized learning, particularly in large classrooms, few studies have explored the challenges and opportunities of implementing this approach in public high schools in Indonesia, especially in rural

settings like West Lombok. This research aims to fill this gap by focusing on English language teachers in the region.

This study employs a qualitative research design, which was chosen to capture the in-depth perceptions of teachers through semi-structured interviews. Qualitative methods are particularly useful for exploring the complex and contextual nature of personalized instruction in diverse educational settings. A purposive sampling method was used to select 12 English teachers from both urban and rural schools in West Lombok. These teachers were chosen to ensure a broad range of perspectives, reflecting the diverse challenges faced by educators in different school environments.

Although the primary focus of this study is on the challenges of implementing personalized instruction, it also identifies potential opportunities that arise from these challenges. For example, collaboration between teachers, the use of technology, and professional development programs offer promising avenues for improving personalized learning practices.

Method

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the challenges teachers face when implementing personalized instruction in large English classrooms. A purposive sampling method was used to select 12 English teachers from public senior high schools (SMAN) across West Lombok, ensuring a mix of teachers from both urban and rural areas. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted over a six-week period. Each interview lasted 45 to 60 minutes and focused on the teachers' experiences with personalized instruction, the obstacles they encounter, and their perceptions of how personalized strategies can be integrated into their teaching practices. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data, identifying recurring themes related to the challenges and opportunities of personalized instruction.

Results and Discussion

Results

The analysis revealed three key categories of challenges faced by teachers:

1. Structural Barriers

- a. **High Student-to-Teacher Ratios:** Teachers reported that large class sizes, often exceeding 30 students, made it difficult to provide individualized attention to each student. One teacher mentioned, "With over 35 students, it's difficult to even give feedback on individual assignments."
- b. **Time Constraints:** Limited instructional time prevented teachers from designing or delivering differentiated activities tailored to individual students' needs. Teachers highlighted that the curriculum often takes precedence over personalized learning, leaving little room for individualized approaches.

2. Technological Barriers

- a. **Unequal Access:** Many schools in the region lack sufficient digital tools, such as computers or reliable internet connections, necessary for personalized learning activities. As one teacher noted, "We have limited access to computers, and the internet is not always reliable, which hinders our ability to implement personalized learning."

- b. **Low Digital Literacy:** Teachers expressed a lack of confidence in using technology to enhance personalized instruction, compounded by inadequate training in digital tools. Many felt that even when technological tools were available, they did not have the skills to use them effectively for personalized learning.

3. Pedagogical Barriers

- a. **Insufficient Professional Development:** Teachers highlighted the need for more professional development in personalized instruction strategies. Without adequate training, teachers struggle to implement personalized learning effectively. One teacher shared, “We need more workshops to learn how to design personalized learning strategies that fit our students' needs.”
- b. **Curriculum Rigidities:** The strict adherence to national curricula limits teachers' ability to tailor lessons and instructional materials to the individual needs of students. Teachers expressed frustration with the inflexibility of the curriculum, which often does not allow for adaptation to students' varying learning styles and interests.

Opportunities Identified

Despite the challenges, the study also identified several opportunities for improving personalized instruction:

- **Peer Collaboration:** Many teachers expressed that collaboration with colleagues helped address some of the barriers to personalized learning. One teacher mentioned, “We try to help each other by sharing ideas on how to manage large classes and personalize lessons, which makes it easier to provide individual support.”
- **Technological Integration:** While access to technology remains limited, teachers saw the potential for integrating digital tools to support personalized instruction. For example, teachers mentioned using online learning platforms to provide students with individualized assignments and feedback.
- **Professional Development Programs:** Teachers expressed a strong desire for training on how to implement personalized learning strategies effectively. One teacher emphasized, “If we had more access to professional development in personalized instruction, we could better address the diverse needs of our students.”

Discussion

The findings from this study align with the literature, which identifies high student-to-teacher ratios as a significant barrier to implementing personalized instruction (Darling-Hammond, 2019). The challenges of managing large classes and limited time highlight the need for classroom management strategies that can support personalized learning, such as peer-assisted learning or group-based activities.

Technological barriers are especially pronounced in rural schools, where access to resources is limited. Digital tools can be essential for providing individualized learning opportunities, yet without proper infrastructure and training, the benefits of these tools cannot be fully realized (Bray & McClaskey, 2017).

Additionally, the study identifies a gap in professional development related to personalized instruction, which supports findings by Zimmerman (2016) that teacher preparedness is crucial in fostering personalized learning environments. Providing teachers with access to professional development programs that focus on personalized learning strategies and digital tools can help bridge this gap.

Conclusions

This study highlights the significant barriers English teachers in West Lombok face when implementing personalized instruction in large classrooms. The structural, technological, and pedagogical challenges outlined in the findings emphasize the need for systemic support to enable effective personalized teaching.

Recommendations include reducing student-to-teacher ratios, improving access to technology, and providing comprehensive professional development on personalized instruction methods. By leveraging frameworks such as Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development and Tomlinson's Differentiated Instruction, teachers can better adapt their teaching to meet the diverse needs of students. Future research should explore strategies to overcome these barriers, focusing on scalable solutions that can support teachers in resource-constrained settings and integrate culturally responsive teaching practices to ensure that personalized instruction is inclusive and effective in diverse educational contexts.

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