



How Can Teachers Tailor Success? Innovative Strategies for Content, Process, and Product in EFL Classrooms

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the Implementation of differentiated instruction in an EFL classroom, focusing on content, process, and product dimensions. It involved an English teacher and thirty-nine 8th-grade students at a junior high school. The research sought to identify the teacher's strategies to implement differentiated instruction, guided by Tomlinson's (2001) theory of Differentiated Instruction. Using a descriptive-qualitative methodology, the study employed interviews, observations, and document analysis as data collection instruments. The findings indicate that the teacher employed diverse texts and resources alongside varied support systems to differentiate content. For process differentiation, strategies included multiple intelligences and flexible grouping. Differentiation of the product involved varied questioning techniques, leading to activities such as student worksheets, group tasks, and presentations. This research contributes to understanding differentiated instruction in Indonesian EFL classrooms, highlighting the challenges and suggesting the need for further innovation in instructional strategies. Despite difficulties, the study illustrates the teacher's efforts to incorporate various differentiated instruction strategies, underscoring the potential for enhancing EFL teaching practices.

Keywords: Differentiated Instruction, EFL class, teacher's strategies, content, process, product

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary educational landscape, the concept of differentiated learning has emerged as a pivotal strategy for catering to the myriad needs of students. This pedagogical approach centred on customizing teaching methods to align with individual learning preferences, capabilities, and backgrounds, has gained prominence for its effectiveness in fostering an inclusive and supportive classroom environment. Differentiated instruction, by its design, allows educators to modify content, processes, and products to meet the unique requirements of each student, thus acknowledging and valuing their distinct intelligence

levels, potential, and individuality. This approach is critical in ensuring every student feels valued and supported, facilitating a more engaging and productive learning experience (Digna et al., 2023; Fitra, 2022; Lestarinigrum, 2022).

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, the heterogeneity of student populations poses unique challenges for educators. Students in these settings often come from varied backgrounds, each bringing different experiences, levels of parental education, and access to resources. Such diversity can significantly influence their learning processes and outcomes, necessitating adaptive teaching strategies to bridge the gaps and enhance educational equity (Suryati et al., 2023; Moosa & Shareefa, 2019). Recognizing the critical role of differentiated instruction in addressing these challenges, educators are increasingly called upon to embrace flexibility and innovation in their teaching methodologies. This adaptation is crucial for meeting students' diverse needs and aligning with academic standards and policy requirements set forth by educational authorities. Thus, the imperative to implement differentiated instruction strategies in EFL classrooms is both a pedagogical necessity and a policy directive aiming to create a more inclusive, practical, and responsive educational environment.

Differentiated education is an approach that enables learners to acquire knowledge in ways that resonate with their inherent, distinct personalities (Tanjung & Ashadi, 2019; Bondie et al., 2019). It involves customizing the instructional environment to accommodate students' interests, readiness levels, and learning profiles across content, process, and product dimensions (Tomlinson, 2017; Ismail, 2019; Kotob & Arnouss, 2019). Teachers can apply these adaptations in class, catering to individual students, small groups, or the entire class as needed. This ensures that students with diverse needs within the same subject are effectively engaged through differentiated instruction (Gualbertus et al., 2013; Sandra & Kurniawati, 2020).

In differentiated instruction, it is challenging to distinctly separate content, process, and product since learning is a holistic experience. Students assimilate ideas through the content they study, reflect upon these ideas when creating products, and generate product ideas through their interactions with various resources. According to Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010), 'content' encompasses the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and concepts teachers aim for students to learn. Tomlinson (2017) suggests several strategies for differentiating content, including concept-based teaching, curriculum compacting, diverse texts and resources, learning contracts, mini-lessons, and support systems. 'Process', on the other hand, pertains to the methodologies through which students engage with, understand, and retain information (Blaz, 2016; Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010).

To differentiate the process, Tomlinson (2017) recommends employing strategies such as utilizing multiple intelligences, forming interest groups, varying graphic organizers, applying complex instruction, achieving concept attainment, and facilitating independent study. As Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) detailed, the product phase allows students to demonstrate their understanding and knowledge through various evaluative techniques, including reports, exams, and interviews. This stage is crucial for assessing students' comprehension and learning outcomes. Diversification in the production of student work encourages the expression of learning through multiple formats such as debates, presentations, experiments, and more, fostering a comprehensive evaluation of student learning (Blaz, 2016; Tomlinson, 2017).

Besides, research underscores the significance of differentiated instruction in enhancing learning experiences. For instance, [Satyarini \(2022\)](#) observed the partial Implementation of differentiated instruction in ESL teaching in a senior high school. The study highlighted the teacher's efforts to accommodate students' varied learning profiles by utilizing diverse media and instructional strategies, including PowerPoint presentations, videos, and graphic organizers, to facilitate access to content and personalize the learning process. Similarly, [Lombardia and Guerza \(2022\)](#) explored the effects of differentiated teaching strategies on EFL students' writing performance at Batna University in Algeria. Their research, involving first-year EFL students, identified positive attitudes towards adaptive instructional methods that offer learning materials and activity choices and group students according to their preferences. In Indonesia, [Nyoman et al. \(2022\)](#) examined the challenges of applying differentiated instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their findings revealed only partial Implementation, with efforts to adapt materials, methods, and products to cater to students' interests and learning profiles. This adaptation included using diverse media and creating personalized learning paths, demonstrating the complexities and potential of differentiated instruction in response to varying educational needs.

Furthermore, building upon a comprehensive analysis of existing literature, theoretical frameworks, and empirical studies, this research identifies a notable gap concerning the application of differentiated instruction strategies by junior high school teachers in EFL classrooms. Despite the breadth of studies addressing broader educational issues across various levels and locations and the absence of a focus on specific theoretical frameworks, there remains a scant exploration of teachers' practical strategies. This study aims to bridge this gap by meticulously examining the strategies utilized by teachers in implementing differentiated instruction based on content, process, and product within the EFL context. The objective is to delineate the practical application of strategies [Tomlinson \(2017\)](#) recommended, thereby offering actionable insights and guidance for educators seeking to enhance their teaching methodologies in EFL settings.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative methodology, aiming to capture and understand the social processes within educational settings by exploring the opinions and experiences of participants ([Marquerite, 2006](#)). Conducted at a junior high school in West Java, the research focuses on a single English teacher and thirty-nine 8th-grade students. This school was selected for its adoption of the Merdeka curriculum and its emphasis on differentiated learning, providing a rich context for data collection. The teacher, a pioneer in the region with specialized training in differentiated learning, presents a valuable case study for examining the practical application of these educational strategies.

Data collection was achieved through three primary instruments: interviews, observation, and document analysis. Interviews with the English teacher explored the Implementation of differentiated instruction and the strategies employed. Observations in the English class allowed the researcher to witness the dynamics of differentiated instruction firsthand, focusing on the teacher's methodologies and student engagement. Finally, analyzing educational documents, including syllabi, lesson plans, textbooks, and modules, offered insights into differentiated instruction's formal planning and expected outcomes. These documents were scrutinized to identify relevant variables and corroborate findings

from interviews and observations, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the differentiated instruction practices at the school.

To analyze the collected data, the researcher utilized three analytical techniques outlined by [Miles and Huberman \(2014\)](#): data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing with verification. Data reduction involved filtering and summarizing essential information relevant to the teaching and learning methodologies observed in the classroom. The initial step in this process included converting audio-recorded interviews into text transcripts, allowing for a more manageable data review. The researcher coded vital themes and information, selecting only the data pertinent to the study's focus. This selection process was critical in isolating significant insights from the observations and interviews.

For data presentation, the researcher organized the streamlined data into coherent groups. This organization facilitated a clear depiction of the findings, categorizing the information derived from observations, interviews, and document analysis. The data was methodically arranged to highlight the study's results, specifically the integration of the Merdeka Curriculum in English language teaching.

The final phase involved drawing conclusions and verifying the data's validity. This analytical stage focused on assessing the data against the research objectives and the study's theoretical frameworks. Verification aimed to enhance the evaluation's accuracy and objectivity, employing evidence with high scientific reliability. The researcher applied triangulation across sources, data, and theory to ensure comprehensive validity. Source triangulation was achieved through collaboration with the English teacher and the eighth-grade students, utilizing observations, interviews, and documentation.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The teacher undertook several preparatory actions before implementing differentiated instruction in the learning process. The initial step involved conducting a pre-assessment to ascertain the students' learning profiles. This assessment utilized various methods, including observations, questionnaires for parents, consultations with peers, or insights from previous teachers. The teacher's statement supports this approach.

During the interview, Mr FM emphasized the foundational role of initial assessments in differentiated learning, starting on April 11, 2023: *"In differentiated learning, in the first stage, we have to give an initial assessment first and respond to the needs of the student. It will take time, observation, lifting, and interviewing, which means it takes time and energy."* This statement highlights the comprehensive effort in tailoring educational approaches to meet individual student needs, including observation and direct student engagement. This practice aligns with [Tomlinson and Imbeau's \(2011\)](#) theory, which posits that teachers are responsible for addressing the diverse needs of all students through continuous assessments, classroom observations, and facilitating discussions among students. Furthermore, [Bondley \(2011\)](#) supports this approach by advocating that curriculum differentiation should be informed by pre-assessment data to address students' prior knowledge and learning gaps effectively. The pre-assessment process is crucial for identifying these educational needs and planning for differentiated instruction.

Moreover, the importance of getting to know students well to enhance instructional effectiveness is echoed by [Ismajli and Morina \(2018\)](#). They suggest that teachers should employ various methods to understand their students better, including observations, clinical

interviews, review of student work, dynamic classroom activities, strategic grouping, individual evaluations, and interactions with students' families. These techniques are instrumental in developing a comprehensive understanding of each student's learning profile, facilitating more targeted and effective differentiated instruction.

Following the initial assessment of students' learning profiles, the teacher organized the students into several groups based on these profiles. Mr. FM detailed this process during an interview on April 11, 2023, stating, "*Well, once we know in one class the characters of these students we already know, we group them based on learning style, whether they are auditory, visual, or kinesthetic learners.*" This approach underscores the importance of understanding individual learning preferences to facilitate more personalized and practical instruction.

This strategy of grouping students according to their learning styles is supported by research. [Levy \(2008\)](#) and [Ismail \(2019\)](#) highlight the effectiveness of differentiated teaching through such groupings, enabling teachers to tailor their instructional approaches to the specific abilities of each group. Similarly, [Suwastini \(2021\)](#) suggests that grouping students with similar traits allows for developing teaching materials and instructional designs that cater to their needs. This tailored approach, employing a variety of media and methods, aims to accommodate all student learning styles, thereby enhancing the efficacy of the learning process. [Middendorf \(2008\)](#) further clarifies that learning styles significantly influence students' preferred methods for acquiring and processing information, reinforcing the value of differentiated instruction based on these styles.

In the final phase of implementing differentiated instruction, the teacher strategically designed the lesson plans to align with the diverse learning profiles of the students. This was elucidated by Mr. FM's remark on April 11, 2023: "*The RPP hasn't changed at all, which means that it is done at one time; it's just the learning medium that I varied.*" This statement indicates that while the overall lesson plan (Rencana et al. or RPP in Indonesian) remains constant, the teacher adapts the learning mediums to suit the varied needs of the students.

Modifying the lesson plan by diversifying the instructional mediums is consistent with the principles. According to [Melesse \(2015\)](#), teacher-based differentiation allows educators to adjust the curriculum, subject matter, teaching methods, and learning outcomes to cater to their students' unique needs or characteristics. This entails not only the use of different materials and teaching aids but also the modification of the classroom environment and the provision of options for students on how to engage with and demonstrate their understanding of the content. [Koeze \(2007\)](#) further supports this view by highlighting the importance of providing multiple ways for students to interact with the material, thus ensuring that the instruction is tailored to their preferred learning styles, whether through changes in materials, setting adjustments, or offering choices in how to process and present their learning. This personalized approach underscores the efficacy of differentiated instruction in meeting the diverse needs of learners.

A. Differentiated by Content

Based on the analysis of the results, in differentiating the content, the teacher conducted two strategies, namely, using varied text and resource materials and varied support systems.

1. Using varied text and resource materials

The transition to differentiated instruction marked a significant shift from the teacher's previous reliance solely on textual materials for teaching. Under the differentiated approach, the teacher adapted the learning materials and sources to cater to the varied needs and interests of the students. This evolution in teaching strategy is evidenced by Mr. FM's statement from April 11, 2023: *"I also varied the content from various sources. In the past, the content was only text, for example, narrative text about Sangkuriang. Well, we're looking for varied content, which means in text form and video."*

Adopting a broader range of instructional materials, including videos alongside traditional texts, reflects a commitment to enhancing the relevance and engagement of content for all students. This approach is supported by Tomlinson (2001), who suggests that diversifying texts and supplementing them with a wide array of materials increases the chances of meeting students' individual interests and needs. This finding is further validated by Rodriguez (2012), who observed that varied questioning and diverse instructional materials are among the most frequently applied techniques in differentiated instruction.

Further supporting evidence comes from Suwastini (2021), emphasizing the importance of varying texts (both written and audiovisual) to address students' interests and cultural backgrounds. Mehany (2022) adds that exposure to a broad spectrum of authentic language materials, such as stories, news articles, picture books, and websites, is crucial for language learners. Additionally, Satyarini (2022) highlighted the teacher's use of multiple media, including PowerPoint, videos, and documents, to offer students various entry points to the content, underscoring the effectiveness of differentiated instruction in meeting diverse learning profiles.

2. Varied support systems

The analysis further revealed that the teacher implemented "varied support systems" as the second strategy for differentiating content. To accommodate students' diverse learning styles, such as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic, the teacher incorporated a range of audio and video resources alongside traditional print materials. This approach is encapsulated in Mr. Fr's explanation from April 11, 2023: *"Learning styles, for example, video, auditory, then kinesthetic—now I don't mean when teaching discriminates between children; this is the child learning videos; this is the child learning; being differentiated is a hassle, right? Teach at once; only the learning medium is what I am, what I distinguish, and how I vary it."*

This strategy underscores the teacher's effort to use varied materials as support systems tailored to meet student's individual needs and learning profiles. According to Tomlinson (2001), employing various support system strategies can significantly enhance students' learning abilities. This approach is supported by Malacapay (2019), who emphasizes the effectiveness of using manipulatives, visual aids, charts, and audiotapes and setting explicit expectations in approximating teaching methods and instructions. Jaques and Salmon (2007) also affirm the importance of differentiating instruction, acknowledging that students assimilate and process information in multiple ways, including through visual, auditory, reflective, and kinesthetic means. This broad spectrum of instructional support systems is crucial for catering to how students learn and process knowledge.

B. Differentiated by Process

Based on the analysis of the results, the teacher applied a multiple intelligence strategy and flexible grouping to differentiate the process.

1. Multiple Intelligences

Building on the theory of multiple intelligences, which identifies nine distinct types of intelligence—linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial-visual, kinesthetic-physical, musical, intrapersonal, interpersonal, naturalist, and existential (Digna et al., 2023; Gardner, 2013)—the teacher incorporated various activities to cater to these intelligences. Videos were used for visual learners to address spatial intelligence. Kinesthetic intelligence was engaged through physical responses and demonstrations in front of the class. Musical intelligence was stimulated by asking students to sing text-based songs. Students worked in groups to improve interpersonal intelligence, enhance social skills, and learn cooperatively.

Mr. Fr articulated his approach on April 11, 2023, stating, *"I teach using a projector to display videos, catering to those who learn better visually. There's also audio from speakers to keep students engaged, offering a variety from just my voice, which could become monotonous, possibly even including musical elements."* This methodology showcases the teacher's application of multiple intelligence strategies to ensure a comprehensive learning experience. Observations confirmed that students were encouraged to participate in various activities, such as performing in front of the class, answering questions through physical actions, and engaging in different forms of intelligence. This approach aligns with studies by Adlam (2007) and Rodriguez (2012), emphasizing that embracing multiple intelligences is crucial in differentiated education. It allows educators to identify and apply the most effective teaching strategies, particularly for special education students, ensuring that learning is accessible and meaningful for all. Rodriguez (2012) further suggests that a differentiated classroom should nurture all types of intelligence by offering learning opportunities that utilize the full spectrum of student abilities.

2. Flexible grouping

The teacher strategically employed flexible grouping in the learning process, organizing students into small, adaptable groups. This approach was particularly beneficial when it became evident that not all students could assimilate the material simultaneously. By grouping students, those who had already grasped the concepts could share their understanding with peers who required more time for learning. Another advantage of this method is that it allows the teacher to concentrate on students who need additional support. According to Tomlinson (2001), flexible grouping is a hallmark of a successful differentiated classroom, as it accommodates students' varying proficiency levels across different subjects.

Mr. Fr detailed his approach on April 11, 2023, saying, *"So, we study in groups; for example, it seems like the person has enough of this material; this one is not bad but lacking. So, we provide that intense support specifically to those lacking."* This practice of flexible grouping aims to ensure that all students receive the support they need to understand the material thoroughly. Supporting this approach, Melesse (2015) noted that while many primary school teachers might not be experienced with differentiation strategies, some methods—such as independent study, interest centres, and flexible grouping—prove more effective. Additionally, Rodriguez (2012) highlighted that flexible grouping and individual projects or inquiries were the most recognized among the differentiated instruction

techniques familiar to teachers. [Rodriguez \(2012\)](#) further emphasized that flexible grouping was the most commonly known and the most frequently implemented by teachers, underlining its effectiveness and popularity in differentiated teaching environments.

C. Differentiated by Product

Based on the result analysis, in differentiating the product, the teacher gave students free choices to conduct their product. Differentiated instruction in products is carried out when the teacher accommodates students' interests and talents without pressure from the teacher.

Mr. Fr articulated his flexible approach to student assignments on April 11, 2023, stating, *"So I don't set a standard that the product has to be like that; at that time, I free the product."* This approach signifies the teacher's commitment to allowing students to create products that reflect their interests, aligning with contemporary relevance. By allowing students the freedom to choose how they express their learning outcomes, the teacher embraces a core principle of differentiated instruction: tailoring educational experiences to meet students' diverse needs and preferences.

The teacher implemented three key strategies to facilitate differentiated products in this educational setting: student worksheets, group tasks, and presentations. These methods were selected based on the students' varied needs and learning profiles, offering a broad spectrum of engagement and expression opportunities. [Tomlinson \(2017\)](#) supports this approach, advocating for the diversification of learning products to include debates, interviews, presentations, experiments, and more, enabling students to showcase their learning in formats most resonant with them.

Furthermore, to enhance the differentiation of products, the teacher employed varied questioning strategies, adding another layer of customization to the learning process. This strategy is not only widespread among educators but also critical for addressing students' unique learning styles and cognitive abilities. [Rodriguez \(2012\)](#) found that most teachers were familiar with and implemented varied questioning techniques. This practice, along with flexible grouping and using a wide range of teaching resources and assignments, underscores the teacher's expertise in effectively applying differentiated instruction techniques. Combining varied questioning strategies with personalized worksheets, group activities, and presentations exemplifies a comprehensive approach to fostering an inclusive and responsive learning environment.

1. Students' Worksheet

The observation and documentation of classroom activities revealed that the teacher provided diverse tasks tailored to reinforce the material covered during the learning process. These tasks were specifically designed to cater to the different learning styles of the students, ensuring that each student could engage with the material in a manner that best suited their individual needs. To support visual and auditory learners, the teacher employed activities that required students to watch and listen to videos, thereby facilitating learning through engagement with both visual elements and auditory information. This approach acknowledges the importance of multimedia resources in enhancing comprehension and retention for students who prefer visual and auditory inputs.

Furthermore, kinesthetic learners, who benefit from a more hands-on and movement-oriented approach, were accommodated through activities that involved

presenting or performing tasks in front of the class using materials like cardboard. This method allows kinesthetic learners to actively participate in the learning process by incorporating physical movement and interaction, aligning with their preferred learning style. By diversifying the types of classroom activities and tasks, the teacher effectively addressed the varied learning preferences of the students, ensuring a more inclusive and practical educational experience. This strategy underscores the teacher's commitment to differentiated instruction, aiming to optimize learning outcomes by tailoring teaching methods to the diverse needs of the student population.

2. Group Task

During the group tasks, students collaborated with their peers to engage in activities that deepened their understanding of the material. Each group received specific tasks from the teacher designed to support diverse learning styles, including visual, auditory, and kinesthetic preferences. This approach to task assignment underlines the teacher's intention to ensure that all students, regardless of their preferred learning modality, could actively participate and benefit from the learning process.

For kinesthetic learners, one notable task involved using cardboard media as a presentation tool. Students were encouraged to leave their seats and physically move to the front of the class to showcase their work. This activity facilitated kinesthetic engagement by allowing students to incorporate movement into their presentation. It provided a tangible, interactive medium to express their understanding of the class material. This method of differentiating products through group tasks exemplifies the teacher's commitment to creating a dynamic and inclusive classroom environment. By diversifying tasks and incorporating elements that appeal to various learning styles, the teacher effectively catered to the student's individual needs, enhancing their overall learning experience and engagement with the subject matter.

3. Presentation

The teacher facilitated student presentations as a critical activity to differentiate the product within the classroom. These presentations, conducted in front of the class, served not only as a method for students to fulfil specific tasks assigned by the teacher but also as a practical approach to engage kinesthetic learners. This direct involvement allowed students to physically engage with the material physically, thereby accommodating their need for movement and active participation in the learning process.

Observations highlighted that the teacher orchestrated various activities tailored to students' learning profiles. Activities such as matching phrases, arranging them, and writing conclusions were explicitly designed to support visual and auditory learners, who benefit from observing and listening to content, such as videos, during their learning process.

Embracing the principles of a differentiated classroom, the teacher granted students the autonomy to approach their tasks in ways that best suited their individual learning needs and profiles. This approach manifested in three distinct methodologies: group work, student worksheets, and presentations. These methodologies align with [Tomlinson's \(2017\)](#) advocacy for educators to offer students diverse formats for expressing their learning outcomes, including but not limited to plays, debates, interviews, and experiments. This diversity in task assignments underscores the teacher's commitment to addressing each student's unique needs and learning styles.

Moreover, the teacher's strategy to provide a variety of task formats exemplifies the concept of differentiated instruction. This concept suggests that educators blend traditional tests with more creative product assignments or even replace some tests entirely to ensure all students can reflect on, apply, and showcase their learning in ways that resonate with their preferences. As noted by Satyarini (2022), this approach permits students to choose their presentation formats, further tailoring the learning experience to accommodate different learning profiles and styles, particularly emphasizing the importance of adapting to students' distinct requirements and learning styles.

CONCLUSION

Implementing differentiated instruction did not necessitate alterations to the lesson plan but instead enriched the teaching and learning process through a nuanced understanding of students' needs. Initially, the teacher conducted a pre-assessment to ascertain the diverse learning profiles within the classroom. This assessment informed the teacher about the student's preferred learning styles and helped tailor the content, processes, and products of the learning experience accordingly. The teacher went beyond traditional text-based materials to accommodate different learning preferences in content delivery, incorporating videos with audio elements. This approach exemplifies the strategy of using varied texts and resource materials and providing support systems to aid learning. Such differentiation ensures that the material is accessible and engaging for all students, regardless of their preferred learning modality.

In terms of learning processes, the teacher embraced a variety of instructional models to support the diverse learning styles present within the classroom. The teacher facilitated peer learning by organizing students into groups, allowing students to share knowledge and insights. This collaborative approach was further enhanced by employing strategies centred around multiple intelligences and flexible grouping, ensuring that instructional processes were inclusive and adaptive to the varied needs of the students.

When focusing on the products of learning, the teacher empowered students by offering them the freedom to choose how they would complete and present their tasks, whether as individual assignments are done outside of class or through in-class activities. The teacher utilized varied questioning strategies to cater to the student's specific needs and learning profiles, leading to the implementation of three main activities: student worksheets, group tasks, and presentations. These activities were designed to assess students' understanding and application of the material and to accommodate and celebrate their unique ways of learning and expressing knowledge.

The study highlights teachers' strategies for applying differentiated learning based on content, processes, and products. Teachers' efforts in applying differentiated learning and the desire to continue learning deserve appreciation for providing valuable insights into the world of education. Given that this research is limited to only one teacher and one school, the researcher recommends that future research expand its scope. Further research could involve more teachers and schools so that it could provide a broader reference as well as a more comprehensive perspective.

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