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Differentiated Instruction in English Lessons: Teacher Challenges

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Abstrak

Kurikulum 2013 telah digantikan oleh Kurikulum Merdeka, yang sekarang diterapkan di semua tingkat pendidikan di Indonesia adanya perubahan tersebut menyebabkan Proses penerapan perubahan kurikulum di sistem pendidikan Indonesia menjadi sulit. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui tantangan yang dihadapi para guru ketika mengimplementasikan pembelajaran berdiferensiasi dalam Kurikulum Merdeka serta mengetahui bagaimana guru mengatasi tantangan tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif, serta data yang dikumpulkan oleh peneliti dilakukan melalui kegiatan observasi dan wawancara dengan guru Bahasa Inggris di kelas 8 MTs Negeri 8 Banyuwangi. Kegiatan penelitian ini menunjukkan hasil penelitian bahwa terdapat beberapa tantangan yang dihadapi oleh guru saat mengimplementasikan pembelajaran berdiferensiasi di Kurikulum Merdeka. Tantangan-tantangan tersebut termasuk fasilitas yang terbatas untuk mendukung kegiatan pembelajaran, kurangnya keinginan peserta didik untuk belajar, dan kurangnya stabilitas dalam pelaksanaan pembelajaran berdiferensiasi. Para guru menghadapi tantangan tersebut dengan cara memberikan pembelajaran yang berbasis teknologi dan menyesuaikan materi pembelajaran dengan hal yang berhubungan dengan kehidupan sehari-hari siswa. Dalam pelaksanaannya pembelajaran berdiferensiasi masih ditemukan beberapa hambatan atau tantangan yang dihadapi para guru, maka strategi yang tepat dibutuhkan untuk mengatasi permasalahan tersebut.

Kata Kunci: tantangan guru, implementasi pembelajaran berdiferensiasi.

Abstract

The 2013 curriculum has been replaced by the Merdeka Curriculum, which is now implemented at all levels of education in Indonesia. The change has made implementing curriculum changes in the Indonesian education system difficult. This study aims to determine the challenges teachers face when implementing differentiated learning in the Merdeka Curriculum and determine how teachers overcome these challenges. This research was used qualitative method, and the data collected by the researcher is carried out through observation activities and interviews with English teachers in grade 8 MTs Negeri 8 Banyuwangi. This research activity shows the results of the study that teachers faced several challenges when implementing differentiated learning in the Merdeka Curriculum. These challenges include limited facilities for learning activities, students' lack of desire to learn, and the need for stability in implementing differentiated learning. Teachers faced these challenges by providing technology-based learning and adapted the learning materials which related to students' daily lives. In implementing differentiated learning, teachers face some obstacles or challenges, so the right strategy is needed to overcome these problems..

Keywords: teacher challenges, implementation of differentiated learning.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental element in individual development and the progress of a nation. Education not only serves as a way to impart knowledge but also as a tool to build character and skills necessary for life in the 21st century. Students are expected to be able to think critically, creatively, collaborate, and communicate well. However, addressing individual student differences is a major challenge for the education system. All students have different needs, interests, skills, and learning methods, which are often difficult to accommodate with traditional one-size-fits-all teaching approaches. To overcome this problem, the Merdeka Curriculum was launched by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia as a replacement for the 2013 Curriculum. The Merdeka Curriculum includes several things, such as independence in learning, developing skills, innovating technology in learning, creating relevant learning content, and carrying out holistic evaluations of students (Hermansyah, 2023). To accommodate students' needs, there is one learning method that is quite effective in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, namely differentiated learning.

Differentiated learning is an educational method that aims to adapt learning methods, materials, and evaluations for each student. Differentiated learning seeks to create a learning environment that is inclusive and responsive to differences by offering students a variety of choices and opportunities to learn in the most effective ways. To implement differentiated learning, teachers must have deep understanding about the various of teaching methods and approaches that can be used to meet the very diverse needs of students. Teachers must be able to differentiate between the abilities, interests, learning styles of and the character of each student also adjust teaching methods, materials, and evaluations according to these differences (Marlina, 2020). This includes various aspects, such as providing a variety of learning materials, using different teaching methods, providing a choice of assignments and projects, and adapting methods of evaluation and feedback. By implementing differentiated learning in the classroom, students are expected to be more motivated, actively involved in the learning process, and achieve better academic achievements. Even though it has great potential, differentiated learning is not free from various difficulties or challenges faced by teachers.

During the learning process in class, teachers have an important role in creating a good and enjoyable learning environment for students in the class. However, teachers often face many challenges when implementing differentiated learning, which can affect the quality of education. These challenges can come from various aspects, such as limited resources, increasing workload, lack of training and support, as well as resistance from students and parents (Umayrah & Wahyudin, 2024). Several studies have analyzed the implementation of differentiated learning in the classroom, but teachers need some help implementing it. Based on research from Umayrah & Wahyudin (2024) found that teachers need help in implementing differentiated learning, such as difficulties in preparing learning tools because it takes a long time, as well as teacher limitations in understanding the various learning styles of students. Another problematic factor teachers face is revealed in Jayanti, et al., (2023), teachers need more understanding regarding differentiated learning to make implementing diagnostic assessments more effective.

Based on the problems related to the implementation of differentiated instruction in learning process, researchers are interested to examining what challenges teachers face during the implementation of differentiated learning, especially in the Merdeka Curriculum. Based on several studies, teachers still encounter obstacles in implementing differentiated learning in the classroom. The purpose of this study is to identify and examine the difficulties that MTs Negeri 8 Banyuwangi English instructors encounter while putting differentiated learning into practice. It is hoped that teachers will get help in implementing this strategy after understanding these problems. Apart from that, it is expected that this research will be able to provide useful suggestions for schools and the government to improve the quality of education through differentiated learning process.

METHOD

This study used a method of qualitative research that adapts a case study technique in order to comprehend the phenomena experienced by research subjects, including behavior, perceptions, motivation, actions, and other phenomena. To gather comprehensive information about the implementation of differentiated learning in English courses and the difficulties teachers encounter while implementing varied learning activities, the qualitative approach was selected, especially in the Merdeka curriculum. Meanwhile, case studies are used to describe a phenomenon in differentiated learning by referring to one of the schools that is the focus of the research.

Researchers chose MTs Negeri 8 Banyuwangi because this school is the one of school in Banyuwangi City that implements the Merdeka Curriculum. In this research, the informant was the English teachers of class 8 at MTs Negeri 8 Banyuwangi. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with two 8th-grade teachers and observations of English learning activities in that class. This study was conducted in 3 weeks on May 2024. Researchers used smartphones for their voices during interviews, as well as interview guide sheets and notebooks during interviews with informants. Data collected from informants was recorded thoroughly before being summarized and reduced to make research conclusions. The data obtained was analyzed using the stages developed by Miles & Huberman, reducing the collected data and presenting it with the aim of drawing conclusions about the research results.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The diversity of students is the main thing in differentiated learning, so teachers must be able to provide learning accommodations with creative and ideal activities based on the level of students' needs. Based on research shows that Teacher at MTs Negeri 8 Banyuwangi accommodates students based on the needs of each student. This accommodation is carried out in various ways, for example like by utilizing a variety of teaching strategies that are adjusted to each student's readiness and interest level. This is in line with Teacher statement regarding the concept of differentiated learning. The interview statement from Teacher in line with previous research, such as research from Sulistyosari et al. (2022), which examined the application of differentiated learning in the Merdek curriculum which shows that teachers use differentiated learning based on students' interests by providing varied teaching media to accommodate their characteristics and different abilities of students.

Data regarding the difficulties teachers at MTs Negeri 8 Banyuwangi found implementing differentiated learning in their English classes will be offered in this study. There are some crucial elements in this research about how teachers faced in differentiated learning. Differentiated learning, according to current thinking, entails using a variety of reading tactics and adjusting them to each student's unique learning preferences in order to provide the best possible learning experience. Marlina (2020) and Tomlinson (2001) state that teachers must always ensure students' readiness for learning activities in various ways and develop multiple ways for students to explore and adapt learning approaches to the needs of students. The research activities carried out by researcher on implementing differentiated learning found several challenges faced by English teachers at MTs Negeri 8 Banyuwangi. The research data are presented in the table below.

Table 1. The Result of Interview About Teachers' Challenges Implementing DI

Indicator	Observation Aspect	Result of Interview	Result of Observation
Teachers challenges in English learning process	Implementation of differentiated learning	There are fewer supporting facilities for learning activities such as LCD, students are less focused on learning activities, and	Lack of teacher understanding of differentiated learning and no mapping of student learning needs.

the integration of
differentiated learning
methods needs to be more
stable.

In implementing English language learning in class 8 at MTs Negeri 8 Banyuwangi, teachers still face challenges. This was expressed by the 8th-grade English teachers at MTs Negeri 8 Banyuwangi in interviews with researchers. However, regarding the underlying things that become challenges during the differentiated learning process between Teacher A and Teacher B, they state different things. Teacher revealed that the challenge during the differentiated learning process was the lack of supporting facilities for learning activities. A simple example of limited facilities to support the differentiated learning process is the unavailability of projectors (LCDs) in each class.

Based on the interview with teacher, provides a clearer picture of the state of the facilities at MTs Negeri 8 Banyuwangi, thereby increasing the obstacles that must be faced in the teaching and learning process. The lack of LCD facilities means teachers cannot carry out learning activities that require audio-visual displays, forcing teachers to look for other alternatives for teaching. Facilities and infrastructure are very important to support smooth learning activities. Facilities allow students to achieve achievements that correlate with learning objectives and enhance their satisfaction of teaching and learning (Yunus et al., 2021). Lack of learning facilities will reduce students' motivation to learn another challenge faced by teachers during the process of implementing differentiated learning. During the observation process, researchers saw that grade 8 students were less motivated to learn English, which made them less interested in the learning themes provided by the teacher.

In addition to the lack of supporting facilities in learning activities, the research results show that instability in the structure of learning programs is one of the main problems in differentiated learning. The program must be stable to ensure that learning strategies can be applied consistently and continuously. If the program structure is unstable, teachers will address issues in the design and development of materials as well as the use of learning methods that fit different concepts of instruction. Whereas this is not in accordance with the statement of Gusniati, et al., (2024) which states that learning support facilities are an important factor that creates educational activities that run in accordance with the objectives and achieve the expected results. In the research have results that the implementation of differentiated learning not running optimally. Apart from that, the Merdeka policy, which implements differentiated learning, requires adaptation at the school level. Programs that are not fully structured and consistent can make it difficult for teachers to predict students' needs and difficulties, as well as adapt effective teaching materials. This is exacerbated by the fact that many teachers still adhere to conventional or teacher-centered learning methods, which are less flexible in dealing with the diversity of students and do not support differentiated learning patterns.

Lack of student motivation or focus in learning makes learning activities in class interactive. During class observation activities, researchers found that some students did not pay enough attention to class, and some paid enough attention to what the teacher taught. As is known, motivation has an important role in the learning process because it makes students more interested in learning and has an impact on their learning outcomes (Dauyah & Yulinar, 2018). This should be a concern for teachers in creating interactive learning activities so that students are more interested in learning activities.

Factors that make it difficult for teachers to adopt differentiated learning were discovered by the researcher in addition to students' lack of focus during learning activities. One of these difficulties is that educators have to understanding differentiated instruction, which prevents them from mapping students needs for learning according to their individual characteristics. However, according to Alfath, et al. (2023), mapping student learning needs is an important aspect because teachers can control student and classroom conditions based on their needs. Then, this is also contradicts Tomlinson (2001) statement that teachers must have the ability to understand students' learning needs so that they can create learning activities that are by learning

objectives and can develop varied learning activities so that students understand the material being taught and are interested in learning activities. Therefore, mapping students' learning needs is needed to achieve their learning goals based on their abilities and characteristics.

To overcome the challenges that faced by teachers, the research found that strategies that involve students in activities that are relevant to the real world are very effective in overcoming problems faced when implementing differentiated learning. The methods used by English teachers at MTs Negeri 8 Banyuwangi are presented in the following data:

Table 2. The Result of Interview About How Teachers Overcome the Challenges Implementing DI

Indicator	Observation Aspect	Result of Interview	Result of Observation
Teachers overcome the challenges in English learning process	Implementation of differentiated learning	Adapt the learning system to the students, such as linking the learning material to the students' daily lives.	Using smartphones in learning activities to assist students in adding information on learning materials.

At MTs Negeri 8 Banyuwangi, teachers overcome challenges by changing their teaching methods and providing relevant context for students. This increases student motivation and learning outcomes. This shows that a contextual and practical approach can not only improve students' interest in learning but can also make the learning environment more interesting and meaningful. Referring to findings from various previous studies, such as those conducted by Marantika et al. (2023), differentiated learning is very dependent on the teacher's ability to make connections between lessons and students' lives. Therefore, ongoing support and training for teachers are essential to improving their skills in implementing effective and meaningful learning strategies.

Other way, to overcome some of the challenges faced, teachers also use students' cell phones for learning activities and assignments. This technology plays an important role in supporting small groups, especially in enriching learning resources and expanding students' access to information. By utilizing cellphone technology, students can access various kinds of information on learning materials via the internet and teachers can use it as a media for giving assignments to students (Budiyono, 2020). Using technology, also makes students' learning experience more interactive and engaging, which meets the requirements of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Overall, this research confirms that involving students in activities that connect theoretical concepts with real life is an effective strategy for increasing students' learning motivation. These results are in line with different theories of learning and are supported by previous research. Therefore, teachers must continue to create and use contextual and relevant learning strategies. In this way, they can overcome challenges and improve student achievement at MTs Negeri 8 Banyuwangi. One way teachers can help their students learn is by using today's technology, such as students' phones.

The root of differentiated learning is the mapping of students' learning needs. With this mapping, information can be obtained and ways to provide students with learning that suits their needs. Differentiated learning in English subjects in its implementation requires teacher creativity in designing and accommodating the learning needs of different students. To support the implementation of differentiated learning, supportive facilities are needed. In this study, the challenge faced by teachers in implementing differentiated learning is inadequate facilities to support differentiated learning activities. Facilities are an important factor for the successful implementation of differentiated learning, and the facilities can accommodate the needs of different students. So, to improve the quality of differentiated learning, the school must facilitate well to support differentiated learning activities at school in accordance with its objectives.

CONCLUSION

Differentiated learning is starting to be implemented in Indonesia, especially in this Merdeka curriculum. The implementation of differentiated learning must be pursued by all teachers in schools because this differentiated learning prioritizes the needs of students by accommodating differences in students. At MTs Negeri 8 Banyuwangi, there are several problems in implementing differentiated learning in the Independent Curriculum, as mentioned in the results and discussion. For the first is there are limited facilities to support the differentiated learning process, the students have lack of motivation in English learning activities which makes the learning process less interactive, the last is there is lack of stability in the implementation of differentiated learning programs. To overcome these challenges, teachers have several ways to make learning activities become more interactive and students are more motivated to learn. The first way is to create material that is relevant to student's lives and utilize the technology around them to support their teaching materials.

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