

THE CHALLENGE OF DIFFERENTIATED LEARNING IN INDONESIAN LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN HIGH SCHOOLS

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Abstrak

Pembelajaran berdiferensiasi merupakan pendekatan dalam Kurikulum Merdeka yang bertujuan untuk menyesuaikan proses belajar dengan kesiapan, minat, dan profil belajar siswa. Guru sebagai pelaksana pendidikan memiliki peran sebagai fasilitator yang merancang pengalaman belajar sesuai karakteristik siswa. Namun, dalam penerapannya di lapangan sering kali menghadapi kendala. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan tantangan yang dihadapi guru dalam menerapkan pembelajaran berdiferensiasi pada mata pelajaran bahasa Indonesia di tingkat sekolah menengah atas. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif jenis fenomenologi, melibatkan tiga guru bahasa Indonesia kelas X di SMA Negeri 7 Tanjungpinang sebagai sumber data utama. Teknik pengumpulan data melalui wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Teknik analisis data dalam penelitian ini menggunakan model Miles dan Huberman yang meliputi reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Keabsahan data diperoleh melalui triangulasi teknik dan triangulasi teori. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru menghadapi beberapa tantangan dalam pelaksanaan pembelajaran berdiferensiasi, yakni keterbatasan waktu, kondisi dan fokus belajar siswa, serta keterbatasan sarana dan prasarana pembelajaran. Meskipun demikian, para guru telah menunjukkan inisiatif dan adaptasi melalui berbagai strategi pembelajaran, pemanfaatan perangkat teknologi seperti LMS dan WhatsApp, serta menciptakan suasana belajar yang menyenangkan dan adaptif. Penelitian ini dapat memperkaya kajian pembelajaran berdiferensiasi, khususnya pada pembelajaran bahasa Indonesia di sekolah menengah atas, serta dapat menjadi referensi bagi guru dan sekolah dalam mengembangkan strategi pembelajaran yang adaptif dan sesuai prinsip Kurikulum Merdeka.

Kata Kunci: pembelajaran, berdiferensiasi, bahasa Indonesia, tantangan

Abstract

Differentiated learning is an approach in the Merdeka Curriculum that aims to tailor the learning process to students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. Teachers, as educators, play the role of facilitators who design learning experiences according to students' characteristics. However, in practice, they often face obstacles. This study aims to describe the challenges faced by teachers in implementing differentiated learning in Indonesian language lessons at the senior high school level. This study uses a qualitative phenomenological approach, involving three Indonesian language teachers of grade X at SMA Negeri 7 Tanjungpinang as the primary data sources. Data collection techniques include interviews, observations, and documentation. Data analysis in this study used the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data validity was obtained through technical triangulation and theoretical triangulation. The results of the study indicate that teachers face several challenges in implementing differentiated instruction, including time constraints, students' learning conditions and focus, and limitations in learning facilities and infrastructure. Despite these challenges, the teachers have demonstrated initiative and adaptability through various instructional strategies, the use of technological tools such as LMS and WhatsApp, and the creation of a pleasant and adaptive learning environment. This study can enrich the study of differentiated learning, particularly in Indonesian language learning in senior high schools, and can serve as a reference

for teachers and schools in developing adaptive learning strategies in line with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Keywords: learning, differentiated, Indonesian language, challenges.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Merdeka Belajar Curriculum is the latest curriculum implemented in Indonesia. This curriculum is designed to provide flexibility for educational institutions to adapt the learning process to students' learning needs (Kemendikbud, 2024). One of the main focuses of the Merdeka Curriculum is differentiated learning, an approach that acknowledges individual diversity and provides learning experiences tailored to students' needs and interests (Bayumi et al., 2021).

Differentiated learning aims to tailor the learning process to meet the needs of each student (Bayumi et al., 2021; Purba et al., 2021; Wahyuningtyas et al., 2023). This strategy is implemented by providing learning resources and teaching methods that are tailored to students' readiness, interests, and learning styles, so that learning becomes effective and meaningful. In its implementation, teachers act as facilitators who design, guide, and ensure that the learning process aligns with students' characteristics. Therefore, educators must be creative and sensitive to the diverse characteristics and learning needs of students (Wahyuningtyas et al., 2023).

According to Tomlinson (in Purba et al., 2021), differentiated learning includes variations in content, process, product, and learning environment. Content differentiation is carried out by adjusting the material according to the level of readiness, interest, or learning style of students (whether visual, auditory, or kinesthetic). Process differentiation relates to how students understand and process the material being studied through tiered activities designed to meet their needs. Product differentiation refers to the products or tasks expected of students by giving them the freedom to choose the type of

task they prefer. Meanwhile, the learning environment includes the atmosphere and classroom layout that support a comfortable learning experience.

The implementation of differentiated learning strategies can create an effective learning environment, encourage students to master the material more easily, and increase their participation in the learning process. However, its implementation in the field has not been optimal. Many teachers have not yet implemented this strategy during learning activities, especially in Indonesian language lessons that cover four language skills, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Kemendikbud, 2022).

The results of observations conducted by Wulandari, et al. (2024), show that learning that takes into account student diversity in schools that have implemented the Merdeka Curriculum is still rarely applied. Teachers tend to deliver material in the same way without considering differences in students' readiness, interests, and learning styles. As a result, students who do not understand the material feel left behind, while those who already understand it feel bored. This aligns with the findings of Halimah, et al. (2023), who revealed that many teachers still struggle to understand the concept of differentiated instruction. Some teachers believe that using differentiated instruction strategies means assigning different tasks to each student, whereas this approach should focus on adapting the learning process to accommodate students' learning needs.

Based on the initial survey results, the researcher met with an Indonesian language teacher at SMA Negeri 7 Tanjungpinang. The researcher obtained information that the school had implemented the Merdeka Curriculum in grades X and XI, while grade XII still used the

2013 curriculum, though its instruction had already adopted differentiation. Based on the interview, it was found that the teacher had implemented differentiated instruction, but still faced several challenges, particularly time constraints. The teacher required more time to prepare materials, strategies, and learning resources tailored to students' needs.

Therefore, this study is important to identify the challenges faced by teachers in implementing differentiated learning, particularly in Indonesian language learning at the senior high school level. The results of this study are expected to provide a realistic picture of the challenges encountered in the field and the strategies teachers use to overcome these challenges. This study can serve as a reference for teachers and schools in developing adaptive learning strategies that are in line with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum.

2. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological research design. According to Creswell & Poth (2016), phenomenology is a research method that describes or depicts the life experiences of several individuals related to a concept or phenomenon. This approach and research design are used to describe in depth the challenges faced by teachers in implementing differentiated learning in Indonesian language subjects at the senior high school level.

This study was conducted at State Senior High School 7 Tanjungpinang on Jalan Kampung Sungai Carang Kilometer 13, Tanjungpinang Timur District, Riau Islands Province. The researcher chose this school as the research location because State Senior High School 7 Tanjungpinang is one of the Leading Schools in Tanjungpinang that has implemented the Merdeka Curriculum and uses a differentiated learning approach in its teaching. The subjects of this study were three Indonesian language teachers in grade X who served as informants

providing information on the implementation of differentiated learning.

In this study, the researcher acted as the main instrument directly involved in data collection and analysis, assisted by observation guidelines and interview guidelines (Sugiyono, 2015). Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth interviews with three teachers, direct observation of the learning process in the classroom, and documentation. Data analysis utilized the Miles and Huberman model, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Sugiyono, 2015). Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources and techniques to confirm the validity of the research findings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the interview results, it was found that Indonesian language teachers in phase E at SMA Negeri 7 Tanjungpinang faced a number of challenges in implementing differentiated learning. These challenges had an impact on the learning process in the classroom. The following are some of these challenges.

Time constraints

Based on the interviews conducted, it was found that differentiated learning faces a number of challenges in its implementation. One of these challenges is caused by time constraints. This was expressed by informant 1 as follows.

"Usually, the limitation is time. When we play games, we have to consider the time they need to complete their assignments, so we explain it again. What's more, sometimes students don't understand, some of them still don't understand but they try, but we can't do it right away, maybe this is the assignment, right? It's not possible to do it like that. So, in my opinion, the main challenge is the limited time because we have to play games, apply the learning model, give assignments, and then reflect on it, so the time is usually more limited."

Differentiated learning requires teachers to prepare various approaches according to students' needs. However, the time available in one session is often insufficient to accommodate all the planned strategies. The same challenge was also conveyed by informant 2 as follows.

“Yes, more or less the same, because the time is limited, and children have different learning styles. However, if we apply the learning method and then combine it, it might be maximized, but there might be some materials that are not maximized. That means there is still time.”

Teachers need more time to ensure that all students fully understand the material. Although the strategy has been well designed, some material is sometimes not conveyed optimally. Informant 1 added the following.

“Yes, it can also affect and hinder learning progress. For example, they are not ready for the assignment, even though we have made it easier, but if time is limited, it means we have to go back to it the following week. So the time is hindered, and the learning progress becomes shorter as well. It also slows down task completion, so students have to repeat the learning from the previous night, and suddenly the next week we have to repeat the learning again like that—that’s the challenge.”

These conditions have an impact on the learning process in the classroom. One of them is slowing down the completion of student assignments and causing teachers to repeat the material in the next meeting. However, teachers continue to seek solutions. Teachers first identify the source of the problem, then adjust their strategies so that learning objectives can still be achieved. This was revealed by informant 1 as follows.

“Usually, we identify the source of the problem first. If the source of the problem is time, then we have to find a way to reduce the time needed so that everything can be

achieved. Then, we also look for learning solutions together. Perhaps the students are bored, so we have to find a way to get them back in the mood to learn. From experience, we have learned how to save time and get the students back in the mood to learn.”

Teachers have made efforts to ensure that learning is effective. Teachers provide additional guidance outside of school hours, individual assistance, and peer tutoring. This is explained by informant 2 as follows.

“It's more or less the same as providing guidance to students. If they don't understand, they are given more guidance, or after class. Or during breaks, special guidance is provided to children who, for example, don't understand the material. They are given the opportunity for guidance when the teacher is free, or they can ask their peers or peer tutors for help.”

Time constraints provide teachers with opportunities to innovate in managing classroom learning. Teachers strive to ensure that all students are accommodated according to their needs, even though learning time is limited. These efforts demonstrate teachers' commitment to providing an adaptive learning process.

Student Learning Conditions and Focus

Based on the interviews conducted, it was found that differentiated learning faces a number of challenges in its implementation. One of them is related to student attendance and conditions in the classroom. This was revealed by informant 3 as follows.

“Now, the challenge is that sometimes there are children who don't come to class, and sometimes there are children who sleep. I call the child and ask why they are sleeping. Then, I ask again, sometimes there are children who often don't come to class, which is actually disturbing...”

Some students are sometimes absent, lack focus, or appear sleepy during the learning process. This situation is normal in the learning

process, but it remains a challenge for teachers in building student engagement in the classroom. Teachers try to understand the conditions of their students so that they remain active in class. Informant 3 added the following.

“If what's important is that the children understand and feel comfortable learning, then it's easy, it just happens. For example, sometimes we use icebreaking so that the children don't get sleepy, that's all.”

Teachers also strive to create a pleasant learning atmosphere through icebreaking, group discussions, and assignments tailored to students' interests and learning styles. This strategy is implemented to keep students engaged, enthusiastic, and comfortable throughout the learning process. Challenges that arise become opportunities for teachers to continue innovating in creating more interactive and adaptive learning experiences.

Facilities and Infrastructure

Based on the interviews conducted, it was found that differentiated learning faces a number of challenges in its implementation. One of them is the limited facilities and infrastructure. This was revealed by informant 3 as follows.

“Well, as for limitations, how do you do it, because there aren't many projectors here, so sometimes there aren't enough plugs. Actually, these are classic problems, but when laptops are not supported, sometimes it takes a long time, so we have no choice but to send them the link.”

Limited facilities and infrastructure, such as the availability of projectors (LCD) and other supporting devices, also affect the learning process. This situation prolongs learning time because teachers need to adjust to the available facilities. To overcome these obstacles, teachers continue to strive to make learning activities effective. Informant 3 added the following.

“Yes, like the Infocus source, but besides Infocus, we can also send it to the LMS, send it to the group, like that. So, it really depends, if you want to do the work on the LMS, go ahead, like that. Actually, these limitations do not hinder the learning process. If we cannot use a projector, we can still use the LMS or use PowerPoint, for example. Because the children are allowed to bring their cell phones, it's safe.”

Teachers show initiative by utilizing various alternative media. The strategies employed by teachers to address these challenges include utilizing alternative tools such as Learning Management Systems (LMS) and WhatsApp groups as supplementary learning platforms. Students are also permitted to use personal devices like smartphones to access learning materials, ensuring that the learning process remains effective and adaptable. This demonstrates that, despite limited resources in schools, teachers' creativity and the use of digital technology can sustain differentiated learning.

Overall, teachers have made efforts to implement differentiated learning to the fullest extent possible in the classroom. Challenges such as time constraints, student conditions, and limitations in facilities and infrastructure remain obstacles that affect the learning process. Nevertheless, teachers at SMA Negeri 7 Tanjungpinang actively seek solutions to address these challenges through professional development, collaboration, strategy adjustments, and an approach that prioritizes student comfort and engagement during the learning process. This demonstrates that existing limitations are not obstacles but rather drive teachers to continue innovating in creating learning experiences aligned with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum.

DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the study, the implementation of differentiated learning in Indonesian language subjects in senior high

schools still faces a number of challenges. These challenges are related to time constraints, student learning conditions and focus, as well as limited facilities and infrastructure. These challenges are explained as follows.

Time constraints

The first challenge faced by teachers in implementing differentiated learning is time constraints (Hermansyah, 2023; Supriana et al., 2024; Widiastari et al., 2024). Teachers need to prepare various techniques, methods, and materials to accommodate the diverse learning needs of students. However, the available time is often insufficient to implement all planned strategies optimally. This finding aligns with the research by Kusasi, et al. (2024), which states that teachers face challenges in managing time because they must adapt teaching strategies to students' learning needs. As a result, not all materials can be effectively conveyed in a single session.

This poses a challenge for teachers because each school has already allocated time for each teacher and their respective subjects (Hermansyah, 2023; Widiastari et al., 2024). Time allocation is related to lesson planning. In the lesson planning process, teachers play a role in designing and modifying teaching modules to suit classroom conditions (Purba et al., 2021; Wahyuningtyas et al., 2023). This also includes managing learning time in the classroom. Therefore, limited time can affect the effectiveness of learning implementation. This is also emphasized by Marantika, et al. (2023), who stated that in diverse classrooms, teachers need additional time to develop appropriate differentiated learning plans and implementation.

Student Learning Conditions and Focus

The second challenge faced by teachers in implementing differentiated learning is the condition and focus of students in the classroom. In practice, some students who are consistently absent, lack focus, or show boredom in learning

become challenges in building student engagement during the learning process. This is related to learning motivation, which can affect student engagement and learning outcomes. According to Hamidah (2023), student learning outcomes can be influenced by several aspects. These aspects include internal factors (motivation and interest) and external factors (environment, social factors, and teaching methods).

According to Marantika, et al. (2023), differences in student characteristics, such as motivation, interest, and readiness to learn, require teachers to continuously adjust their approach so that all students remain actively engaged during the learning process. Some students show a lack of enthusiasm and interest in the learning process, which creates challenges for teachers who are trying to foster an engaging learning environment. Teachers are faced with the task of ensuring that all students remain active and engaged.

Facing these challenges, teachers have used various strategies to build student motivation by playing games and icebreaking when students start to look bored, especially if learning takes place during the day. Sopiani (2023), also mentions that learning success does not only depend on the material presented, but also on the teacher's ability to maintain student enthusiasm and participation. Teachers also encourage students to learn outside the classroom, such as in the library or school grounds, to create an environment that invites students to learn. This underscores the importance of differentiated instruction that accommodates students' interests and learning profiles (Tomlinson, 2001).

Facilities and Infrastructure

The final challenge faced by teachers in implementing differentiated learning is the availability of facilities and infrastructure (Hermansyah, 2023; Supriana et al., 2024). In the learning process, the availability of adequate facilities is a crucial supporting factor in creating

effective learning. Teachers have noted that in certain situations, such as limited access to projectors and textbooks, they must seek alternatives to ensure the learning process continues (Hermansyah, 2023).

Some teachers overcome these limitations by utilizing digital devices, such as WhatsApp groups, LMS, and students' personal devices. This aligns with the views of Kusasi, et al. (2024), who argue that the use of technology significantly assists teachers in overcoming limitations in facilities and infrastructure. Marantika, et al. (2023), also highlight that the use of digital media has become a common solution to support flexible and responsive learning processes tailored to students' conditions. These challenges highlight the importance of utilizing various support systems, such as the use of learning technology (Bayumi et al., 2021; Purba et al., 2021; Tomlinson, 2001; Wahyuningtyas et al., 2023).

Differentiated instruction in high schools faces several challenges, ranging from time constraints, student learning conditions and focus, to limitations in supporting facilities and infrastructure. In response to these challenges, teachers actively demonstrate efforts to adapt teaching strategies and utilize available technology to ensure the learning process continues. These efforts reflect the objectives of differentiated learning as described by Wahyuningtyas, et al. (2023), where teachers can be more creative in designing learning activities, identifying effective strategies, and exploring new ways to support students' learning processes.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the implementation of differentiated learning in Indonesian language lessons in phase E at SMA Negeri 7 Tanjungpinang has been well attempted by teachers. However, in its application, it still faces a number of challenges that affect the learning

process. These challenges include time constraints, student learning conditions and focus, and limitations in supporting facilities and infrastructure.

Time constraints are a major obstacle, as teachers need to adapt their strategies, methods, and materials to the diverse needs and characteristics of their students, while class time is often insufficient to implement all of the planned strategies. Additionally, the diversity of student conditions, such as inconsistent attendance, lack of focus, or boredom in learning, requires teachers to continuously innovate in creating engaging learning experiences, fostering active student participation, and creating an environment that promotes learning. On the other hand, limitations in facilities, such as projectors and textbooks, encourage teachers to utilize technology and alternative devices, such as LMS, WhatsApp, and students' personal phones, to ensure that learning remains effective.

Despite facing a number of challenges, teachers have shown active efforts to overcome them. Teachers have made adjustments, utilized digital technology, and created a pleasant learning atmosphere through activities such as icebreaking, group discussions, and creative assignments. These efforts reflect the implementation of differentiated learning in line with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which is to provide space for each student to learn according to their individual needs and potential.

This study has limitations because at the time of the study, the government had announced plans to implement a new curriculum that would replace the Merdeka Curriculum. This situation caused some teachers to begin making adjustments, resulting in the implementation of differentiated learning not being fully optimized. This situation is not a weakness of the school or teachers, but rather part of the educational policy transition process. The findings of this study contribute theoretically by enriching the literature on differentiated instruction, particularly in

Indonesian language instruction at the high school level, and by strengthening existing theories regarding the implementation of differentiation strategies in heterogeneous classrooms. Practically, this study can serve as a reference for teachers in developing adaptive strategies tailored to students' learning needs.

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