

PERCEPTIONS OF HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS IN PALU CITY TOWARDS DIFFERENTIATED LEARNING

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Abstract

Differentiated learning is an approach that adapts to the learning needs of each student. Teachers provide facilities that suit students' individual needs, bearing in mind that each student has unique characteristics and cannot be treated uniformly. This article aims to provide a deeper understanding of learning differentiation and explore teachers' perceptions regarding its implementation in the classroom. The results of interview research show that the purpose of differentiated learning is to coordinate learning by paying attention to students' interests, readiness and learning preferences. This aims to help all students achieve learning goals, increase motivation and learning outcomes, and establish a harmonious relationship between teachers and students, so that students are more enthusiastic about learning. In conclusion, differentiated learning gives students the opportunity to learn naturally and efficiently with the help of teachers who are able to combine the required methods and approaches. There are several obstacles that arise, such as limited facilities and infrastructure that support the differentiated learning process, teachers need time to prepare learning instruments, appropriate methods and appropriate media, implementing differentiated learning requires relatively high costs and teachers must have good classroom management skills.

Keywords: Perception, Teachers, Differentiated Learning

INTRODUCTION

Differentiated learning is not a new concept in the world of education, but there are still few educators who apply it in the learning process. This approach gives students the freedom to be creative according to their abilities without any pressure or coercion from other parties. Differentiated learning is in line with Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy which emphasizes the importance of guiding children according to their nature to achieve the highest safety and happiness, both as individuals and members of society (Herwina, 2021). Differentiated learning is an educator's effort to adjust learning

activities in the classroom so that they can meet students' learning needs. This includes their readiness to accept new material, interests, and diverse learning profiles or styles (Wulandari, 2022).

This means that educators give freedom to students, but still provide guidance and direction so that they do not lose direction or endanger themselves. The nature of children in question refers to their potential or abilities, so that children are given the freedom to develop these potentials and abilities. This requires educators to continuously understand students' strengths and weaknesses in learning activities. The demand for professionalism from educators in differentiated learning means that some educators are not yet fully able to implement this approach. Educators are used to a one-way learning system that is centered on themselves, whereas in differentiated learning, educators act as facilitators so that learning focuses on the students.

Differentiated learning can be effective if teachers and students trust each other in the learning process. According to Tomlinson, Ann & Moon (2014) and Marlina (2020), there are several important points in differentiated learning: 1) Differences in the classroom are something natural and valuable. Teachers must embrace and understand students with a variety of experiences and different techniques. These differences are challenges and uniqueness that teachers need to respect; 2) Teachers must realize that every student has hidden potential and capacity. Teachers need to have a positive view that students' greatest strengths may not yet be visible, so it is the teacher who must explore this potential in order to develop optimally; 3) Teachers have a responsibility as pioneers in facilitating student success. In a differentiated classroom, student success is measured by growth toward achieving goals and exceeding set targets. This growth does not occur instantly or coincidentally, but rather depends on the teacher's role in making learning decisions; 4) Teachers must believe that they are champions for all students in differentiated learning.

Apart from that, the general aim of differentiated learning according to Marlina (2020) is to coordinate learning that focuses on students' learning interests, their readiness for learning, and learning preferences. Specifically, differentiated learning has five goals: 1) helping all students achieve learning goals; 2) increasing student motivation through learning stimuli so that their learning outcomes increase; 3) establishing harmonious relationships in the learning process so that students are more enthusiastic; 4) encourage students to become independent learners and respect diversity; 5) increasing teacher satisfaction by providing challenges that encourage creativity and development of teaching competence. The differentiated learning paradigm views each student as a unique individual. This approach aims to meet the specific needs of each

student. Individual differences must be taken into account because each student has a different background. Students grow up in diverse environments and cultures, so learning must be done in various ways to understand their interests and talents. According to Maryam (2021), there are three types of differentiated learning: 1) content differentiation; 2) process differentiation; 3) product differentiation.

Differentiated learning is an effort or process to adapt the learning system in the classroom according to the diverse learning needs and abilities of each student. The main principle in differentiated learning is the recognition that each student has unique abilities, abilities and different ways of understanding subject matter. Thus, differentiated learning involves a series of decisions based on common sense made by teachers to create learning that focuses on students and their learning needs. These decisions include how to create a conducive learning environment, defining learning objectives, and ongoing assessment processes to ensure effective classes.

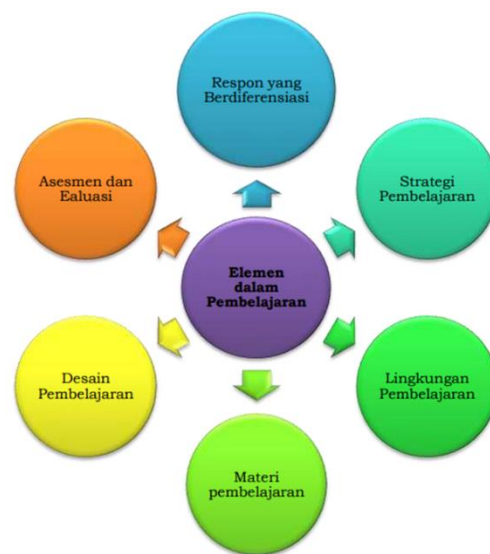


Figure 1. Learning elements (Marlina, Guide to Differentiated Learning Models in Inclusive Schools)

Differentiated learning does not mean that the teacher teaches 32 students in 32 different ways or gives more questions to students who are faster than others. This is also not about grouping students who don't understand with those who don't understand, and those who are smart with those who are smart, or giving different tasks to each student so that the learning process becomes chaotic. Nor is it about teachers having to make several lesson plans at once and running around helping student A, B, or C at the same time. Differentiated learning aims to make it easier, not difficult, for teachers and

students to carry out the learning and teaching process (Tomlison, 2000). The first step in implementing differentiated learning is to map student learning needs. Students' learning needs can be divided into three main aspects, namely learning readiness, learning profile, and interests and talents. Differentiated learning can be analogous to an equalizer button. To produce a harmonious sound, one has to adjust the equalizer knob by raising or lowering it. This equalizer button is likened to students' needs, which need to be regulated so that they can receive the material appropriately and produce appropriate learning products in class. Equalizer buttons provide guidance for teachers in determining student readiness levels (Tomlison, 2001).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative method. Qualitative research is an approach to study that follows traditional methods in social, behavioral and health science research. In this research, researchers begin by identifying a problem that needs to be solved, then formulate questions that, if answered, will help solve the problem. These questions are answered by collecting and analyzing data from individuals who can provide relevant information (Creswell, 2018). This research uses a phenomenological approach. This phenomenological approach is based on the researcher's interest in studying in depth the phenomena experienced by key informants. The aim of this research is to describe and analyze phenomena, events, social activities, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions and thoughts of individuals and groups (Sumarsih et al, 2022).

The study in this article is focused on discussing teachers' perceptions at the high school level regarding the implementation of differentiated learning. This research aims to find out and describe a general picture of the opinions of teachers in high schools in implementing differentiated learning. This research was conducted through interviews at several high schools in Palu City with a total of 5 informants, all of whom were teachers who had implemented differentiated learning. This research interview contains 8 focus questions. The following is a grid of interview questions presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Interview Question Grid

Statement Focus
Focus 1: Teachers' General Knowledge about Differentiated Learning
Focus 2: Teacher Practices related to Student Readiness
Focus 3: Teacher Practices related to Learning Profiles

Focus 4: Teacher Practices related to the Learning Environment

Focus 5: Teacher Practices related to Content

Focus 6: Teacher Practices regarding Process & Product

Focus 7: Teacher Practices i regarding Assessment

Focus 8: Teacher Challenges in Implementing Differentiated Learning

Research analysis was carried out in stages according to Miles & Huberman (2014) which are shown in the image below.

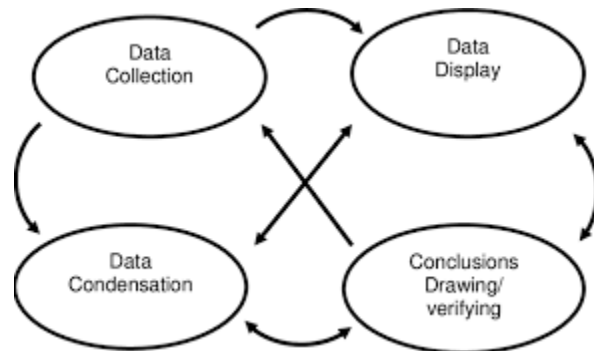


Figure 2. Research stages according to Miles & Huberman (2014)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Differentiated learning is a method used by teachers to meet the needs of each student. In this process, students study subject matter according to their respective abilities, interests and needs, so that they do not feel frustrated or failed in their learning experience (Tomlison, 2017).

This research describes the perceptions of high school teachers in Palu City regarding teachers' general knowledge about differentiated learning, teacher practices related to student readiness, teacher practices related to learning profiles, teacher practices related to learning environments, teacher practices related to content, teacher practices regarding processes & products, teacher practices regarding assessment, and teacher challenges in implementing differentiated learning. Five teachers or respondents gave their views, which will be described in the following discussion.

1. Teachers' General Knowledge About Differentiated Learning

Based on the results of the interviews, all 5 teachers already had knowledge related to differentiated learning. Differentiated learning is an approach that recognizes that each student has unique differences and dynamics. Therefore, schools need to plan a differentiated learning approach that involves several important steps. First, evaluate the current curriculum to assess its suitability to student strengths and weaknesses. Second, designing school plans and strategies that are in accordance with the curriculum and learning methods that can be used to meet the needs of various students. Third, clarify the teacher's role in providing the support needed to meet students' individual needs. Fourth, regular evaluation and assessment of the achievement of the school plan to ensure the successful implementation of this approach (Marlina, 2020).

To implement differentiated learning in the classroom, teachers need to take several important steps, namely: (1) mapping student learning needs based on three main aspects, namely learning readiness, learning interest, and student learning profile, using methods such as interviews, observation, or surveys using questionnaires, and so on; (2) designing differentiated learning based on the results of the mapping, by providing a variety of choices of learning strategies, materials and methods; (3) evaluate and reflect on the learning that has been implemented to increase its effectiveness.

In facing challenges and obstacles in implementing differentiated learning, teachers need to maintain a positive attitude by doing the following things: (1) Continue learning and sharing experiences with colleagues who experience similar challenges (forming a Learning Community). (2) Provide support and encouragement to colleagues. (3) Implement what has been learned and can be applied, even though it is not perfect. (4) Committed to continuing to evaluate and improve the learning process that has been implemented.

2. Teacher Practices Related to Student Readiness

Readiness is basically the physical and mental ability to learn, which also includes expectations regarding the abilities possessed and the background to do something. Several factors that indicate readiness to learn include physical, mental, emotional conditions, needs, motivation, goals, and knowledge. According to the results of interviews with teachers, students showed strong readiness to learn in physical and emotional aspects, where all students in the class did not experience significant obstacles related to their physical and emotional conditions.

However, readiness to learn in terms of knowledge, needs, motives and goals is still low. Readiness to learn in terms of knowledge refers to students' understanding

of the material that has been taught previously and the material that will be taught next. Observation results show that the percentage of students' knowledge is still low, indicating that they have not fully mastered the initial material. This implies that students may face difficulties in learning the next material, so efforts are needed from teachers to develop strategies that can support students' cognitive development.

Need refers to the feeling of wanting to have or get the subject matter being taught. There are conscious needs and there are unconscious ones. Unconscious needs tend not to provide encouragement to try. On the other hand, recognized needs provide motivation to strive to achieve learning goals. The low percentage of students' learning readiness in terms of needs, motivation and goals indicates that students may not be fully aware of their learning needs.

3. Teacher Practices Related to the Learning Environment

Based on the results of interviews, in the observed learning practices, the author found that the initial learning conditions had not reached the expected level of effectiveness. There are several indicators that are not met, such as inadequate interaction between teachers and students so that teachers cannot manage the class well, the set learning objectives are not fully achieved thereby hampering the learning process, and student involvement is still less active while the teacher's role is more dominant in providing explanations rather than giving students opportunities to discuss or practice. This condition causes the formation of a learning environment that is less effective in achieving the learning goals that should be achieved. Heryanti et al (2021) state that the learning environment can have a positive or negative impact on student achievement. Incompatibility of the learning process with student needs can result in learning discomfort for students, which in the end can reduce their interest in the subjects being taught.

An effective learning environment will provide optimal support for students in their learning process. This means that the learning that takes place in the classroom not only affects students' cognitive abilities, but also their overall responses and behavior. According to Heryanti, Tanzeh, and Masrokan (2021), the learning environment has a significant impact on students' abilities, especially in terms of learning achievement. Another study by Aini and Taman (2012) also shows that the learning environment has a real influence on student learning achievement. The teacher's role in creating an effective learning environment is very important, because this will facilitate student development both in cognitive and other aspects. Therefore, the teacher's readiness and learning planning must be in line with the class conditions at the previous meeting. In this way, teachers can build a learning environment that supports students' holistic growth optimally.

4. Content-Related Teacher Practices

A key component in content differentiation is the teacher's ability to provide various sources or learning materials that are appropriate to each student's level of understanding. This is achieved by paying attention to the availability of learning assessment materials. By analyzing the needs for the material to be delivered, teachers can prepare the material by checking the available resources. This approach is not just about creating without a foundation, but also taking into account underlying industry norms. Teachers can differentiate their curriculum by offering resources that make it easier for students to access the core curriculum and additional materials. In addition to the printed materials usually available in classrooms and libraries, students can also obtain additional content through electronic media. So that students can access material anytime and anywhere, teachers can provide resources in the form of animated learning videos, PDF files, e-books and PowerPoint.

The content approach to learning, where material is presented only using a blackboard and books, has proven to be very limited, especially in arts and culture subjects with dance as material. Based on direct observations and analysis carried out by researchers, it appears that the content presented is very monotonous and less interactive. There is no use of electronic media or other tools that can strengthen learning concepts. In fact, the use of teaching materials or picture story books can increase students' interest in learning (Yonanda et al., 2023). Therefore, the process of presenting this concept needs to be improved by seeking references from various sources to make it better in the future.

5. Teacher Practices Regarding Process & Product

After collecting data about student needs, the instructor designs learning by developing appropriate modules. Teachers in this study used a variety of teaching strategies tailored to students' learning preferences. This is in line with research by Sukendra (2015), which states that teachers are responsible for choosing the right models, methods and strategies to encourage student learning.

Teachers provide opportunities for groups of students to discuss and work together during the learning process, considering the different learning styles of students. Teachers encourage students' active participation through group discussions and collaboration exercises to create a more meaningful learning experience. This method aims to foster an atmosphere that supports students in sharing ideas and opinions in addition to conveying knowledge. By offering this variety of options, educators support social skills, critical thinking, and teamwork, in addition to meeting each student's individual learning preferences.

The process approach involves the responses given by students during learning. In this activity, the students' response was very positive and enthusiastic. They are given the freedom to express opinions and arguments, as well as space to discuss and solve problems together. They also demonstrated several movements as a group. Researchers assess that the process approach in this class is quite good and students understand the material very well. This highly interactive learning process also reflects the concept of independent learning, where learning takes place actively and responsively, giving students space to manage their knowledge better.

Based on the concept of product differentiation, teachers help students understand the material in a way that allows them to produce various products as a form of measuring their understanding. Students have created various products in the format of recordings, video clips and observation notes. At this stage, the aim is to use students' works related to the subject matter to concretely evaluate their understanding. In line with the views of Faiz (2022), teachers are responsible for setting achievement standards, designing curriculum, and observing the results of product creation.

By dividing students into study groups that vary in skill level, this approach is consistent with field practice. Students show enthusiasm during the product creation process because they are given the freedom to express themselves. They can optimize their creativity by creating products that suit their individual interests and learning styles. The various projects that students produce in class are the result of product differentiation choices. From this research, it was concluded that giving students the freedom to make decisions based on their interests will motivate them to show original creativity.

6. Teachers' Practices Concerning Assessment

Based on the interview results, the results show that the teacher's role in evaluating classroom learning includes several aspects, including:

- a. Providing assessments to students,
- b. Assessing the level of success of students in the learning process,
- c. Assessing the achievement of predetermined learning objectives,
- d. Measuring time efficiency in the learning process,
- e. Determine the benefits of the learning objectives that have been implemented during learning process.

Teachers use various types of assessment in the Merdeka curriculum, including diagnostic, formative, and summative. Diagnostic assessments are conducted to evaluate students' knowledge and skills and to identify their learning needs. Formative

assessment aims to provide feedback to teachers and students so that the learning process can be improved. Meanwhile, a summative assessment is carried out at the end of learning to assess the achievement of overall learning objectives. In the context of differentiated learning, teachers must carry out different assessments for content, processes and products. Content differentiation can include cooperative tasks, mind mapping, higher-order thinking activities, and a focus on learning material. Process differentiation can be done by giving students varied assignments to ensure maximum understanding of the material. Meanwhile, product differentiation is carried out through tiered assignments, homework modifications, or creative projects.

After determining the appropriate type of differentiation assessment, teachers need to design an appropriate assessment rubric. In developing this rubric, teachers must consider student characteristics, the suitability of the assessment to learning objectives, and the ease of using the rubric to provide feedback to students. For example, in teaching writing fantasy story texts with a differentiated approach, teachers must use assessments based on the final product in the form of fantasy story texts written by students. This assessment should differentiate between students' auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learning styles. Assessment rubrics must also take these differences into account to ensure that all students can be assessed fairly without any assessment gaps.

7. Teacher Challenges in Implementing Differentiated Learning

The implementation of differentiated learning has gone well, although it still faces several significant challenges. From the principal's perspective, one of the main challenges in implementing differentiated learning is the availability of adequate facilities and infrastructure. This is considered a difficult matter because the differentiated learning process requires adequate accommodation for the differentiation of learning processes, content and products.

One of the other challenges in implementing differentiated learning is the requirement for teachers to arrange multimethods, multimedia and diverse resources so that learning can meet the learning styles of various students. Putting this all together requires significant additional time for teachers, which is a challenge due to the time allocations that schools have set for each teacher and their respective subjects. Allocation of learning time is closely related to the learning planning process. Learning planning is a scientific, realistic process and uses learning systems and technology to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of learning implementation (Majid, 2005). Combs (1982) also emphasized that learning planning is the rational application of systematic analysis.

Implementing differentiated learning requires high costs because schools must

have broad access to various resources and learning materials to support the needs of each student. Apart from that, it is also necessary to provide a variety of learning media that suit students' individual needs. This will obviously require ongoing financial support, which many schools may find difficult to provide. Apart from the financial aspect, implementing differentiated learning also requires effective classroom management skills from teachers. They must be able to maintain a balance between providing individual attention to students and maintaining overall classroom conditions. Good classroom management is the key to creating an effective learning environment, where educational interactions between students and teachers can occur optimally.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research through interviews, in the learning process, teachers have implemented three elements of differentiation learning, namely product, process and content differentiation. In product differentiation, teachers give different tasks to students based on their level of understanding. In process differentiation, teachers use a variety of teaching strategies according to students' learning preferences, including allowing group discussions and providing extra time and help. For content differentiation, teachers provide access to various learning resources, provide encouragement and guidance. They also support and encourage students who have difficulty understanding the material. However, in implementing product differentiation, teachers often have difficulty determining the appropriate type of product, considering the diversity of students and the need to provide appropriate treatment for each individual. Mapping students' readiness and learning needs must be based on learning profile indicators that enable students to learn more naturally and efficient. The teacher's role in combining the models, approaches and methods needed to design material is very important. The aim is to increase motivation and learning outcomes by prioritizing harmonious relationships between students and teachers so that students are more enthusiastic about learning. The role of creative teachers is very necessary in differentiated learning to bring students towards success and happiness in learning.

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