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Teachers' Perceptions of Differentiated Learning in Merdeka Curriculum in Elementary Schools

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ABSTRAK

Kurikulum besifat dinamis, artinya dapat terus berubah sesuai dengan zamannya. Merdeka merupakan kurikulum yang bertujuan untuk mengoptimalkan bakat dan minat siswa yang berkarakter dan juga berkompeten. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk menganalisis persepsi guru tentang pembelajaran berdiferensiasi di kurikulum merdeka khususnya pada jenjang sekolah dasar. Jenis penelitian ini yaitu kualitatif. Metode yang digunakan adalah metode campuran yang menggunakan kuisioner dan wawancara kepada 30 guru. Instrument yang digunakan dalam mengumpulkan data yaitu kuesioner. Data penelitian dianalisis menggunakan analisis triangulasi data. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa antusias guru untuk mempelajari kurikulum baru sangat tinggi, keikutsertaan guru dalam diklat kurikulum merdeka juga sudah cukup tinggi. Namun, hal tersebut tidak berbanding lurus dengan pemahaman guru mengenai pembelajaran berdiferensiasi. Hanya beberapa guru sudah paham tentang pembelajaran berdiferensiasi, serta sebagian besar guru belum melaksanakan pembelajaran berdiferensiasi di kelasnya. Disimpulkan bahwa guru memahami perlunya perubahan kurikulum yang mengikuti perkembangan masyarakat, sehingga guru tidak terbebani dengan perubahan kurikulum.

ABSTRACT

The curriculum is dynamic, meaning it can continue to change according to the times. The Merdeka Curriculum is a curriculum that aims to optimize the talents and interests of students with character and competence. This study aimed to analyze teachers' perceptions of differentiated learning in the independent curriculum, especially at the elementary school level. This type of research is qualitative. The method used is a mixed method using questionnaires and interviews with 30 teachers. The instrument used in collecting data is a questionnaire. Research data were analyzed using data triangulation analysis. The study results show that the teacher's enthusiasm for learning the new curriculum is very high, and the participation of teachers in the independent curriculum training is also relatively high. However, this is not directly proportional to the teacher's understanding of differentiated learning. Only a few teachers already understand differentiated learning, and most must implement it in their classes. It was concluded that teachers understand the need for curriculum changes that follow community developments, so teachers are not burdened with curriculum changes.

1. INTRODUCTION

The curriculum is a guideline for the implementation of learning activities to achieve certain educational goals. A good curriculum is a curriculum that is able to adopt to its era (Tarihoran et al., 2021; Supriyono, 2022). The curriculum is dynamic and continues to be developed or adapted according to the context and characteristics of students, to build competencies according to student needs. The existence of demands from the times makes it necessary to improve the curriculum. Alteration in the curriculum are logical consequences of changes in the political, socio-cultural, economic, and science and technology systems in the society of the nation and state. The curriculum needs to be developed dynamically by the demands and changes that occur in society as a concept that must be able to answer all challenges where the curriculum is implemented (Nugraha, 2022; Dewi et al., 2023).

One of the changes in education needs in Indonesia is due to the pandemic factor (Kusuma & Hamidah, 2020; Maulana & Hamidi, 2020; Syarifudin, 2020). The rapid spread of the COVID-19 virus has made the Minister of Education and Culture (Mendikbud) implement a learning policy to be carried out online from the homes of their respective students. Learning activities carried out remotely certainly experience many difficulties even from various factors such as geographical conditions, the economy, the initial state of school before the pandemic, and applicable policies (Donnelly & Patrinos, 2021; Iwu, 2021). The obstacle to online learning are the limited internet connection experienced by students as well as many

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other obstacles that cause students to experience deterioration in cognitive, social and behavioral development. (Minsih et al., 2021; Nafrin & Hudaidah, 2021). The obstacles experienced by students during learning at home result in learning loss (Engzell et al., 2021; Putri & Kaltsum, 2022).

In efforts to restore learning and catch up with learning (learning loss) the government is developing an Merdeka curriculum as a more flexible curriculum framework while focusing on essential materials and developing the character and competence of students. There are 3 main characteristics of the Merdeka curriculum, namely: 1) project-based learning for the development of soft skills and character according to the profile of Pancasila students; 2) Focus on essential materials so that there is sufficient time for deep learning for basic competencies such as literacy and numeracy; 3) Flexibility for teachers to carry out differentiated learning according to student abilities. (Miftakhuddin et al., 2022; Sumaludin, 2022).

Talking about differentiated learning is closely related to the adjustment of learning to the needs of students. The characteristics and profiles of students who come from different backgrounds, result in different learning needs (Hidayati et al., 2022; Lubaba & Alfiansyah, 2022; N. Rachmawati et al., 2022). Not only that the different levels of intelligence of students also make the need for different teacher treatment of students. It is the students with all their differences that make it necessary to apply differentiated learning in the classroom. Differentiated learning is learning that gives students the freedom to learn comfortably, according to their potential, uniqueness, and conditions, so that children feel comfortable in the learning climate created by the teacher. (Fitra, 2022; Lestariningrum, 2022)

One of the theories behind the need for differentiated learning is the theory initiated by Howard Gardner, namely multiple intelligences or in Indonesian referred to as compound intelligence. Intelligence contains a person's ability to solve real problems and in various situations (Moningka, 2022; Sutaris, 2022). So that a person can be equated with intelligence if he can solve problems in real life, not just a theory (Hernaeny et al., 2021; Irawati et al., 2022). In this theory of compound intelligence, it is stated that there are nine forms of intelligence, including 1) linguistic intelligence; 2) logical-mathematical intelligence; 3) spatial-visual intelligence; 4) kinesthetic-physical intelligence; 5) musical intelligence; 6) intrapersonal intelligence; 7) interpersonal intelligence; 8) naturalist intelligence; and 9) existential intelligence (Gardner, 2013; Suardana et al., 2022). Of the nine bits of intelligence possessed by the child, a learning strategy is needed that can be used by teachers in teaching learning oriented to students' compound intelligence (Anam, 2021; Celik, 2019).

In the previous curriculum, learning was focused on students as a learning center, while the Merdeka curriculum was made more varied and Merdeka according to the talents and interests of each student (Ananda, 2022; Usman et al., 2022). The concept of differentiated learning is one of the ways teachers empower students to explore all the potential possessed by the nature of the times and the nature of nature (Bayumi et al., 2021; Kasman & Lubis, 2022). This learning is an adjustment to students' interests, learning preferences, readiness to achieve improved learning outcomes (Marlina, 2019; Hasanah et al., 2022). It is necessary to map the learning needs of students, to find out the types of needs of each student, so that the right services can be provided for children at school (Nugroho & Minsih, 2021; Andriansyah et el., 2022).

The implementation of differentiated learning is in line with the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum. The implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in the 2022/2023 school year in education units is carried out through Merdeka channels. Based on the Decree of the Head of the Education Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Number 025/H/KR/2022 concerning the implementing education unit for the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum through Merdeka channels in the 2022/2023 academic year phase I, schools can implement an Merdeka curriculum with 3 categories, namely: a) Merdeka learning; b) self-sustaining change; and c) Merdeka sharing.

The results of the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in driving schools have been carried out optimally, but in its implementation there are still many obstacles. The implementation of the Merdeka learning curriculum that is currently being carried out is still many shortcomings and obstacles (Rahayu et al., 2022; Saidah & Imron, 2022). The key to the successful implementation of the Merdeka learning curriculum is the willingness of the principal, and teachers to make changes. As well as research which stated that the problem faced by school partners in implementing the Merdeka curriculum in inclusive schools is the lack of information related to the Merdeka Curriculum itself (Rafikayati et al., 2022; Rukmana, 2022). Therefore, researchers are interested in analyzing further, whether the enactment of an Merdeka curriculum will also make teachers understand the concept of differentiated learning. The study aims to analyze teachers' perceptions of differentiated learning in the Merdeka curriculum at Elementary Schools in Jatisrono District, Wonogiri Regency.

2. METHOD

The research method used is a mixed method of open and closed questionnaires (Creswell, 2018). Surveys as quantitative data are designed using questionnaires to identify teachers' perceptions of differentiated learning in Merdeka curricula. There were 30 teachers who participated in this study and were spread across several sub-districts in the Wonogiri Regency, such as Jatisrono, Baturetno, Bulukerto, Nguntoronadi, Tirtomoyo, Ngadirojo, Jatipurno, Sidoharjo, Jatiroto, and Wonogiri Kota districts. All teachers involved are teachers who teach grades 1 to 6 in elementary school. Selection of research subjects using purposive sampling techniques. The survey was conducted using Google Forms and shared with teachers through the WhatsApp Mesengger application. Participants involved are given 7 days to be able to access the link that has been sent. It takes about 23 minutes to answer the entire set of questions on the questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of a combination of questions with a Likert scale and yes/no answers. The questions on the questionnaire are divided into 4 parts, the first part is the teacher's assumption of curriculum changes consisting of 4 questions. The second part of the survey is on the application of the Merdeka curriculum in schools. The third part discusses the participation of teachers in Merdeka curriculum training. The last part, which consists of 7 questions, discusses the proportion of differentiated learning theory training subjects in the training followed by the teacher. Meanwhile, in-depth interviews as qualitative data were conducted to get information on how to implement differentiated learning in Wonogiri District elementary schools. The gird of Instruments presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The gird of Instruments in This Study

No	Question
1	How do you present the material in various forms?
2	How do you apply skills that students can learn independently?
3	How do you present material so that students who have a high learning rate can convey it to their peers?
4	How do you present material with various levels of difficulty in one big theme?
5	What do you do in conveying material in a variety of ways according to students' understanding abilities?
6	What do you do in grouping students so you can understand the material based on location, number of students, and place of study?
7	What do you and your students do to actively find additional knowledge?
8	How do you apply the assessment of student understanding so that it is made varied?
9	How did you design the questions so that there are variations in the activity in doing the task?
10	How do you apply the assessment based on the level of difficulty and student ability?
11	How do you get students to create their own products?

Quantitative data is obtained from quantitative questionnaires, while qualitative data is obtained from interviews. The collected data was analyzed using data triangulation to ensure the credibility of the information obtained (Creswell, 2018). From the information that has been obtained, then the data is graphed and presented in the form of a table.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The survey was conducted on 30 teachers in Wonogiri district. Of the 30 teachers, they were asked to express an educator's concerns in the face of curriculum changes. These can be identified in Table 2.

Tabel 2. Teachers' Concerns about Curriculum Changes

Teacher Anxiety over Curriculum Changes	SS	S	N	TS	STS
To assume the stigma of "change ministers change	3,3%	43,3%	20%	26,7%	6,7%
curriculum" is the right thing					
Feeling overwhelmed by curriculum changes	-	16,7%	23,3%	53,3%	6,7%
The previous curriculum is still effectively used	3,3%	26,7%	63,3%	6,7%	-
The need for curriculum changes to adapt to the needs	36,7%	56,7%	6,7%	-	-
of the times					

In the survey, teachers were also asked to disclose the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in their respective schools. The Merdeka curriculum, which has only been implemented in several classes, made almost half of respondents reveal that they have not implemented an Merdeka curriculum in their classes. Teachers learn the Merdeka curriculum by utilizing various trainings both online and offline. Online training for the implementation of an Merdeka curriculum can be followed from various types of platforms. Data on teacher participation in training in figure 1.

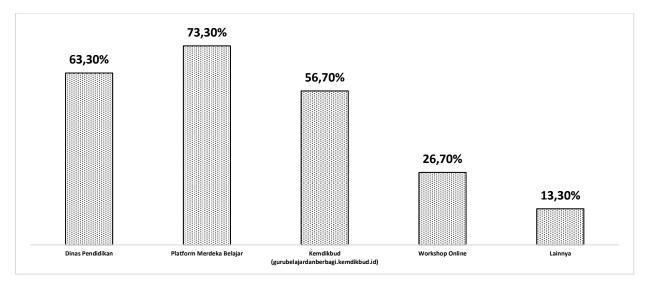


Figure 1. Teacher Participation in Merdeka Curriculum Training

The survey also explored information about the presentation of differentiated learning materials in training that had been followed by teachers. The survey results can be seen in table 3.

Table 3. Differentiated Learning Materials in Training

Differentiated Learning Materials in Training		S	N	TS	STS
Differentiated Learning Materials in Training	23,3%	63,3%	10%	3,3%	-
Explained about the differentiated learning component in	16,7%	70%	10%	3,3%	-
the training I participated in					
Explained about the objectives and benefits of	20%	70%	6,7%	3,3%	-
differentiated learning in the training I participated in					
I learned about the child's learning profile in the training I	16,7%	73,3%	6,7%	3,3%	-
participated in					
I gained an understanding of diagnostic assessments in the	20%	70%	10%	-	-
training I participated in					
The allocation of time for discussion of differentiated	-	3,3%	6,7%	70%	-
learning is sufficient					
I understand the concept of differentiated learning from	-	-	6,7%	73,3%	20%
the training I participate in					

Interviews conducted by researchers with teachers regarding the understanding of student learning profiles as well as diagnostic assessments revealed results that some teachers had done so "... The implementation of diagnostic assessments is carried out at the beginning of the semester by conducting observations, interviews, and initial assessments of children. This is done as a guideline to prepare learning according to the needs of the child." In other words, the teacher has carried out diagnostic assessments in his classes. However, several other teachers admitted that they had not conducted diagnostic assessments so they did not know the student's learning profiles.

Furthermore, concerning the application of differentiated learning in primary schools, teachers claim to have not implemented it "... has not applied differentiated learning to children. Because it is difficult to prepare for learning by following student differences, so classical learning is applied both in the use of media, learning resources, and student learning evaluation." On the other hand, two teachers out of 30 respondents replied that they had implemented differentiated learning in the classroom "... Differentiated learning begins with conducting diagnostic assessments so that teachers can get to know the diverse needs

of students. In the differentiated learning carried out, students are grouped according to their learning needs and facilitated learning according to the content they like. For example, based on the student's learning profile, students are given audio, visual, or audio-visual content according to their learning characteristics. The provision of evaluations including the collection deadline and the type of learning outcomes products are also adjusted to the needs of students". From the results of interviews with teachers, it can be concluded that not many teachers have carried out differentiated learning in their classes.

Discussion

The application of the Merdeka curriculum is a form of curriculum that is applied as a cure for the crisis of learning in Indonesia (Afifah, 2022; Ananda, 2022). The Merdeka curriculum is a curriculum that has the aim of optimizing students' talents and interests that focuses on essential materials, student character development, and also student competencies (Khusni et al., 2022; Dewi et al., 2023). Curriculum changes occur due to the demands of the 5.0 era society so that it can compete in the global world (Manalu et al., 2022; Hasanah et al., 2022). In this study, most teachers understand the importance of curriculum changes that are adapted to the state of community development. So that teachers do not feel burdened by curriculum changes. However, the implementation of this new curriculum needs to be supported by training and workshops directed at professional development to be able to contribute to curriculum development (Mantra et al., 2022; Irawati et al., 2022). The enthusiasm of teachers in participating in the Merdeka curriculum training program has been very high. Training or training is an activity that has the aim of developing and improving the personality of employees not only knowledge but also attitudes and skills (Simanjutak, 2005; Iwu, 2021). By participating in training activities, it is hoped that teachers can understand the Merdeka curriculum better, and are also expected to improve skills in providing the best service for students (Rafikayati et al., 2022; Hasanah et al., 2022).

The differentiated learning paradigm sees all students as having their uniqueness derived from differences in student backgrounds. Learning is carried out by looking at student uniqueness as the basis for meeting student learning needs and setting students in mixed-ability classroom (Faiz et al., 2022; Magableh & Abdullah, 2022). In terms of mapping student learning needs, a diagnostic assessment is needed. Diagnostic assessment is a test given before learning activities that aim to obtain information about the readiness, learning styles, interests, and characteristics of students (Mustika, 2022; Irawati et al., 2022). In this study, Most teachers have not conducted diagnostic assessments. The results of diagnostic assessments are very useful as a basis for providing follow-up in the form of teacher treatment of students following students' strengths and learning difficulties (Rachmawati & Lestariningrum, 2022; Iwu, 2022).

Differentiated learning is carried out as meaningful learning followed by stimulating the emergence of ideas from students that are connected to information that students already know (Ananda, 2022; Jatmiko & Putra, 2022). In differentiated learning, there are four components, namely: content, process, product, and learning environment (Iwu, 2021; Marlina, 2021). A small number of teachers have carried out this differentiation starting from content differentiation, namely by preparing learning resources for students according to their needs, then differentiating the process by grouping students according to characteristics so that teachers are easier to organize learning. In product differentiation, teachers have also given differences in treatment for students such as differences in collection time limits and types of learning products. Differentiated learning is learning that emphasizes shiva diversity and will be well implemented if teachers understand student differences (Marlina, 2019; Mulyawati et al., 2022). But unfortunately, there are still many teachers who have not analyzed the needs of students, so they have not been optimal in preparing differentiated learning.

In this study, teachers revealed that it is still too difficult to carry out differentiated learning. This is because not implementing an Merdeka curriculum in their classrooms is one of the reasons for the teacher's lack of understanding of differentiated learning. In fact, differentiated learning is not the latest educational model because it has existed for a long time (Marlina, 2020; Kasman & Lubis, 2022). In addition, the lack of time allocation in Merdeka curriculum training makes teachers unable to learn the concept of differentiation learning in depth. Teachers also reasoned that it was a hassle to prepare learning that was different for each student. In fact, the concept of differentiated learning does not mean that teachers must teach 32 students in 32 different ways. Many teachers are still unable to imagine differentiated learning practices because they are used to teacher-centered learning (Herwina, 2021; Putri & Kaltsum, 2022). Changing the mindset of teachers is not easy, even though the teacher's creativity in processing interesting learning (Jamila et al., 2021; Saidah & Imron, 2022).

Through this research, it is hoped that the government can find out how far teachers know and understand the meaning of differentiated learning. Some recommendations for subsequent research can also be made based on current research. First, researchers can then expand the scope of the research area and multiply the research subjects to enrich information. Second, researchers can then examine the

implementation of differentiated learning that has been carried out by elementary school teachers next, researchers can find information on how effective differentiated learning is at improving student learning outcomes. The situation in the field illustrates that there is still a lack of teacher knowledge of differentiated learning, one of the causes of which is the lack of training that discusses differentiated learning. Therefore, it is hoped that the government and related agencies can maximize the implementation of these training activities.

4. CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study is that teachers understand the need for curriculum changes that follow the development of society, so that teachers are not burdened with curriculum changes. Participation in Merdeka curriculum training indicates that the enthusiasm of teachers in learning the new curriculum is also very high. However, the allocation of time to study differentiated learning materials is still limited so that teachers cannot explore the material. As a result, teachers' understanding of differentiated learning is also still low. The implementation of differentiated learning has been carried out by a small number of teachers, and the rest have not done.

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