Can the diversity of students and differentiated instruction achieve curriculum targets?

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Abstract

Learning in the 21st century requires a shift from teacher-centred to student-centred methods. This change is necessary to equip students with essential 21st-century skills known as the 4Cs (Communication, Collaboration, Critical Thinking, Creativity). To develop these skills, educators must guide their students, who have diverse characteristics, in mastering the 4Cs. Differentiated instruction is a teaching approach aimed at accommodating students' varied needs, interests, and abilities in a classroom. This approach involves adjusting the content, process, products, and learning environment so that each student can learn most effectively. Differentiated instruction is an ideal concept for students. This approach can enhance students' potential according to their individual learning needs, including their interests, learning readiness, and learning profiles. The purpose of this article is to describe how differentiated instruction can meet the curriculum targets of education in Indonesia. This research is descriptive in nature, involving the collection of various relevant references on differentiated instruction.

Pembelajaran abad ke-21 menuntut pergeseran dari metode yang berpusat pada guru menuju pendekatan yang berpusat pada siswa. Perubahan ini diperlukan untuk membekali peserta didik dengan keterampilan esensial abad ke-21, yang dikenal sebagai 4C (Communication, Collaboration, Critical Thinking, Creativity). Dalam mengembangkan keterampilan tersebut, pendidik perlu membimbing peserta didik yang memiliki karakteristik beragam agar mampu menguasai 4C secara optimal. Pengajaran berdiferensiasi merupakan pendekatan instruksional yang dirancang untuk mengakomodasi perbedaan kebutuhan, minat, dan kemampuan peserta didik dalam suatu kelas. Pendekatan ini mencakup penyesuaian aspek konten, proses, produk, serta lingkungan belajar, sehingga setiap peserta didik dapat belajar dengan cara yang paling sesuai bagi mereka. Dengan menerapkan pengajaran berdiferensiasi, potensi peserta didik dapat dikembangkan secara optimal berdasarkan kebutuhan belajar individu, termasuk minat, kesiapan belajar, dan profil belajar mereka. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan bagaimana pengajaran berdiferensiasi dapat mendukung pencapaian target kurikulum pendidikan di Indonesia. Penelitian ini bersifat deskriptif dengan menggunakan berbagai referensi relevan mengenai pengajaran berdiferensiasi sebagai sumber kajian.

Keywords: Diversity of Students, Differentiated Instruction, Merdeka Curriculum, Profile of Pancasila Learners

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental and indispensable component of the human growth process. In a deeper sense, education is a process and a tool to improve human quality, both in ability and character. Education is necessary for every generation, especially the younger generation, because the development of human resources and the quality of education in a country cannot be separated from the role of its younger generation (Pelangi, 2020). Actually, education has been instilled in individuals since they were young, so the role of education

is very important in shaping their character and abilities. From an early age, individuals are equipped with basic knowledge that comes from the family environment. Families play the first and foremost role in shaping character and instilling moral values (Kamali & Nawawi, 2023). Furthermore, formal education obtained from school enriches academic knowledge and practical skills necessary for daily life and future employment. School is not only a place to learn but also a place to interact socially and develop critical thinking skills (Murati, 2016). In addition, society also contributes greatly to the education process through various social, cultural, and religious activities that broaden individuals' horizons and life experiences (Simbolon, 2022). Education serves as a vessel for developing the nation's potential to contribute on the global stage, while also being an investment in honing individual abilities (Iskandar, 2021).

A quality education meets and supports the needs of every student. The primary task of education is to open the gates of learning for all students without discrimination so that every child in the nation can develop and achieve their fullest potential (Sebu, 2023). This is continually strived for and hoped for by educators in Indonesia. However, in reality, it is often found that many Indonesian children are still unable to obtain adequate education suitable for their potential due to various factors, including economic background, geographical location, and other demographic issues.

Innovative learning is key to improving the quality of education. Creative and adaptive teaching and learning processes in schools are crucial elements in advancing education quality. As stated by Komalasari (2013), learning is a system that integrates the roles of educators and students in a structured and measurable teaching and learning process to achieve learning goals effectively and efficiently. In this system, educators play a crucial role as guides for students to achieve these goals. Therefore, educators are expected to continue to innovate in designing learning activities.

Despite several curriculum changes, the reality remains that learning activities in Indonesia have not seen significant changes. Until now, conventional teaching practices that are teacher-centered are still prevalent, where educators dominate the teaching process. This approach contradicts the fact that each student has unique and varying abilities. Instead of being ignored, student diversity can be a valuable asset to enhance the quality of learning and achieve curriculum targets. Therefore, educators need to continue learning and innovating in designing learning experiences that cater to the individual needs of students, creating a conducive, professional, and effective learning environment (Marlina, 2019).

Given the differing characteristics of each student in the class, differentiated learning is certainly needed. Although the term "differentiated learning" has been frequently heard lately, especially in schools implementing independent curricula, in reality, differentiated learning is not a new approach introduced in the field of education. To meet the current needs of students, differentiated learning is an essential component of the teaching and learning process (Yani & Susanti, 2023). Compared to conventional teaching methods, differentiated learning is considered capable of meeting students' learning needs. According to Anderson (2007), the idea behind this strategy is that all students can receive the same learning material regardless of their individual knowledge development.

METHODS

This research employs the literature review method. According to Sugiyono (2018), a literature review is a study involving theoretical analysis of various references related to scientific literature. This research aims to understand the role of student diversity and differentiated instruction in achieving curriculum targets in Indonesia. The researcher gathers relevant information from various sources on the concepts of student diversity and differentiated instruction, and then examines the connection between these concepts in achieving curriculum targets.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Student's Diversity

Every individual certainly has one or possibly several differences in characteristics from one another, including students within the same class. Various factors, such as gender, skill level, personality, and learning style influence the diversity of students' characteristics. These differences have a significant impact on the learning process at multiple levels (Turhusna & Solatun, 2020). In education, Tomlinson (2013) identifies three main aspects that form the basis of differences among students, as follows.

1) Student's Readiness to Learn

Readiness to learn refers to an individual's ability to receive and comprehend new information, particularly in the context of education focused on classroom subjects. For the teaching and learning process to be optimal, students must have adequate facilities and infrastructure, a safe learning environment, and a comfortable atmosphere conducive to absorbing the subjects taught by educators.

2) Student's Interest

Hasni et al. (2022) explain that interest is a strong attraction or desire towards something, whether in the form of activities, objects, or specific fields. Because interests are related to the preferences of each individual, it is not surprising that each person has different interests, including students within a classroom. It is highly unlikely that all students in a class share the same interests. Certainly, there are various interests within a class, such as interests in sports, mathematics, arts, and others. Students can use their interests as motivation to become more active in the learning process. Due to the importance of students' interests in motivating their learning, Tomlinson (2001) explains that educators should consider students' interests when designing learning experiences because there are several objectives, namely: a) Increasing student learning motivation. b) Demonstrating the connection between all learning. and c) Assisting students in finding alignment between the school environment and their learning interests.

3) Student's Learning Profile

The learning profile is also a crucial element in the learning process. This profile is influenced by various factors such as language, religion, race, culture, social status, and others. The learning profile is closely related to students' learning styles, which vary widely.

a) **Visual**: students who are more accustomed to learning relying on their sense of sight. Suitable media for students with a visual learning profile include using PowerPoint, diagrams, lecture notes, charts, or concept maps.

b) **Auditory**: students who are more accustomed to learning relying on their sense of hearing. Students with this learning profile typically feel comfortable learning by reading aloud, listening to music while studying, and engaging in discussions.

c) **Kinesthetic**: students who feel comfortable learning when interspersed with engaging in other activities (Lukitaningtyas, 2022).

The diversity and differences among students described above necessitate educators to implement differentiated learning approaches. This approach can accommodate various learning needs so that all students can reach their optimal potential.

Differentiated Instruction

1) The Essence of Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated Instruction is an instructional approach where educators use various teaching methods to meet the individual needs of each student according to their characteristics (Purnawanto, 2023). Gheyssens et al. (2023) and Marlina (2019) explain that differentiated instruction involves adjusting to students' interests, learning

preferences, and readiness to enhance their learning outcomes. This concept aligns with Ki Hajar Dewantara's view on the importance of education in guiding the natural potential of every child, enabling them to achieve happiness and success to the fullest extent as individuals and members of society (Herwina, 2021).

Essentially, differentiated instruction enables every educator to interact with students according to their level of knowledge and adjust learning to align with students' learning interests. However, many educators struggle to implement this approach because they are accustomed to teacher-centered and one-way learning models that have been in place for years (Heningjakti & Surono, 2023).

According to Marlina (2019), in traditional classrooms, differences among students are often seen as a challenge. This model tends to emphasize intellectual intelligence, with less attention to individual student interests and learning profiles. Evaluation is typically conducted at the end of the lesson to assess students' understanding of the material, while educators act as problem solvers and set assessment standards for the entire class. On the other hand, when differentiated learning approaches are applied, educators have the opportunity to develop both their own and students' potential more comprehensively and collaborate to achieve learning goals together.

2) The Goals of Differentiated Instruction

Purnawanto (2023) mentions several goals for implementing differentiated learning, including the following.

a) **Meet the individual needs of students**. This approach recognizes that every student has variations in learning styles, abilities, and interests. By adjusting teaching methods, subject matter, and learning activities according to these variations, educators can create a more inclusive and effective learning environment (Tomlinson, 2014). This ensures that every student receives support and challenges aligned with their potential, enabling them to achieve success in both academic and personal aspects. Differentiated instruction aims to deepen understanding of concepts and encourage active participation in their learning process, to maximize academic achievement and personal growth.

b) **Improving student achievement**. The implementation of differentiated instruction also aims to improve student achievement. By considering individual differences in learning styles, pace of understanding, and interests, educators can provide more suitable approaches for each student (Amalia et al., 2023). This approach enables students to learn in an environment that supports their optimal development. If students feel good in their environment, they will be able to perform their best in class, thereby achieving higher scores in their final exams. This ultimately contributes to improving their academic achievement, as they can understand the material more deeply and apply that knowledge effectively in various learning contexts.

c) **Increasing student motivation and interest**. Differentiated instruction also aims to increase the motivation and interest of students. By recognizing the diverse needs and interests of students during the learning process, teachers can provide more significant learning experiences. This raises student involvement and improves learning outcomes since students' abilities and interests play a key role in their engagement in various learning tasks. Therefore, this approach helps build stronger connections between students and the subject matter, making them more likely to participate actively and achieve learning goals more effectively.

d) **Developing social and collaborative skills**. Another goal of differentiated teaching is to help improve students' social and collaborative skills. In this approach, students are allowed to work in different groups or teams, made up of individuals with different backgrounds and abilities. In this way, they can develop skills on how to cooperate with others, communicate fluently, and solve problems together. Social skills will be acquired when children learn how to share ideas by working together in a place where success is valued more than competition.

e) **Boosting self-esteem**. Improving students' self-esteem is one of the important goals of differentiated

instruction. Self-esteem refers to individuals' positive evaluation of themselves, including belief in their abilities and positive self-worth (Vacalares et al., 2023). In the educational context, differentiated instruction can significantly contribute to enhancing students' self-esteem. By considering the diversity of students' abilities and interests, educators can create suitable and successful learning experiences for each individual. When students feel recognized and fully accepted in the learning process, they tend to feel more confident in facing academic challenges. The improvement in achievement and mastery of the material attained through approaches that cater to their needs can also enhance students' overall self-confidence. Thus, differentiated instruction aims not only to enhance academic achievement but also to build a strong foundation of self-esteem for students' personal development in the future.

f) **Increasing students' engagement**. Improving students' engagement is one of the primary goals of implementing differentiated instruction. Student engagement refers to their level of active participation in the learning process, including involvement in discussions, group work, and other learning activities (Galugu & Baharuddin, 2017). Educators can create more meaningful and interesting learning experiences for each student by varying learning styles, topics of interest as well as individual needs. When subject matter is presented in a manner that students associate with their personal experiences and based on the way they usually learn, students become more involved and excited about learning. This method reinforces the internal motivation of learners and helps them get involved in the learning process more actively. As a result, it facilitates more effective and profound learning goal accomplishment.

3) The Benefits of Differentiated Instruction

In addition to the goals of differentiated instruction mentioned above, Purnawanto (2023) also explains several benefits of differentiated instruction, namely.

a) **Equal growth for every student**. The main benefit of differentiated instruction is to ensure that all students receive exactly what they need to learn and grow as individuals while providing each of them equal opportunities in their development. It allows educators the flexibility to adjust their teaching tactics, the resources they use, and how students are assessed based on their abilities and needs. As a result, students with varying learning speeds or different strengths can still make significant progress in their academic achievements. This approach not only closes learning gaps but also creates an environment where every student feels supported and empowered to reach their maximum potential individually..

b) **Fun learning**. This approach allows educators to design learning activities that are engaging and relevant to students' interests and needs. By considering the diverse learning styles and preferences of students, learning can be presented in a creative and challenging manner, thereby improving students' motivation to study (Vergara et al., 2020). When students find learning interesting, they are more likely to become actively involved and participate in classroom activities, leading to greater overall academic and social performance (Dogani, 2023). Therefore, differentiated instruction not only enhances academic performance but also fosters the creation of a positive learning atmosphere and establishes a solid foundation for student development.

c) **Personalized learning**. This approach also allows educators to adapt teaching methods, learning content, and assessments according to the needs and interests of individual students. By understanding differences in learning styles, comprehension speeds, and student interests, educators can provide relevant and effective learning experiences. Personalized learning helps students feel recognized and supported in their learning process, which in turn can enhance their motivation and engagement (Cardenas et al., 2022). By prioritizing the needs of each individual, students can deepen their understanding of the subject matter and develop their skills comprehensively. Therefore, differentiated instruction approaches not only build an inclusive learning environment but also provide opportunities for every student to achieve their academic potential to the fullest.

4) The Elements of Differentiated Instruction

Suwartiningsih (2021) explains that there are four important elements in differentiated learning, namely the following.

a) **Content**: relates to what will be delivered (in this case, the material) to the students. Here, educators will adjust the learning approach for each student according to how they understand a topic.

b) **Process**: pertains to the way students will receive the material from educators. In other words, this is the process through which students acquire knowledge, understanding, and skills from the material taught by educators.

c) **Product**: is evidence of what students have learned and understood. They will demonstrate or apply the understanding they have gained into a piece of work.

d) **Learning environment**: reorganizes the classroom space according to the student's readiness level, interests, or profiles, aiming to enhance their motivation in learning. Additionally, the classroom arrangement process aims for students to learn comfortably and without disturbance from other students.

The Merdeka Curriculum

The Merdeka Curriculum emerged as an innovation in the world of Indonesian education. Designed to address various challenges faced by the previous education system, this curriculum offers a more flexible approach, focusing on developing students' potential and catering to local needs. One of the characteristics of the Merdeka Curriculum is diverse and optimal intracurricular learning so that students can more freely explore concepts and strengthen competencies. Educators also have the freedom to choose and implement teaching media that suit the learning needs and characteristics of students, thereby creating a more interactive and enjoyable learning environment (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

The main goal of the Merdeka Curriculum is to respond to challenges faced by the previous education system by holistically developing students' potential. This means emphasizing not only academic achievements but also developing practical life skills that are relevant to students' daily lives. Interactive learning approaches and project implementations become key strategies for achieving this goal. Consequently, students can apply their theoretical knowledge to real-world practice, which is a significant factor contributing to their preparedness for future challenges (Khoirurrijal et al., 2022). Moreover, the Merdeka Curriculum aims to grant more autonomy to schools in designing their curricula, enabling better adaptation to the local needs and characteristics of students in each region. This provides each school with an opportunity to develop learning strategies that are more aligned with their local contexts, thereby strengthening the connection between classroom learning and students' daily lives.

The Profile of Pancasila Learners

According to the Directorate of Primary Education of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, a Pancasila Student is the embodiment of an Indonesian lifelong learner who possesses global competencies and behaves according to the values of Pancasila. Meanwhile, a profile is the learning style possessed by student attitudes. Therefore, The Profile of Pancasila Students encompasses the abilities, character, and competencies that Indonesian students should possess in the 21st century, reflecting the values of Pancasila as the noble values of the Indonesian nation. In Indonesia, Pancasila was chosen as the student profile in Indonesia as it is considered the best way to capture all the characteristics and competencies needed by a student in Indonesia (Irawati et al., 2022).

There are 6 characteristics of The Profile of Pancasila Learners outlined in Minister of Education and Culture Regulation Number 22 of 2020, as follows:

a. **Believers, devout to God Almighty, and noble in character**. Indonesian learners who are believers, devout

to God Almighty, and noble in character demonstrate ethical behavior in their relationship with God Almighty. They understand the teachings of their religion and practice them in their everyday lives.

b. **Global diversity**. Learners in Indonesia maintain their cherished cultural heritage, local identity, and sense of self while demonstrating an open-minded approach to engaging with diverse cultures. This fosters mutual understanding and the potential for positive cultural integration that aligns with the nation's esteemed cultural values. Key components of global diversity encompass comprehending and valuing various cultures, possessing intercultural communication abilities for interacting with others, and reflecting on and exhibiting responsibility toward multicultural experiences.

c. **Cooperate**. Indonesian learners have the ability to cooperate, engaging collectively and voluntarily in activities to ensure smooth, effortless, and harmonious task completion.

d. **Self-reliant**. Indonesian learners are self-reliant and take responsibility for their learning process and outcomes. Key factors contributing to this self-reliance include self-awareness and self-regulation, which empower learners to control their own learning and manage the conditions that arise.

e. **Critical thinking**. Learners who think critically can objectively analyze qualitative and quantitative data, synthesize diverse information, evaluate reasoning, and draw appropriate conclusions. The practice of critical thinking encompasses acquiring and processing information and ideas, analyzing and evaluating arguments, reflecting on cognitive processes, and formulating conclusions.

f. **Creativity**. Learners with creative capabilities demonstrate adaptability and ingenuity in producing distinctive, impactful, and memorable outcomes. Generating novel ideas and engaging in original work and behaviors constitute crucial elements of creativity.

Diversity of Students And The Role of Differentiated Instruction in Achieving Curriculum Targets

Differentiated instruction plays a crucial role in achieving the goals of the Merdeka Curriculum by adjusting the teaching and learning process according to each student's individual needs. This method prioritizes teaching the whole class concerning general instruction, while also paying attention to specific aspects such as individual students' needs, interests, learning modes, and skill levels. Differentiated learning enhances not only concentration on academic points but also on other social objectives among students as well as the psychological welfare of learners, according to Ki Hajar Dewantara's principles of humanistic service to children. The use of this method encourages students to tap into their abilities using what they like and what motivates them, corresponding with the Merdeka Curriculum's aim to develop competent students not only in academics but also have good moral standing based on Pancasila values. This means that differentiated instruction goes beyond being just a teaching approach but rather a way through which all learners are included in feeling empowered during their studies.

By implementing differentiated instruction, educators are expected to effectively achieve the goals of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes students' freedom to develop their talents, interests, and characters based on Pancasila values. Differentiated learning not only allows for adjustments in teaching methods, content, and assessment based on individual student needs but also accommodates differences in learning styles, skill levels, and interests. An understanding of these principles is vital if teachers are to develop an inclusive and motivating learning atmosphere that supports students in reaching their full potential. This approach focuses not only on developing academic competencies but also on building strong characters aligned with the moral and social values integrated into the Merdeka Curriculum. Therefore, differentiated learning is not just an educational strategy but also a crucial foundation for achieving broader and sustainable national educational goals.

CONCLUSION

Differentiated instruction is an approach to learning that considers individual diversity and student needs. More profoundly, differentiated learning involves adjusting to students' interests, profiles, and readiness to enhance their learning outcomes. When implementing differentiated instruction in the classroom, educators need to focus on four main elements: content, process, product, and learning environment.

Differentiated instruction can be implemented within the current educational curriculum. This aligns with the goals of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes freedom for students to develop according to their diverse talents and interests, while also fostering a Pancasila-based student profile.

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