

Differentiated Learning Strategies at Batealit 2 elementary school Jepara

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ABSTRACT

The diversity of characteristics and learning styles among elementary school students requires educators to create enjoyable and meaningful learning experiences. Differentiated instruction has become one of the models implemented in the Merdeka Curriculum, allowing students the freedom to choose their learning styles. The point of this study is to look into how important differentiated learning is at Batealit 2 elementary schools so that teachers can figure out how to use it with students who have different needs and ways of learning. a qualitative descriptive method in this study is qualitative descriptive with a case study approach. We collected data through direct observation, interviews, and document analysis. The results indicate that the learning strategy employed to create meaningful learning experiences for students is through differentiated instruction. The learning process takes into account the diverse characteristics and learning styles of the students. There are three learning styles among the fourth-grade students at Batealit 2 elementary school: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic, which encourages educators to create learning experiences tailored to the children's learning styles. Through differentiated instruction, students have the opportunity to explore their identities, abilities, skills, and knowledge.

Keywords: differentiated learning, *Merdeka Curriculum*, learning style.



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INTRODUCTION

Education plays a crucial role in every human being's life. Quality education will produce a progressive generation for the nation. Coe states that there are four priority activities that educators can undertake to enhance the quality of 21st-century learning in the classroom, making it more effective, meaningful, and enjoyable. These four aspects are: (1) Fully understanding the learning content to be taught and knowing how to teach it to students; (2) Creating an environment that supports the learning process, especially deep learning; (3) Managing the classroom to maximize the learning process so that learning becomes

meaningful; and (4) Presenting content, learning activities, and interactions that enhance students' thinking skills [1].

Every child has their own characteristics and uniqueness. The needs of students in a single classroom can vary significantly [2]. Therefore, each student requires meaningful learning tailored to them, allowing for differences to be designed into the learning process that can meet students' needs. The learning process must also be supported by adequate facilities and infrastructure, and the approaches, models, and methods used by educators must be appropriate to meet the needs of each student. In other words, educators must pay attention to the characteristics and learning styles of students, a concept known as differentiated instruction.

Differentiated learning is closely associated with the independent curriculum. Differentiated instruction is the conscious effort of educators to modify learning to meet students' learning needs [3]. Differentiated learning provides space for students to learn in diverse ways within the same classroom [4]. In line with this, Ayu Sri Wahyuni also argues that differentiated learning is an educator's effort to provide learning services tailored to students' learning needs [5].

Differentiated learning is a suitable model to implement in elementary schools, considering children's characteristics. This approach allows educators to adjust teaching methods to the needs and abilities of each student [6]. Through differentiated learning, students are given the opportunity to learn in ways that are most suitable for them, thereby enhancing their understanding and engagement with the material being taught. In this context, the focus of differentiated learning is on adjusting students' interests, profiles, and readiness to learn so that learning objectives can be achieved [7].

The emergence of differentiated learning is rooted in the differences in characteristics and learning abilities of children. One of the diverse characteristics of students is their learning styles [8]. Learning style refers to the way individuals absorb and process the information they receive [9]. Generally, individual learning styles are categorized into three types: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. The diversity of characteristics and learning styles among students necessitates different treatments in learning to meet their learning needs [10]. Adjusting learning based on these styles allows for active, effective, conducive, and enjoyable learning, thereby improving students' learning outcomes. This is the goal of differentiated learning.

Differentiated learning is characterized by its flexibility. Although this learning is conducted using various models within a single lesson, it remains structured through several student-centered approaches. There are several characteristics of differentiated learning, including an engaging learning environment that motivates students to learn, clearly defined learning objectives, ongoing assessment, educators who can respond to students' needs, and effective classroom management [11]. In line with this, there are several characteristics that distinguish differentiated learning from other types of learning [4]. These characteristics include: 1) flexible learning, 2) assigning different tasks to students based on their interests and readiness while still adhering to learning objectives, 3) learning based on assessment and students' learning needs, 4) variation in learning within a single classroom, 5) students determining their own learning methods, and 6) structured learning activities.

Differentiated learning is a highly suitable model for implementation in classrooms, as it can foster creativity and provide opportunities for students to demonstrate what they have learned. This indicates that differentiated learning strategies are essential in education in the 21st century. Differentiated learning strategies can serve as an approach to enhance students' creativity [3]. The several benefits of differentiated learning, including: 1) facilitating the development of students' creativity; 2) minimizing failures in learning; 3) encouraging students to adapt and develop their interests and potential; and 4) fostering student behavior that supports an orderly classroom environment [12]. Nevertheless, the implementation of

differentiated learning in classroom learning also experiences several obstacles, such as the lack of resources which include the lack of teacher ability to apply various models, the absence of supporting facilities such as media, time constraints, and so on. The constraints of differentiated learning in Malaysian classrooms include time constraints, lack of teacher awareness and training, and limited resources [13]. These challenges hinder teachers in adjusting their teaching strategies, content and assessment to meet the diverse needs of students [14].

The application of differentiated learning strategies can create a conducive and varied classroom atmosphere that aligns with students' interests, characteristics, and readiness to learn. Applying different learning strategies in guidance programs can help students from various backgrounds and ability levels achieve better outcomes [15]. In practice, this strategy encourages students to learn according to their interests and potential, so that if implemented effectively, it can maximally meet students' learning needs. However, the reality on the ground shows that there is still a lack of knowledge and mastery among educators regarding differentiated learning. Educators often feel overwhelmed by this model because it requires them to prepare more teaching materials for their students. Therefore, this research aims to provide educators with insights into differentiated learning strategies in elementary schools, particularly at Batealit 2 elementary school.

In conclusion, differentiated learning is not just a teaching method but a comprehensive approach that recognizes and values the diversity of students. By tailoring instruction to meet individual needs, educators can create a more inclusive and effective learning environment. This approach not only enhances academic achievement but also fosters a love for learning, encouraging students to become active participants in their education. As we move further into the 21st century, the importance of differentiated learning will only continue to grow, making it essential for educators to embrace and implement these strategies in their classrooms.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design with a field research approach and a case study methodology aimed at analyzing and exploring in depth the strategies that educators can use in implementing differentiated learning in elementary schools. A case study is a type of qualitative research that involves in-depth exploration by the researcher of a program, activity, process, or event [16]. The subjects in this research were the principal, grade 4 teachers, and 26 grade 4 students at Batealit 2 elementary school. The reason for choosing this subject is because class 4 has implemented *Merdeka Curriculum*. The data collection techniques used in this research include interviews, observations, documentation, and data analysis. Interviews were conducted using in-depth interview techniques, where the observer gathered information by directly engaging in free-form question-and-answer sessions with the principal, without prior preparation, allowing for a lively interaction. The researcher also conducted observations to obtain in-depth information regarding the implementation of differentiated learning at Batealit 2 elementary school. The form of observation used in this study is participant observation, which is a method where the researcher actively participates and is directly involved in the learning activities conducted by educators at Batealit 2 elementary school.

Documentation is a method used in research to record real information from documents, reports, diaries, photo archives, and other sources [17]. Data analysis techniques were employed to summarize the information previously obtained, specifically regarding the application of differentiated learning at Batealit 2 elementary school. In this study, data analysis utilized an inductive qualitative analysis technique, which involves developing the data

collected. The steps include data reduction (summarizing key points and selecting data according to themes) and discarding irrelevant data, displaying data, and drawing conclusions or verification [18]. These data collection techniques require personal quality, especially during the interview process, observations of students, and documentation in the form of data and photographs [19]. This research aims to understand the learning styles of students in elementary schools so that educators can design differentiated learning strategies. The data analysis used in this study involves categorizing students into several specific learning style groups, which will later be summarized to inform the development of differentiated learning strategies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Urgency of Differentiated Learning

Based on an interview with the principal of Batealit 2 elementary school on November 29, 2022, She stated, "Differentiated learning is essential to implement in elementary schools. This is because students in elementary schools have diverse learning styles. These differences in learning styles pose a challenge for educators to ensure that all students understand, without exception. Educators must be able to create enjoyable learning models for all students. Through differentiated learning, students can gain meaningful learning experiences that align with their individual styles, interests, and needs. Students are given the freedom to explore their knowledge and understanding, while still under the guidance of educators." This opinion aligns with the relevant research which indicates that differentiated learning is a suitable model for students with various diversities [20].

The importance of differentiated learning lies in its ability to enhance students' productivity, independence, and skills. This is because differentiated learning presents varied approaches within a single subject. Students are allowed to choose learning models that match their interests. They can develop their abilities and knowledge without the pressure of a single learning style. Differentiated learning can accommodate, acknowledge, and serve the differences and diversity of students according to their interests, readiness, and preferences [5]. In line with this, there are five objectives of differentiated learning, including: 1) to assist the learning process of all students without exception, 2) to enhance students' motivation and learning outcomes, 3) to foster harmonious relationships between students and educators, 4) to support students' independent learning processes, and 5) to increase educators' satisfaction [21].

Additionally, observations made in the field by teaching campus students also indicate that differentiated learning plays a complex role in enhancing students' understanding, interest, motivation, and learning outcomes. Students are more enthusiastic about participating in learning because they gain meaningful understanding that aligns with their readiness and interests. Differentiated learning can increase student engagement by providing them with choices in the learning process, which ultimately enhances children's intrinsic motivation [22]. Furthermore, when students feel that learning is tailored to their needs, they tend to demonstrate better learning outcomes and have a more positive attitude toward their learning experiences [23].

The implementation of differentiated learning not only assists students with various learning styles but also creates an inclusive and responsive learning environment. The tailored learning can help reduce achievement gaps among students from different backgrounds [24]. From the above discussion, it can be concluded that in efforts to improve students' learning outcomes, differentiated learning can be utilized as one of the models that can be implemented in the classroom. Differentiated learning serves as an effort to enhance students' abilities, interests, motivation, and learning outcomes. By considering students' readiness, interests, and learning styles, differentiated learning can create enjoyable and meaningful educational

experiences. Through differentiated learning, students are given the opportunity to explore themselves, their abilities, skills, and knowledge.

Benefits of Differentiated Learning

Based on observations during the teaching campus program at Batealit 2 elementary school, there are several benefits of differentiated learning, as follows: 1) It makes students more independent, creative, and productive in every learning experience. Differentiated learning can enhance student independence by providing them with choices in how they learn and complete tasks, which can foster their creativity and productivity [25]. 2) It facilitates equal growth for students. Differentiated learning allows students with varying levels of ability to develop simultaneously, as this approach tailors the content and teaching methods to individual needs, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to achieve the same learning objectives [26]. 3) It creates enjoyable learning experiences for students. Rosa found in their study that enjoyable and relevant learning experiences can increase student motivation, which is one of the primary goals of differentiated learning [27]. 4) It effectively addresses students' learning needs. The importance of recognizing and valuing the various types of intelligence that students possess, allowing differentiated learning to meet the diverse and unique learning needs of each individual [28]. 5) Students with different characteristics feel more valued and treated fairly. When students feel valued and recognized in the learning process, they tend to have a positive attitude toward school and learning, contributing to an overall improvement in learning outcomes [29]. Thus, the implementation of differentiated learning at Batealit 2 elementary school not only provides direct benefits for students but also supports the development of an inclusive and equitable learning environment.

Implementation of Differentiated Learning

Based on an interview with Dian, the homeroom teacher for grade 4 at Batealit 2 elementary school, she stated, "Each student has their own learning style. Some are visual, some are auditory, and some are kinesthetic." This statement is supported by observations made during the implementation of differentiated learning models. Students appeared to be more engaged in their learning because they were given the freedom to choose how to learn according to their styles and interests. As a result, it was found that the educator utilized three learning styles in differentiated learning: visual learning, auditory learning, and kinesthetic learning. Below is an explanation of each learning style:

a. Visual Learning

In the implementation of learning in grade IV at Batealit 2 elementary school, students were mapped according to their learning needs. Group formation was based on students' learning styles, interests, and abilities to maximize information absorption. Through this visual learning style, the educator grouped six students together. In this visual learning activity, the educator paired students to create three pairs. Each pair was given a poster depicting plants, which included blank columns for labeling the parts of the plant. Students presented or communicated their assigned tasks, which allowed them to reflect on their understanding of the material that had been taught. The educator needs to appreciate the students' work to foster enthusiasm and motivation to develop their competencies, thereby increasing the students' self-confidence.

b. Auditory Learning

In this learning style, the educator grouped eight students and provided a review of the material on plants, briefly explaining the parts of the plant to the students. This was followed by the educator showing an educational video about the parts of plants. Afterward,

students were assigned tasks that included answering several questions in front of the class to reflect their understanding of the material presented by the educator.

c. Kinesthetic Learning

In the kinesthetic learning style, eight students were grouped and given a task by the educator to directly observe the parts of plants outside the classroom. In this group, students were asked to take notes on the parts of the plants based on their own observations, and then each student presented their findings in front of the class.

By having group activities that are tailored to the needs of students' learning levels, educators can implement differentiated learning in class IV more effectively. Differentiated learning can increase student motivation and engagement, because each individual gets a learning experience that suits their style and needs [30]. In this context, although each group receives the same material, the different approaches in delivery and activities carried out allow students to learn in the way that best suits them. This is in line with findings expressed by Caesaria who stated that diversity in learning styles and student needs can be increased through flexible teaching strategies [31]. Thus, diversity in students facilitated by educators not only enriches the learning experience, but also contributes to the continuity of a more inclusive and effective teaching and learning process. Educators who are able to recognize and respond to these differences will create a more dynamic learning environment, where every student feels valued and motivated to actively participate in the learning process.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Differentiated Learning

Based on observations made during the teaching campus program at Batealit 2 elementary school, the implementation of differentiated learning does not always run smoothly. Several advantages and disadvantages were identified during the application of differentiated learning in the classroom. These advantages and disadvantages are influenced by supporting and hindering factors. The supporting factors for the success of differentiated learning at Batealit 2 elementary school include the following:

- 1) The educator's skill in managing the classroom during differentiated learning.
- 2) The high interest of students, as they find the new learning model engaging.
- 3) The establishment of good relationships and communication between educators and students.

On the other hand, the hindering factors in the implementation of differentiated learning at Batealit 2 elementary school include:

1. Limited knowledge and competence of educators regarding differentiated learning.
2. Differentiated learning is perceived as a new paradigm in education.
3. Insufficient ability of educators to understand the diversity of students.
4. Limited skills of educators in using information technology (IT).

Considering these supporting and hindering factors, the advantages and disadvantages of differentiated learning in elementary schools, particularly at Batealit 2 elementary school, can be summarized as follows:

Advantages of Differentiated Learning:

- a. It enhances the competencies and skills of educators in creating a pleasant and meaningful learning environment.
- b. It increases students' motivation and learning outcomes.
- c. Educators can identify students' readiness, interests, and learning styles, allowing them to determine the appropriate strategies to develop each student's potential.
- d. There is a greater opportunity to achieve learning objectives, as differentiated learning enables students to understand the material more easily.

Disadvantages of Differentiated Learning:

- a. Educators must spend more time preparing learning content, as differentiated learning involves presenting multiple models within a single lesson.
- b. If educators are unable to effectively manage the classroom, the learning process may not proceed optimally.
- c. Differentiated learning is often perceived as complicated because it requires a variety of content within a single lesson.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings and discussion, it can be concluded that differentiated learning, which takes into account students' readiness, interests, and learning styles, is capable of creating a pleasant and meaningful learning experience. Through differentiated learning, students are given the opportunity to explore themselves, their abilities, skills, and knowledge. This is evident in the fact that before the implementation of differentiated learning, only a few students responded well. However, after applying differentiated learning by grouping students children became more creative, active, and better able to understand the material explained by the educator. Additionally, there are still many shortcomings in the implementation of differentiated learning in grade IV at Batealit 2 elementary school. For example, there is a limited knowledge and competence among educators regarding differentiated learning, as well as a lack of skills in using information technology.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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