

English Junior High School Teachers' and Students' Perspectives of Differentiated Instruction Practices in Kurikulum Merdeka

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Abstract: This study proposes to explore English Junior High School teachers' and students' perspectives of differentiated instruction practices in *Kurikulum Merdeka*. The study conducted a descriptive qualitative approach. Three teachers and 3 classes of each grade of Junior High School students were selected to become participants in this study. The data were gathered through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The result of this study revealed that all teachers and most of the students had positive perspectives on the use of Differentiated Instruction in the classes. That was indicated from their positive thoughts on their planning and implementation that Differentiated instruction became an effective and engaging learning practice in the classroom. The teachers planned the lesson with different stages but with the same topic. The teachers are evaluated as good practitioners for students in practicing Differentiated Instruction. Most of the students had positive feedback on their experiences and found when the teachers implemented differentiated instruction strategies in their classes, they could overcome their learning difficulties. All this result lead to the alignment of the differentiated instruction practices that should be implemented in any classroom activities.

Key words: Differentiated instruction practices, teachers' perspectives, students' perspectives, kurikulum merdeka

INTRODUCTION

Each student has a different learning style. Pashler et al. (2009) state that learning style refers to the view that different people learn information differently. Learning styles require teachers to provide different instructions for each student. The result of this diagnosis helps teachers analyze students' learning needs and adapt them to teaching methods. Tomlison (1992, p.2) clarifies that in a differentiated classroom, teachers use time flexibly, implement different learning strategies, and ensure that learning content and learning content and environments are appropriate for students. Teachers are concerned about their own abilities, one of which is the lack of learning opportunities and support from schools.

The main features of this curriculum are aimed at restoring learning after the pandemic, one of which is that teachers provide differentiated learning according to student's abilities and adapt to local conditions and content. Teachers find Differentiated Instruction very difficult to apply because of the curriculum that requires specific subjects to be taught. This is to prevent teachers from normal practices.

The Indonesian government has previously implemented an emergency curriculum during the pandemic and has started Kurikulum Merdeka on February 11th, 2022. The main features of this curriculum are intended at restoring learning after the pandemic, one of which is that teachers provide differentiated learning according to students' abilities and adapt to the lesson's flexibility. (National Curriculum Information System, 2022)

The transition from the 2013 curriculum to the Merdeka curriculum has resulted in some teachers, still seeing differentiated Instruction as a difficult approach, creating unique challenges for teachers in applying differentiated learning. Teachers need to prepare lesson materials and practice sheets between lesson plans. In that case, teachers are expected to be able to understand each other's situation of students in different classes.

Differentiation in the classroom is achieved through teachers' assumptions and their belief system, which is related to their mindset. A teacher's belief in a learning model determines actions and steps, but applying Differentiated Instruction can be challenging due to specific curriculum requirements. Stollman (2018) highlights a teacher's perspective on Differentiated Instruction to prevent deviation from normal practice.

It appears important to include the group of insiders or recipients (students) who are actively involved in Differentiated Instruction practices in order to provide an extension of this perspective. In this situation, it would be fascinating to ask both teachers and students about their opinions of how well their teachers take into account the unique needs of each student.

The Differentiated Instruction implementation research has been conducted by Kelley (2018) in her research entitled "Using Differentiated Instruction in Foreign Language Classrooms Successfully: A Basic Qualitative Investigation". The similar thing of this research with my research is the use of differentiated Instruction in the teaching and learning process and both of them use qualitative design. The difference between this research and my research is this study highlighted the specific strategies, techniques, and processes of nine secondary teachers who differentiate instruction in a secondary modern foreign language course to successfully meet the needs of non-native mixed-ability students. While, my research will identify the teachers' and students' perspectives on the use of DI, and the skill analysis will be writing specifically.

From the explanation above, this study would like to explore the perspectives of English teachers and students of junior high school on the implementation of Differentiated Instruction practices in Kurikulum Merdeka. It intended to find out the difficulties that probably appear in the learning process.

RESEARCH METHOD

Design of the Research

In this research, the researcher will use qualitative design to investigate is the teacher's and students' perspectives on the implementation of DI to English Teaching Learning. Qualitative research is also a process of searching for a key issue (Silverman, 2020).

Data and Data Source

The research data is from the teachers' and students' perspectives on DI practices in Kurikulum Merdeka. The data source from qualitative research comes from many sources such as interviews, observations, documents, and audio-visual information (Creswell, 2014).

The data are from 2 English Teacher and 7th grade students of SMP N 1 Trangkil. There are 9 classes but I will use 3 class as a sample.

Research Instruments

The research tools used in this qualitative study are observations and interviews. The first step in this study was to develop a classroom observation checklist with reference to Subban and Round (2015). This checklist contains yes/no questions designed to help researchers get an

initial idea of how DI might be applied in the classroom. Additionally, her checklist is better suited for use in this study because there are five of her themes to observe in the classroom. In the final phase of this study, we conducted semi-structured interviews based on lesson observation data. A semi-structured interview (SSI) is used to conduct an in-depth conversation (Kakilla, 2021). This is because SSI researchers can use non-verbal responses such as smiling, laughing, and silence to reveal hidden responses of the interlocutor. Similar to Adams (2015, p. 494), SSIs found that when in a focus group with a peer, they may exhibit reactions that are impossible to express from the other.

Research Instruments

The data collection techniques in this study started with three class observations to determine class status, with Curriculum Merdeka and DI serving as the main features. Instruction observation will be conducted twice for each class. After conducting a classroom observation, the teacher conducts her one-hour, semi-structured, one-on-one interview and answers her questions regarding understanding, perception, and practice of DI in the classroom.

Then, The teacher conducts her one-hour, semi-structured, interviews to some students (as samples will be 5 students for each classes, there are three classes as samples from 9 classes) and answers her questions regarding the practice of DI in the classroom.

Data Analyses Technique

This study belongs to case study analysis as it is based on real phenomena. The aim is to find out teachers and students' perspectives on DI implementation at Kurikulum Merdeka. Case studies may use multiple data collections (Creswell: 2012).

Data from class observation are the first to show how DI is being implemented in classrooms at Kurikulum Merdeka. Upon learning of the situation, researchers transcribed audio recordings of interviews with her two teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Trangkil and her 15 seventh graders students from 3 classes. Researchers encode and flatten the data to complete the analysis process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As a consequence of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, various findings pertaining to instructors' attitudes were discovered. According to this survey, instructors had favorable opinions about the application of differentiated instruction practices in the classroom. This judgment was made in light of a number of observations and conversations regarding the viewpoints of teachers as revealed through textbook evaluations and surveys regarding the functions of textbooks in the classroom. Differentiated instruction was viewed by the teachers as an acceptable and effective teaching method. For the pupils in the classroom, they claimed that the teaching and learning process is more appealing, transparent, and simple to understand. The implementation of differentiated instruction practices could theoretically achieve the objectives of teaching and learning.

According to the study's findings, the majority of students and all teachers view the implementation of differentiated education in the classroom favorably. Their positive comments on their planning and execution showed that differentiated instruction was a successful and interesting teaching method in the classroom. Teachers are seen as excellent role models for children when it comes to using differentiated education. The majority of the students gave good reviews of their encounters and discovered that they could get past their learning

challenges when the teachers used differentiated instruction tactics in their classes. All of these findings lead to the alignment of differentiated instruction strategies that have to be used in all activities in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

The result of this study revealed that all teachers and most of the students had positive perspectives on the use of differentiated instruction in the classes. That was indicated from their positive thoughts on their planning and implementation that differentiated instruction became an effective and engaging learning practice in the classroom. The teachers planned the lesson with different stages but with the same topic. The teachers are evaluated as good practitioners for students in practicing differentiated instruction. And most of the students had positive feedback on their experiences and found when the teachers implemented differentiated instruction strategies in their classes, they could overcome their learning difficulties. All this result leads to the alignment of the differentiated instruction practices that should be implemented in any classroom activities.

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