

Differentiated Learning in Social Studies Subjects as an Effort to Create an Inclusive Learning Environment

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Abstract: Differences in student characteristics certainly affect the learning process and outcomes carried out in the classroom. Student diversity is a challenge for schools and teachers to create an inclusive learning environment. This challenge is experienced by all subject teachers, including social studies. One solution to overcome this challenge is to include a differentiated learning approach. This is urgent in the learning process in the Independent Curriculum. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the application of differentiated learning in social studies subjects in schools. The location of the study was Public JHS 4 Malang. This study used a descriptive qualitative method, with observation, direct interviews, and documentation, as well as literature studies to collect data and strengthen the research results. The results showed that social studies teachers at Public JHS 4 Malang used various media and strategies in implementing differentiated learning. Diagnostic tests were conducted before learning to determine students' abilities and needs. Analysis of the results of this test helps teachers design learning programs that are tailored to student characteristics, so that each student can develop optimally. The implementation of differentiated learning in social studies subjects at Public JHS 4 Malang has succeeded in creating a learning environment that supports student growth and motivation, making this school an ideal place to develop the individual potential of each student.

Keywords: Merdeka Curriculum; Differentiated Learning

Introduction

Education is the main foundation in forming a superior and competitive next generation in the future. Various policies are certainly needed to achieve these goals to the fullest. Progressive and inclusive education policies are the key to ensuring that each individual has equivalent access to quality education and the same opportunity (Medina-García et al., 2020). The education curriculum continues to undergo transformation to adjust to the demands of the times and learning needs that are more relevant and effective. The change in the curriculum becomes a common thing in the world of education in Indonesia, the curriculum is influenced by political, socio-cultural development, to science and technology (Setiawan & Suwandi, 2022). The purpose of

curriculum change in education is to prepare students to face the future by mastering the science, attitudes, and skills needed to adapt to the changing environment (Kumar & Rewari, 2022; Limiansi et al., 2023).

The Merdeka Curriculum that is running in the world of education currently provides opportunities for students to develop their potential holistically and based on individual needs (Yulianti & Hadi, 2023). Basically the independent curriculum issued by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) aims to increase pleasure in the educational process, both for students and educators (Sulistiyosari et al., 2022). Students in the learning process must certainly be given the freedom to develop their potential without having to be limited by the desire of the teacher. Each

student has a uniqueness, needs, and different potential (Vargas, 2019). So that the learning approach is inclusive and responsive to individual needs is the main key in creating an effective learning environment.

One learning approach that can create an inclusive learning environment is differentiated learning. In differentiating learning is one of the adjusting efforts in learning in class to meet the individual needs of each student, by aligning the interests, learning profiles, and readiness of students to achieve learning goals (Febriana et al., 2023; Sulistyosari et al., 2022). This differentiation learning is closely related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum which is being improved in every educational institution today. Therefore, the differentiated learning approach is an important key to creating an inclusive and responsive learning environment to the diversity of students in various learning processes, including social studies subjects.

The subject of social studies has a very important role in equipping students with an understanding of the community that occurs in the surrounding environment. Through social studies, students are expected to be able to develop critical thinking skills, creative, and empathy for various social issues faced by the community (Sudrajat, 2015). In the context of an independent curriculum, differentiating learning in social studies subjects can be an effective means to accommodate various backgrounds and experiences of students in understanding social issues. With this approach, the teacher can arrange learning in accordance with the learning profile of students, including interest in certain themes in social studies, such as history, geography, or economy. In addition, learning differentiation in social studies also allows teachers to adjust teaching strategies and methods based on learning readiness and students' understanding, so that each individual can achieve optimal learning goals. This not only increases the involvement and motivation of learning, but also builds the social skills needed to actively participate in social studies learning in schools.

Based on the findings of the case of social studies teachers related to efforts to build an inclusive classroom environment, many teachers

face challenges in adjusting learning to meet the needs of all students. One of the difficulties is related to managing heterogeneous classes, where there are variations in abilities, interests, and learning styles. Social studies teachers must be able to identify the individual needs of students through diagnostic assessments, then apply differentiated learning. Another challenge that often arises is the limited resources and time in providing assignments that are appropriate for each individual, and ensuring that all students are actively involved without anyone feeling neglected. This is also seen in the implementation of social studies learning at SMP Negeri 4 Malang, where teachers try to create an inclusive classroom environment by implementing a variety of learning methods, such as group discussions and the use of interactive learning media. Teachers at the school also use process and product differentiation to accommodate differences in student abilities. These efforts help create a more inclusive classroom atmosphere, where all students can learn according to their respective capacities and potentials. Moreover, SMP Negeri 4 Malang as a quality and progressive educational institution, needs to pay attention to the diversity of its students so that each individual can develop optimally according to their potential and needs. Through the implementation of differentiated learning, it is expected to be able to create an inclusive learning environment, strengthen diversity, and ensure the fulfillment of curriculum targets according to the needs of each student.

Based on the description above, therefore it is important to do further exploration in the application of differentiated learning in social studies learning as an effort to create an inclusive learning environment. This research is important to provide views and direct experience in the field. In addition, the hope is to make contributions and references for further research.

Materials and Methods

Study Area & Procedures

This research is a qualitative research with a descriptive approach that aims to explore the

implementation of an independent curriculum with differentiating learning. Descriptive qualitative research emphasizes observations, interviews, and documentation to explore rich and detailed data on the topic being studied (Denny & Weckesser, 2022). In this context, researchers try to understand the implementation of the free learning curriculum and the application of learning differentiated in social studies subjects through direct interaction with teachers and students in the school environment. This approach allows researchers to describe the conditions that occur in the field clearly and objectively, and analyze the various dynamics that exist in the learning process (Ramdhan, 2021). The study was conducted at Public JHS 4 Malang during learning activities. Researchers conducted direct research by conducting observations and interviews at Public JHS 4 Malang.

The subject of this study was a teacher and class student in one of the classes in Public JHS 4 Malang. Researchers will observe and interview teachers and students to get more detailed data about the implementation of an independent curriculum with differentiating learning. Researchers also strengthen the results of research by conducting a literature study, which is an effort to gather relevant information to the topic or problem under study. The literature study was carried out by examining various relevant literature, both in the form of books, scientific journals, and previous research articles, to get a theoretical perspective that supports findings in the field (Ridwan et al., 2021). This approach is important for enriching researchers' understanding of key concepts such as differentiated learning and independent learning curriculum, as well as providing a strong academic foundation for the interpretation of the resulting data. By combining the results of observations and interviews with existing literature, this research is expected to provide a comprehensive picture of the application of differentiated learning approaches in social studies, as well as validating findings through relevant scientific references.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study was conducted through several stages, namely collection, reduction,

presentation, and drawing conclusions. After the data is obtained from the results of interviews, observations, and documentation, researchers conduct data reduction process by selecting and filtering relevant information in accordance with the focus of research, namely the application of differentiated learning in the independent curriculum learning in social studies subjects. Data that has been summarized is then presented in the form of descriptive narratives to provide a clear picture of the observed phenomena. The final stage is withdrawing conclusions, where researchers conclude findings based on data interpretation to provide a comprehensive explanation.

Results and Discussion

Results

Public JHS 4 Malang is known as a favorite school because it has a lot of achievements. As a support in becoming a superior school in Malang City of Public JHS 4 Malang has a variety of extracurricular activities for students. One of the famous extracurricular activities in Public JHS 4 Malang is PPST (Education and Traditional Art Development). The formation and development of traditional arts is one of the most important foundations for the younger generation today. It is hoped that the young generation PPST not only knows culture, but also inherits the heritage of arts and traditions of their ancestors. Not only PPST, Public JHS 4 Malang also provides facilities to students who have talents and interests in various fields such as scouts, sports, literacy, and similar talent interests.

Students in Public JHS 4 Malang are very diverse in terms of interests, talents, and backgrounds, reflecting rich and dynamic diversity in the school environment. With this diversity, Public JHS 4 Malang provides an opportunity for every student to develop according to the potential and uniqueness of the individual. Through various extracurricular programs and inclusive learning approaches, this school creates a learning environment that supports the holistic growth of students in various aspects of life. In accordance with the opinion of Fauzia & Ramadan (2023) that the independent curriculum is prepared to give

students greater freedom in the education process and optimize potential in accordance with interests and talents in individual students.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Public JHS 4 Malang is also supported by differentiated learning applied by teachers in each class. The teacher in the implementation has used various media in the learning process such as PPT learning, educational video, kahoot, canva, educaplay, quizziz, and various other media. Even Malang teachers also use various methods or strategies in applying differentiated learning. The application of differentiated learning can stimulate students to make maximum use of information during the learning process (Lupita & Hidajat, 2022). Of course, a teacher in the learning process is very important can facilitate diversity by adjusting the characteristics of students in each class.



Figure 1. Learning differentiated Discussion Group Division
Note: Researcher Documentation



Figure 2. Learning Differentiates in Formative Assessments
Note: Researcher Documentation

Differentiated learning implemented by teachers in Public JHS 4 Malang in each class is different. The uniqueness in grouping classes in Public JHS 4 Malang based on the interests and talents of students is a characteristic. However, the teacher before the implementation of the activity provides a diagnostic test to ensure to ensure that each student is placed in the right group in accordance with their abilities and learning needs. This test helps teachers in designing appropriate and effective learning strategies to optimize the development of each student.

The teacher after the diagnostic test analyzes the results to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of each student. Diagnostic assessment used in the form of cognitive diagnostic assessment. Cognitive diagnostic assessment focuses on students' cognitive abilities, such as understanding concepts, the ability to solve problems, and critical thinking skills. The form of cognitive diagnostic assessment can be in the form of written tests with multiple choice questions. Through the cognitive diagnostic assessment, the teacher can gain a deeper understanding of the cognitive abilities of each student. Then, the teacher can design a more effective and differentiated learning strategy that is tailored to the characteristics of students in the classroom. This differentiation learning approach involves various strategies, such as material variations, various activities, and tasks that are tailored to the level of difficulty that can be achieved by students.

The differentiated learning process in the classroom is carried out by adjusting teaching based on the needs, interests, and learning readiness of each student. In its application, teachers use the forms of differentiation, process differentiation and product differentiation. In process differentiation, teachers give different tasks according to the abilities and learning readiness of students. As for product differentiation, teachers give students the choice to demonstrate their understanding through presentations, making videos or written reports. For example, in social studies lessons that have been implemented in Public JHS 4 Malang, students can choose to complete projects in a way that suits their learning style, such as making posters about local history,

writing analytical essays, or composing short dramas related to historical events being studied.

Discussions

Based on field findings, differentiated learning that begins with a diagnostic assessment to understand the learning profile, interests, and learning readiness of students can increase the effectiveness of the learning process. This diagnostic assessment acts as an instrument to map the individual needs of students in more depth, so that teachers can develop more personal and adaptive strategies. This is relevant to the results of Sitorus's research (2019), namely that mapping student needs should not only be based on learning styles, but also based on learning readiness, interests, and learning profiles to obtain accurate results and in accordance with the concept of differentiation. With the implementation of appropriate learning, an inclusive learning environment can be created in the classroom. In addition, students can learn more efficiently and in a focused manner, and feel more motivated because the learning they receive is relevant to their characteristics.

In social studies learning, the differentiated learning process allows students to learn more efficiently and in a focused manner. Differentiated learning is considered more effective because it is adjusted to the learning needs of each student (Martanti et al., 2022). It should also be noted that differentiated learning is designed according to the characteristics of students and is able to increase their active participation. When learning is tailored to the individual potential of students, they not only feel actively involved, but also find it easier to understand the material being presented. The end result is a more inclusive and collaborative classroom atmosphere, where each student gets the opportunity to develop according to their own uniqueness.

Conclusions

This study shows that Public JHS 4 Malang is a favorite school known for its various achievements and inclusive learning approach. Through various extracurricular programs, such as PPST (Traditional Education and Arts Development),

this school not only preserves culture but also develops students' interests and talents in various fields. The diversity of students' interests and backgrounds creates a dynamic learning environment, which is further supported by the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This curriculum gives students more freedom to learn according to their individual potential and interests. In addition, the differentiated learning implemented in this school, starting with diagnostic tests, helps teachers understand students' learning profiles, interests, and readiness. With the right adjustment of learning strategies, students can learn more effectively and efficiently according to their needs. The use of various media and learning methods, such as educational videos, online quizzes, and project-based assignments, allows students to be more actively involved in the learning process. This differentiated approach has been shown to increase students' learning motivation because the material presented is relevant to their characteristics, creating an inclusive and collaborative classroom atmosphere. Every student gets the same opportunity to develop their potential optimally according to their uniqueness, making Public JHS 4 Malang an ideal school in supporting the holistic growth of students.

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