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## **Differentiated Learning Management: A Theoretical Integration of Tomlison's Model within The Merdeka Curriculum Framework**

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### **Abstract**

*Merdeka Curriculum is an alternative educational approach that focuses more on skill development and self-empowerment. In its implementation, a learning concept called differentiated learning is designed. This research aims to find out 1) The concept of differentiated learning management; 2) The principles applied; and 3) The role of teachers in differentiated learning management. Using qualitative research method with literature study research type. Data sources are obtained through literature in the form of scientific research journals, proceeding articles, books or some other forms of documents collected from Google Scholar, Sinta Kemendikbud, university libraries, Google Books, and some other digital sources. The data analysis technique uses thematic analysis, which is an analytical technique that allows researchers to identify and categorize thematic patterns from the previously collected literature. The results of this study reveal 1) The stages of differentiated learning management: the planning stage begins with a diagnostic assessment to diagnose students' readiness and learning styles, at the organizing stage the teacher determines the media that is suitable for students' learning styles so that the implementation stage can run optimally, then the stage of controlling learning outcomes through formative assessment. 2) The principles that need to be considered are learning environment, quality curriculum, continuous assessment, responsive learning and leadership and classroom routines. 3) In this learning, the role of teachers, especially their creativity in management, is needed to create effective and efficient learning. The existence of this research is a reference for educators to be able to carry out learning in the independent curriculum effectively and efficiently, one of which is by implementing differentiated learning.*

**Keywords:** *Management; Learning; Differentiated; Merdeka Curriculum.*

### **Introduction**

The independent curriculum is an alternative educational approach that focuses more on skill development and self-empowerment. Based on the belief that each learner has different characteristics (Rahmafritri, Deswita, & Trisoni, 2024; Satria Budi & Setio Rini, 2024). So that in the implementation

of the independent curriculum, a learning concept is designed, where in the process students are given the freedom to increase their potential according to their interests, talents and learning styles, which is called differentiated learning (Muliani, 2023). In essence, differentiated learning is not something that is new to us in the world of education with a new system and order, in this case emphasizing more on efforts to create learner-centered learning practices (Safitri, 2023). Differentiated learning was first introduced by Carol Ann Tomlison & Moon. According to them, differentiated learning is learning that serves, facilitates, pays attention to the interests and learning tendencies of diverse students and also knows their level of readiness. Differentiated learning focuses on care and attention to students' strengths and needs (Marlina, 2020).

The implementation of the new curriculum is one of the government's concerns aimed at the educational aspect. The renewal of the current curriculum, namely the independent curriculum, is an effort to improve and improve learning concepts that are considered less effective in the previous curriculum. In this case, differentiated learning is one of the learning concepts that is considered effective and in accordance with the concept of an independent curriculum (Purnawanto, 2023). Forming effective learning is by involving students' participation and appreciation in the learning process. And most importantly, the teacher is an important factor in creating effective learning (Junaedi, 2019).

Differentiated learning is a good and ideal learning concept in the independent curriculum, but it is a challenge for teachers to be more creative in the learning process. The new concept presented in the independent curriculum requires educators to adapt and adjust learning methods so that the material can be conveyed properly. Educators are given the freedom to be able to determine the methods that are suitable for the learning that will be carried out. In the implementation of differentiated learning, teacher activity and creativity are needed to form learning that provides freedom for students to actively participate in teaching and learning activities, so that the potential that exists in them can be further developed (Agustiana, Malik, & Rumiati, 2023).

Several studies have examined differentiated learning. Fauzia and Hadikusuma's (Fauzia & Hadikusuma Ramadan, 2023) research journal, Marantika et al. (2023) and Mahfudz's (2023) research results discuss the indicators that need to be considered, the objectives and stages in implementing differentiated learning in schools. Ningrum's journal discusses the characteristics of differentiated learning in the independent curriculum in madrasah ibtdaiyah (Ningrum, Maghfiroh, & Andriani, 2023). Furthermore, Bendriyanti's research in her research explained that the management of differentiated learning implemented in the school had a positive impact on building students' enthusiasm for learning (Bendriyanti, Dewi, & Nurhasanah, 2022). In Suwandi's research, which discusses strategies for differentiated learning aspects of learning content that are in accordance with student learning interests in an independent curriculum (Suwandi et al., 2023). And in Muliani's research with a discussion of tips and tricks in overcoming obstacles in differentiated learning (Muliani, 2023).

Some of the above studies have discussed differentiated learning, starting from the characteristics of differentiated learning, the stages of implementation, the effect of differentiated learning on students with positive or negative results, or the obstacles felt by teachers in its implementation. Some of these studies become the author's reference to conduct research on the theme of differentiated learning. In this research, the author will emphasize more on the management of differentiated learning in the independent curriculum which has not been discussed much before,

namely emphasizing the preparation process or differentiated learning management process from planning, implementation, to control and assessment. It also discusses the basic principles that need to be considered in differentiated learning. And discusses the important role of teachers in differentiated learning in the implementation of the independent curriculum. This research aims to provide a comprehensive overview of differentiated learning management. In addition, it can be a reference for educators in creating learning that is in accordance with the current curriculum.

### **Research Methods**

This research uses qualitative research methods with a library research approach. In qualitative research, researchers try to understand new phenomena needed in science and poured in detailed and in-depth descriptions with descriptive words in accordance with the natural context (Fadli, 2021). Research using the literature study method through the stages of research carried out by collecting literature sources from various literatures that are in accordance with the topic to be discussed (Darmalaksana, 2020). This research approach was chosen based on the flexibility provided so that it can explore theories and research findings that are in accordance with the topic of discussion and the objectives of this research from various sources without geographical limitations or other technical constraints.

Data collection was carried out through searching for various literature relevant to the topic studied from various sources such as Google Scholar, Sinta Kemendikbud, University Libraries, Google Books, and several other digital sources. Data sources are obtained from literature that has been collected in the form of scientific research journals, proceedings articles, books or some other forms of documents. This literature study aims to obtain theoretical information to become a strong theoretical basis for researchers. The type of data used in this study is secondary data, namely data that is not obtained directly from the field, but is collected from existing sources.

The data analysis technique in this research uses thematic analysis, which is an analytical technique that allows researchers to identify and categorize thematic patterns from the previously collected literature. The initial step taken was to read and sift through the literature to identify themes relevant to the research topic. Furthermore, after identifying the main themes, the researcher conducted an in-depth analysis of each theme to explore the patterns or relationships of each theme. The results of the analysis were then compiled in the form of a comprehensive narrative and in accordance with the research topic studied.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### ***The Concept of Differentiated Learning Management in the Merdeka Curriculum***

Differentiated learning is an effort in the learning process in the classroom that is appropriate and can meet the learning needs of students. In simple terms, differentiated learning is the things that teachers have decided logically to be able to meet the needs of students (Pitaloka & Wahyudin, 2023). According to Marlina in Mukhtar et al. (2023) the general purpose of differentiated learning is to coordinate learning centered on two aspects, namely student interest and readiness in the teaching and learning process. Then the objectives of differentiated learning specifically are, 1) Helping students in increasing awareness of student abilities so that learning objectives can be achieved; 2) Increasing student motivation through learning stimuli so that student learning outcomes increase;

3) Building harmonious interactions between teachers and students to be more enthusiastic in learning; 4) Stimulating students to be able to learn independently and have an attitude of respect for diversity; and 5) Increasing teacher satisfaction with learning concepts that are more challenging and can develop creativity and teaching skills (Faiz, Pratama, & Kurniawaty, 2022).

In differentiated learning, teachers must realize that in implementing this learning, one approach or method is not enough. Many aspects need to be considered and organized by the teacher in this learning. These include subject matter, exercises, assignments in class and at home, evaluations to measure the level of understanding, interest in learning, and methods of delivering subject matter in accordance with the learning profile of students (Safitri, 2023). In this case, good management is needed so that the learning process can be carried out well and the learning objectives that have been determined are achieved. The management concept of differentiated learning refers to the strategies and practices used by teachers to meet the needs of diverse learners.

### 1. Planning

In accordance with the concept of differentiated learning where the learning pattern is to meet the individual needs of students (Lukitaningtyas, 2022). Therefore, the initial stage of the teacher in planning differentiated learning begins with finding out and understanding the learning readiness, interest and learning profile of each individual. In differentiated learning to identify students' needs, teachers need to conduct diagnostic assessment. This diagnostic assessment is conducted before the lesson so that the teacher can measure the level of ability, readiness, interest and learning style of the students (Fitrotul Insani, Harto Nuroso, & Iin Purnamasari, 2023).

The Merdeka Curriculum aims to maximize learning outcomes and can meet the individual needs of students (LUTFIANA, 2022). To fulfill this goal, there are stages that need to be carried out in the form of diagnostic assessments, which are divided into cognitive and non-cognitive diagnostic assessments (Fitrotul Insani et al., 2023; Muktamar, Ardianto, & Ariswanto, 2024). The difference between the two is that cognitive diagnostic assessments are conducted at the beginning of learning about new material on a regular basis. This aims to analyze the teacher on the level of student readiness to enter new learning materials (Sasomo & Rahmawati, 2023). While non-cognitive diagnostic assessments as teacher identification in the emotional, social and psychological domains. From this assessment, teachers can find out the personal conditions of students that can have a significant impact on student achievement at school (Hasmawati & Muktamar, 2023). The implementation of this diagnostic assessment will be very useful for teachers in differentiated learning. Teachers can analyze students' learning readiness, interests and learning styles so that they can adjust learning with the results of the analysis. After the teacher obtains the data and analyzes it, the next step is lesson planning and adjusting the learning media that will be needed.

### 2. Organizing

From the teacher's analysis of the assessment results that have been carried out before learning, the next step is to develop a lesson plan by determining the methods and strategies for delivering material, media and supporting materials that have been adapted to the needs of students during learning (Elviya & Sukartiningsih, 2023). As one of the patterns of implementing independent learning, this learning system requires effective classroom management to achieve the goal of meeting the needs of students globally. Creating flexible learning that is structured so that learning can still run effectively (Munauwarah & Achadi, 2023). A step that teachers can take in

developing lesson plans is to divide students into several learning groups with characteristics based on the level of ability or learning needs of students. After dividing the groups, the teacher can adjust the activities and materials according to the learning needs of each group. For example, students who have more ability can be given more challenging tasks (Purnawanto, 2023).

Differentiated learning has three patterns in its implementation in the form of differentiation of content, process, product and environment or learning climate in the classroom. From these three patterns, teachers can determine which one of them is appropriate and can be used in the teaching and learning process. Of course, by taking into account the student's learning profile (Wahyuningsari, Mujiwati, Hilmiyah, Kusumawardani, & Sari, 2022). Here's an explanation of each pattern:

a. Content Differentiation

This pattern refers to the learning content with consideration of students' learning needs. Through mapping and categorizing according to students' abilities or learning profiles, teachers can design teaching materials by including various activities tailored to the learning topic (Fauzia & Hadikusuma Ramadan, 2023). Teachers can present several forms of content or learning materials according to the theme, for example, materials can be presented using pictures, videos, lesson plans, exercises or writings.

b. Process Differentiation

Process differentiation refers to the activities carried out by students in the classroom. How do students understand the learning material delivered by the teacher. Each student has a different way of capturing the material taught. This activity is not assessed numerically, but qualitatively in the form of feedback notes on students' attitudes, knowledge and skills that are still lacking or need to be improved (Marantika et al., 2023).

c. Product Differentiation

Shaping students' understanding of learning objectives through work reports to the teacher. The report can be a diagram, essay, article, presentation, file, audio, video or other format. Using product differentiation, students can customize their understanding in a way that best suits their individual skills (Amalia, Rasyad, & Gunawan, 2023).

3. Actuating

In implementing differentiated learning, teachers need to pay attention to three aspects of student diversity. The first aspect is student readiness, which is the extent of students' knowledge and skills in achieving learning objectives. Teachers need to pay attention to what students need so that they can succeed in their lessons (Sasmayunita, Haerul, Thahir, & Afriyanti, 2023). The second aspect is interest. Interest is an important aspect that can increase students' learning motivation. Teachers can ask students about their interests, hobbies or favorite subjects. Students will be more diligent in learning things that interest them (Faiz et al., 2022). The third aspect is the learning profile. The student's learning profile refers to the delivery techniques or methods that interest or are of interest to students so that the subject matter can be conveyed well and is easier to understand. For example, there are students who like to learn with large groups or with small groups. Or with auditory, visual and kinesthetic methods (Zulkarnain & Khoir, 2023).

Teacher creativity is needed in implementing differentiated learning with reference to student learning profiles (Purwowododo & Zaini, 2023). Especially with the current development,

teachers can utilize various devices as media for delivering learning (Yusra & Sesmiarni, 2025). For example, pictures or colored writing media will be interesting for children with visual learning styles. Then, videos, movies, songs or other sound media will appeal to children with auditory learning styles. Currently, many videos and songs have been made by including elements of learning material in them. Meanwhile, to attract students with kinesthetic learning styles, practicum activities, projects or observations of the surrounding environment can be done (Fatmawaty, 2025; LATIFAH, 2023).

#### 4. Controlling

As a control of student learning, teachers need to know the results of the learning process that has been carried out. Assessment helps teachers to assess whether students have understood the material or need further explanation, identify parts that need deepening (Puteri, Yoenanto, & Nawangsari, 2023). A short example is to ask simple questions related to the material that has just been presented, to measure the level of understanding of the material (Sarnoto, 2024). In the classroom we can view assessment in three perspectives, namely: 1) Assessment for learning, assessment conducted during the learning process and is usually used as a basis for improving the teaching and learning process; 2) Assessment of learning, assessment conducted after the learning process is complete; 3) Assessment as learning, assessment as a learning process and involves students actively in the assessment activities (Mahfudz, 2023).

### ***Basic Principles of Differentiated Learning in the Merdeka Curriculum***

In differentiated learning, there are some basic principles that guide teachers in implementing differentiated learning. According to Tomlison and Moon (2013) in Zulkarnain and Khoir (2023) there are five basic principles that become an aid for teachers in implementing differentiated learning, including:

#### 1. Learning Environment

The learning environment is the entire physical area of the school where students spend their time learning (Faiz et al., 2022). Learning climate is the situation during learning, the interaction that occurs between students and their teachers while at school. This learning environment and climate need attention from the teacher. In accordance with Jumrawarsih and Suhaili's research (Jumrawarsi & Suhaili, 2021) that creating a conducive learning environment and climate will be able to stimulate students to the desired learning objectives. During the learning process, teachers must respond to students by adjusting their readiness, interests and learning profiles, so that students' learning needs can be met. By adjusting the student learning environment to their learning readiness, interests and learning profiles, it is hoped that it will increase student learning motivation at school (Amalia et al., 2023).

#### 2. Quality Curriculum

A quality curriculum with clear objectives makes the implementation process focus on the goals that must be achieved until the learning process ends, it is also supported by the ability of teachers in its application (Ayudia et al., 2023). It is important to note that in learning the teacher must focus on student understanding, not for students to memorize the learning material. Students' understanding of the subject matter and its application in everyday life is the most important thing that needs to be achieved in learning. Teachers also need to pay attention that the existing

curriculum can spur and develop students' thinking more deeply so that their enthusiasm and motivation to learn will increase (Heny Kristiani et al., 2021).

### 3. Continuous Assessment

Continuous assessment is a teacher's action in formative assessment that is carried out continuously during the learning process, to find out things that need to be improved in teaching and the limits of students' understanding of the subject matter (Sarnoto, 2024). In this assessment, grades in the context of numbers are not given, formative assessment is carried out as a diagnostic test to find out the problems and obstacles faced by students when understanding learning materials and how solutions can be made by teachers to solve them (Fifani, Safrizal, & Fadriati, 2023). In continuous assessment, it is necessary to apply diagnostic assessment at the beginning of learning. Its function is to measure the limit of students' understanding of the material to be learned. One example of its implementation is brainstorming by asking basic questions about the material to be taught, besides that, a pre-test can also be done about the material. Then before the end of learning the teacher conducts a final assessment, this stage can be an evaluation for the teacher of his teaching methods. Teachers can find out things related to learning materials that may need to be improved or repeated (Zulkarnain & Khoir, 2023).

### 4. Responsive Learning

From the assessment results at the end of the lesson, we can see the things that need to be improved. Thus, the teacher can adjust the next lesson plan to the current situation by referring to the assessment results in the previous lesson (Baruta, 2023). In this case, a responsive response is needed from the teacher regarding the assessment results. The response is in the form of modification or development of further learning methods and strategies according to the needs, interests and learning profiles of students which can be known through the assessment at the end of the lesson (Sasmayunita et al., 2023).

### 5. Leadership and Classroom Routine

Teacher competence in managing the classroom well is certainly needed, especially in the implementation of differentiated learning. One of the principles is leadership, which is the teacher's ability to coordinate students to comply with the rules in learning. Classroom routine is how the teacher can manage the class every day by adjusting the procedure and can be responsible for creating quality learning (Gusteti & Neviyarni, 2022). Examples of some things that can be done by teachers in classroom management are, giving clear directions in every task given, keeping the sound of conversations of students who are in group discussions not noisy, or providing materials and materials needed by students can be easily reached (Zulkarnain & Khoir, 2023).

## ***Teacher's Role in Differentiated Learning Management***

In differentiated learning, teachers are expected to be able and able to apply methods and strategies that are in accordance with the conditions of the students, and not only with one method or strategy (Herwina Wiwin, 2021). Student characteristics and individual differences are very necessary to be considered, but by making these differences it is hoped that it will not cause jealousy between students and not discriminate against one another (Fauzia & Hadikusuma Ramadan, 2023). Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy, which is in line with differentiated education, is summarized as follows:

Those who work as woodcarvers must have knowledge of the types of wood, the properties of wood, the condition of wood, the beauty and the way to carve it. As a teacher, it is necessary to have the skills to teach in a kind and understanding way, just like carvers who understand the condition of wood. Teachers must also know the conditions of their students and how to treat them well, as well as have extensive knowledge (Sopianti, 2022). The condition and characteristics of students are important things that teachers need to know, to be a reference for teachers in formulating learning strategies, so as to ensure the achievement of learning objectives.

Learning and teachers are two things that cannot be separated. According to Urie Bronfenbrenner in Faiz et al. (2022) saying that the teacher as a cog in the teaching and learning process needs to know the fact that each student has unique abilities in each individual. The abilities, intelligence, character and skills of each student are not the same as the others. Since the teacher is the cog in the learning process, the teacher must be able to adapt to the students' learning styles and understand the characteristics of each student. In this differentiated learning, the teacher's target is to form a learning that is really needed by students which includes student readiness, student interests, and student learning styles. Like any other learning, teacher involvement is an important key in the learning process (Dhani, 2020). In differentiated learning, teachers are required to have a creative spirit in creating an interesting learning atmosphere and creating comfort for students in learning in class, happy with the subject matter and also able to maintain the enthusiasm of students during learning. Because in differentiated learning the teacher's orientation is to create learning by paying attention to the different needs of students without seeming to discriminate (Munauwarah & Achadi, 2023).

According to Marlina (2020) the teacher's role in differentiated learning includes: 1)Assessing students' readiness through various means; 2)Reading and interpreting students' interest tendencies and learning preferences; 3)Creating various ways for students to gather information and ideas; 4)Developing various ways for students to explore and have ideas; and 5)Presenting various means by which students can express and expand their understanding. Please check all images in your article, both on screen and printed versions. When checking the printed version of the image, please ensure that: (1) the color has sufficient contrast; (2) the picture is quite clear; (3) all labels on the image are readable.

## **Conclusion**

In differentiated learning, there needs to be structured management, so that even though in the process students are more free to express themselves, it still goes according to the flow and can achieve learning objectives. In this learning management, the earliest stage is that teachers need to know student readiness, interests and learning profiles through diagnostic assessments conducted at the beginning of learning, then from the assessment results, an analysis of the learning styles of students in the class is carried out. From the results of the analysis the teacher can conclude what learning steps or learning styles will be implemented in learning. Such as auditory, visual or kinesthetic learning styles. The main points that need to be considered in implementing differentiated learning are learning readiness, interest and student learning profile. Then as the final stage to determine the level of learning success as well as to control student learning outcomes, a final assessment is carried out, and the results of the assessment will inform the teacher whether students have really understood the lesson or still need further explanation.



There are several principles that need to be considered by teachers in implementing differentiated learning, namely, a student learning environment that is tailored to learning readiness, interests and student learning profiles, a quality curriculum with clear learning objectives, continuous assessment, namely teacher actions in formative assessments that are carried out continuously during the learning process, responsive learning, namely the teacher's active response to the results of learning assessments and classroom leadership and routines. In this learning process, teachers are guided to be creative in creating learning with the active involvement of students.

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