

EFL Teachers' Perceptions and Challenges in Implementing Differentiated Learning in Kurikulum Merdeka

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ABSTRACT

Differentiated learning is an instructional approach that tailors teaching methods to accommodate students' diverse needs. This study investigates teachers' perceptions of implementing differentiated learning in the context of the Kurikulum Merdeka, focusing on how it impacts teaching and learning. Through a qualitative case study approach, the research involved in-depth interviews with five teachers from Balikpapan City, East Kalimantan, who have between three to twenty-two years of teaching experience. The study explores teachers' preparedness to apply differentiated learning, their beliefs regarding its benefits, and the challenges they face in its implementation. While teachers recognize that differentiated learning fosters student engagement and accommodates diverse learning needs, they also encounter significant obstacles such as limited resources, time constraints, and the complexity of managing diverse student abilities and moods. Despite these difficulties, teachers commit to overcoming challenges by adopting creative strategies and continuous adaptation. The findings emphasize the need for institutional support, including training and resources, to enable teachers to implement differentiated learning effectively. This research contributes to how differentiated instruction can be more successfully integrated into classrooms under the Kurikulum Merdeka.

KEYWORDS

Classroom Instruction;
Differentiated Learning;
Educational Challenges;
Kurikulum Merdeka;
Teacher Perceptions

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menginvestigasi persepsi guru mengenai penerapan pembelajaran berdiferensiasi dalam konteks Kurikulum Merdeka, dengan fokus pada bagaimana hal tersebut memengaruhi proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran. Melalui pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, penelitian ini melibatkan wawancara mendalam dengan lima guru dari Kota Balikpapan, Kalimantan Timur, yang memiliki pengalaman mengajar antara tiga hingga dua puluh dua tahun. Studi ini mengeksplorasi kesiapan guru dalam menerapkan pembelajaran berdiferensiasi, keyakinan mereka mengenai manfaatnya, serta tantangan yang mereka hadapi dalam pelaksanaannya. Meskipun guru menyadari bahwa pembelajaran berdiferensiasi dapat meningkatkan keterlibatan siswa dan mengakomodasi berbagai kebutuhan belajar, mereka juga menghadapi kendala signifikan seperti keterbatasan sumber daya, kendala waktu, dan kompleksitas dalam mengelola kemampuan serta suasana hati siswa yang beragam. Meskipun menghadapi kesulitan tersebut, guru berkomitmen untuk mengatasi tantangan dengan mengadopsi strategi kreatif dan adaptasi yang terus-menerus. Temuan penelitian ini menekankan

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Instruksi Kelas; Kurikulum Merdeka; Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi; Persepsi Guru; Tantangan Pendidikan

pentingnya dukungan institusi, termasuk pelatihan dan sumber daya, untuk memungkinkan guru menerapkan pembelajaran berdiferensiasi secara efektif. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi terhadap pemahaman tentang bagaimana pembelajaran berdiferensiasi dapat diintegrasikan dengan lebih sukses di dalam kelas Kurikulum Merdeka.

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INTRODUCTION

In today's educational landscape, differentiated learning has become a central approach to addressing the diverse needs of students. This method emphasizes tailoring instruction to meet varying abilities, interests, and learning styles within the classroom. Research shows that incorporating differentiated learning strategies positively impacts student outcomes by making content more accessible and engaging (Chen et al., 2023; Lisa et al., 2021). Differentiated learning encourages the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills, allowing students to engage with material in ways that suit their individual learning preferences. Teachers play a crucial role in implementing these strategies, adapting their instruction to create more personalized, practical, and meaningful learning experiences. In this context, differentiated learning is a powerful tool for fostering a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. As Lai et al. (2015) argue, such approaches are essential in preparing students for the challenges of information and knowledge, ensuring that all students develop the skills necessary for future success. Technology reinforces the importance of digital literacy and career skills for students' future success.

One of the critical advantages of differentiated learning is its capacity to promote independent and active learning by providing students with various instructional resources tailored to their needs. Beyond enhancing individual learning, differentiated strategies encourage student collaboration, enabling them to work together while still engaging with content at their levels (Fatimah & Santiana, 2017). Technology, such as tablets and smartphones, has been particularly effective in supporting differentiated learning (Nikolopoulou et al., 2023). From a teacher's perspective, these digital tools allow for greater flexibility in instruction, enabling teachers to meet the varied needs of their students more effectively. However, selecting appropriate resources remains challenging, as teachers must carefully choose tools and apps that align with each student's abilities and learning goals. As numerous studies suggest, the success of differentiated learning largely depends on teacher perceptions and their willingness to adapt their teaching methods to support diverse learners (Ghufron et al., 2024; Hasumi & Chiu, 2024; Regan et al., 2019).

Differentiated learning approaches have been widely adopted in elementary education, even in more remote or underserved regions. Using digital tools within a differentiated learning framework can revolutionize teaching by offering students immediate access to a broad range of learning resources tailored to their needs (Ramorola, 2013). This shift encourages a move toward more learner-centered practices, allowing teachers to design more relevant and meaningful instruction for each student. This shift in access also leads to changes in teaching practices, pushing educators towards more learner-centered approaches (Gravani et al., 2024). As Avci et al. (2019) explain, such approaches not only enhance student engagement but also promote critical reflection and the development of student voice. These methods also empower teachers to take leadership roles in their classrooms, improving student outcomes. However, the successful implementation of differentiated learning faces several challenges, including unequal access to devices and unreliable internet connectivity. Additionally, there is an ongoing need for professional development to ensure that teachers are adequately equipped to implement these strategies effectively (Hero, 2019; Rintaningrum, 2023).

Addressing the challenges of implementing differentiated learning requires a comprehensive effort to ensure teachers are adequately prepared. Educators must be skilled not only in delivering content through various tools but also in tailoring instruction to meet the diverse needs of students. Professional development plays a critical role in this process, as Vrasidas and McIsaac (2001) emphasize the importance of ongoing training to build teachers' confidence and proficiency in adapting learning strategies. Beyond mastering technology, teachers must also develop approaches for customizing lessons to accommodate different learning styles, abilities, and backgrounds. Educators can lead by example when adequately trained, showing how differentiated learning, supported by technology, can create more inclusive and effective classroom environments.

In Indonesia, differentiated learning holds significant promise for improving educational outcomes, but accessibility remains a critical issue (Ammade et al., 2018; Sianturi, 2021). While technology can facilitate personalized learning experiences and equalize access to educational resources, especially in underserved areas, the uneven availability of infrastructure limits the effectiveness of these approaches (Sumarno, 2023). Many rural regions face challenges such as unreliable internet access and a lack of necessary devices, which widens the gap between students in different areas (Damayanti et al., 2023). This disparity hinders the implementation of differentiated learning and underscores the need for targeted infrastructure investments. To ensure equitable access to differentiated learning, policymakers must address the infrastructure gap and provide teachers with the necessary support and training. Without these efforts, the potential of differentiated learning to transform education will remain unevenly realized across Indonesia.

The Merdeka Curriculum significantly transforms Indonesia's educational landscape, focusing on holistic and flexible learning approaches (Rahayu et al., 2022). As part of

Indonesia's broader educational reforms, this curriculum is designed to equip students with essential 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity (Rohmah et al., 2024). The curriculum moves away from rote memorization and standardized assessments, focusing on a student-centered approach. This approach encourages active engagement and participation in learning. This transformation is formalized through the Decree of the Minister of Education and Culture No. 56 of 2022, which guides the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* as part of the learning recovery. While the Merdeka Curriculum introduces new policies and terminologies, its foundational principles share similarities with the previous 2013 Curriculum. While building on some foundational aspects of the last 2013 Curriculum, the Merdeka Curriculum introduces a more dynamic and innovative framework. This shift reflects Indonesia's ongoing efforts toward more progressive educational practices (Durriyah et al., 2024).

In addition to policy changes, the Merdeka Curriculum brings fundamental shifts in classroom learning dynamics. It redefines the learning process as an interactive experience, where students engage actively with their environment, leading to meaningful behavioral changes. Teachers are crucial in shaping a conducive learning environment that promotes positive student outcomes (Mulyasa, 2003). The emphasis on flexibility allows teachers to personalize lessons for their students, fostering a more adaptive teaching approach. This empowers students to take ownership of their learning and aligns with the curriculum's focus on developing essential life skills.

This study examines teachers' experiences in Balikpapan City, East Kalimantan, as they prepare to implement differentiated learning within the Merdeka Curriculum framework. The focus is on private schools aiming to align their educational outcomes with those of nearby international institutions. Given the increasing emphasis on tailoring instruction to meet the diverse needs of students, this research explores how teachers perceive and apply differentiated learning strategies in their classrooms. Previous studies, such as Candrasa & Cen (2023), have demonstrated that personalized teaching methods, supported by technology, can significantly enhance student performance. In Balikpapan, teachers view differentiated learning positively, acknowledging its potential to improve student engagement and outcomes. However, effective implementation requires addressing socio-economic challenges, like equitable resource access and teacher training, to ensure all students benefit (Apriliyanti et al., 2021). This study engages senior teachers with experience in differentiated instruction, exploring both the benefits they observe and the obstacles they encounter. The research seeks to answer two key questions: How do teachers prepare for differentiated learning within the Merdeka Curriculum, and what advantages and challenges emerge during its application?

The Merdeka Curriculum offers distinct opportunities and challenges within the English Language Teaching (ELT) framework (Puspitasari et al., 2023; Riyan Rizaldi & Fatimah, 2022). As English continues to serve as a global lingua franca, its importance in Indonesia's education system has grown, particularly as the country becomes more integrated into the

international community. The curriculum promotes teaching methodologies beyond basic linguistic proficiency, positioning English as a tool for broader educational and personal growth (Hiniz & Çelik, 2024). The Merdeka Curriculum's ELT strategies offer insights into adapting education to a globalizing world. While research on the overall implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is extensive, there's a gap in understanding differentiated learning within specific subjects. This study investigates teachers' perceptions of incorporating differentiated learning strategies into elementary students' classroom activities within the Merdeka Curriculum.

Differentiated Learning

Differentiated learning is an approach that harmonizes student potential with their individual readiness, interests, and learning profiles, allowing for a more personalized and practical learning experience (Nahdhiah & Suciptaningsih, 2024). Successful implementation of differentiated learning requires a motivating learning environment, clearly defined learning goals, continuous assessment, responsive teachers, and effective classroom management. This method recognizes that each student possesses unique talents and interests, and teachers must skillfully coordinate and address these differences through targeted strategies (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). The core principle of differentiated learning is to create customized instruction that aligns with student needs, ensuring that all learners can fully engage with the material and achieve their potential. Differentiated learning is implemented through four main components: content, process, product, and learning environment differentiation. Content differentiation involves adjusting the learning material based on a student's readiness, interests, and learning profile, ensuring that each student receives instruction that is appropriate to their level. Process differentiation refers to tailoring how students engage with learning activities, offering different approaches depending on their learning styles and needs. Product differentiation involves creating varied assignments that allow students to demonstrate their understanding in ways that suit their abilities and preferences. Environmental differentiation adapts the learning space to foster a setting conducive to individual learning profiles. According to Xu et al. (2023), problem-based models effectively boost student engagement and academic performance in elementary social science education.

The benefits of differentiated learning have been further demonstrated across various subjects. Research by Wahyuni (2023) found that differential learning in English subjects within the independent curriculum follows three stages: early, implementation, and evaluation. In the early stage, teachers assess students' interests and learning styles; during implementation, they focus on content, process, product, and environment; and in the evaluation stage, formative and summative assessments guide learning improvements. Moreover, Lutfi et al. (2024) show that while teachers understand the basics of differentiated learning, they still experience confusion in its deeper implementation. School leaders support teachers by encouraging them to participate in training. Previous studies emphasize that

although differentiated learning shows promise, it needs refinement from teachers and the curriculums.

Teacher pedagogy

Teaching and learning development emphasizes teacher competency and confidence, particularly in the post-digital context, where integrating technology, pedagogy, and differentiated learning is essential (Hasumi & Chiu, 2024). Differentiated learning tailors instruction to meet diverse student needs. To implement it effectively, teachers must blend cross-curricular elements and technology. Confidence in using technology enhances its integration in the classroom. It also supports the implementation of differentiated learning strategies, allowing teachers to adapt content, processes, and environments to suit different learning styles (Starcic et al., 2023). Ghufon et al. (2024) emphasize that teachers' online learning management skills are crucial for effective school-based management, especially during disruptions. The ability to implement both technology and differentiated learning helps maintain the quality of education. Furthermore, Auslander et al. (2021, 2023) emphasize the importance of teacher preparation programs, like the edTPA, in producing teachers equipped to teach in diverse environments and integrate differentiated learning into their pedagogy. Comprehensive training equips teachers with the technological proficiency and differentiated learning skills necessary to meet the diverse needs of all students. This underscores the significance of ongoing teacher development in refining their approaches to technology and differentiated instruction.

METHOD

This study employs a phenomenological approach to explore elementary school teachers' lived experiences and perceptions regarding differentiated learning. Phenomenology is a philosophical and methodological approach that seeks to understand the subjective experiences of individuals. It focuses on the lived experience and how individuals interpret and make sense of their world (Caldas, 2003). The research involved nine elementary school teachers from a school in Balikpapan City. These teachers were selected through purposive sampling, a qualitative research technique that identifies participants who can provide insights into the research problem and questions (Creswell, 2016). The participants aged 26 to 46 are considered senior teachers due to their extensive teaching experience and permanent positions at their respective schools. These participants were selected to gather detailed information from experienced educators about their classroom experiences and perceptions of differentiated learning. Each teacher holds a bachelor's degree and some hold masters' degree in education.

Table 1. Participants' demographic background

Participants	Years Old Teaching Experience
P1	5 years
P2	14 Years
P3	3 Years
P4	3,5 Years
P5	5 Years

Instrumentation and Data Collection

This study employed open-ended questions to gain primary information from the participants. Open-ended questions allow participants to express themselves in their own words, allowing researchers to interpret facts, behaviors, or reactions during interviews. This approach generates storytelling by asking open rather than closed questions and following up on participants' accounts with open-ended prompts. In addition, the researcher used a verbal probing approach to explore the participants' cognitive responses in this context (DeMarrais et al., 2024). The researcher developed question items based on the formulation of the problem to be solved, then validated them through rearrangement linked to previous studies and discussions with experts in their field.

The list of open-ended questions

How do you accommodate different learning styles in your classroom?

How do you identify different learning preferences among students, and what strategies do you use to address them?

How do you assess student progress in a differentiated classroom?

How do you assess students with different abilities and learning speeds?

What challenges do you face when implementing differentiated learning in Kurikulum Merdeka?

How do you collaborate with other teachers to support differentiated learning?

The interview was conducted in person, an appropriate data collection method. Both semi-structured and unstructured interview techniques were employed to gather in-depth information and allow for flexibility in exploring emerging themes (Edwards & Holland, 2023). The semi-structured interview provided a framework for the conversation while allowing for follow-up questions and exploration of unexpected topics. The unstructured interview allowed for more open-ended discussion and exploration of participants' perspectives.

Data Analysis

This study employed a case study approach, with the data analyzed qualitatively. This paper explores an individual or group's in-depth activity and process in line with case study. The researcher utilized several techniques to produce the final reports of this study, applying thematic qualitative analysis through six phases as described by Creswell (Challob, 2021). To prepare and organize the data, the researcher typed and saved the data collected by the research instruments in Microsoft files. Additionally, the data and participants were labeled for easy identification and organization.

The initial data analysis phase involved collecting participant data and writing detailed memos. The researcher then interpreted the data, organized it into themes, and revised these categories. While describing findings and forming themes, the researcher reviewed the data multiple times, creating broad categories that integrated emerging themes. The identified themes were classified into primary and secondary themes, merging them into more comprehensive categories aligned with the research objectives. Finally, the researcher structured the final reports, presenting the findings and explaining the results clearly.

Validity and Reliability

This study used data triangulation through multiple sources, including previous related research. Multiple data collection instruments were used to ensure the accuracy and validity of the data. According to Denzin and Lincoln, triangulation contributes to verifying and validating qualitative analysis by checking the consistency of findings generated by different data collection methods and data sources within the same method (2018). Through the comparative analysis of data from various sources, the researcher was able to identify emerging patterns and trends.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Differentiating learning in the classroom can be challenging. Teachers need to understand how to tailor instruction for different students. Even experienced teachers must adapt to this new approach. They need to accept that students learn differently. This requires strategies that fit each student's needs, interests, and learning style (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). Implementing differentiated learning enhances the inclusivity and effectiveness of the educational process. However, it demands teachers to be highly adaptive and responsive. Teachers must engage in ongoing professional development and self-directed learning to successfully grasp the nuances of differentiated instruction and apply it effectively in their classrooms.

Preparing for differentiated learning requires considerable effort and reflection. Teachers must familiarize themselves with various instructional methods and materials before incorporating them into their lessons. Teachers have implemented strategies such as independent study through reading educational literature to enhance their understanding of how to design lessons that cater to diverse learning needs. Additionally, they have participated in professional development workshops. Engaging in collaborative discussions with colleagues and seeking educational leaders' guidance further refine their approaches. Regular practice in developing differentiated activities ensures they can effectively meet their students' diverse needs.

At first, differentiated learning was a total headache. I had no clue how to adjust my lessons for students who were all over the place or how to keep everyone on track when they were all doing their own thing. But after going to a few workshops and chatting with other teachers, I started to get the hang of it. It took a while, but eventually, I

figured out how to create lesson plans that worked for everyone. Now, I use things like flexible grouping and tiered assignments to ensure everyone is engaged and learning at their own pace. (P3)

Developing expertise in differentiated instruction is an ongoing process that requires dedication. Teachers often adopt a structured approach to learning how to differentiate content, methods, and products for their students. They study instructional theories, review case studies, and participate in hands-on activities to apply differentiation strategies effectively. Regular meetings with peers often complement this professional learning to exchange ideas and refine techniques. Teachers also receive support from school administrators, who provide resources and feedback. This improves their ability to manage diverse learning needs, making their classrooms more inclusive and boosting student engagement and achievement. As one teacher posits,

At first, I found differentiation challenging, especially managing different skill levels. However, after training and talking with colleagues, I learned to plan activities that match student interests and abilities. It's made my classroom more dynamic (P5).

Teachers' Beliefs about Differentiated Learning

Differentiated learning is a game-changer in education. Teachers can improve learning and help students reach their goals by adjusting lessons to fit each student's needs. Differentiation makes learning more relevant and accessible by tailoring materials to individual students. Teachers use different strategies, like grouping students or changing lesson content, to keep everyone engaged and challenged. This approach helps meet diverse learning needs and creates a stronger bond between teachers and students. As one teacher shared, "Differentiated learning allows me to address different student needs in a way that's effective for everyone. By providing varied tasks, I can ensure each student is challenged but not overwhelmed." (P1)

Teachers believe differentiated learning enhances student engagement by making lessons more interactive and personalized. For example, teachers can use activities tailored to student interests to make learning more meaningful and enjoyable. This approach supports critical thinking and problem-solving by encouraging students to explore in-depth topics independently. Teachers also observe that students are more motivated when learning activities align with their interests and abilities. Differentiation, therefore, strengthens engagement and supports the development of key academic skills. As one teacher noted,

When students work on tasks aligned with their interests, they shift their attitude toward learning. They become more eager to engage and take on challenges, even difficult ones. Differentiated learning helps me tap into this motivation by tailoring activities, which keeps them focused and enthusiastic (P3).

Differentiated learning is a pedagogical approach that tailors instruction to meet students' diverse needs. By considering students' readiness levels, interests, and learning styles, teachers can create more engaging and compelling learning experiences. Implementing differentiated

learning requires careful planning and collaboration among teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders. Teachers often exchange ideas about strategies for differentiating content, process, and assessment to serve diverse student needs better. Administrators can support these efforts by providing resources and guidance for teachers to implement differentiation in their classrooms. Another teacher shared, "It takes time to plan differentiated lessons, but the results are worth it when students become more confident and achieve better results" (P5).

Difficulties and Challenges in Applying Differentiated Learning

Accommodating different learning styles in the classroom is essential to create an inclusive environment where all students can succeed. Teachers must pay attention to their students' diverse needs and ensure lessons work for different learning levels, interests, and preferences. One way to do this is to use various teaching strategies that appeal to different learning styles, like visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic. For example, teachers can use videos and diagrams for visual learners, discussions and lectures for auditory learners, and hands-on activities for kinesthetic learners. One teacher explained how they accommodate these differences

I try to vary my teaching methods to meet different learning styles. For instance, I use videos for students who are visual learners, group discussions for those who learn better through talking, and physical activities or projects for those who need to move and be hands-on (P5).

Identifying students' learning preferences is a critical step in implementing differentiated learning. Teachers often rely on both formal assessments and informal observations to understand students' strengths, weaknesses, and preferences. In a differentiated classroom, the goal is to adapt content, process, and product based on the student's readiness and learning profiles. Teachers may assess students through ongoing formative assessments or observe how they respond to different teaching methods. This allows teachers to modify their approach, ensuring students are engaged and supported. As one teacher shares,

I assess students by observing how they react to different activities and materials. Some students are more engaged when I give them creative tasks, while others prefer more structured assignments. I must constantly evaluate and adapt my teaching to ensure everyone is learning effectively (P3).

Assessing student progress in a differentiated classroom can be tricky, especially when students learn at different speeds and have different abilities. Teachers need to be flexible with their assessments to allow for individual growth. Traditional tests might not always show each student's progress, so alternative assessments like projects, presentations, or creative assignments can be more helpful. Differentiated assessment also means offering different formats, like oral exams or open-ended questions, to cater to various learning needs. One teacher explained their approach.

I try to use a mix of assessments—sometimes it's a quiz, other times a group project, or even a presentation. This way, I can gauge progress from multiple angles, especially for students who may not perform well on traditional tests (P1).

Implementing differentiated learning within the *Kurikulum Merdeka* presents unique challenges. The curriculum's emphasis on student-centered learning requires teachers to continuously adapt their strategies to meet the diverse needs of their students. This can be time-consuming and demanding, especially when resources are limited. Many teachers face challenges due to insufficient access to technology and teaching materials. As a result, teachers often need to find creative solutions, such as grouping students or adjusting lessons to work with what is available. One educator shared their experience with this issue: "Managing time is a big challenge for me. Planning different activities for students can be time-consuming, especially when resources are limited. I need to be creative and make the most of what I have." (P4)

Another significant challenge is managing students' diverse emotional and cognitive needs during lessons. The success of differentiated learning often depends on students' engagement and focus. Students becoming disengaged or distracted can hinder their learning and disrupt the classroom dynamic. Addressing this challenge requires careful observation and adaptive strategies to maintain student interest and participation. As one teacher explained, managing classroom energy has become a critical part of their approach:

Two of my students were in a bad mood, affecting the whole class. Despite trying to encourage them, their disengagement was contagious. Since then, I've started using ice-breakers to gauge the students' mood at the beginning of each class, which helps set a positive tone (P4).

Implementing differentiated learning in the *Kurikulum Merdeka* requires teachers to prepare thoroughly. They must understand its theoretical underpinnings and practical skills. This involves adapting lessons to meet the diverse needs of students. Teachers often rely on self-directed learning, collaboration, and professional development to strengthen their understanding. However, they also need to adjust classroom management and lesson planning. Teachers are willing to adapt and explore new methods but face time and resource constraints. Teachers' beliefs about differentiated learning are crucial. Most educators recognize its benefits in fostering engagement and improving learning outcomes. They believe aligning tasks with students' interests and readiness levels creates a more motivating learning environment. Teachers noted students' increased enthusiasm and willingness to tackle challenges when tasks are connected to their interests. This positive outlook reflects a deep understanding of its potential to promote student-centered education. However, teachers also recognize the need to manage classroom dynamics and support all students. This affirms with the recent findings on differentiated learnings and classroom dynamics (Kasih et al., 2024; Wibowo et al., 2025).

Despite positive perceptions, implementing differentiated learning presents challenges. Limited resources hinder teachers' ability to provide a fully differentiated experience. The time required to plan and execute differentiated activities can be overwhelming, especially when managing diverse student emotions and engagement levels. Teachers found it difficult to maintain a productive classroom when students were disengaged. This shows the need for more resources, training, and collaboration to effectively help teachers implement differentiated learning.

CONCLUSION

The successful implementation of differentiated learning within the *Kurikulum Merdeka* necessitates comprehensive teacher preparation, continuous professional development, and collaborative engagement. To effectively integrate differentiation into their teaching practices, educators engage in self-directed learning, participate in professional training workshops, and collaborate with colleagues to refine their instructional methods. By tailoring lessons to align with students' interests, readiness levels, and learning preferences, teachers create a more inclusive and engaging learning environment. The findings of this study indicate that differentiated learning offers several advantages, including increased student motivation, improved academic performance, and stronger teacher-student relationships. However, its implementation also presents significant challenges, particularly in terms of limited resources, time constraints, and the complexities of addressing diverse learning needs within a single classroom setting. These challenges may impede the effectiveness of differentiated instruction and place additional demands on teachers.

To facilitate the successful application of differentiated learning, institutional support is essential. Schools and policymakers must provide educators with structured professional development programs, adequate instructional resources, and a conducive teaching environment. By ensuring that teachers receive the necessary training and support, differentiated learning can be effectively integrated into the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, ultimately enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes.

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