

DIFFERENTIATED ASSESSMENT IN ENGLISH SUBJECT WITHIN INDEPENDENT CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION

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ABSTRACT

Penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka memerlukan perubahan pendekatan pembelajaran untuk memenuhi beragam kebutuhan pembelajaran yang melekat di kelas-kelas saat ini. Penilaian Berdiferensiasi, landasan kurikulum ini, muncul sebagai strategi penting untuk mendorong pengalaman belajar yang disesuaikan dan bermakna. Penelitian ini menyelidiki penerapan praktis penilaian berdiferensiasi oleh guru, khususnya dalam kurikulum Bahasa Inggris di Sekolah Menengah Atas Negeri (SMAN) 5 Banjarmasin, sekolah inovatif yang mengadopsi Kurikulum Merdeka. Tujuan utamanya adalah untuk mendeskripsikan mekanisme yang digunakan guru untuk menerapkan penilaian berdiferensiasi, menganalisis manfaat yang dirasakan, mengevaluasi efektivitasnya dalam meningkatkan hasil belajar siswa, mengembangkan potensi individu, dan mengintegrasikan beragam gaya dan minat belajar ke dalam proses penilaian. Penilaian berdiferensiasi dapat menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang lebih bervariasi dan adaptif dengan memungkinkan penyesuaian strategi penilaian berdasarkan kebutuhan siswa secara individu. Penelitian ini, yang menggunakan metodologi studi kasus dengan data observasi dan wawancara, bertujuan untuk memberikan wawasan langsung tentang efektivitas penilaian berdiferensiasi dalam mendukung keterlibatan siswa, pemahaman konseptual, dan motivasi dalam konteks Kurikulum Merdeka.

Kata kunci: Mata Pelajaran Bahasa Inggris, Kurikulum Merdeka, Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi

ABSTRACT

Implementing the Independent Curriculum requires a change in learning approaches to meet the diverse learning needs inherent in today's classrooms. Differentiated assessment, a cornerstone of this curriculum, is emerging as an essential strategy to foster personalized and meaningful learning experiences. This research investigates the practical application of differentiated assessment by the teacher, particularly in the English curriculum at State Senior High School (SMAN) 5 Banjarmasin, an innovative school adopting the Independent Curriculum. The main objectives are to describe the mechanisms the teacher use to implement differentiated assessment, analyze the perceived benefits, evaluate its effectiveness in improving student learning outcomes, developing individual potential, and integrating diverse learning styles and interests into the assessment process. Differentiated assessment can create a more varied and adaptive learning environment by allowing the customization of assessment strategies based on individual student needs. This research, which uses a case study methodology with observational and interview data, aims to provide first-hand insights into the effectiveness of differentiated assessment in supporting student engagement, conceptual understanding, and motivation in the context of the Independent Curriculum.

Keywords: Differentiated Assessment, English Subject, Independent Curriculum

INTRODUCTION

The Independent Curriculum embodies a student-centered educational philosophy, emphasizing learner autonomy and character development. It offers a wide range of learning content, allowing students to explore various learning pathways and

develop essential competencies (Kemdikbud, 2021). Inspired by Ki Hajar Dewantara's vision, this approach encourages self-directed growth aligned with individual character traits while reinforcing the importance of moral and ethical education.

Fauzan (2023) notes that the principal aim of this curriculum model is to improve student achievement. However, the role of the teacher remains pivotal in the successful implementation of any educational reform, particularly one as recent as the Independent Curriculum. Teachers must be adaptable, proactive, and innovative in order to remain aligned with current educational trends. Teachers are expected not only to keep pace with student development but also to critically reflect on and respond to the complexities of modern teaching (Aprianto, 2023). As Adiyono (2023) asserts, teachers must strike a balance between delivering academic content and nurturing students' character, ensuring that they do not merely keep up with their students but guide them meaningfully.

Within this framework, instructional methods should foster creativity and enhance cognitive skills. The Independent Curriculum encourages pedagogical approaches that cultivate student independence, confidence, emotional intelligence, and self-awareness. These attributes contribute to forming learners with well-rounded personalities, capable of navigating academic and real-world challenges. The overall objective is to shape students into capable individuals through a structured, student-centered learning process that supports continued personal and academic growth.

Differentiated instruction plays a vital role in this educational paradigm. It aims to facilitate learning experiences to accommodate the unique needs, readiness levels, and interests of individual students. While distinct from personalized learning, differentiated instruction in this context focuses on using various instructional strategies to align with students' strengths and areas for development. Teachers must thoughtfully design their lessons to incorporate different modes of engagement—modifying content, processes, outcomes, and the learning environment to create inclusive and responsive classrooms (Wulandari, 2023).

Assessment in the Independent Curriculum is multifaceted, encompassing formative, summative, and diagnostic approaches. Diagnostic assessments are particularly crucial, as they help identify learners' starting points and guide instructional planning (Wijayanti, 2023). In English language instruction, differentiated assessment offers significant benefits by aligning

evaluation methods with student needs. To effectively implement such assessments, teachers must be equipped with adequate training in curriculum design and responsive teaching strategies (Barlian, 2023). Utilizing diverse learning styles as a foundation, teachers can design varied assessment activities that reflect students' preferences and optimize learning outcomes (Paongan, 2024).

Given this context, the current study investigates strategic approaches to implement differentiated assessments within the Independent Curriculum. It emphasizes the importance of English teachers' understanding of their students' learning preferences and styles to customize instructional and evaluative methods accordingly. This paper aims to explore how differentiated assessment is applied in English learning, focusing on practical implementation and perceived benefits from both teacher and student perspectives. The discussion further examines various strategies such as the preparation of differentiated learning modules, the use of collaborative learning techniques, and the integration of multimedia tools to enhance teaching quality and foster student engagement.

Fauzan (2023) pointed out that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Indonesia emphasizes character building, soft skills, and the formation of a well-rounded student profile aligned with the values of Pancasila. This approach integrates project-based learning and extracurricular activities aimed at fostering students' moral development. Lessons are structured to focus on essential content, such as literacy skills, and incorporate contextual and local learning materials. Differentiated teaching is central to this framework, enabling instruction to be adapted based on students' individual aptitudes and learning contexts.

A core component of this educational model is the dynamic interaction between teacher and student. The relationship significantly influences learning outcomes, as both roles are interdependent in the classroom. While the teacher facilitates and guides the learning process, students are active participants whose progress depends on the teacher's ability to provide structured, supportive, and motivating instruction. Teachers are encouraged to recognize student success and foster a positive learning environment, while

parental involvement remains a key factor in overall student development. The Independent Curriculum enables teachers to create learning pathways that align with each student's goals and needs.

Ramadhan (2023) highlighted that this curriculum marks a shift toward innovation and flexibility in educational practice. In contrast to previous curricula—which emphasized memorization, standardized exams, and rigid structures—the Independent Curriculum prioritizes adaptability, creativity, and responsiveness to student diversity. It represents a pedagogical evolution focused on preparing students not just academically, but holistically.

However, challenges persist, particularly in English language learning. Majid (2024) observes that many students exhibit reluctance to use English in daily communication due to a fear of making mistakes. Additional barriers include time limitations, large class sizes, insufficient opportunities for practice, and limited access to digital learning tools. To address these challenges, differentiated instruction offers a promising solution by accommodating students' varying interests, skill levels, and learning styles. As Tomlinson (2017) asserted, differentiation involves planning instruction that reflects learners' preferences and capabilities, encompassing content, process, products, and learning environments.

Differentiated instruction does not equate to personalized learning but involves creating flexible pathways that increase students' strengths and address their areas for improvement through targeted strategies. Wijayanti (2023) stresses that teachers must be strategic in selecting appropriate methods and models, recognizing that a one-size-fits-all approach is ineffective in diverse classrooms. Adawiyah (2024) supported this by emphasizing the importance of aligning teaching strategies with students' learning profiles during lesson planning to optimize learning outcomes.

Ahmad (2024) highlighted the need for engaging and inclusive classroom environments. Ensuring teachers have the tools, training, and institutional support they require is critical to overcoming instructional challenges and achieving equitable education for all learners. Barlian (2023) added that professional development in curriculum design and differentiated instruction is essential for

teachers aiming to meet diverse educational objectives. Effective implementation also demands time management skills and a strong link between students' prior knowledge and new content.

Adapting curriculum content to accommodate students' learning styles and limitations enhances instructional relevance. Arsyad (2024) pointed out that differentiated instruction in English classes often encounters logistical obstacles, such as inadequate resources, lack of supporting infrastructure, and difficulty providing individualized feedback. These challenges can hinder the effective implementation of differentiated assessments, which require customized evaluation methods.

Despite these limitations, differentiated assessment contributes significantly to student engagement and ownership of learning. According to Noman (2014), teachers must structure learning by first identifying student needs, setting learning objectives, and integrating modular content. Although assessment encourages self-reflection and goal-setting, all students are still expected to meet common learning standards, regardless of prior knowledge. Therefore, the aim of differentiated learning is not to lower expectations but to provide accessible pathways for all students to achieve the same academic goals.

In short, the literature supports the idea that differentiated instruction and assessment are integral to the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum. These approaches offer practical means to address student diversity, enhance motivation, and foster more meaningful learning experiences in the English language classroom and beyond.

METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative case study approach to explore the implementation of differentiated assessment in English language instruction within the framework of the Independent Curriculum. The study was conducted at Sekolah Menengah Atas Negeri (SMAN) 5 Banjarmasin, South Kalimantan, for four months in 2024. Through direct classroom observations and semi-structured interviews, the research aimed to investigate both the practices employed by an English teacher and the perceived benefits from the perspectives of teacher and students.

Creswell (2014) outlines that case study research involves systematic steps in data collection and analysis, which are critical to ensuring the depth and credibility of the findings. This study followed those steps closely, which are detailed as follows:

1. Selection of the Research Case

The first stage involved identifying the specific case to be examined. The study focused on a teacher's application of differentiated assessment in English classes at SMAN 5 Banjarmasin, as well as the insights of both the teacher and students regarding the value and impact of these assessments within the Independent Curriculum framework.

2. Data Collection Method

To obtain comprehensive data, the researchers employed multiple methods. These included classroom observations using a semi-structured observation tool designed to capture the phases of teaching and the implementation of differentiated assessment techniques. Additionally, structured interviews were conducted with both teacher and students to explore their perspectives on the benefits and challenges of differentiated assessment.

3. Data Organization and Coding

Following data collection, all materials—interview transcripts and field notes—were systematically organized and coded. The data were categorized into thematic areas that aligned with the study's research questions, such as instructional strategies, assessment practices, and perceived outcomes.

4. Data Analysis

The researchers employed both interactive and thematic analysis to interpret the collected data. Thematic analysis helped identify recurring patterns and themes across the dataset, while interactive analysis facilitated a deeper understanding of the relationships between those themes. Data were grouped into categories to facilitate clarity, and the findings were presented in a sequential narrative that reflected the natural progression of classroom and interview observations.

5. Validation and Conclusion of Findings

To ensure accuracy and credibility, the findings underwent a validation process. This included cross-referencing data with the

original research questions and verifying the consistency of responses during the interviews. After validation, the researchers synthesized the findings into a comprehensive conclusion, supported by descriptive evidence drawn from the field.

This case study offers detailed insights into how differentiated assessment is implemented in English education under the Independent Curriculum. The findings show the potential of such assessments to enhance learning engagement and effectiveness. Moreover, the study emphasizes the utility of the case study method in evaluating curriculum implementation at the school level, and it suggests directions for improving teacher training and classroom practices in response to diverse student needs.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study explored how differentiated assessment is implemented in English language instruction under the Independent Curriculum implementation at SMAN 5 Banjarmasin. The findings indicate that the teacher has adopted a range of strategies—such as offering task choices, providing detailed rubrics, and delivering constructive feedback—to adapt assessments to students' individual needs. From the perspectives of both teachers and students, the use of differentiated assessment yields several benefits: it helps adapt instructional modules to align with students' interests, deepens the teacher's understanding of student characteristics, and supports the achievement of learning objectives. Students showed increased motivation, participation, and comprehension as a result of this assessment approach.

Implementation of Differentiated Assessment in English within the Independent Curriculum

The implementation process can be divided into three primary phases: (1) planning and preparation, (2) learning enactment, and (3) evaluation. These stages form a coherent process in which the teacher adapts instruction to accommodate diverse student profiles.



Figure 1. Classroom observation

In the planning stage, the teacher prepared modules that promote non-cognitive skill development, designed lessons that reflect students' learning preferences, interests, and readiness. During the learning enactment phase, instruction was carried out using differentiated strategies that include interactive activities and individualized engagement. The teacher acted not only as facilitators of content but also as motivators and guides, encouraging student agency and critical thinking.

Wulandari (2023) highlighted that diagnostic assessments can be conducted at multiple points in the lesson—before, during, or after the presentation of material. These assessments help teachers identify student difficulties and adjust lesson plans accordingly. Lesson planning begins with setting clear objectives, selecting appropriate assessment methods, and aligning them with students' profiles.

Differentiated instruction under the Independent Curriculum is inherently student-centered. According to Barlian (2023), this model emphasizes improving instructional quality by empowering schools and teachers to design creative, independent learning experiences. Teachers become catalysts in driving educational transformation through responsive and innovative teaching.

Ahmad (2024) supported this idea, noting that differentiated learning enables teachers to align instruction with students' individual knowledge and preferences. Teachers design content, processes, and products that reflect varied learning styles and abilities, using the four key components of differentiation: content, process, product, and learning environment.

This approach rests on a "learning triangle"—teacher, students, and materials—each contributing to a supportive and effective learning environment. Understanding the interplay among these elements is critical for establishing a classroom culture that fosters learning.

Noman (2014) conceptualized differentiated assessment as "assessment as learning," wherein students take responsibility for their learning while teachers facilitate reflection and goal setting. This metacognitive approach helps students assess their progress and plan improvement strategies.

In practice, teachers assess student-produced work aligned with their learning preferences and readiness levels. The evaluation phase involves providing continuous feedback and adjusting instruction to meet student needs. Despite varying backgrounds, all students are expected to meet the same learning standards—differentiation is a means of providing equitable, not lowered, expectations.

Benefits of Implementing Differentiated Assessment in English

The Independent Curriculum, supported by the Ministry of Education and Culture (KEMENDIKBUD), actively promotes differentiated learning as a way to help students reach their full potential. While the concept itself is not new, its implementation has gained complexity and relevance under the independent learning model. Differentiated strategies enable students to engage with content in ways that align with their individual learning preferences.

Teachers prepare instructional materials that reflect these strategies and use engaging media and technologies to support learning. Schools also play a key role by providing facilities and flexible schedules that enable differentiated instruction to flourish (Wijayanti, 2023).

The teacher in this study reported that allowing students to be creative during lessons enhances comprehension and retention. When instruction is aligned with students' interests and abilities, learning becomes more enjoyable and effective. Differentiated assessments, similarly, allow students to produce outcomes that reflect their strengths. These assessments are made to accommodate student creativity and encourage

active consultation and feedback during the process.

Furthermore, differentiated assessment has helped the teacher to identify learning gaps and provide targeted support. Through ongoing formative evaluation, the teacher can modify instructional strategies and offer supplementary resources such as guided reading, multimedia tools, or individualized support sessions (Arsyad, 2024). This leads to more inclusive classrooms where students feel recognized and empowered to succeed.

The integration of technology further enhances the implementation of differentiated assessment. The teacher used digital platforms, multimedia presentations, and interactive tools to diversify instruction and facilitate assessment. Students benefit from flexible, self-paced learning opportunities that support independent exploration. Kholid (2024) mentioned that teachers must stay open to pedagogical innovation and the use of educational technology to effectively implement differentiated instruction. Technology also streamlines the assessment process, enabling rapid feedback, performance tracking, and personalized assessment design. Students can demonstrate learning through diverse modalities, including presentations, multimedia products, and peer teaching, increasing both engagement and comprehension.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of differentiated assessment within the Independent Curriculum has had a measurable impact on English language learning at SMAN 5 Banjarmasin. The teacher has adapted their instructional and evaluative strategies to meet diverse student needs, resulting in greater student engagement, improved understanding, and more inclusive learning environments. The integration of diagnostic tools, student-centered instruction, and technology-supported assessments positions differentiated assessment as an effective strategy in realizing the goals of the Independent Curriculum. Further empirical studies are needed to examine differentiated assessment across various educational contexts and subject areas. Comparative research involving multiple schools can offer deeper insights into how differentiated practices affect learning outcomes and teacher efficacy. Exploring the long-term impact of such

strategies on academic achievement and learner autonomy would also contribute valuable knowledge to the field particularly in English language teaching.

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