



DIFFERENTIATED LEARNING BASED ON CURRICULUM FLEXIBILITY IN MADRASAH IBTIDAIYAH IN BANTAENG REGENCY

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in madrasah ibtidaiyah cannot be separated from various challenges. The various learning problems faced include monotonous and rigid learning methods, lack of understanding of educators of the diversity of students, and learning evaluations that do not reflect the needs and potential of students. This study aims to analyze the planning, implementation, and evaluation/results of differentiated learning based on curriculum flexibility in madrasah ibtidaiyah. This research was conducted in 13 madrasah ibtidaiyah in Bantaeng Regency, South Sulawesi Province, Indonesia. The method used in this research is qualitative method. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The results of this study are expected to provide practical recommendations to overcome the obstacles faced, such as the need for intensive training for educators, provision of resources, and continuous evaluation of learning. Thus, this research can contribute to improving the quality of education at madrasah ibtidaiyah in Bantaeng Regency and support the achievement of the national education vision.

Keywords: Differentiated learning; independent curriculum; curriculum flexibility; madrasah ibtidaiyah.

1. INTRODUCTION

The implementation of effective and efficient learning is an ideal goal in the national education system to realize the great ideals of education in Indonesia. To achieve these goals, the government has regulated education policy through the National Curriculum and National Education Standards, which are formulated by the National Education Standards Agency (Badan Standar Nasional Pendidikan, 2020). This education policy is based on the 1945 Constitution, which affirms that every citizen has the right to education. As a derivative of this constitutional mandate, there are three main laws that form the basis for education

development, namely Law No. 20/2003 on the National Education System, Law No. 17/2007 on the National Long-Term Development Plan, and Law No. 14/2005 on Teachers and Lecturers (Masykur, 2013).

This regulation was followed up with various technical regulations to support its implementation, including Government Regulation No. 19/2005 on National Education Standards and several Minister of National Education regulations, such as Permendiknas No. 22/2006 on Content Standards, and Permendiknas No. 23/2006 on Graduate Competency Standards (Masykur, 2013). However, the implementation of these education policies does not always run smoothly. Various challenges are still found, especially in learning practices at the education unit level such as madrasah ibtidaiyah. The learning problems faced include monotonous and rigid learning methods, lack of understanding of the diversity of learners, and learning evaluations that do not reflect the needs and potential of students.

To overcome these problems, the government through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology introduced the Merdeka Curriculum as an improvement of the 2013 Curriculum. The Merdeka Curriculum provides flexibility for education units to design learning in accordance with local conditions, regional potential, and the needs of students. This concept emphasizes differentiated learning, which is a learning approach that respects student diversity in terms of ability, learning style, and socio-cultural background. According to Nadiem Makarim, Merdeka Belajar policy aims to provide freedom for educators and education units to innovate, so that learning can be more relevant to the needs of students.

However, the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in madrasah ibtidaiyah is not free from challenges. One of the main obstacles is the lack of training for educators on the concept of differentiated learning. Many educators are still trapped in traditional learning patterns that tend to be rigid and uniform. In addition, limited resources, both in terms of learning facilities and technological support, are another obstacle in the implementation of this curriculum. Resistance to change also often arises, especially from educators who are used to conventional learning methods.

Nevertheless, the differentiated learning model based on curriculum flexibility remains a strategic solution to improve the quality of learning in madrasah ibtidaiyah. With this model, educators can design learning activities that are inclusive and able to accommodate the diverse needs of students. In addition, this approach allows learning to be more interesting and interactive, thus encouraging students' active involvement in the teaching-learning process. This is in line with Government Regulation No 57 of 2021 and Government Regulation No 4 of 2022, which mandate that the development of the education unit curriculum must be based on the principle of diversification, in accordance with regional potential, the characteristics of the education unit and the needs of students (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2022).

The Merdeka Curriculum also aims to create a nation's generation that is superior, resilient, and ready to compete at the global level. This is relevant to the National Education Vision 2005-2025, which emphasizes the development of comprehensively intelligent and competitive human resources (Muhaimin, 2001). According to Muhaimin, competitively intelligent human resources include five main aspects, namely spiritual, emotional, social, intellectual and kinesthetic intelligence. These five aspects of intelligence support each other in forming individuals who have faith, have good social skills, master science, and have optimal physical fitness (Muhaimin, 2001).

To overcome the various barriers to implementing Merdeka Curriculum, a comprehensive effort is needed that involves intensive training for educators, provision of adequate resources, and effective change management (Hamalik, 2005). In addition, it is important to ensure that learning evaluation is carried out on an ongoing basis with an approach that respects the individual needs of learners. In the context of madrasah ibtidaiyah,

differentiated learning based on curriculum flexibility is expected to be a strategic step in responding to learning challenges, while improving the overall quality of education (Direktorat KSKK Madrasah, 2022).

This study aims to analyze the planning, implementation and evaluation of differentiated learning based on curriculum flexibility in madrasah ibtidaiyah in Bantaeng district. The results of this study are expected to provide practical recommendations for educators and education stakeholders to create learning that is innovative, inclusive and in accordance with the needs of diverse learners. Thus, this research contributes to efforts to improve the quality of education in Indonesia, while supporting the achievement of the grand vision of national education.

2. METHODS

2.1 Type and Location of Research

This type of research is descriptive qualitative research. According to Strauss and Corbin, qualitative research is a type of research that produces findings that cannot be achieved through statistical procedures or other quantification methods. This is in line with Denzin and Lincoln's (2005) explanation in Merriam (2009), which states that qualitative research aims to understand phenomena in a natural context through meaning by people who experience these phenomena (Merriam, 2019). This research is more descriptive, so the data to be collected is not emphasized on numbers. The qualitative approach was chosen in this study due to several considerations. First, to describe the problem of differentiated learning based on curriculum flexibility in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah as the main character of the independent curriculum. Second, this research is inductive by describing problems based on data that is open to further researchers. Third, this research was conducted in a natural situation and prioritized qualitative data.

This research was conducted in 13 madrasahs in Bantaeng Regency, South Sulawesi Province, Indonesia. These locations were chosen based on the consideration that the implementation of the independent curriculum is being implemented in these locations and the diversity of geographical backgrounds and socio-economic conditions of the madrasah environment.

2.2 Data Sources

According to Lofland and Lofland in Moleong, the main data sources of qualitative research are words and actions, the rest are additional data such as documents and others (Moleong, 2014). The data sources in this research are primary and secondary data. Primary data sources are used to obtain information about differentiated learning in order to realize curriculum flexibility as a characteristic of an independent curriculum. The primary data sources in this study are the Head of Madrasah Education Section, the Free Curriculum Facilitator of the Ministry of Religion of Bantaeng-Bulukumba Regency, madrasah heads, class teachers, and subject teachers and students. The author makes direct observations of what is obtained through interviews and will be combined or synchronized with documentation data that can be analyzed by researchers.

Furthermore, according to Sugiyono, secondary sources are sources that do not directly provide data to data collectors, such as other people or documents (Sugiyono, 2008). Secondary data collection aims to strengthen and complement primary data. Secondary data in this study includes madrasah curriculum documents related to madrasah accreditation in the current year. Madrasah Operational Curriculum or 2013 Curriculum, learning tools, Director General of Religious Education's decision letter on implementing the independent curriculum, learning modules, differentiated learning planning tools and madrasah profiles. The sources of information in this study are outlined in Table 1.

Informants as research subjects as described in Table 1, were determined using two techniques, namely purposive sampling and snowball sampling with the aim of providing an overview of how the characteristics of curriculum flexibility in the learning process support the implementation of differentiated learning. The purposive sampling technique was implemented by grouping informants based on the madrasah accreditation score, geographical location, and the readiness of educators and education personnel.

Table 1. Sources of Information

No	Type of Information	Source of Information
I	Informants	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Head of madrasah education at the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Bantaeng Regency 2. Madrasah Independent Curriculum Facilitator 3. Head of Madrasah 4. Educators in Madrasahs 5. Madrasah ibtidaiyah students
II	Research Location	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. MIN Bantaeng 2. MIS Qaulan Nabhan Bulu-bulu 3. MIS Maarif Batulabbu 4. MIS Maarif Borong Kapala 5. MIS Muhammadiyah ErengEreng 6. MIS Alhidayah Labbo 7. MIS Cendekia Saukang 8. MIS Assalam Bungungpandang 9. MIS Maarif Biangloe 10. MIS Maarif Bakarayya 11. MIS DDI Darul Falaḥ Mattoangin 12. MIS Nurul Azma Talatala 13. MIS DII Dongkokang
III	Documents and Archives	Curriculum documents and learning tools learning journals, students grades photos of activities, videos of activities
IV	Learning events/activities	<p>Activities of madrasah principals in utilizing man, money, materials, methods, machines, minutes, information to support the implementation of differentiated learning based on curriculum flexibility;</p> <p>Interaction between madrasah principal and educators Interaction between educators and educators Interaction and communication between learners and educators; Educators' behaviors that illustrate differentiated learning effects of differentiated learning that are internalized in learners' behavior.</p>

2.3 Data Collection Methods

The data collection methods in this research are observation, interviews and other documentation as support (Sugiyono, 2008). In this study, data will be collected by researchers

by means of researchers going directly to the object of research. Researchers do not use a special questionnaire to make observations (Satori & Komariah, 2010). Then, an interview is a conversation conducted by two parties, namely the interviewer and the interviewee (Koentjaraningrat, 1981). In-depth interviews are used to explore information holistically (Satori & Komariah, 2010). In the in-depth interview, the researcher used an Android phone recorder to record the interview session. This in-depth interview aims to obtain in-depth information about the implementation of differentiated learning based on curriculum flexibility. The interview process is semi-structured, either in person or through a virtual platform that has been agreed with the informants to gather their views and opinions. In addition, the researcher will also conduct focus group interviews with informants who have been classified based on their roles in the implementation of differentiated learning, including madrasah principals, educators, learners and parents.

Furthermore, the data collection method through documentation was carried out by researchers to obtain data and documents. According to Sugiyono, documents can be in the form of guidelines, SOPs, monumental works of a person. In this study, the documents include curriculum and learning tools, academic supervision documents of the madrasah head, and madrasah policies related to the implementation of differentiated learning (Sugiyono, 2008).

2.4 Research Instruments

According to Sugiyono, in qualitative research, the researcher himself functions as the main instrument. Therefore, researchers must validate their readiness to conduct research, which includes an understanding of the research topic and adequate preparation, both academically and logistically. This validation process is carried out by researchers through self-evaluation to ensure they are ready to face challenges in the field (Sugiyono, 2008).

In this research, the qualitative method was deepened by using several instruments. The list of instruments used include qualitative interview guides, observation checklists, focus group guides, qualitative surveys, document analysis guidelines, learning material observation instruments, field notes, and audio or video recordings.

2.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research involves several phases that include activities before, during, and after researchers are in the field. Researchers conduct data analysis continuously by evaluating the results of interviews and asking additional questions if needed until the data obtained is considered credible and in-depth. According to Miles and Huberman, qualitative data analysis is an interactive process that includes three main activities, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. The analysis steps are briefly presented in Figure 1 (Sugiyono, 2008).

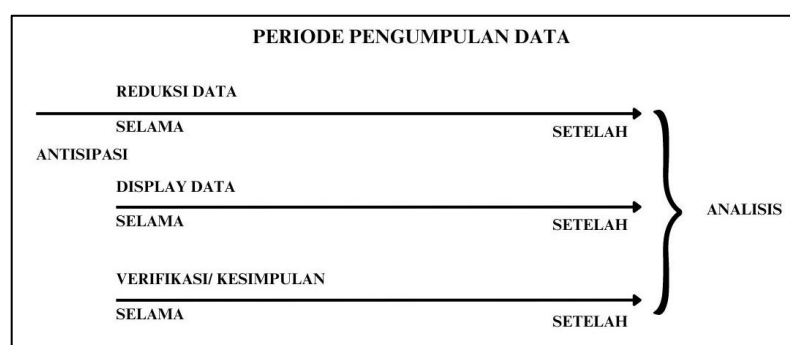


Figure 1. Components in Data Analysis (flow model)

2.5.1 Data Reduction

Data reduction is a sensitive thinking process that requires intelligence and a high breadth and depth of insight. Reducing data means summarizing, selecting key things, focusing on important things, looking for themes and patterns and discarding unnecessary ones. Thus the data that has been reduced will provide a clearer picture and make it easier for researchers to conduct further data collection and search for it when needed. Data reduction can be assisted by electronic equipment such as mini computers, by providing codes on certain aspects.

During the research, the author conducted repeated data collection, which caused the data to become more and more. To overcome this, the author conducted data reduction by summarizing, selecting important elements, looking for themes and patterns, and discarding irrelevant information, so that the data obtained provided a clear understanding of the implementation of differentiated learning based on curriculum flexibility in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Bantaeng Regency.

2.5.2 Display Data

By displaying data from the field, researchers can understand what is happening and plan the next steps. Data is categorized based on the main problem and presented in matrix form to make it easier for researchers to see patterns of relationships between data.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Differentiated learning based on curriculum flexibility is an approach designed to meet the learning needs of students with different abilities, interests and learning styles. In madrasah ibtidaiyah, this approach can be applied in various forms, depending on the context and students' needs. The following are the results of research related to the implementation of differentiated learning based on curriculum flexibility in madrasah ibtidaiyah in Bantaeng district in various aspects.

1. Academic Aspects

In terms of improved academic achievement, students show improvement in learning outcomes, especially in core subjects such as Bahasa Indonesia, Mathematics and Islamic Religious Education. With curriculum flexibility, high-ability students can explore the material in greater depth, while struggling students are supported. Differentiation ensures each learner's needs are met, fostering a growth mindset, self-confidence and academic success.

Furthermore, curriculum flexibility encourages learners' creativity and innovation to explore interests and apply knowledge. The learning applied at Madrasah ibtidaiyah in Bantaeng district is linked to relevant local culture, such as Islamic art making, so students find learning more meaningful. Several studies have shown that differentiated learning that utilizes interactive media such as learning videos, educational applications, or educational games can increase student attention.

2. Psychological Aspects

On the psychological aspect, differentiation can increase students' learning motivation and self-confidence. This is shown by the situation of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah students in Bantaeng district, who have diverse social, cultural and academic backgrounds. By implementing differentiation, teachers can provide more personalized attention according to the needs of each student. For example, students from rural areas who need a contextual approach in understanding the subject matter, or students with developing literacy skills, can be given more supportive learning strategies.

In addition, implementing differentiation also helps overcome the challenges of a class with a large number of students, where each child has a different learning pace. By providing customized materials, students feel more valued, which increases their motivation to learn. Ultimately, this approach creates a conducive learning environment that not only supports academic development, but also builds students' confidence and independence from an early age.

3. Social Aspects

In the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah of Bantaeng district, the application of differentiation in learning can have a significant impact in improving students' social and academic quality. Bantaeng district, which is culturally and socially diverse, requires approaches that accommodate such diversity in the teaching and learning process. By utilizing strategies such as project-based learning or group work, students are not only given the opportunity to collaborate, but also to understand and appreciate differences in learning styles and each other's abilities.

Students at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Bantaeng district, who often come from diverse backgrounds, can take advantage of this opportunity to learn to adapt in a more constructive way. They learn to respect each other, both in terms of academic ability and differences in ways of thinking and acting. For example, students who understand the material more quickly can help their peers who are struggling, while students who take longer to understand the lesson can gain support from their peers, creating a mutually supportive and positive learning environment.

In addition, through group activities, students learn to listen to each other, express opinions in a respectful way, and work together to achieve a common goal. These social skills will be very useful in their daily lives, both in the school environment and in the community. Diversity in learning groups at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Kabupaten Bantaeng will foster mutual respect and strengthen a sense of community, which is an important foundation in creating an inclusive and harmonious society.

With the right differentiation approach, it is hoped that Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Kabupaten Bantaeng can become a place that not only teaches academic knowledge, but also shapes the character of students who are able to collaborate with various individuals, appreciate differences, and become agents of positive change in society.

This research is in line with previous studies which show that differentiated learning approaches have a positive impact on student learning outcomes. Tomlinson (2017) asserts that differentiation allows students with different levels of ability to develop to their potential through strategies tailored to individual needs. In addition, Renninger & Hidi's (2015) research shows that student engagement increases when learning is relevant to their interests or experiences, such as the application of local culture in the learning process at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. This approach is also reinforced by Aulia et al., (2024) findings, which prove that interactive media such as educational apps and learning videos not only increase student attention, but also help students understand the material in a more enjoyable and meaningful way. The implementation of curriculum flexibility, as described in the Merdeka Curriculum Guide, provides space for students to explore their interests and creativity, thus creating a more meaningful and relevant learning experience to the needs of the times (Saa, 2024). Thus, this research reinforces the importance of differentiation and the utilization of interactive media in improving students' academic achievement holistically.

3.1 Differentiated Approach Model

The model of differentiated learning approach based on curriculum flexibility in madrasah ibtidaiyah in Bantaeng district includes integrated thematic approach, problem-based approach and project-based approach. The integrated thematic approach combines

several subjects in one theme with differentiation in tasks, activities or end results based on students' abilities. The problem-based learning approach gives students the opportunity to solve real problems with an approach that is appropriate to their level of understanding. In project-based learning, students are given the flexibility to develop projects according to their interests, such as projects on the madrasah environment or religious values.

3.2 The Effect of Implementing Curriculum Flexibility

The implementation of differentiated learning based on curriculum flexibility in madrasah ibtidaiyah in Bantaeng district has a positive impact on teachers. The impact can be seen from the development of teacher competencies, more complex classroom management and increased teaching satisfaction. Teachers tend to be more creative and innovative in designing lessons because they are required to provide a variety of teaching materials and methods. Then, teachers face the challenge of managing students with diverse needs while ensuring learning objectives are achieved. Then, in terms of increased teaching satisfaction, teachers feel more satisfied because they can contribute more to the development of each student individually.

There are at least three roles of curriculum flexibility in madrasah ibtidaiyah in Bantaeng district. The first role is adaptation of the national curriculum. The national curriculum can be adapted to the characteristics of students in madrasah, for example by providing more time for basic skills development for students who need it. Then, curriculum flexibility allows teachers to incorporate Islamic values in each subject according to student needs. Furthermore, curriculum flexibility acts as an opportunity for exploration of interests and talents. Flexibility provides space for students to develop their interests and talents through additional activities or interest-based learning.

The successful implementation of differentiated learning in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Bantaeng district is inseparable from system support. These include teacher professional development, collaboration with parents and infrastructure improvements. Research shows that teachers need to be intensively trained to design effective differentiated learning, including the use of technology and classroom management. Furthermore, the flexibility of the curriculum implemented in madrasah ibtidaiyah is often more successful when supported by parental involvement in assisting children to learn at home. In addition, the availability of adequate learning spaces, learning aids and digital devices will facilitate the implementation of differentiated learning.

3.3 Implementation Challenges

Although the implementation of differentiated learning has many benefits, there are several challenges in implementing differentiated learning based on curriculum flexibility in madrasah ibtidaiyah in Bantaeng district. First, it is related to teacher limitations. Teachers often need additional training to understand the concept of differentiated learning. Secondly, limited resources, where not all madrasahs have enough facilities or supporting tools to accommodate individual student learning needs. Third, curriculum adjustment. A flexible curriculum requires time to be adapted into daily learning practices.

3.4 Implementation Strategy in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

Differentiated learning is part of a systematically and rationally structured learning system. The implementation of differentiated learning is carried out with three stages, namely content differentiation, process differentiation and product differentiation. Therefore, the implementation strategy of differentiated learning in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Bantaeng district must pay attention to these stages.

In content differentiation, teachers need to provide materials with different levels of difficulty according to students' abilities. For example, students who understand the material

quickly are given additional tasks, while slow students are given more intensive help. In this case, teachers also need to identify information about the knowledge and skills that learners have. According to Stephen Joseph et al. (2013) the purpose of such identification is to map their learning needs and customize learning so that all learners can achieve optimal results (Joseph et al., 2013).

Then, in process differentiation, the learning process is designed to be varied, such as through discussions, experiments, or the use of technology. It aims to make learning interesting, encourage increased thinking capacity, and adjust to factors in the learners' environment.

Furthermore, in product differentiation, students are given the freedom to demonstrate their understanding in the form of projects, presentations or writings. The main key in product differentiation is that educators must help increase learners' confidence and be able to vary learning methods and media according to the needs and situation of the learning process. Therefore, educator empowerment is very important in improving competence and creativity to be able to bring the learning process to be more interesting for students (Dinar Westri, 2022). In addition, Madrasah ibtidaiyah also needs to utilize Islamic religious values as an approach to build student character during the learning process.

4. CONCLUSION

The implementation of differentiated learning based on curriculum flexibility in madrasah ibtidaiyah has a positive impact on students, teachers and the education system as a whole. Despite the challenges, this approach is highly relevant in creating inclusive, adaptive and meaningful education. Differentiated learning can improve the quality and learning outcomes of students. However, there are still obstacles that need to be worked on together, such as the lack of teacher skills in differentiated learning and the lack of available resources. Further research needs to be directed at exploring the best model for sustainable implementation that is relevant to the local context.

Authors' contribution

Fahmi Dahlan: Conceptualization, Data curation, Investigation, Project administration, Resources, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. Muh. Khalifah Mustami: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – review & editing. Muljono Damopolii: Formal analysis, Resources, Supervision, Writing – review & editing. Misykat Malik Ibrahim: Resources, Supervision, Writing – review & editing.

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