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Challenges and strategies in developing differentiated learning-based Indonesian language teaching modules: A case study at madrasah tsanawiyah Negeri 1 Bone Bolango, Indonesia

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Abstract

The implementation of differentiated learning in Indonesian language instruction is essential for accommodating diverse student needs within the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. However, teachers at *Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri 1 Bone Bolango* face significant challenges in developing effective teaching modules that align with differentiation principles. This study aims to examine the key obstacles in module development, analyze their impact on instructional effectiveness, and propose solutions for improving differentiated teaching practices. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through document analysis, interviews, and classroom observations. The study focused on Indonesian language teachers, evaluating their instructional modules and teaching strategies within the framework of *Kurikulum Merdeka*. The collected data were analyzed thematically to identify common difficulties in module design, assessment implementation, and instructional execution. The findings indicate that many teaching modules lack essential components such as clear learning objectives, student profiling, and differentiated assessment strategies. Teachers struggle with understanding and applying differentiation principles due to insufficient training and resource limitations. Institutional barriers, including rigid assessment policies, further hinder the effective implementation of differentiation. Addressing these challenges requires targeted professional development, standardized module frameworks, and policy reforms that support flexible instructional approaches. This study contributes to the discourse on differentiated instruction by providing empirical insights into its challenges and potential solutions in Indonesian language education. Future research should explore the long-term impact of differentiated modules on student learning outcomes and examine the role of digital tools in supporting personalized instruction.

Keywords: Instructional Module Development; Student-Centered Learning; Flexible Assessment Strategies

1. Introduction

Indonesian language education holds a crucial role in shaping national identity, fostering unity, and promoting cultural literacy. As the national language, Indonesian serves as a unifying force in a country with diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. The significance of Indonesian as a medium of instruction in schools and an official language in government institutions is recognized in the 1945 Constitution, positioning it as a central element in nation-building (Arsanti & Setiana, 2020). Moreover, in the era of globalization, Indonesian has gained international recognition, further amplifying its relevance in the global discourse. However, as globalization and technological advancements progress, challenges emerge in preserving the integrity of the language, requiring continuous updates in educational approaches to maintain linguistic competence among students (Murdiyati, 2020).

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In response to the evolving educational landscape, Indonesia has implemented the Kurikulum Merdeka (Independent Curriculum), which emphasizes student-centered learning, flexibility, and inclusivity. This curriculum advocates differentiated instruction, a pedagogical approach that acknowledges students' diverse learning needs, interests, and cognitive abilities (Jannah & Harun, 2023). Differentiated learning is particularly relevant in language education, where individual student differences significantly influence learning outcomes (Badriah & Robandi, 2023). Within this framework, differentiated learning-based instructional modules serve as essential tools in ensuring effective teaching and learning processes. These modules offer structured and adaptable learning experiences tailored to accommodate students' varied competencies and learning styles (Maryam et al., 2022). However, despite the curriculum's progressive vision, many educators face difficulties in implementing differentiated learning, particularly in the context of Indonesian language instruction at the secondary level.

One of the primary challenges in implementing differentiated instruction is the development of effective teaching modules that align with the Independent Curriculum's objectives. Teachers in Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri 1 Bone Bolango struggle to design instructional modules that integrate differentiation principles while ensuring coherence with the curriculum's competency standards. Common issues include difficulties in formulating clear learning objectives, selecting appropriate teaching models, and designing assessments that cater to varied student needs (Hutahean & Gafari, 2023). Furthermore, teachers often lack adequate professional training and resources to support them in developing instructional materials that meet the diverse learning needs of students (Farhrohman, 2023). Without well-structured modules, the implementation of differentiated learning remains inconsistent, limiting students' opportunities to engage in personalized and meaningful learning experiences.

To address these challenges, several general solutions have been proposed in the literature. One common approach involves professional development programs that provide teachers with training on differentiated instruction and module development. Workshops, seminars, and mentoring programs have been shown to improve teachers' understanding and implementation of differentiation strategies (Situmorang et al., 2023). Additionally, educational institutions have begun incorporating technological tools to facilitate differentiated instruction, allowing for more personalized learning experiences (Marita, 2023). The integration of digital learning platforms and interactive teaching aids enables teachers to tailor instruction according to students' readiness levels and learning preferences (Hidayatullah et al., 2023). Despite these efforts, many teachers still encounter difficulties in translating theoretical knowledge into practical applications, highlighting the need for targeted interventions that specifically address the complexities of module development.

Previous studies on differentiated instruction and module development provide valuable insights into effective strategies for overcoming instructional challenges. Research by Wahyuni (in Sarie, 2022) emphasizes the importance of structured module design that incorporates three key differentiation components: content, process, and product. Differentiated content involves varying instructional materials based on students' proficiency levels, differentiated processes focus on providing multiple pathways for learning, and differentiated products allow students to demonstrate their understanding through diverse assessment formats. Additionally, Purnawanto (2023) highlights the significance of formative assessments in guiding instructional differentiation. Teachers who utilize ongoing assessments to gauge student progress are better equipped to adjust instructional strategies and provide targeted support to students with different learning needs.

Another relevant study by Rohim & Rigianti (2023) explores the role of technology in supporting differentiated learning. The findings suggest that the integration of digital tools, such as adaptive learning software and interactive multimedia, enhances student engagement and facilitates individualized instruction. Similarly, research by Zuhajji et al. (2023) demonstrates that teachers who receive training in digital pedagogy are more successful in implementing differentiated learning approaches. These studies collectively underscore the need for a multifaceted approach that combines teacher training, technological integration, and continuous assessment in module development. However, while these studies provide general recommendations, limited research has been conducted on the specific challenges faced by Indonesian language teachers in secondary schools when developing differentiated learning modules.

Despite the growing body of literature on differentiated instruction, a significant research gap remains regarding the contextual factors influencing module development in the Indonesian language curriculum. Most existing studies focus on general differentiation strategies without addressing the specific constraints faced by teachers in adapting these strategies within the Indonesian educational system. Additionally, few studies examine the structural and pedagogical inconsistencies that arise when teachers attempt to align differentiated learning principles with national curriculum requirements. This gap highlights the necessity of empirical research that explores the nuanced challenges of developing differentiated instructional modules in Indonesian language education, particularly in Madrasah Tsanawiyah settings.

This study aims to investigate the problems encountered in the development of Indonesian language instructional modules based on differentiated learning at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri 1 Bone Bolango. Specifically, it seeks to (1) describe the existing instructional modules developed by Indonesian language teachers, (2) analyze the key challenges faced in module development, (3) propose practical solutions for addressing these challenges, and (4) formulate a structured framework for developing effective differentiated learning modules. The findings of this study contribute to the growing discourse on differentiated instruction by providing empirical evidence on the complexities of module development within the Indonesian secondary education system. Additionally, this research offers practical recommendations for educators and policymakers to enhance the implementation of differentiated learning in Indonesian language instruction. By addressing the existing research gap, this study not only advances academic knowledge in the field of language education but also provides actionable insights for improving instructional practices in diverse classroom settings.

2. Methodology

This study was conducted at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri 1 Bone Bolango, a state Islamic junior high school located in Bone Bolango Regency, Gorontalo Province, Indonesia. The institution, under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, serves as a key educational center in the region. As of the 2023 academic year, the school accommodates approximately 350 students distributed across three grade levels: 100 students in Grade 7, 100 in Grade 8, and 150 in Grade 9. The school comprises nine classrooms, an administrative office, a teacher's lounge, and a dormitory equipped with essential educational facilities.

The institution has been recognized by the Ministry of Religious Affairs as a model school for implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka (Independent Curriculum). As the only state Madrasah Tsanawiyah in Bone Bolango, it has been designated as a hub for professional development, particularly in Indonesian language instruction. The school hosts regular Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran (MGMP) or subject teachers' working group meetings, which serve as a platform for discussing instructional practices and curriculum adaptation. Given its strategic role in education reform, this school was selected as the research site to explore the challenges associated with developing differentiated instructional modules for Indonesian language teachers.

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to investigate the complexities surrounding the development of differentiated learning-based instructional modules. According to Abdussamad (2021), qualitative research is particularly useful for exploring naturalistic settings, as it provides in-depth insights into human experiences and contextual phenomena. This approach was chosen to capture the perspectives of teachers, analyze instructional materials, and identify systemic challenges in module development.

Qualitative research is inherently interpretative and exploratory, allowing for a deeper understanding of underlying pedagogical issues (Sugiyono, 2018). The study was designed to collect and analyze rich qualitative data that would illuminate the difficulties faced by teachers in designing instructional modules that align with the principles of differentiated learning. This approach facilitated a comprehensive examination of the instructional strategies currently employed, the barriers to effective module development, and the potential solutions for enhancing instructional quality.

This study is classified as descriptive research, aiming to systematically document and analyze the issues related to differentiated instructional module development. The descriptive method was used to present a detailed account of the challenges, strategies, and practical experiences of teachers at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri 1 Bone Bolango. Through this method, the study provides an empirical basis for understanding the implementation gaps in differentiated learning and the contextual constraints affecting teachers' instructional decisions.

The research was conducted through the following systematic steps:

- Identification of Research Objectives – The study's objectives were clearly defined to guide the research process and ensure alignment with the research questions.
- Participant Selection – Indonesian language teachers at *Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri 1 Bone Bolango* were chosen as key participants. These teachers were directly involved in developing instructional modules and implementing differentiated learning strategies.
- Instrument Development – Research instruments, including interview guides, observation checklists, and document analysis frameworks, were designed to systematically collect relevant data.
- Data Collection – Multiple data collection techniques were employed, including interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis.

- Data Analysis – Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic coding and interpretative analysis to identify patterns and key findings.
- Interpretation and Reporting – The findings were synthesized to provide actionable insights and recommendations for improving differentiated module development.
- This study relied on multiple sources of data to ensure a comprehensive and triangulated understanding of the research problem. The primary data sources included:
- Indonesian Language Teachers – Teachers at *Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri 1 Bone Bolango* served as the principal informants. They provided first-hand insights into their experiences with differentiated learning, the challenges they faced in module development, and their perspectives on effective instructional strategies.
- Instructional Modules – The study analyzed instructional modules developed by teachers for the 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 academic years across Grades 7, 8, and 9. These modules were examined to assess their adherence to differentiation principles and alignment with *Kurikulum Merdeka*.
- Curriculum and Policy Documents – Official curriculum guidelines, instructional frameworks, and government-issued educational policies were reviewed to contextualize the findings within national curriculum mandates.

The data collection methods employed in the study included:

- Interviews – Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Indonesian language teachers to gather detailed narratives about their experiences with differentiated instruction and module development. These interviews provided qualitative insights into teachers' challenges, instructional decisions, and professional development needs.
- Classroom Observations – Observations of classroom instruction were carried out to document the implementation of differentiated learning modules. These observations helped identify the practical difficulties teachers encountered in applying differentiation strategies.
- Document Analysis – A systematic review of instructional modules, lesson plans, and assessment materials was conducted to evaluate the extent to which differentiation principles were integrated into teaching materials.

The collected qualitative data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model, which consists of three main stages:

- Data Reduction – The process of selecting, focusing, and organizing data to extract meaningful patterns. Redundant or irrelevant data were eliminated to maintain analytical clarity.
- Data Display – The organization of findings into matrices, thematic charts, and descriptive narratives to facilitate interpretation. This stage ensured that data were systematically structured for comparative analysis.
- Conclusion Drawing and Verification – The interpretation of findings to derive key insights and theoretical implications. The validity of conclusions was continuously verified through data triangulation, participant validation, and peer debriefing.

To enhance the reliability of findings, thematic analysis was employed to categorize data into meaningful themes. Key themes included:

- Common challenges in differentiated module development
- Misalignment between instructional materials and curriculum requirements
- Strategies adopted by teachers to overcome differentiation obstacles
- The role of teacher training in improving module quality
- To establish the credibility and dependability of the research findings, several validation techniques were employed:
- Methodological Triangulation – Data were collected through multiple methods (interviews, observations, and document analysis) to ensure the robustness of findings.
- Member Checking – Participants were given the opportunity to review and confirm the accuracy of interview transcripts and preliminary findings.
- Peer Review and Expert Validation – Research findings were evaluated by subject-matter experts and fellow educators to ensure the integrity and accuracy of conclusions.
- Transparency and Replicability – A detailed description of the research process was provided to allow future researchers to replicate the study in different educational settings.

All research activities adhered to ethical research principles, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Teachers and school administrators were briefed on the study's objectives, and their participation was

based on informed consent. Anonymity was maintained to protect participants' identities and professional standing. Additionally, institutional approvals were obtained before data collection commenced, ensuring compliance with ethical research standards.

3. Results and Discussion

The development of Indonesian language teaching modules based on differentiated learning at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri 1 Bone Bolango has encountered significant obstacles. The analysis revealed that these challenges arise in three primary areas: the structure and components of the module, teachers' understanding of differentiated learning principles, and the practical difficulties of aligning differentiated instruction with the Kurikulum Merdeka framework.

One of the most pressing issues identified is the incompleteness and inconsistency in the structure of the teaching modules. Many instructional modules lack essential components such as clear learning objectives, student profiles, and well-defined assessment criteria. According to Maryam et al. (2022), a well-structured teaching module should contain general information, core instructional components, and supplementary materials. However, in the case of the modules analyzed, key components such as student readiness levels, differentiated learning strategies, and assessment tools were either missing or inadequately detailed. This structural deficiency hinders teachers' ability to implement differentiated learning effectively.

A closer examination of the modules also revealed that learning objectives were not clearly aligned with the differentiation principles outlined in the Independent Curriculum. In many instances, the formulation of learning objectives did not adequately consider students' varying competencies, learning styles, or prior knowledge. This misalignment poses a significant barrier to achieving the intended learning outcomes, as differentiation relies heavily on understanding and responding to individual student needs (Purnawanto, 2023). Additionally, inconsistencies in module structure result in instructional gaps, making it difficult for students to progress at their own pace.

Another key finding of this study is that teachers at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri 1 Bone Bolango face substantial difficulties in conceptualizing and applying differentiated learning strategies. The majority of teachers struggle with the practical aspects of differentiation, including defining student profiles, selecting appropriate differentiation strategies, and implementing flexible learning assessments.

The findings indicate that teachers often lack adequate professional training and pedagogical support in differentiated learning. Many teachers still adhere to traditional instructional methods, which emphasize uniform content delivery rather than personalized learning pathways (Farhrohman, 2023). This results in the inability to effectively integrate differentiation into instructional modules, leading to generic lesson plans that do not cater to diverse learning needs.

Additionally, teachers find it challenging to determine the student profiles necessary for differentiation, such as students' readiness levels, learning preferences, and cognitive abilities. The lack of systematic student profiling further complicates the process of developing differentiated instructional modules. This aligns with the findings of Situmorang et al. (2023), who argue that accurate student profiling is a prerequisite for successful differentiated learning implementation. Without this foundation, teachers cannot effectively design learning experiences tailored to students' specific needs.

The difficulty in implementing differentiated assessment methods also emerged as a major concern. Many teachers struggle with designing formative and summative assessments that align with differentiation principles. Differentiated learning requires assessments that measure student progress across varying levels of understanding and cognitive development (Jannah & Harun, 2023). However, the absence of clear assessment guidelines and flexible evaluation methods in the analyzed modules suggests that current assessment practices are still predominantly standardized and do not fully reflect the principles of differentiation.

Beyond individual teacher challenges, several systemic barriers hinder the effective development and implementation of differentiated learning-based Indonesian language modules. These include limited access to professional development programs, inadequate instructional resources, and institutional constraints related to the adaptation of differentiated learning.

One major limitation is the lack of structured professional development programs focusing on differentiated instruction. While training sessions on Kurikulum Merdeka have been conducted, many of these sessions fail to provide practical guidance on differentiated module design (Hutahean & Gafari, 2023). Teachers reported that existing training programs

are often theoretical and lack hands-on application. This gap between theory and practice limits teachers' confidence in implementing differentiation in the classroom.

Moreover, the availability of instructional resources remains a significant challenge. Differentiated learning requires access to a diverse range of instructional materials, including leveled texts, adaptive learning technologies, and flexible classroom strategies (Marita, 2023). However, in Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri 1 Bone Bolango, teachers often rely on standardized textbooks that do not accommodate different learning profiles. This lack of material diversity prevents teachers from fully implementing differentiation, as they are unable to provide alternative content or varied learning pathways for students with different learning needs.

Institutional barriers also play a crucial role in limiting the adoption of differentiated learning. The rigid implementation of standardized testing and grading systems often discourages teachers from fully embracing differentiation (Badriah & Robandi, 2023). Since student performance is typically measured using uniform assessments, teachers feel pressured to adhere to traditional teaching approaches rather than exploring flexible instructional strategies. This structural constraint further reinforces a one-size-fits-all approach, undermining the effectiveness of differentiated learning initiatives.

To address these challenges, several intervention strategies must be considered. One of the most effective solutions is the implementation of targeted professional development programs focused on differentiated instruction. Unlike general curriculum training, these programs should provide practical workshops, mentorship sessions, and peer collaboration opportunities to help teachers develop and refine their differentiated teaching modules (Wahyuni in Sarie, 2022). Training should also emphasize real-world applications of differentiation strategies, including lesson planning, student profiling, and differentiated assessment design.

Another critical solution is the provision of structured instructional resources and best-practice guidelines. The development of standardized yet flexible teaching module templates could help teachers align their instructional materials with differentiation principles (Rohim & Rigianti, 2023). These templates should include clear differentiation guidelines, adaptable learning activities, and assessment rubrics that support varied learning styles.

Additionally, technological integration can enhance the effectiveness of differentiated instruction. Digital learning platforms that offer adaptive learning experiences and interactive content can help teachers provide differentiated materials tailored to individual students' needs (Hidayatullah et al., 2023). The use of technology-assisted formative assessments can also help track student progress more effectively, enabling teachers to adjust instructional strategies accordingly.

The findings of this study highlight the urgent need for policy reforms that support differentiated learning at the institutional level. Educational policymakers should consider developing clear guidelines for differentiated instruction within Kurikulum Merdeka, ensuring that schools and teachers receive adequate support in implementing differentiation strategies. Moreover, policies should promote more flexible assessment models that accommodate diverse learning needs, rather than relying solely on standardized testing frameworks.

Future research should explore the long-term impact of differentiated learning module implementation on student achievement. Longitudinal studies tracking student progress under differentiated instruction models could provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of various differentiation strategies. Additionally, further research is needed to examine the role of digital technology in facilitating differentiated instruction, particularly in Indonesian secondary education settings.

4. Conclusion

This study highlights the key challenges in developing differentiated learning-based Indonesian language teaching modules at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri 1 Bone Bolango. The findings reveal structural deficiencies in module design, including missing or unclear learning objectives, inadequate differentiation strategies, and inconsistencies in assessment frameworks. Additionally, teachers face difficulties in implementing differentiation due to a lack of training, limited instructional resources, and rigid institutional assessment policies. These barriers hinder the effective adoption of differentiated instruction, preventing students from receiving personalized learning experiences tailored to their needs.

The study's implications emphasize the necessity of targeted professional development programs, standardized yet adaptable teaching module templates, and improved access to instructional resources. Moreover, policy reforms are

needed to support flexible assessment models and encourage a more student-centered approach within the Kurikulum Merdeka. By addressing these issues, schools can enhance the implementation of differentiated learning, ultimately improving student engagement and learning outcomes.

This research contributes to the growing body of literature on differentiated instruction by providing empirical insights into the challenges faced by Indonesian language teachers. Future studies could explore the long-term impact of differentiated module implementation on student achievement or examine the role of digital learning tools in facilitating differentiation. Addressing these gaps will further strengthen differentiated learning in Indonesia's education system.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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