Practice and reflection of differentiated learning in sociology at senior high school

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ABSTRACT

Global challenges require the government to organize learning in schools that are more up-to-date following episodes in the times. The independent curriculum learning promises flexibility for teachers and students and replaces the relatively new curriculum-13. In implementing the independent curriculum, differentiated learning is a concept that focuses on the diversity of students' learning styles. This research was conducted to obtain an overview of the implementation and reflection of differentiated learning in senior high schools in Central Java. Teachers, especially those teaching sociology subjects, the assistant principal of academic affairs and curriculum, and students are the research subjects. It is qualitative research with a phenomenological research type and purposive sampling technique. The results of this study show: i) the practice of differentiated learning in sociology subjects in high schools has been well implemented with the independent curriculum approach; ii) the challenges and obstacles faced by sociology teachers when implementing differentiated learning are the teacher's skills in preparing learning; and iii) sociology teachers who face challenges and obstacles when implementing differentiated learning must pay more attention to the readiness of differentiated skills.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education produces updates in the field of science, and the application of good education can be seen in a civilized and innovative society. Accordingly, education is organized in a country that aims to develop individual self-competence to prepare for the development of increasingly modern times. This is reinforced by the Law of the Republic of Indonesia-RI number 20 of 2003 Chapter II Article 3 concerning the National Education System, which contains, in essence, national education intended to shape and develop the potential of students to become devoted, knowledgeable, and valuable human beings for society to realize the welfare of a country. To successfully implement education, it is necessary to have a curriculum that facilitates increasing students' competence in schools. The provisions regarding the curriculum are contained in Law No. 20 of 2003 Chapter 1 Article 1, which states, "The curriculum is a set of plans and arrangements regarding the objectives, content, and subject matter as well as the methods used as guidelines for organizing learning activities to achieve certain educational goals".

Currently, there is a change from the 2013 curriculum to the independent curriculum because there is an evaluation to improve and ensure the implementation of the learning process and to keep up with the times [1]. In addition, the background of the independent curriculum was initiated based on research by the program for international student assessment, which resulted in an assessment that students in Indonesia are still at the lower level, so it is necessary to improve the curriculum with the concept of student independence in determining methods independently to participate in learning. Nadiem Makarim, Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, 2020 launched independent learning which is implemented in schools and universities [2]. The curriculum change is expected to be a dynamic set of educational plans that will always follow the development of generations in society.

The independent curriculum is a curriculum that has the flexibility for educators to choose various kinds of learning tools according to the needs, interests, and characteristics of students [3]. The independent curriculum contains differentiated learning to improve the quality of education in Indonesia. Differentiated curriculum development here refers to the adjustment of educational programs that are seen from various conditions and characteristics of the potential of each region to meet the needs of diversity. Earl [4] mentioned, "Differentiation has a goal for how educators can ensure the proper learning at the right time for students."

The principles contained in the implementation of differentiated learning are student differences, development in activity and creativity, curriculum elements, how collaboration between teachers and students is assessed, and collaborative cooperation with effective learning environments and conditions for maximum learning [5]. Realizing differentiated learning is building awareness of the importance of student welfare, which can be done by emphasizing the aspects of increasing the actualization of the roles and functions of teachers [6]. Focus on academic supervision, review of learning implementation, and then coordination meetings to evaluate implementation results [6].

Differentiation as a teaching practice is a growing topic in education systems [7], and recommended approaches to meet the needs of each student equally [8]. Differentiated learning is a teaching strategy catering to various abilities and needs [9]. There is an urgency that ensures differentiated learning experiences are now interpreted as a component of quality and comprehensive pedagogy [10]. Differentiated learning fully supports the learning needs of learners and has been implemented in many Australian territories [11]. Schools in Queensland, Australia, have, on the whole, practised differentiated teaching and learning [12]. Differentiated learning respects each student, placing students at the centre of the teaching process and viewing them as individuals by recognizing differences and diversity of abilities [13]. Some countries implementing differentiated learning practices still consider teachers' readiness to deal with learner heterogeneity as not being maximized [14]. Sociology teachers in public high schools in Indonesia also experience obstacles in differentiated learning, namely the diversity of students, so they have to prepare more for learning [15]. The obstacles educators face in implementing differentiated learning, namely the complexity of the process, causes teachers to feel overwhelmed in managing it according to student needs. Then, limited resources and lack of active student involvement are real challenges sociology teachers face. Therefore, intensive training is needed to optimize the differentiation approach [16].

Problems from previous research on differentiated learning resulted in findings that are obstacles for teachers in preparing and implementing learning in the classroom but have not explicitly explained the strategies and reflections that teachers make in implementing differentiated learning. Teachers must dynamically provide learning experiences to students to help them reach the maximum stage of their potential growth. Seeing this phenomenon, the author is interested in examining, more specifically, the implementation and reflection of differentiated learning practices in sociology subjects at state high school using constructivism theory contributed by Vygotsky [17]; the theory explains the cognitive development of individuals facing new and challenging experiences.

2.   METHOD

This research uses qualitative research methods to focus on the facts of implementing the independent curriculum in differentiated learning, especially in sociology subjects. The type of research used is phenomenology, namely, seeing phenomena based on the state of the field with the research subjects, schools that implement the independent curriculum, mover teachers, especially in sociology subjects, and students. The data collection technique uses purposive sampling by considering specific criteria to represent the data [18].

Researchers took three public high schools and one private high school in Central Java, with sources of 5 sociology teachers, 14 high school students were selected as samples based on teacher recommendations from references to student learning styles that researchers will identify, such as the ability to develop creativity, critical thinking skills, independence and good learning activeness. Then there are four vice principals in the academic and curriculum fields. The researcher chose the schools because they had a

sociology mover teacher and a mover school, and they implemented the independent curriculum within two years. This research procedure begins with the preparation process, then the data collection process, and finally, the data analysis. The data collection technique in this journal uses three techniques: conducting the in-depth interview technique is a process that involves the researcher and the source in a conversation, where the conversation can include additional questions that are still relevant to the theme and require a long time in order to develop an emotional bond between the researcher and the source. Participant observation involves the researcher actively observing subject activities, namely students and teachers, in learning activities to understand the implementation of the independent curriculum and differentiated learning in sociology subjects. Document searches using several superior accredited scientific articles and books relevant to the research topic help find the required information sources.

Data analysis is done by collecting, reducing, presenting, concluding data, and verifying [19]. Comprehensive data analysis is collected from the results of interview transcripts, observation of learning activities in the classroom and looking for other relevant documents. At the data reduction stage, what has been collected will be simplified so that it is easy to understand; after that, at the data presentation stage, the researcher compiles the reduction results into a more organized and easy-to-understand form, and the last is a conclusion or verification which is a summary of new findings that have been analyzed and proven correct.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the assistant principal of academic affairs and curriculum interviews regarding the implementation of the independent curriculum, learning at senior high school in Central Java said they had carried out learning by the curriculum structure in the independent curriculum. Each of the three schools used as research sites said they had implemented the independent curriculum in the second year. Then, one school said it was in the third year of implementing the independent curriculum because it was the first batch of mover schools. In implementing the independent curriculum, there is a lesson, namely differentiated learning, which starts from mapping the interests and talents possessed by students regarding their readiness and profile. Differentiated learning is learning that recognizes the diversity of learning styles of students. In differentiated learning, the focus of learning lies in how the teacher pays attention to the needs and strengths of each learner [20]. In the independent curriculum, there are several main characteristics, namely, focusing on essential material; in this material, students can increase creativity and innovation so that learning takes place in depth. In implementing the independent curriculum, learning is carried out in a differentiated manner so that students have enough time to deepen the material and strengthen competencies.

The differentiated learning process approach can be done with a strategy divided into three supporting components: content, process, and product. The first differentiated learning strategy is content differentiation, which implements independent learning. This learning method provides material to learners based on their abilities, interests, and learning styles [21]. We found that according to informant YS, who is a sociology teacher in one of the state senior high schools, exploring learners' interests in realizing integration in content differentiation can be done by providing three different materials, namely for visual learning styles through personal blogs, auditorial learning styles in the form of podcast broadcasts, and for kinesthetic learning styles with discussions through group presentations. The integration process can be done in several ways, such as evaluating learning objectives, evaluating the mastery of student material, dividing small groups in class for those who have not mastered the material, and reducing time for students who have mastered the material [22].

Process differentiation refers to how a teacher can bring learners to find knowledge in learning activities independently in its processes and varied activities, such as activities outside the classroom or the outing class by students from private high schools. DK, as a sociology teacher at a private high school, said that students had been invited to the press monument as a form of implementation of social change material. Process differentiation focuses on how students work on information or ideas, including learning styles, communication, and interaction with the material obtained from the teacher. Based on interviews with students, assignments according to learning styles are more fun because they can learn to explore knowledge. Then, the results of these interactions become a benchmark for determining how to learn based on students' choices. A teacher must carefully and deliberately study the diversity of student learning styles so that these differences can be accommodated appropriately according to the needs of each student [23].

Product differentiation relates to the products students produce, such as presentations, videos, essays, and performances, due to understanding and knowledge during learning. As conveyed by informant AT, as a sociology teacher at senior high school public, students are free to choose the results of their assignments, such as writing by hand, utilizing applications such as Canva for presentations, and making TikTok according to the class agreement at the beginning of the meeting. The division of tasks for students in the independent curriculum is divided into individual and group. The method used for group-based tasks is

project-based learning, students are given the opportunity to develop ideas and collaborate with their friends [24]. Students can more easily develop creativity through this exchange of ideas and cooperation to produce learning products.

Working on these products takes a long time, which is adjusted to their preferences and can be done individually or in groups. In its implementation, it is indeed inseparable from challenges and obstacles. Then teachers try to overcome the difficulties and obstacles of differentiated learning because students have to learn interests that tend to change at any time; as conveyed by YS, a sociology teacher, students' interests constantly change at any time, for example, at the beginning of learning, students have a visual learning style, but over time students' learning styles can change so that mapping must be done regularly not only at the beginning of the semester.

The school created a learning community to solve learning problems, as conveyed by DK, a private high school sociology teacher. If students have difficulties, they can discuss them in the learning community, sharing solutions to overcome them. Furthermore, a statement from YS stated that it is necessary to approach students to motivate them to learn, increase their interest in learning according to their needs, and encourage them to master learning materials. The government also provides a self-paced teaching platform on its website [25] help teachers develop teaching skills and implement an accessible self-paced curriculum [26]. As stated by DK, as a public high school sociology teacher, helps teachers with all questions regarding the independent curriculum.

3.1. Differentiated learning practices in sociology subjects

Differentiated learning has been applied to the independent curriculum in several schools; in practice, it is implementation emphasizes meeting each student's needs, including adjusting the characteristics, learning styles, interests, and talents that students have, as is known [27]. Every student has the right to get appropriate learning opportunities to meet the stage of the proximal development zone and maximize the learning process. It is the same with the implementation of the independent curriculum, where teachers also have complete freedom in determining the chapters to be studied and the learning strategies to be applied in each chapter because, in essence, the independent curriculum is freedom for teachers.

Teachers have an essential role in preparing academic guidance and advice related to learning styles that offer strategies used for learning, namely the critical role of teachers in preparing educational guidance, providing input and advice related to learning styles that offer strategies used for learning. The implementation of differentiated learning also has a positive impact [28]. Namely, teachers can develop a curriculum that is more flexible and responsive to student needs and pay attention to individual students' characteristics and learning styles. Implementing differentiated learning for teachers is not easy because teachers must adequately understand the characteristics and needs of students and prepare various types of teaching materials and learning activities that students can do in different ways.

3.2. Challenges and constraints in differentiated learning

The challenges in content differentiation are the obstacles educators face in differentiated learning; the first is the difficulty in dividing the time for teachers to prepare learning materials by studying the independent teaching platform. The application is required for teachers using the independent curriculum. This technology platform is intended as a companion for teachers and principals in teaching, learning and working [29]. This difficulty is due to the large amount of material from the teaching independence platform application that must be done by the teacher, and this interferes with the teacher's main task, which is teaching. Second, the diversity of students' learning styles requires teachers to adapt to the learning process; learning styles in differentiated learning are divided into auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learning styles [30]. Because of the variety of learning styles of these students, teachers must provide a variety of learning media that suit the needs of students' learning styles.

The challenge in process differentiation namely changes in student learning interests, is still related to learning styles, where students not only have one learning style but have several and can change their learning styles. The last challenge that all interviewees did not experience was the difficulty in implementing technology pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK). TPACK is a collection of theoretical knowledge developed for teachers' needs in teaching students effectively and using technology [31]. Teachers still need help to create a variety of learning content related to technology and adjust the needs of students during teaching and learning activities.

According to Vygotsky's [32] theory, constructivist learning, or sociocultural learning, emphasizes the critical role of social interaction in one's learning development through collaborative and individual actions. The relevance of the application of differentiated learning to the theory of constructivism learning concept where students learn by using multiple intelligences accompanied by teacher instruction [33]. In implementing social constructivism learning theory, some teachers still need help finding models or actual examples of the implementation of differentiated learning. Then, the teacher applies differentiated learning

according to individual needs. In addition, teachers often need help with time management due to the large number of lesson hours and activities and limited time to explore plans, create materials, or differentiate learning. Compared to conventional learning, this process takes a longer time, where the assessment of each individual will vary according to the ability and portion of the learner, which requires a differentiation approach for more effective learning [34].

Some teachers are often concerned about assessing each individual because there may be gaps between skilled and unskilled learners. Another challenge teachers face is getting learners actively involved in the classroom. Sometimes, teachers skip the introductory activities in the stimulus and closing activities used to test how well students understand the material the teacher has taught. The zone of proximal development (ZPD) described by Vygotsky [35] is the distance between what a person can do independently with the help of others. Learning testing is not only determined by the child's current level of achievement but also the child's potential development. Here, the teacher is too focused on delivering the material, and there is a lack of reciprocity between the two parties, so the teacher needs to calculate the time appropriately. This happens because teachers need to carry out learning activities by the module. The lack of understanding of teachers related to learning modules will also affect the achievement of learning activities and maximum results, where teachers must understand and explore modules to create structured and programmed learning [36].

3.3. The reflection process is a teacher's effort to overcome the challenges and obstacles of differentiated learning

Teachers increase competence to support quality learning, making it easier for them to master materials related to learning. Independent teaching platform allows teachers to learn more about the independent curriculum. This platform offers learning assessments, tools, independent training, and components supporting learning [37]. The independent learning platform can be accessed through an application on a smartphone. Independent teaching application can be an alternative for teachers to increase competence and innovation in teaching. The independent curriculum develops students' potential by centering on lessons students are interested in. Finding out what students expect or want from the material provided by the teacher is the right step to fulfill or find out the usefulness and needs of students. This is the most crucial part of implementing the educational process [38]. Learning readiness can arise from ideas, information, or new skills that load from a capacity. According to Morcom [39], the cognitive development is the influence of the social and cultural environment, which plays a vital role in shaping the way of thinking to solve the process problems a person will face. Based on Vygotsky theory, in learning activities, children must have the opportunity to develop their proximal zone or potential through learning to create [35].

The teacher's tasks create a readiness to learn and encourage students to master materials and overcome challenges. Students who get the proper support during the learning process will help them get out of their comfort zone. The potential developmental level of the ZPD can be reached if one can collaborate with more competent peers and under the guidance of adults. The concept of ZPD explains that a teacher must be able to identify what students already understand and do not understand. With this teacher's ability, students' ability can be maximized during the learning process at school because they will feel that learning at school is not a burden they must bear [40]. With this concept, learners will be in the correct position to acquire the abilities at school according to what they want or like.

Problematic teachers assume that they do not need to use differentiated learning because, globally, flagship schools tend to teach more high-achieving students than junior or senior high school teachers [41]. Most teachers still do mapping at the beginning of learning only, but in reality, learners can experience changes in learning styles. Learners may have an audio learning style at the beginning, but over time, they may change their learning style to visual or kinesthetic. Therefore, it is expected that sociology teachers can conduct mapping periodically, either at the beginning of learning, in the middle of learning, at the end of learning, or at other times [42].

The new findings in this study show that each school created a learning community that became a space for teachers to discuss and solve problems regarding learning. As in previous curricula, there is a practice where teachers within a subject or across subjects work together or collaborate. For example, sociology teachers collaborate with art teachers. Schools that have implemented learning communities are private high schools. These efforts are expected to be a solution for teachers to improve the quality of education, especially in sociology learning, so that teachers and students can feel free and receive the benefits of the merdeka curriculum policy program.

4. CONCLUSION

Differentiated learning in the independent curriculum, especially in sociology learning, has been implemented, but the latest facts from the results of this study state that its implementation still needs to be

improved. Differentiated learning strategies include content preparation and process and product differentiation. Differentiated learning can increase students' achievement potential because there is an influence of social interaction and assistance from an expert according to the chosen learning style. From the process, students can produce products based on their understanding and knowledge while learning at school. The challenges of differentiated learning faced by teachers in this study found that it is difficult to divide time for teachers to prepare learning materials through the independent teaching platform learning application, the diversity of student learning styles, and changes in learning interests, so teachers must adapt when implementing the learning process. Some teachers need help applying TPACK to create a variety of learning content.

The challenges and obstacles in differentiated learning can be resolved by government efforts, namely by guiding teachers through implementing the independent teaching platform better to understand the independent curriculum's application in learning. In addition, training from subject-teacher communities will facilitate teachers in communicating with more expert colleagues. This research proves that education by implementing differentiated learning by adjusting learning styles can lead students to achieve learning goals and can develop the potential that exists in students. Thus, this research contributes to the world of education by creating renewal for generations with character, innovation, and quality.

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