



Inclusive and Differentiated Education: Responding to the Challenge of Diverse Student Learning Styles

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the educational approach methods both inclusively and differentially in responding to the diversity of student learning styles in the school environment. Through a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected from teachers, principals, and students in a school that applies the principle of inclusion. Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and documentation studies. The results of this study indicate that the implementation of inclusive and differential education is quite good, although there are still various challenges, such as limitations in human resources, facilities, and awareness among teachers. Learning strategies such as differentiation methods, personal approaches, and the use of technology have been proven to help accommodate diverse learning needs.

INTRODUCTION

The world of education now faces a major challenge in dealing with student diversity, especially in terms of different learning styles. This diversity not only includes physical and intellectual conditions, but also affects social and emotional aspects and how students receive and process information. In this context, a uniform pedagogical approach is no longer relevant and can hinder student development. Therefore, it is important to present adaptive approaches such as integrated and differentiated education, which can take into account different student learning styles.

Education is able to provide broad thinking in viewing differences, likewise education is an easy place to internalize the noble values of Pancasila and Bhineka Tunggal Ika comprehensively (Deak, The Role of Christian Religious Education in Maintaining Social Interaction in a Multicultural Society in Indonesia, 2022). Integrated education is an approach that emphasizes acceptance and awareness of all students, including students with special needs, to learn together in an educational environment. Students with integrated learning in a way that is tailored to their respective skills, needs, and possibilities. This requires flexibility in the learning methods, media, and reviews used by educators. On the other hand, joint training shows how important it is to adjust the learning process based on differences in students' skills, interests, and learning styles. This approach requires teachers to design different learning in terms of content, process, and learning products to realize all student profiles in the class. The results of this study actually show a variety of backgrounds, including education, students with special needs, students with mild learning disorders, and students who are unique in social development. Learning through a hierarchical approach that emphasizes personalization and support. Students involved in differentiation training include all students who show various learning styles, including graphic, auditory, kinesthetic, and a mixture of the three. The learning strategies used are flexible and contextual and adjusted to the characteristics of individual students.

This journal explains in detail how important the implementation and rationale for the purpose of each approach is to understanding educational integration and differentiation. In addition, a discussion of research on these learning styles, including understanding, expert views, student learning methods, and general classifications of learning styles in schools. Finally, this article discusses learning strategies and methods as an attempt to use tasks when rapid instructional responses are used for various learning styles. This paper contributes to the development of more adaptive, integrated, and transformative educational knowledge and practices for all students.

METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach. This approach was chosen to explore information about how integrated and differentiated education is used to address the diversity of student learning styles in the school environment. Through this approach, researchers can understand educational phenomena contextually and comprehensively from the perspective of educators.

In this study, classroom teachers, special counselors (if any), principals, and students in one of the elementary or middle schools that use integrated and differentiated education principles. The research location was specifically selected. In other words, schools that are known to have integrated education policies or practices.

Data collection was conducted in various ways: tools for teachers, school leaders, and students to understand the implementation and challenges of integrated and differentiated education. In addition, direct observation of the learning process in the classroom involving students who implement different strategies or have special needs. Document studies were also conducted on the curriculum, lesson implementation plans (RPP), and school guidelines related to integrated and differentiated education. The main instrument of this research is the researcher himself with interview guidelines, observation sheets, and field notes to ensure the validity of the data obtained.

Data analysis is the process of systematically searching for and compiling data obtained from interview results. (Deak, Implementation of Independent Campus Learning in Improving the Quality of Higher Education, 2022) Data Analysis Techniques Looking at the distance traveled model and Huberman which consists of three stages used, namely data reduction, data presentation, image presentation and review of conclusions. Data reduction is done by filtering information related to the focus of the research. The reduced data is presented in the form of narratives, matrices, or other visualizations that support understanding. In addition, researchers draw conclusions and check by formulating the meaning of the data that has been analyzed in detail. To ensure the validity of the data, this study uses triangulation techniques, both source triangulation (teachers, students, principals) and technical triangulation (interviews, observations, documentation). In addition, researchers can also check with informants to see the truth of the results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One way that must be done to maintain the process of diversity and plurality is through education (Deak, The Role of Christian Religious Education in Maintaining Social Interaction in Multicultural Societies in Indonesia, 2022). Education is a process of humanism known as humanizing humans (Pristiwanti, 2022). Education is also a lifelong process, with the aim of optimally developing individual potential, both in terms of cognitive, affective, or psychomotor. Education does not occur formally in schools, but is carried out informally in the family and community environment. It is undeniable that the progress or decline of a civilization is greatly influenced by education (Deak, The Role of Christian Religious Education in Maintaining Social Interaction in Multicultural Societies in Indonesia, 2022). Education is the most important part of life, and must be in line with the times (Deak, Implementation of Independent Campus Learning in Improving the Quality of Higher Education, 2022, p. 1114). In essence, it is a formation of character and individual abilities that can play an active role in social and professional life. Therefore, education is the main

foundation in the formation of a civilized and sustainable civilization. One of the important education is Christian religious education. Christian religious education is a conscious and planned effort carried out in the process of guiding someone to the introduction of the Creator so that they can grow in faith in Jesus Christ (Deak, The Role of Christian Religious Education in Maintaining Social Interaction in Multicultural Society in Indonesia, 2022, p. 1188). Education has 2 approaches, namely Inclusive Education and Differentiated Education.

Inclusive education is a view of education that is open and also respects human rights (Khairuddin, 2020). If we look at the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of the Republic of Indonesia No. 70 of 2009, Inclusive Education is an education system that provides opportunities for all students who have disabilities and have the potential for intelligence and/or special talents to participate in education or learning in an educational environment together with students in general (Ministry of National Education of the Republic of Indonesia, 2009).

Inclusive education in Indonesia is organized with the aim (Ahmad, 2023): (1) Providing the widest possible opportunity for all children, including children with special needs, to receive proper education according to their needs; (2) Helping to accelerate the compulsory basic education program; (3) Helping to improve the quality of basic education and reduce the number of repeating classes and dropping out of school; (4) Creating the mandate of the 1945 Constitution, especially Article 31 paragraph 1 which states 'every citizen has the right to receive education, and paragraph 2 which states that every citizen is obliged to follow basic education and the government is obliged to finance it. Law no. 20/2003 concerning the National Education System, especially Article 5 paragraph 1 which states that every citizen has the same right to obtain quality education. 'Law no. 23/2002 concerning Child Protection, especially Article 51 which states that children with physical and/or mental disabilities are given the same opportunity and accessibility to obtain regular

education and special education. By reducing the number of repeating classes and dropping out of school. Differentiated Education is a learning method approach that focuses on the diverse learning needs of students. Differentiated learning is a teaching strategy that considers the unique needs of each student. The goal of diverse learning is to ensure that all students receive a quality education (Rahmawati, 2024) Differentiated education is a pedagogical approach that aims to appreciate and respond to individual diversity in the learning process. In the context of modern education that is increasingly inclusive and oriented to the needs of students, this learning style is an important instrument for realizing a fair and adaptive education system. The main goal of differentiated education is to create a learning space that is responsive to differences in abilities, learning styles, interests, and social, cultural, and economic backgrounds of students. This indicates a paradigm shift from a uniform learning approach to an approach that positions students as unique active subjects.

Differentiated education not only accommodates differences but also makes it the basis for designing learning experiences. Thus, each student is given an equal opportunity to access the curriculum through strategies that suit their profile. This practice includes modifying aspects of content, process, product, and learning environment, which are adjusted to the learning readiness, interests, and cognitive styles of students. Teachers act as adaptive and reflective facilitators in managing learning, so that each student feels recognized, motivated, and has the opportunity to develop their academic and social potential. The role of Christian religious education in forming a tolerant attitude and strengthening harmonious social interactions in a diverse society. These values are in line with the principles of inclusive education, which emphasize acceptance of diversity and the importance of building a supportive environment for all individuals (Deak, *The Role of Christian Religious Education in Maintaining Social Interactions in Multicultural Societies in Indonesia*, 2022). Based on the results of the documentation analyzed from the Learning

Implementation Plan (RPP) document and teacher activity reports at a private school in Bandung, it was found that inclusive and differentiated approaches had begun to be implemented in the learning process. Teachers use a combination of learning methods such as group discussions, visual media, and assignments that are tailored to students' abilities. This shows an effort to respond to differences in students' learning styles, both in terms of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic.

However, documentation data also shows several obstacles, such as the limited time for a teacher to design differentiated materials, the lack of learning media that supports students with learning disabilities, and the absence of special training on differentiation strategies. In one of the teacher's reflection reports, it was stated that "it is still difficult to differentiate assignments that do not give the impression of favoritism towards certain students", which illustrates the low technical understanding in implementing this approach neutrally and effectively.

This finding strengthens the argument that although inclusive and differentiated approaches have been included in school learning policies, their implementation has not been fully optimal. This is in line with Victor Deak's statement (2021) that intensive mentoring and training are needed to equip teachers in understanding the diversity of students' learning styles as a whole.

The implementation of differentiated education also aims to increase the effectiveness of learning as a whole. When students learn in a context that is relevant and tailored to their needs, participation and engagement tend to increase (Rahmawati S., 2021). Research shows that this approach can improve learning achievement, foster self-confidence, and strengthen critical and collaborative thinking skills. Therefore, differentiated education is not only beneficial for students with special needs or certain backgrounds, but also has a positive impact on the overall quality of learning. In addition, this style of education supports the global and national agenda in building an inclusive and transformative education system.

In the Indonesian context, the implementation of differentiated education is in line with the direction of the Independent Curriculum policy which emphasizes personalization of learning, student independence, and diversity of local contexts. The Independent Curriculum itself is a learning system that characterizes the concept of critical, fast, quality, transformative, applicable, effective, varied, progressive, factual and actual learning (Deak, Implementation of Independent Campus Learning in Improving the Quality of Higher Education, 2022). This approach is also part of the government's efforts to implement student-centered education principles and ensure equal access to education for all children.

Thus, differentiated education is not just a teaching strategy, but an educational philosophy that emphasizes the importance of recognizing diversity and empowering students. The goal is not only to achieve better academic results, but also to create a learning environment that is humane, inclusive, and relevant to the challenges of 21st-century society. However, the implementation of inclusive and differentiated education styles in practice does not always go well. Where the role of teachers as the spearhead in implementing classroom learning often faces various obstacles, such as limited facilities and infrastructure, lack of professional teacher training, and doubts in understanding the concept of diversity in student learning styles as a whole. So it will be effective if there is a mentoring method and also training for teachers (Deak, Mentoring in Developing Character Development for Students at Smpk Bintang Mulia Mekar Wangi Bandung as One of the Efforts to Strengthen the Calling of Christian Life, 2021). The lack of a complete understanding of the principles of inclusion and differentiation strategies can hinder the creation of a good, fair, equal learning environment and develop all students optimally. So a Demonstration method is needed for a process so that the stages can be implemented (Deak, Mentoring in Developing Character Building for Students at Smpk Bintang Mulia Mekar Wangi Bandung as One of the Efforts to Strengthen the Calling of Christian Life, 2021).

Moreover, obstacles in the diversity of learning styles are also closely related to differences such as cultural, social, economic, and intellectual backgrounds of students. Therefore, the combination of inclusive and differentiated approaches needs to be understood not only as a strategy in learning techniques, but also as part of the transformation of the educational paradigm that leads to justice and humanism.

Based on this background, it is very important to thoroughly examine how the relationship between inclusive and differentiated education approaches can be applied synergistically in responding to various challenges of the diversity of student learning styles. This study is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding and can be practically recommended for educators in creating adaptive, collaborative, and equitable learning methods.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that inclusive and differentiated education are increasingly relevant approaches in the context of student diversity in the school environment, especially in dealing with various learning styles and personal needs. The implementation of both approaches in the schools that are the subjects of the study reflects a commitment to providing equal and equitable education, although still facing a number of obstacles.

Inclusive education is not only related to the acceptance of students with special needs into regular classes, but also requires a paradigm shift in designing learning, building an environment that is friendly to differences, and creating interactions that support all students without discrimination. Meanwhile, differentiated education is an important strategy to answer the challenge of heterogeneity in student learning styles, by accommodating variations in interests, learning readiness, and learning preferences.

From the results of the study, it can be concluded that the success of the implementation of inclusive and differentiated education is greatly influenced by teacher competence, school policies, availability of resources, and environmental support, both from within and outside the school. Teacher involvement in identifying and responding to student learning needs is a key element, and this requires ongoing training and consistent institutional support.

In addition, a holistic approach involving the entire education ecosystem of teachers, students, principals, parents, and the community is needed so that the principles of inclusion and differentiation are not only formal policies, but are realized in real daily practices. In the future, the sustainability and effectiveness of the implementation of this approach depend greatly on collaboration between stakeholders and a commitment to pedagogical renewal that is adaptive to social change and the increasingly diverse needs of students. Thus, inclusive and differentiated education is not just a response to diversity, but a real manifestation of humanistic and transformative education, which places each individual as a unique and valuable subject of learning.

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