

Implementation of Differentiated Learning Management in Indonesian Junior High School Education

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the implementation of differentiated learning management at SMP Negeri 42 Pekanbaru in the context of the Kurikulum Merdeka. This curriculum was launched to address the "learning loss" due to the COVID-19 pandemic and to catch up with Indonesia's educational lag at the international level. Differentiated learning is a strategy that adjusts the learning process to the individual needs of students, taking into account their interests, readiness, and learning profiles. The research method used is a case study with a qualitative approach, involving observations and in-depth interviews with teachers at SMP Negeri 42 Pekanbaru. The results show that most teachers still experience difficulties in implementing differentiated learning according to the guidelines provided by the Ministry of Education. The main obstacles include a lack of understanding of the principles of differentiated learning and limited resources. However, some teachers have successfully adapted this method and reported an increase in student learning motivation. The study concludes that further support from the government and ongoing training is needed to optimize the implementation of differentiated learning in schools. The implications of this study are expected to provide insights for the development of more effective educational policies about learning differentiation in the future.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a crucial factor in responding to the challenges and changes of the times. On February 11, 2022, the government, through the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, Nadiem Anwar Makarim, launched the Kurikulum Merdeka to address the "learning loss" caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and to improve the quality of Indonesian education, which lags behind other countries. Results from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) show

that 70% of 15-year-old students are below the minimum competency level, highlighting the urgent need for educational reform.

The principle of differentiated learning is central to the Kurikulum Merdeka, designed to consider the developmental stages and learning needs of students. There are three (3) aspects of student diversity according to Tomlinson (2000) to know the students' needs; readiness, interest and learning profile Differentiated learning is expected to make learning more meaningful and enjoyable. However, many teachers in Pekanbaru, including those at SMP Negeri 42 Pekanbaru, still do not fully understand and implement this principle according to the guidelines provided by Tomlinson and the Ministry of Education and Culture, Research, and Technology.

Mahfudz (2023) in his research found that differentiated learning is learning that accommodates students' learning needs. Teachers facilitate students according to their needs, because each student has different characteristics, so they cannot be given the same. Differentiated learning focuses on the unique needs of each student, allowing adjustments in the learning process to maximize individual potential. Dista et al (2024) emphasized that differentiated learning does not categorize students based on intelligence but rather adjusts approaches to accommodate their unique characteristics, ensuring each student feels valued and their learning needs are facilitated. Alhafiz (2022) underscored that differentiated learning not only enhances student creativity but also provides freedom to develop their potential. Despite facing challenges such as student grouping and time management, solutions like initial observations and increased teacher understanding can help overcome these obstacles. Hanafiah et al (2024) highlighted the importance of adequate facilities to support differentiated learning, Setiyo (2022) found that collaboration with parents and the community can enhance student learning activities. Sarnoto (2024) emphasized the importance of classroom management and ongoing support for teachers to ensure the success of differentiated learning in improving educational quality and student creativity. SMP Negeri 42 Pekanbaru has implemented differentiated learning for two years. This research intends to investigate the extent to which teachers at SMP Negeri 42 Pekanbaru implement differentiated learning management as an effort to improve the quality of education. By understanding this implementation, it is hoped to assist in the transformation of Indonesian education to catch up based on PISA scores and to address the "learning loss" due to the COVID- 19 pandemic.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Implementation

According to Winarsih (2016), policy management is a method for achieving policy objectives. Implementation encompasses planned activities, actions, and measures aimed at specific goals (Asy'ari & Harahap, 2024; Hermita et al., 2020). Salabi (2020) states that implementation involves extending activities that align goals and actions in interactions to achieve objectives, requiring effective executors and bureaucracy. Fidayanto (2018) emphasizes that implementation is the action of individuals, officials, or groups directed toward achieving policy goals. Sukmawarti et al (2022) define implementation as the action of executing, fulfilling, and completing. Implementation can also be interpreted as the translation of tools, techniques, or methods from knowledge into practice. Based on these opinions, implementation is a planned and measured action to achieve established goals, following specific rules. Implementation is not merely an activity but is also influenced by all aspects related to the executed policy.

Theoretical Model of Educational Policy Implementation

In implementing policies, a model is required as a guideline to ensure that the policy implementation remains aligned with the plan. Several policy implementation models according to experts include:

1. Theory of George C. Edward III

Edward III identified four elements that influence the success or failure of policy implementation: communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure (Figure 1) (Kurniawan & Adiputra, 2023).

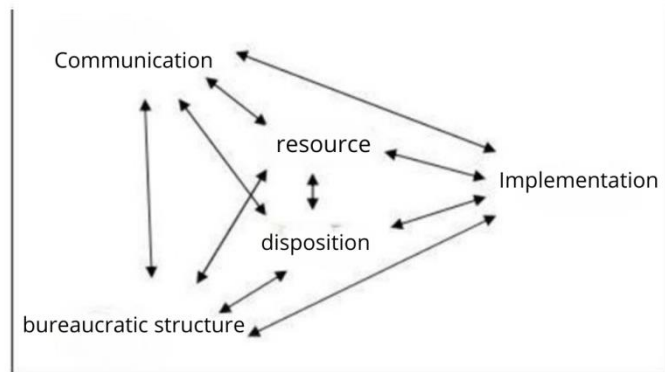


Figure 1. Factors Determining Implementation Success according to Edward III

2. Theory of Merilee S. Grindle

Grindle argued that the success of implementation is influenced by two main variables: policy content and implementation context. These factors include benefits for target groups, types of benefits received, desired level of change, program location suitability, policy relevance, and program resource availability. The uniqueness of Grindle's model lies in a comprehensive understanding of policy context, implementers, beneficiaries, potential conflicts, and necessary resource conditions (Grindle, 2004).

3. Theory of Daniel A. Mazmanian and Paul A. Sabatier

Mazmanian and Sabatier, as quoted by Wahyu (2019), identified three categories of variables that have an influence on the success of implementation, namely the characteristics of the problems faced (as problem solvers), characteristics of policies or laws (legal capabilities within the implementation framework), and other environmental factors.

4. Theory of Donald S. Van Meter and Carl E. Van Horn

According to Meter and Horn, as quoted in Wahyu (2019), there are five variables that have an impact on the effectiveness of implementation. These variables include policy standards and objectives, resource allocation, information exchange between organizations and improvement efforts, characteristics.

This research utilizes the theoretical framework of George C. Edward III, which identifies four critical factors in the success or failure of differentiated learning management implementation: communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure. Applying this theory helps

analyze the implementation of differentiated learning in schools, regulatory conditions, and the social, economic, and political factors at play. This research used such indicators to measure the implementation of differentiated learning.

Management

To achieve the national education goals, which are to create a learning environment that encourages students to actively develop their potential, appropriate strategies with good management are necessary. Management is a process that involves humans and other resources, using effective and efficient methods to achieve predetermined goals. Etymologically, management originates from the Latin words "manus" (hand) and "agere" (to do), meaning "handling." Management entails handling, training, and organizing steps (Ridho, 2020; Casmudi, 2019).

Terminologically, various experts define management as the process of planning, organizing, directing, and controlling to achieve objectives. Kompri states that planning involves SWOT analysis. Harold Koontz and Cyril O'Donnell view management as planning efforts to achieve goals through the activities of others. James A.F. Stoner and R. Edward Freeman describe management as the process of using organizational resources to achieve common goals. Casmudi emphasizes that management is the process of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling organizational efforts effectively and efficiently. From these various definitions, management can be concluded as a structured process involving planning, organizing, leading, and controlling to achieve shared goals (Kompri, 2015; Casmudi, 2019; Koontz et al., 1986).

Learning Management

The concept of learning management includes understanding the definition, nature, and essence of learning management. Etymologically, the term "management" originates from the Latin words "manus" (hand) and "agere" (to do), combined into "managere" meaning to handle or manage. In English, this term becomes "to manage" with the nouns "management" and "manager" for someone who performs management. Management broadly involves planning, organizing, directing, and controlling organizational resources to achieve goals effectively and efficiently. Three sources emphasize the same concept: cooperation involving many people, activities performed, organizational goals, and resource management through planning, organizing, supervising, controlling, and evaluating results. Therefore, the essence of educational management is the effective and efficient management and implementation of educational tasks through the processes of planning, organizing, implementing, assessing, and evaluating to achieve school education goals (Hermita et al., 2021; Shadri et al., 2023).

Differentiated Learning

Definition of Differentiated Learning

Differentiated learning is an approach that adjusts the learning process to meet the educational needs of each individual, aligning with the educational philosophy of Ki Hajar Dewantara. Dewantara described the role of teachers as farmers who sow, plant, and nurture plants, aiming to facilitate the natural growth of children's strengths. This learning aims to create a comfortable, enjoyable, and meaningful learning environment for students by considering their readiness, interests, and learning profiles (Tomlinson, 2017). The approach requires the use of various student-centered teaching methods to optimize learning according to their abilities and needs (Dista et al., 2024; Riadi, 2023; Mahfudz, 2023).

Principles of Differentiated Learning

Tomlinson (2001) identified several key principles in differentiated learning. First, continuous assessment to adjust lesson plans to meet students' needs. Second, recognition of student diversity and organization of learning based on their interests and needs. Third, flexible grouping of students for various collaborations. Fourth, ongoing collaboration between general educators and specialists. Fifth, cooperation between teachers and students to achieve expected learning outcomes. Sixth, flexible use of time according to learning needs. Seventh, use of varied teaching strategies. Lastly, assessment of students in various ways appropriate to their development.

Strategy of Differentiated Learning

Wahyuningsari et al (2022) described four strategies of differentiated learning: content, process, product, and learning environment. Content differentiation refers to organizing and delivering material formats tailored to students' needs. Process differentiation involves various methods to process ideas and information according to students' learning styles. Product differentiation involves how students demonstrate what they have learned, allowing teachers to assess understanding and provide further material. A conducive learning environment tailored to students' learning profiles motivates them to learn better, encompassing personal, social, and physical classroom aspects that support learning (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010).

Management of Differentiated Learning Implementation

Based on the understanding of differentiated learning, principles of differentiated learning, strategies of differentiated learning, it can be concluded that to optimize learning and of course the results of student learning, learning is needed that is developed according to the learning needs of students. Therefore, the following are the steps to manage differentiated learning.

Stages of Planning Differentiated Learning

At the planning stage, there needs to be socialization from the school leader/principal to the school community and development of teacher competencies related to the implementation of differentiated learning, as well as the provision of supporting facilities and infrastructure so that the implementation of differentiated learning runs optimally and achieves the expected goals.

Stages of Organizing Differentiated Learning

At the organizing stage, it is necessary to design good learning tools that start with mapping student learning profiles by conducting an initial assessment to see the steps that must be taken to design student-centered learning and adjusted to student characteristics so that the implementation of differentiated learning runs well and optimally. Differentiated learning begins with a planning stage that involves initial assessments to understand the needs and characteristics of students. Non-cognitive assessments are used to determine students' learning profiles and interests, while cognitive assessments aim to measure their readiness to learn. In the organizing stage, teachers design structured learning experiences based on the principles of differentiated learning. This includes setting learning objectives, creating teaching modules and instructional media tailored to students' learning styles, and using various assessments to develop students' talents and interests (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010).

Stages of Implementing Differentiated Learning

At the implementation stage, the learning design that has been prepared according to the characteristics of students that includes differentiated learning strategies is implemented optimally where the teacher who implements it is also able to create a pleasant learning environment. During the implementation stage of differentiated learning, teachers apply strategies for differentiating content, process, and products. They create a supportive and enjoyable learning environment, build positive relationships among students and between teachers and students, and employ diverse teaching methods. Teachers also collaborate with students to build class commitment and agreements, motivating both themselves and students to actively participate in learning focused on individual and group needs. Collaboration with parents and other teachers is also crucial in supporting the success of differentiated learning (Dista et al., 2024).

Stages of Assessment and Evaluation Differentiated Learning

In assessment and learning guidances of ministry of education, culture, research and technology of the republic of Indonesia (2022), evaluation in differentiated learning is ongoing, utilizing diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments. Diagnostic assessments determine students' starting points before beginning a learning unit, formative assessments track students' progress during the learning process, and summative assessments measure learning outcomes at the end of a unit or specific period. High- quality assessments help students understand their achievements, their relative status toward learning goals, and ways to enhance their growth. Teachers also keep learning journals and student progress records to plan future lessons effectively.

The researcher's framework of thought regarding its relevance to the title of this research is illustrated in figure 2.

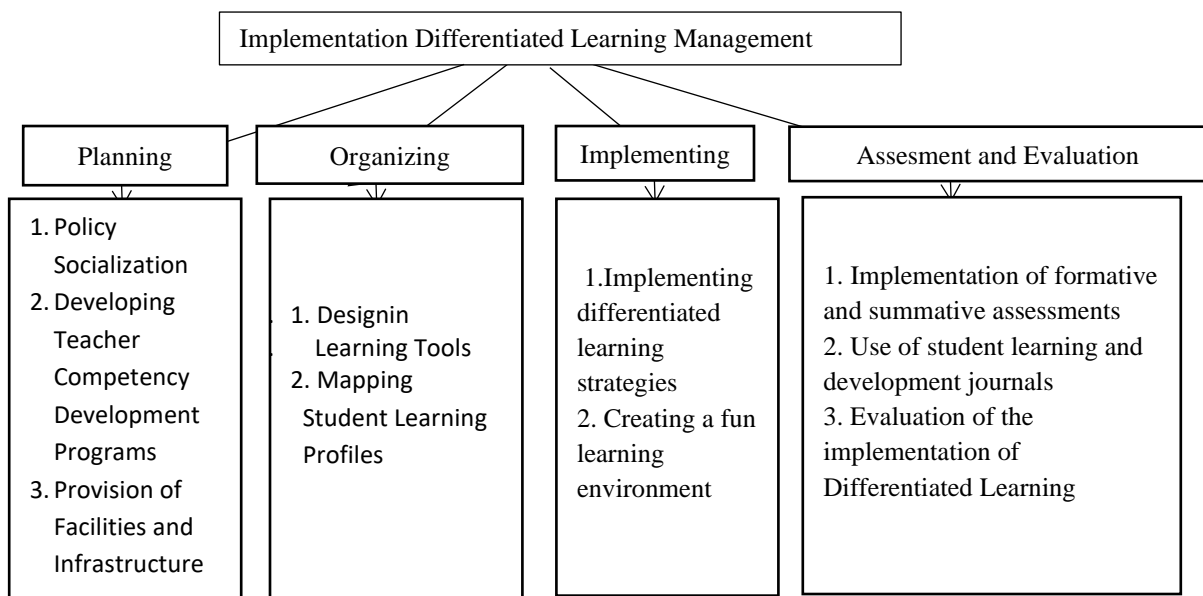


Figure 2. Framework of Thinking

METHOD

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. The researcher collects data in the form of written and spoken words, expressions, and opinions from research subjects, as well as observed behaviors. According to Moleong (2007), qualitative methods produce descriptive data in the form of words or spoken language from people and observed behaviors. Sugiyono (2017) added that qualitative methods are based on postpositivist or interpretative philosophy, used to study objects in natural conditions, with the researcher as the key instrument and data collection techniques through triangulation. The object of this research is the analysis of the implementation of differentiated learning management at SMP Negeri 42 Pekanbaru. This study was conducted at SMP Negeri 42 Pekanbaru, located on Jalan Datuk Tunggal, Kelurahan Purwodadi Barat, Kecamatan Tuah Madani, from January to June 2024.

Data Collection Technique

Data is collected from a social context involving the place, behavior, and activities that interact synergistically. The data sources include the principal, teachers, students, and related official records and documents. The researcher is the key instrument, the data collection technique is carried out by triangulation (a combination of observation, interviews, documentation), the data obtained tends to be qualitative data, inductive/qualitative in nature, and the results of qualitative research are intended to understand meaning, understand uniqueness, construct phenomena, and find hypotheses (Sugiyono, 2017).

a. Data Analysis Technique

After data collection, the data analysis is conducted using a descriptive method that involves logical, thorough, and systematic thinking to produce accurate conclusions. In this research, the researcher uses theory of Miles and Huberman (1992), qualitative data analysis is carried out during and after data collection, through an interactive process that continues until data saturation is reached (Figure 3).

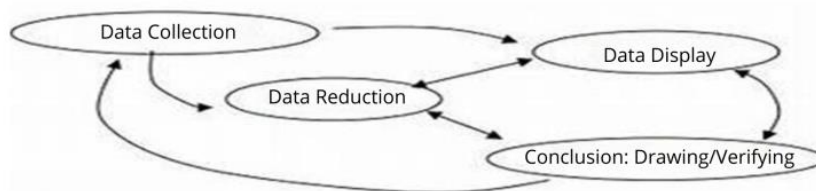


Figure 3. Components of the Interactive Data Analysis Model from Miles and Huberman (1992)

b. Validity Test

To ensure the validity of data in, the researcher used triangulation. Sugiyono (2017) stated that triangulation techniques in data collection, the data obtained will be more consistent, complete and certain. By using these techniques, the researcher can ensure that the data used in qualitative research has high validity and can be scientifically justified.

c. Decision Making

The criteria for determining the decision on the implementation of differentiated learning management at SMP Negeri 42 Pekanbaru are categorized based on the findings of this research as follows: very good, good, and less good. If all indicators are implemented very well then the category is very good. If all indicators are implemented but not optimally, then the category is good. However, if there are indicators that are not implemented properly, the category is less good.

RESULTS

Here is a summary of the research findings on SMP Negeri 42 Pekanbaru based on several key components:

Planning of Differentiated Learning

Based on the results of research findings related to the implementation of differentiated learning management at SMP Negeri 42 Pekanbaru in the sub-focus of differentiated learning planning, it can be seen that the principal has taken planning steps by:

a. **Conducting Socialization of Differentiated Learning Policies.**

The socialization of the implementation policy of the Merdeka Curriculum with the principles of differentiated learning at SMPN 42 Pekanbaru is a crucial step to ensure effective and consistent implementation. The principal conducted direct socialization during meetings with teachers and educational staff, based on the decision of the Director General of Education appointing SMPN 42 as the third cohort of pilot schools. Through this socialization, teachers are expected to clearly understand what is expected in implementing differentiated learning, thus becoming more open to change and understanding the goals of this new approach. The principal also developed the School Operational Education Plan (KOSP) as a foundation for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, including the principles of differentiated learning as one of its fundamental principles (Alim et al., 2024).

b. **Prepare A Teacher Competency Development Program Related to Differentiated Learning**

In developing teacher competency, SMPN 42 Pekanbaru held In House Training (IHT) assessment and learning activities; In House Training (IHT) activities compile differentiated teaching modules, and training in creating IT-based learning and assessment media. Teachers need to understand the principles of differentiated learning before they can implement them in the classroom. Performance is influenced by work motivation, competence, task clarity and acceptance, and opportunities to work. Therefore, enhancing teacher competence is crucial for the implementation of differentiated learning (Rohmad, 2024).

c. **Provision of Supporting Facilities for Differentiated Learning**

Facilities and infrastructure play a crucial role in supporting differentiated learning, as part of effective classroom management. Although the school has some supporting facilities such as science and math teaching aids, and a few infocus units, their numbers are limited, especially considering the classrooms that do not meet standards with a large number of students. These challenges highlight the need for adjustments in organizing classroom spaces to better support differentiated learning activities. The limitations of facilities and infrastructure in schools can have negative impacts, as described by Hehakaya and Pollatu (2022) such as inability to identify individual student differences inhibits teachers from

designing suitable learning strategies, learning adjustments cannot be effectively made, , inadequate facilities hinder the provision of additional resources, Teachers may struggle to implement differentiation strategies and manage classrooms with diverse student needs without sufficient support. Therefore, providing adequate facilities and infrastructure is crucial to supporting effective differentiated learning implementation and ensuring that every student can learn according to their needs and potential.

Organizing of Differentiated Learning

a. Designing Learning Tools

Through In House Training (IHT) activities, teachers have formulated CP-TP-ATP for each subject. These serve as guidelines for designing lesson materials and learning objectives for the academic year 2023/2024 from grades VII to IX. This process is based on the learning achievements set by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Teachers have also designed differentiated teaching modules, each of which is presented and receives feedback from fellow teachers. This process helps in adapting learning to individual student needs. Through these activities, teachers acquire a conceptual understanding and experience in designing differentiated teaching modules, which serve as the basis for developing their respective teaching modules (Amaliya, 2019; Masitah, 2018)

b. Student Learning Profile Mapping Program (Initial Non-Cognitive Formative Assessment)

The school conducts initial non-cognitive formative assessments during the School Environment Introduction (MPLS) managed by the guidance counselor. The results of these assessments provide individual learning profiles for each student, including learning styles and social background. By knowing students personally, teachers can understand and appreciate each student's worth, following the principles of human dignity as proposed by Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010). The next challenge is the extent to which teachers utilize these mapping results in designing learning and building effective communication with students.

These learning profiles are used as references in designing differentiated learning tailored to each student's needs. Despite facing challenges related to limited facilities and classroom space, this holistic and structured approach is expected to create meaningful and effective learning experiences for every student at SMP Negeri 42 Pekanbaru.

Implementation of Differentiated Learning

The implementation of differentiated learning is a strategic step in education to meet the individual learning needs of every student. This approach requires teachers to recognize differences in students' abilities, interests, and learning styles, enabling them to design appropriate teaching methods. With the right strategies, differentiated learning allows each student to learn in the most effective way possible, maximizing their academic potential as well as their social and emotional development.

a. Differentiated Learning Strategies

- **Product Differentiation:** Teachers have implemented product differentiation by assigning tasks based on student interests. Observation results show that 100% of teachers incorporate product differentiation in their teaching modules. However, only 59% implement content differentiation and 41% use all three differentiation strategies (content, process, product).

- Content and Process Differentiation: Implementing these requires deep understanding and creativity from teachers in designing teaching materials and learning models. Leadteachers demonstrate a stronger understanding in applying differentiated learning compared to other teachers.
 - Challenges: Teachers face challenges in preparing media and teaching materials, especially with high teaching loads. Additionally, some teachers adopt teaching modules from others without proper adjustments, resulting in less effectiveness when applied in the classroom.
- b. Creating a Positive Learning Environment
- Positive Atmosphere: Teachers strive to build good relationships with students, use varied teaching methods, and incorporate icebreakers and games to increase student engagement.
 - Classroom Physical Environment: Space limitations and class sizes exceeding standard capacities pose challenges in creating a comfortable and flexible learning environment. This hampers learning activities such as the Number Head Together (NHT) model.

Despite these challenges, efforts are ongoing to optimize differentiated learning at SMP Negeri 42 Pekanbaru, aiming to enhance both academic achievement and overall student development.

Assessment and Evaluation of Differentiated Learning

Assessment and evaluation in differentiated learning are crucial processes to measure students' learning progress and provide constructive feedback. Here is a summary of the implementation of assessment and evaluation in this context:

- a) Implementation of Assessment
- Initial Assessment: 25 teachers from 41 teachers use written tests (61%). 16 (39%) of teachers conduct oral precepts at the beginning of lessons.
 - Formative and Summative Assessment: All teachers use formative assessment (oral questions, written exercises, quizzes). For summative assessment, teachers use assignments, products, projects, practices, presentations, and scheduled written exams. End-of-semester summative assessments are still conducted through scheduled written exams.
- b) Use of Learning Journals and Student Development Journals
- Learning Journals: All teachers maintain learning journals that record lesson activities, student participation, assignments, and student difficulty notes.
 - Student Development Journals: The school prepares case books to record the development of students facing challenges, while other students do not yet have development records.
- c) Evaluation of Differentiated Learning Implementation by the School
- Evaluation and Supervision: The school principal and performance assessment team conduct evaluations through supervision and classroom observation twice a year. Supervision includes pre-observation, observation, and post-observation to ensure the implementation of differentiated learning strategies. Evaluation also occurs through learning communities scheduled twice a week.
- d) School Communication on Student Learning Progress to Parents

- Communication with Parents: Teachers communicate with parents of students facing issues through subject teachers, class advisors, guidance counselors, and student affairs representatives. Good relationships and open communication help create a positive and collaborative learning environment.

Assessment and evaluation in differentiated learning should be flexible, varied, and responsive to students' needs. For Formative and summative assessments of the end of school material free teachers to design evaluations according to needs but are adjusted to the criteria for achieving learning objectives. Teachers conducted formative and summative assessments through various methods such as observation, performance, written tests, oral tests, assignments, and portfolios to provide a holistic picture of student achievement. However, for the end of school material summative, it applies its own standards in the form of written exams. Effective implementation of these strategies helps monitor student progress and provides useful feedback for their development. Support from the school principal, assessment team, and collaboration with parents are crucial to ensure the successful implementation of differentiated learning.

DISCUSSION

Based on the data analysis, the implementation of differentiated learning management at SMP Negeri 42 Pekanbaru generally falls within the categories of good. In terms of planning, the school has integrated the principles of differentiated learning into the curriculum and teacher development programs, despite facing some challenges in providing facilities and infrastructure. For example, the class sizes do not yet meet national standards, and limited classroom space affects the effectiveness of differentiated learning. Additionally, supportive facilities such as projectors and media are still very limited, hindering the implementation of more interactive teaching methods.

In terms of organizing and implementing, teachers are capable of designing differentiated teaching modules, they still encounter challenges in implementing them in the classroom, highlighting the importance of teachers' mindset and creativity in implementing differentiated learning. This aligns with Alhafiz's research (2022), which emphasizes that the success of differentiated learning implementation heavily depends on teachers' ability to adapt teaching methods to student needs.

In terms of assessment and evaluation, Teachers have carried out formative and summative assessments by implementing product differentiation. However, there is still a need for improvement in preparing initial learning assessments. SMPN 42 Pekanbaru has also evaluated the implementation of learning by carrying out academic supervision and classroom observations. Regarding implementation, teachers at SMP Negeri 42 Pekanbaru have successfully designed teaching modules and differentiated learning strategies, particularly in terms of product differentiation. However, some teachers still struggle with differentiating content and processes due to facility limitations. Nevertheless, a conducive learning environment has been established through effective communication between teachers and students. Assessment and evaluation of differentiated learning are also rated as good, with early, formative, and summative assessments needing slight improvement. The school has supportive documents such as learning journals and case books and maintains good communication with parents, supporting overall student learning development.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of differentiated learning management at SMP Negeri 42 Pekanbaru has been assessed across four key areas. The planning aspect is rated as excellent, with effective dissemination of principles and integration into the school's operational curriculum, annual work plans, and teacher competency development programs. The organizing aspect is rated as good, with the establishment of differentiated teaching modules and assessments, though challenges remain due to inadequate classroom space and limited infrastructure. Implementation is also rated as good, with teachers successfully designing and applying differentiated learning strategies, particularly in product differentiation, but facing difficulties in content and process differentiation due to resource constraints. Finally, the assessment and evaluation aspect is rated as good, with initial, formative, and summative assessments in place, although there is room for improvement in structured initial assessments and comprehensive student progress tracking. The school has strong communication with parents and conducts regular supervision and classroom observations to enhance the effectiveness of differentiated learning.

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