



## The Extend of Differentiated Instruction Implementation in Junior High School's English Subject

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### Abstract

*The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia has brought about significant changes in the educational landscape, particularly through the introduction of Differentiated Instruction. This qualitative descriptive research aimed to analyse the implementation of Differentiated Instruction in the English subject at SMP Islam De Green Camp Tanjungpinang, a Sekolah Penggerak for the Merdeka Curriculum. The study focused on exploring English teachers' perceptions of Differentiated Instruction, their understanding of its concept, and the extent to which it was being implemented in their classrooms. The findings revealed that while teachers generally had a positive perception of the Merdeka Curriculum and Differentiated Instruction, their practical implementation was still evolving. Although they understood the theoretical underpinnings of Differentiated Instruction, there were gaps in fully differentiating all four elements of instruction: content, process, product, and learning environment. This research contributes to the understanding of how Differentiated Instruction is being interpreted and applied in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, highlighting both the progress made and the areas that require further development to fully realize the potential of Differentiated Instruction in enhancing student learning outcomes.*

**Keywords:** Differentiated Instruction, Merdeka Curriculum, Implementation, Teachers' Perception

## INTRODUCTION

The curriculum was crucial in the learning process, especially in junior high schools (Lestari & Purbasari, 2023). In Indonesia, the implementation of the curriculum continually evolved to keep up with the times and the changing educational needs. To address these demands, the "Merdeka Curriculum" was developed and implemented in 2021. This curriculum was introduced through the Sekolah Penggerak programme, marking the seventh episode of the Merdeka Belajar grand programme by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, with Sekolah Penggerak serving as the pilot project for the Merdeka Curriculum (Nurjanah & Syamsudin, 2023).

The Merdeka Curriculum emerged in response to the demands of educational needs. A few years ago, Indonesia faced the Covid-19 pandemic, which necessitated online learning for all schools. This situation led to a decline in the quality of education in Indonesia, affecting both educators and students (Sammi & Amir, 2023). Consequently, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology introduced the Merdeka Curriculum, emphasising student-centred learning as its core component. One effective approach to student-centred learning was Differentiated Instruction (Nurjanah & Syamsudin, 2023).

In comparison to the previous curriculum, the 2013 Curriculum (K13), it was observed that teachers often grouped students without considering their individual learning needs. This practice resulted in students with lower readiness being placed with those who were more prepared, leading to issues of confidence and creativity among students (Lestari & Purbasari, 2023). Differentiated Instruction, as outlined in the Merdeka Curriculum, aimed to address these issues by catering to students' individual learning profiles and needs, thereby enhancing the overall quality of learning (Sofiah & Hikmawati, 2023). This approach also extended support to learners with special needs through inclusive education, ensuring their specific needs were met (Lestari & Purbasari, 2023).

However, the implementation of Differentiated Instruction was often misunderstood. Some reports indicated a confusion between Differentiated Instruction and individualised instruction, which was more suitable for exceptional schools rather than regular or inclusive schools (Moosa & Shareefa, 2019). It was crucial to distinguish between these concepts. Individualised instruction focused on specific interventions associated with special services provided to students, whereas Differentiated Instruction emphasised evaluating students' readiness, interests, learning profiles, and learning environments to tailor the instructional approach (Shareefa et al., 2019). Essentially, Differentiated Instruction aimed to consider each student's unique learning style, potential, and needs (Marlina et al., 2019).

According to Hasanah et al. (2022), Differentiated Instruction was still relatively new in Indonesia. Marlina et al. (2023) observed that many schools had not yet implemented Differentiated Instruction effectively. Several factors contributed to this, including a prevailing mindset that required the curriculum to be met by all students uniformly. Teachers still believed that all students needed to master the same material in the same manner and at the same time. This was rooted in an outdated way of thinking that regarded education as "one size fits all". Consequently, teachers did not have to prepare diverse lesson materials, but this approach ultimately forced students to learn in ways they might not have preferred.

Based on the Distribution Map of Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (IKM) released by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, in Tanjungpinang City, Riau Islands Province, in 2024, 29 junior high schools had adopted the Merdeka Curriculum. Among these, only SMP Islam De Green Camp Tanjungpinang accepted both regular and special needs students. Consequently, the possibility of the aforementioned misinterpretation and misconception might have occurred at this school. A preliminary interview with an English teacher at SMP Islam De Green Camp Tanjungpinang revealed such misinterpretation in the implementation of Differentiated Instruction within the Merdeka Curriculum. Although SMP Islam De Green Camp Tanjungpinang was a Sekolah Penggerak, it

was not immune to potential errors in applying Differentiated Instruction. There seemed to be a bias in implementing Differentiated Instruction for regular students compared to students with special needs (PDBK), particularly in the English subject. This preliminary interview prompted the researcher to undertake a qualitative descriptive study entitled “An Analysis of Differentiated Instruction Implementation in English Subject at SMP Islam De Green Camp Tanjungpinang.” The study aimed to determine whether the teachers' perceptions, especially those of English teachers, towards Differentiated Instruction at the school aligned with the existing theories of Differentiated Instruction, as part of the Merdeka Belajar form within the Merdeka Curriculum.

### **1.1 Differentiated Instruction in Merdeka Curriculum**

The execution of the Merdeka Curriculum commenced in 2021 with the introduction of the Sekolah Penggerak programme, which represented the seventh episode of the grand Merdeka Belajar initiative by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. The Sekolah Penggerak served as a pilot project for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum (Nurjanah & Syamsudin, 2023). This curriculum directed teachers to adopt Differentiated Instruction, an approach deemed capable of meeting students' learning needs according to their individual profiles, thus enhancing the quality of education (Sofiah & Hikmawati, 2023).

The application of the Merdeka Curriculum was considered crucial for the recovery of learning post-COVID-19 pandemic, with student-centred learning being one of the key interventions (Nurjanah & Syamsudin, 2023). One method of student-centred learning involved the implementation of Differentiated Instruction (Nurjanah & Syamsudin, 2023). This method entailed tailoring educational experiences to suit students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. Differentiated Instruction comprised four elements: content, process, product, and learning environment (Nurjanah & Syamsudin, 2023).

Compared to the previous curriculum (K13), the Merdeka Curriculum's implementation offered greater flexibility. For instance, in creating curriculum books and instructional materials, schools had complete control over these resources. This flexibility allowed teachers to be more creative and innovative in conducting the learning process (Nurjanah & Syamsudin, 2023). In summary, the Merdeka Curriculum not only emphasised student-centred learning but also promoted Differentiated Instruction to cater to the diverse needs of students, thereby fostering a more personalised and effective learning environment.

### **1.2 English Subject in Merdeka Curriculum**

The English Subject within the Merdeka Curriculum for junior high schools (SMP/MTs/Program Paket B) represented a significant enhancement over the previous 2013 Curriculum (Zidan & Qamariah, 2023). This curriculum aimed to provide students with essential language skills and broader socio-cultural knowledge, preparing them for a globally interconnected world. English, as a dominant global language, was used in diverse sectors such as education, business, science, law, tourism, international relations, health, and technology. Learning English enabled students to communicate with people from various cultural backgrounds, enhancing their ability to engage with a wide range of texts. These interactions helped students acquire knowledge, develop skills, and adopt behaviours crucial for thriving in a culturally diverse world (Kemendikbudristek, 2022b).

The English Subject within the Merdeka Curriculum aimed to broaden students' perspectives related to self-awareness, social relationships, culture, and global job opportunities. It provided students with the tools they needed to interact with the outside world and comprehend many points of view. This understanding enhanced their critical thinking skills and helped them appreciate cultural diversity by understanding both Indonesian and foreign cultures,

which in turn strengthened their self-identity. The English Subject within the Merdeka Curriculum was designed to help students achieve proficiency in six language skills: listening, speaking, reading, watching, writing, and presenting across various texts (Zidan & Qamariah, 2023). The specific objectives of this subject included developing communicative competence through multimodal texts, fostering intercultural competence to appreciate diverse cultural perspectives, building confidence for self-expression, and enhancing critical and creative thinking skills.

Instruction in the English Subject for Phase D (SMP/MTs/Program Paket B) emphasised strengthening both oral and written language skills. The curriculum featured a wide range of text types, including narratives, descriptions, expositions, procedures, arguments, discussions, short messages, advertisements, and authentic texts. These texts were presented in various formats – oral, written, visual, audio, and multimodal – to facilitate technological literacy and digital information navigation. Teachers had the flexibility to choose text types based on classroom conditions and students' familiarity with the topics, gradually introducing new text types to build understanding and production skills in both oral and written forms (Kemendikbudristek, 2022a). The selection of texts could also be adapted to real-life contexts encountered by students at school and home.

The learning process in the English Subject was student-centred, focusing on transforming students' abilities in using English across the six language skills through various text types. Instruction was tailored to the students' developmental stages in language proficiency, encompassing both receptive skills (listening, reading, viewing) and productive skills (speaking, writing, presenting). This comprehensive approach aimed to develop students' communicative competence and life skills, enabling them to communicate effectively in English and succeed in a globalised environment (Zidan & Qamariah, 2023).

### **1.3 Philosophical Foundations**

In implementing Differentiated Instruction, it was essential for teachers to share a common understanding of this approach. This understanding could be achieved by grasping the foundational principles of the approach, particularly its philosophical basis. According to Purba et al. (2021), Differentiated Instruction was grounded in three key educational theories: progressivism, constructivism, and humanism. These theories collectively formed the basis for developing Differentiated Instruction, a teaching method that recognised and addressed the diverse learning needs of students within the same classroom.

Differentiated Instruction was based on the perspective that each student had different approaches and readiness levels for learning. Even within the same age group, grade, or class, students exhibited varying thinking processes, perceptions of the content being delivered, emotional stability, and learning steps. The theoretical foundation for Differentiated Instruction was the belief that all students could succeed according to their individual capacities, supporting the implementation of this approach in the classroom (Purba et al., 2021). Differentiated Instruction focused on addressing the different learning stages of students, from beginners to proficient learners, and was not necessarily based on age but on ability, as students of the same age could have different levels of competence.

Purba et al. (2021) explained that the progressive philosophy emphasised the importance of fostering creativity, providing various activities, creating a natural (authentic) environment, and considering students' experiences in the learning process. Constructivism viewed students' direct experiences as key to learning, asserting that the experiences of others, such as those in textbooks, needed to be connected with the students' direct experiences. Humanism, on the other hand, saw students from the perspective of their uniqueness, potential, and motivation. In summary, Differentiated Instruction was a teaching approach built on the principles of progressivism, constructivism, and humanism. It acknowledged the unique learning needs of each student, aiming to provide an inclusive and effective learning environment that supported the success and development of all students.

#### **1.4 Sociological Foundations**

In addition to understanding the philosophical foundation of Differentiated Instruction, teachers also needed to be aware of the sociological foundation of this approach. This foundation was closely related to the social aspects of the students. In his book “Pusara” (1940), Ki Hajar Dewantara stated that it was not beneficial to standardise unnecessary or standardisable matters, and such diversity should have been wisely facilitated (Yunazwardi, 2018, as cited in Purba et al. 2021). This diversity should have prompted teachers to accommodate and implement differentiation.

Heterogeneity among students remained a problem that received insufficient attention, which could lead to low learning outcomes. Differentiated Instruction was a teaching and learning process where students could learn the material according to their abilities, preferences, and needs, so they did not feel frustrated or like failures in their learning experiences (Tomlinson, 2017). Additionally, students should have been given the opportunity to work in flexible groups. Student grouping could have been done in various ways, such as working individually, in pairs, within the whole class, embracing individual differences, recognising commonalities, or based on their interests.

#### **1.5 The Elements of Differentiated Instruction**

Differentiated Instruction was an educational approach designed to tailor teaching strategies, methods, materials, and techniques to create optimal learning experiences for individual students or small groups. This approach could be applied across four key elements: content, process, product, and learning environment. Differentiation was based on students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles (Tomlinson, 2017). By adapting these elements—content, process, product, and learning environment—educators could address the diverse needs of their students, fostering a more inclusive and effective learning experience. This approach ensured that all students had the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their individual differences.

#### **1.6 Students' Diversity**

The concept of differentiated learning had gained recognition as an effective strategy for accommodating the diverse needs of students by focusing on their readiness, learning interests, and varied learning profiles. According to Tomlinson (2017), Differentiated Instruction adapted to these aspects to enhance educational outcomes, as highlighted by Magableh and Abdullah (2020). This approach depended on understanding and responding to students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. A teacher implementing Differentiated Instruction needed to first recognise the diversity of their students before beginning the learning process, which could be achieved through personality tests, observations during initial meetings to assess each student's readiness, or other assessments designed to identify students' unique interests or learning profiles. In summary, acknowledging and addressing learners' diversity in terms of readiness, interests, and learning profiles is crucial for effective teaching, and Differentiated Instruction fosters a more inclusive and supportive learning environment where all students can thrive.

#### **1.7 Review of Related Studies**

Nurjanah and Syamsudin (2023) conducted a qualitative descriptive study to analyse the implementation of Differentiated Instruction as part of the Merdeka Curriculum in Mathematics at SDN 1 Imbanagara Raya. The research findings indicated that the Merdeka Curriculum had been implemented quite effectively in its first year. However, each “Sekolah Penggerak” was tasked with developing and applying the Merdeka Curriculum across all classes for the current year. Based on the analysis, it could be stated that the Merdeka Curriculum's implementation was more optimal compared to the previous curriculum, despite only one year of application. The study also revealed that Differentiated Instruction in elementary school Mathematics was highly effective, evidenced by improvements in understanding across all tested indicators. Differentiated Instruction was found to be more engaging than other teaching methods, as it incorporated various learning media tailored to students' individual learning profiles, thus increasing their interest in the learning process.

In contrast, Lestari and Purbasari (2023) investigated the implementation of Differentiated Instruction for descriptive text material with 10th grade students at SMA Negeri 1 Toroh, focusing on students' readiness and learning needs. This marked the school's first use of the Merdeka Curriculum. The research data indicated that Differentiated Instruction improved students' speaking abilities and fostered collaborative, responsible, and caring traits, thus realising the Pancasila Student Profile. It also resulted in a positive shift in students' attitudes towards learning, from less active to more enthusiastic. The average group presentation score rose from 85 in the first cycle to 90 in the second cycle, demonstrating enhanced speaking skills through groupings aligned with students' interests and learning profiles. The study concluded that Differentiated Instruction effectively improved students' speaking abilities and contributed to positive character development in line with the Merdeka Curriculum.

Similarly, Sofiah and Hikmawati (2023) examined the implementation of Differentiated Instruction in Bahasa Indonesia at SDN Batuan 1 Sumenep. Their research found that Differentiated Instruction at this school included elements of differentiated content, process, and product, although there was no analysis of differentiated learning environments. Despite this, the findings showed significant positive changes, with students displaying increased enthusiasm and improved overall evaluation scores. Differentiated Instruction helped create an inclusive and engaging classroom environment, allowing each student to develop according to their potential.

Building on these studies, the researcher decided to conduct a novel study to investigate the implementation of Differentiated Instruction in English at junior high school. Unlike the focus of Nurjanah and Syamsudin (2023) on elementary school Mathematics, Lestari and Purbasari (2023) on descriptive text material in senior high school English, and Sofiah and Hikmawati (2023) on Bahasa Indonesia in elementary schools, this new research aimed to address a critical gap by examining Differentiated Instruction in junior high school English. The study explored English teachers' perceptions of the approach, challenges, limitations, and the implementation of differentiated elements. By analysing differentiated content, process, product, and learning environment elements at SMP Islam De Green Camp Tanjungpinang, the study aimed to provide comprehensive insights into how Differentiated Instruction could be tailored to meet the diverse needs of junior high school students, thereby enhancing engagement and understanding during this transitional educational stage.

## **II METHOD**

This study delved into the implementation of Differentiated Instruction in the English subject at SMP Islam De Green Camp Tanjungpinang. It interpreted English teachers' perceptions towards the said approach. According to Waruwu (2023), a study that involves detailed elaboration and interpretation of events, phenomena, and social situations is categorized as Qualitative Descriptive Research. The research was conducted at SMP Islam De Green Camp Tanjungpinang, situated at Jalan Taman Siswa, No.1, Batu IX, Tanjungpinang Timur Subdistrict, Tanjungpinang City, Kepulauan Riau Province. There were three English teachers

instructing Phase D classes at the school, implementing Differentiated Instruction. The rationale for selecting this institution was that SMP Islam De Green Camp Tanjungpinang is one of the Sekolah Penggerak in Tanjungpinang that implements the Merdeka Curriculum and employs a Differentiated Instruction approach across the subjects provided to students.

## **2.1 Instruments**

In qualitative research, the researcher acted as the planner, executor of data collection, analyst, data interpreter, and ultimately the reporter of the research findings (Moleong, 2006). As a key instrument in this research, the researcher was responsible for determining the research focus, selecting informants as data sources, collecting data, assessing the quality of the data, analysing the data, interpreting the data, and drawing conclusions from the findings. The researcher drafted the interview guideline which was used to execute the data collection at SMP Islam De Green Camp Tanjungpinang, involving interviews with three English teachers at the research site.

Supporting instruments were tools used by a researcher (the key instrument) to gather the necessary data (Suardi, 2017). Every research, whether qualitative or quantitative, utilised supporting instruments to collect the required data. The purpose of this was to help researchers obtain authentic data. In this research, the researcher utilised an interview guideline as the supporting instrument. In qualitative research, an interview guideline is a preplanned set of questions or topics that the researcher refers to during an interview. It served as a framework for guiding the conversation while allowing flexibility for unexpected insights. The goal was to understand the interviewee's experiences and perspectives, uncovering their lived world beyond scientific explanations (Mauldin, 2020).

In this research, the researcher utilised an unstructured interview guideline, which was meant to uncover the answer to the question: "To what extent was Differentiated Instruction being implemented in the English subject at SMP Islam De Green Camp Tanjungpinang, as guided by the Merdeka Curriculum?" The interview was conducted in Indonesian to ensure that interviewees could provide comprehensive answers without any limitations caused by using a language that is not commonly used in daily life. Once the data was obtained and compiled into an interview transcript, the interview results were then translated into English.

## **2.2 Data and Data Resources**

This research utilized qualitative data. Qualitative data are those collected primarily in the form of words or images rather than numbers. This included interview transcripts collected through the data collection process at SMP Islam De Green Camp Tanjungpinang. The data were obtained from three English teachers from SMP Islam De Green Camp Tanjungpinang, who served as informants to respond to the researcher's questions orally based on the interview guidelines.

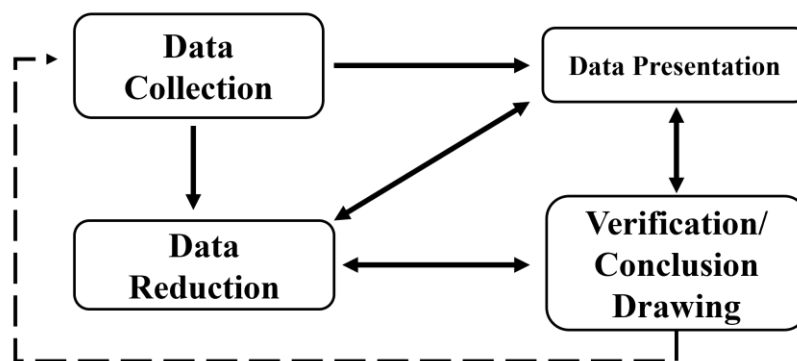
## **2.3 Data Collection Technique**

The data collection technique used in this research was interview. An interview is a question-and-answer process with someone to obtain information or opinions on a particular matter. According to (Mardawani, 2020), the technique used in qualitative research is in-depth interviewing. In-depth interviewing is a process to obtain information for research purposes through direct face-to-face interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee, with or without guidelines. In this research, the researcher conducted an unstructured interview. Unstructured interviews were conducted freely, where the researcher did not use systematically prepared interview guidelines for data collection. The interview only followed broad outlines of

the issues to be addressed (Mardawani, 2020). The questions could develop during the flow of the interview. In line with this research's first and third objectives, this type of research was used to find out the English teachers' perceptions regarding the implementation of Differentiated Instruction in the English subject at SMP Islam De Green Camp Tanjungpinang.

## 2.4 Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis in qualitative research requires conceptualization, which is the process of forming concepts before entering the field. This is followed by categorization and description, conducted while in the field. The data analysis in this study used the Miles and Huberman model. The data analysis process involved three important activities after data collection: data reduction, data display/presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Rosyada, 2020). Here is an illustration of the process:



**Figure 1 Miles and Huberman Data Analysis Model**

Based on the illustration, it can be seen that this research process was iterative and interconnected from before entering the field, during fieldwork, and through the completion of the research. The data collection process in this research included interviews with three English teachers at SMP Islam De Green Camp Tanjungpinang. The collected data then underwent the data reduction stage, where the information was recorded in detail and meticulously. This stage involved summarising the recorded data, focusing on important aspects, and omitting unrelated information towards the research objectives, thereby providing a clear overview for facilitating data display and presentation. After data reduction, the data were presented in the form of brief descriptions. These presented data were then used for drawing conclusions. According to Rijali (2018), conclusions can become credible if supported by valid and consistent data. In this research, the conclusions were presented in the form of narrative text supported by the data collected directly from the research site. The conclusions explained the English teachers' perceptions towards the implementation of Differentiated Instruction in the English subject at SMP Islam De Green Camp Tanjungpinang.

## III RESULT

### 3.1 Teachers' Perception Towards Merdeka Curriculum Concept on Teaching Practices within the English Subject

Through the interview, it was revealed that the Merdeka Curriculum had generally been received positively by the English teachers at SMP Islam De Green Camp Tanjungpinang, who appreciated its increased flexibility and differentiation in teaching methods. These aspects were seen as beneficial for students with diverse learning styles and needs. Informant 1 viewed the



Merdeka Curriculum as validating the school's existing practices, which already incorporated a similar approach to curriculum development, and believed the emphasis on flexibility and differentiation benefited students by allowing for tailored teaching. Informant 2 highlighted the curriculum's focus on student-centred learning, which provided students with more autonomy and allowed them to learn at their own pace, while also acknowledging the flexibility it offered teachers to adapt to specific student needs. Informant 3 valued the curriculum's emphasis on differentiated instruction, which enabled her to tailor her teaching to individual student needs, particularly those with special requirements. Overall, the interviewed teachers considered the Merdeka Curriculum a positive advancement in education, believing its flexibility and differentiation were advantageous for students with various learning styles and needs. This perspective was consistent with the experiences of students during their English lessons at SMP Islam De Green Camp Tanjungpinang.

### **3.2 Teachers' Understanding Towards the Concept of Differentiated Instruction**

Through the interview, it was found that the English teachers at SMP Islam De Green Camp Tanjungpinang perceived Differentiated Instruction as a student-centred approach designed to address diverse learning styles, needs, and abilities. They highlighted key aspects such as varying teaching methods and assessments, which involved using different techniques and difficulty levels to cater to both regular and PDBK students. Flexibility and adaptability were crucial, with teachers needing to adjust their instruction based on ongoing assessments of student needs. The approach also emphasised student-centred learning and creating a supportive environment, fostering a sense of community and valuing student diversity. Overall, the teachers considered Differentiated Instruction a valuable tool for meeting all students' needs, though their understanding, based on Tomlinson's (2017) theory, seemed general and lacked specificity in differentiating the four elements according to students' needs, readiness, interests, and learning profiles.

## **IV DISCUSSION**

The English teachers at SMP Islam De Green Camp perceived that implementing Differentiated Instruction as part of the Merdeka Curriculum involved emphasising student-centred learning and recognising the diverse needs of learners. According to Zidan and Qamariah (2023), the implementation of Differentiated Instruction within the Merdeka Curriculum was intended to be flexible and student-centred, aimed at enhancing the quality of education by granting students the freedom to develop their potential and teachers the freedom to deliver relevant and contextual material. However, the findings revealed that, although the school had adopted Differentiated Instruction, its implementation was still a work in progress, particularly within the English subject.

The findings showed that, despite the English teachers being aware that Differentiated Instruction required differentiating four elements to address students' diversity, they had not yet fully applied differentiation to all four elements. For instance, in differentiating content, the English teachers used the same ATP and teaching modules for all students, irrespective of their individual differences in readiness, interests, and learning profiles. This did not fully align with the principles of Differentiated Instruction, which advocate tailoring content to meet the specific needs of each learner. Tomlinson (2017) highlighted that differentiating content involves providing multiple ways to engage with facts, concepts, principles, attitudes, and skills, adjusted to students' diversity based on their level of readiness, interest, and learning profiles.

On the other hand, the English teachers had made significant progress in differentiating the process and product of instruction. They adapted their teaching methods, materials, and assessments to cater to the diverse needs of their students. For example, they provided varying levels of scaffolding, offered different types of activities, and used diverse assessment formats

to accommodate different learning styles and readiness levels. This aligned with Valiandes (2015), who stated that the purpose of differentiated instruction is to meet the needs of a wide range of students by customising the level of challenge and offering each student just the right amount of support to help them achieve their learning objectives.

Regarding the learning environment, the school had created a generally inclusive and supportive atmosphere. Students were not segregated into specific groups based on their differences, and teachers encouraged interaction between students with special needs and regular students. However, this did not fully align with Tomlinson's (2017) principles of Differentiated Instruction, which suggested differentiating the learning environment to meet each learner's specific needs. The teachers had their reasons for this approach. Given that SMP Islam De Green Camp Tanjungpinang had a student composition including both regular students and those with special needs (PDBK), there was concern that grouping students might lead to misunderstandings and feelings of separation due to their differences. Nevertheless, there was scope for further differentiation in this area, such as creating more flexible seating arrangements and offering more opportunities for students to self-select into groups based on their interests.

Overall, the implementation of Differentiated Instruction in the English subject at SMP Islam De Green Camp Tanjungpinang was partial. While the teachers had embraced the concept and made efforts to apply it, there were still areas requiring further development, particularly in differentiating content and creating a more differentiated learning environment.

## V CONCLUSION

The English teachers at SMP Islam De Green Camp Tanjungpinang generally perceived the Merdeka Curriculum and Differentiated Instruction positively. They valued the flexibility and student-centred approach of the curriculum, recognizing its potential to cater to diverse learning needs. However, the data collection also revealed that while the teachers understood the concept of Differentiated Instruction, their practical implementation was still evolving. They had not yet fully differentiated all four elements of instruction (content, process, product, and learning environment), particularly in terms of content differentiation. This suggests that while the teachers embraced the principles of Differentiated Instruction, they were still in the process of translating those principles into practice within the specific context of their school and the English subject.

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