



## TEACHERS' CHALLENGES IN DESIGNING WORKSHEET FOR DIFFERENTIATED LEARNING IN MERDEKA CURRICULUM

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### **Abstract:**

In the context of Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes personalized and student-centered learning, teachers face significant challenges in designing worksheets that cater to diverse learning needs. This article explores the complexities encountered by educators when creating differentiated worksheets within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum. Through interviewing English teachers at one of Islamic senior high schools in Sidoarjo, the data related to the challenges that the teachers encounter in designing differentiated learning worksheets are explored. The challenges include balancing curriculum standards with individual learning styles, ensuring equitable access to resources, and adapting instructional materials to varying levels of student ability. Furthermore, the study highlights the critical need for professional development and support systems to enhance the teachers' capacity in designing worksheets within the context of the Indonesian curriculum framework. By addressing these challenges, the Merdeka Curriculum's goal of fostering inclusive and effective learning environments can be more fully realized, ultimately supporting improved educational outcomes for all students.

**Keywords:** *Differentiated learning, Teacher Challenges, Worksheet*

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Indonesian government has been using the Merdeka Curriculum since 2022. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) released the Independent Curriculum with the intention of giving teachers fresh ideas for their lessons and giving pupils a different focus. As a result, differentiated learning was first used as a way to implement one of the core tenets of the Merdeka Curriculum, which is a more student-centered approach that enables teachers to adapt instruction to each student's abilities and interests. The practice of adapting instruction to each student's needs is known as differentiated learning. To meet these needs, teachers give pupils a variety of ways to learn (Heacox, 2012). The practice of adapting instruction to each student's needs is known as differentiated learning. To meet these needs, teachers give pupils a variety of ways to learn. According to its definition, differentiated learning is a teaching approach that shows various approaches to language acquisition in the classroom, gives students the right chances to learn at their best, and enhances teaching strategies based on the diversity of the students. Teachers often believe that they can differentiate their instruction to fit the diverse needs of their pupils by making minor changes to their curricula.

According to Suhandi and Robiah (2022), the curriculum is a mandatory tool that serves as a guide or guideline in the implementation of education and the learning process at school. The Merdeka Curriculum is an optional curriculum that education units can implement starting in the 2022/2023 academic year (Barlian, et al., 2022). According to Saputra and Hadi (2022, p. 32), the Merdeka Curriculum is a new paradigm curriculum that aims to provide a meaningful, happy, and an enjoyable



learning process for students to prepare a golden generation in 2045 according to the lofty ideals initiated by the Minister of Education Culture Research and Technology. The Hallmark of this independent curriculum is to uphold flexibility between schools, teachers, and students in learning.

The Merdeka Curriculum is regarded for being a "new" curriculum since it emphasizes curriculum simplification, freedom for educational units in managing learning, and space for creativity. The Merdeka Curriculum was first implemented during the COVID-19 transition period as an enhancement to the 2013 curriculum (Saputra & Hadi, 2022), and as a way to address the effects of the pandemic on the educational system that suffered from learning loss (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). Its goal is to catch up to Indonesia in terms of literacy and numeracy (Anas et al., 2023). Teachers must be able to apply the Merdeka Curriculum since they are the primary and direct implementers of the curriculum in schools (Dhani, 2020; Rouf and Lufita, 2018; Zamili, 2020). Teachers are crucial to raising the standard of education, and their success in putting this new curriculum into practice largely depends on them (Suhandi and Robi'ah, 2022). However, there isn't much research on this because the Merdeka Curriculum is young. Teachers must have a forward-thinking, flexible, and progressive outlook on life and the changing times in order to fulfill their tasks and responsibilities as required by the Merdeka Curriculum (Suhandi and Robi'ah, 2022). In order for the learning process to be conducted in a comprehensive, enjoyable, imaginative, and creative way, teachers need to be knowledgeable about technology. In order for students to come up with intelligent answers, teachers must be able to motivate them to think critically and critique their own ideas. In order to inspire students, his professional skill facilitates learning in the classroom (Anas et al., 2023).

The Merdeka Curriculum's implementation in Indonesia places a strong emphasis on student-centered learning, allowing students to explore their potential in accordance with their aptitudes and areas of interest. Teachers have a number of difficulties with this method, especially when creating worksheets for differentiated instruction. In the same classroom, teachers must design resources that meet the varied requirements, learning preferences, and skill levels of their students. This entails creating several iterations of worksheets with differing degrees of difficulty to keep every student interested and suitably challenged. Additionally, teachers frequently struggle to create thorough and successful differentiated worksheets due to time restrictions and a lack of resources. Since instructors must learn new techniques and resources to successfully apply differentiated learning, there is an obvious need for ongoing professional development and assistance.

An approach that recognizes the varied learning needs, skills, and interests of pupils is called differentiated learning. Teachers are urged by the Merdeka Curriculum to create lessons that let pupils advance at their own speed. This necessitates that instructors provide a variety of worksheets that accommodate a range of learning levels, from fundamental to sophisticated, while also taking into account distinct learning preferences including kinesthetic, visual, and auditory. It is quite difficult to strike a



balance between these elements in a single classroom since it calls for meticulous preparation, ingenuity, and a thorough comprehension of each student's needs.

Worksheets are essential tools in facilitating differentiated learning, providing students with tailored exercises that suit their abilities and learning styles. The Merdeka Curriculum's flexibility requires teachers to design varied worksheets, presenting unique challenges. Previous research about worksheets is some of the results in many aspects such as a study on instructional media development worksheet to improve learning outcomes, it can be concluded that Live Worksheet based student worksheet which have been developed effectively and very practical use in improving students' critical thinking abilities. Worksheets are an important educational tool intended to help students expand and excel in the learning process. These are organized teaching aids so that children can practice skills, apply concepts and demonstrate an understanding in a focused way. Worksheets are a vital component in the differentiated learning environment because they allow students opportunities to work at their own pace and according to personal ability levels. They can be tailored to various learning styles and levels, making them valuable for addressing the diverse abilities present in a classroom.

The Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture released the Merdeka Curriculum, which marks an important step in the focus of a more adaptable, student-centered approach to education. Its main objective is to facilitate customized instruction and accommodate a range of learning needs, in line with the broader global trends toward differentiated learning. This curriculum encourages teachers to create lessons that are specific to the needs, interests, and abilities of their students. But applying this vision into practice will not be easy, especially when it comes to worksheet design. Worksheets are an essential resource for providing practice opportunities, evaluating comprehension, and reinforcing concepts. They have to be made to fit a variety of learning levels and styles in a differentiated learning environment. This means that in order to ensure that the materials are appropriate for each student, teachers must strike a balance between the needs of customization and curriculum goals.

The large amount of variety in classrooms is one of the main obstacles. Due to students have various educational histories, skill levels, and preferred methods of learning, it can be challenging to design worksheets that work properly for everyone. Teachers also are frequently faced with limitations like scarce resources, a lack of time, and lack of education in differentiated teaching methods. These elements may make it more difficult for them to create engaging and beneficial worksheets for learning.

In addition, implementing the Merdeka Curriculum requires a reconsideration of standard teaching methods and the acquisition of newly developed competencies for producing adaptable educational resources. Teachers need to know how to properly assess the needs of their students, create worksheets that meet those needs, and modify their methods on a regular basis in response to feedback and performance from the students.

For the Merdeka Curriculum to be implemented successfully, these issues must be taken care of. The goal of the curriculum, which is to improve educational outcomes for all students, will ultimately be supported by an inclusive and productive learning



environment created by understanding and overcoming the challenges teachers face when designing worksheets.

## 2. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method, involving interviews with teachers from various educational institutions implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Additionally, a review of recent literature and official documents related to differentiated learning and curriculum implementation was conducted. Data were analyzed thematically to identify common challenges and effective strategies.

This research aims at exploring challenges encountered by teachers in designing worksheets for differentiated learning within the Merdeka Curriculum. To achieve the research objective, this research applies qualitative design. This research design is relevant due to in-depth exploration of the issue that becomes the main concern of this research.

The data collection techniques comprise an interview and an observation. was carried out through an interview process, to one of the English teachers at one of Islamic senior high schools in Sidoarjo. The interview was conducted during the fourth week of the teaching process. In addition, the observation is conducted to examine the use of a worksheet in the classroom.

The data from the interview and observation are analyzed using thematically to identify recurring themes and insights. This stage involves coding the data to highlight common challenges and strategies addressed by teachers.

## 3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia brings the spirit of more flexible and student-centered learning. However, in practice, teachers face various challenges, especially in designing worksheets suitable for differentiated learning. Differentiated learning requires teachers to customize teaching materials and methods based on each student's readiness, interests and learning profile. This means teachers must be able to identify individual differences in the classroom and develop appropriate strategies to meet these needs. However, this process is not easy. According to research by Lailiyah and Mas'ud (2024), teachers often experience difficulties in understanding and implementing the concept of differentiated learning, coupled with limited supporting facilities and infrastructure.

In addition, limited resources are a significant obstacle. Teachers are often faced with a lack of varied teaching materials and adequate learning aids to support students' various learning styles. This is exacerbated by the standardized curriculum, which often limits teachers' flexibility in adjusting teaching materials according to students' individual needs. As stated by Umayrah and Wahyudin (2024), limited resources and a rigid curriculum are the main challenges in implementing differentiated learning.

Classroom management is also a challenge. In a class with a large number of students, providing individualized attention and adjusting learning according to each student's learning style becomes a complex task. Teachers are required to have effective classroom management skills in order to manage student diversity well. In addition, time constraints in designing and implementing differentiated learning add to teachers'



workload. As stated by Suwartiningsih (2021), adjusting students' learning needs and limited resources are the main challenges in differentiated learning.

Lack of training and professional development in differentiated learning is also a hindering factor. Many teachers have not received adequate training to understand and implement differentiated learning strategies effectively. This results in teachers feeling less confident in designing and implementing worksheets that suit students' individual needs. As stated by Lailiyah and Mas'ud (2024), limited training and support from the school are challenges in implementing differentiated learning.

Implementing learning is hampered by (1) a lack of expertise about the subject topic and pertinent information; (2) a lack of flexibility in answering open-ended questions; and (3) a lack of awareness about student psychology. The improper paradigm of preliminary assessment, the difficulty in defining the learning process, and the lack of knowledge about formative assessment are some of the obstacles to learning evaluation. According to Kemendikbudristek (2024), some teachers find it difficult to implement differentiated instruction because they don't have enough time to create lessons tailored to each student's needs, while others find it difficult to assign students to readiness groups because of a large class size and constrained classroom space. The application of learning in the classroom and the assessment procedure are also impacted by the insufficient time allotted for each instructional program (Tanggur, 2023). Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum is reportedly difficult due to a lack of diversified learning resources and supporting infrastructure (Ramadani et al., 2023).

BBG PSMU mentioned, In differentiated learning, there are several challenges faced, namely the timing and preparation for planning and arranging different learning for each student which requires more time and more intensive preparation for the teacher. This challenge can be overcome by using available resources efficiently and collaboratively with fellow teachers. Class management in facilitating asynchronous learning for each student in one class. Teachers need to ensure that all students remain engaged in learning, while giving specific attention to students who need additional support. Assessments and evaluations measure students' progress in a fair and accurate manner. Teachers need to provide evaluation methods that are appropriate to individual students' levels of understanding and abilities, while maintaining clear and consistent standards. Lack of time is one of the biggest issues teachers deal with. Because creating differentiated worksheets requires creating many sets of materials for a single class, it takes a lot of time. Furthermore, a lot of teachers lack access to the tools and technology that may help them create worksheets that are interesting and varied. The requirement for ongoing evaluation presents another difficulty. Teachers' already tough labor is increased by the need to routinely evaluate students' progress and modify their worksheets accordingly. Furthermore, it is challenging for many educators to successfully apply varied learning methodologies since they have not received sufficient training in this area. Professional development in the implementation of differentiated learning which requires specific knowledge and skills from teachers. Therefore, continuous professional development is needed to support teachers in understanding and implementing differentiation strategies effectively.

The purpose of the study is to investigate the difficulties that teachers encounter when creating worksheets for differentiated instruction using the Merdeka Curriculum framework. Following a sample of teachers' interviews and questionnaires, the following major issues were found. The study's findings point to a number of obstacles



that make it difficult to apply differentiated learning through worksheet design in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum. These difficulties fall into three categories: systemic, logistical, and pedagogical problems that need to be addressed with different approaches.

### 1. Insufficient Knowledge of the Principles of Differentiated Instruction

Regarding the actual implementation of differentiated learning in the classroom, many educators expressed doubt. It was difficult for them to translate their understanding of the need to modify instruction to meet the needs of different students into the design of effective worksheets. Regarding how to adjust the process, product, and content according to students' learning profiles, interests, and readiness levels, some teachers were unsure. Teachers' lack of understanding of the fundamentals of differentiated instruction is one of the main issues. The Merdeka Curriculum's core concept of differentiated learning calls for teachers to abandon traditional, one-size-fits-all methods in favor of more adaptable, student-centered ones. To create worksheets with several entry points for learning, teachers must be able to evaluate students' preparedness, interests, and learning profiles. It is therefore imperative that professional development programs give special attention to expanding teachers' pedagogical understanding of differentiated instruction.

### 2. Restricted Time in Preparing the Worksheets

One of the main obstacles mentioned by teachers was time constraints. Differentiated worksheet design takes more time to create than a standard worksheet. To meet the varied needs of their students, teachers should think about creating multiple versions of a single worksheet or a variety of activities within one worksheet. Many teachers found it difficult to find the time to organize and carry out differentiated learning activities because of their busy schedules and administrative responsibilities. Creating differentiated worksheets necessitates teachers to consider several avenues for student success within a single lesson or unit, the process takes more time overall. Schools could solve this by giving teachers more time for planning or by giving them opportunities to work together to divide the workload. Furthermore, the challenge of implementing differentiation is made more difficult by a lack of resources. Technology and a wide range of educational materials that facilitate differentiated instruction and make it simpler for teachers to create adaptable worksheets should be purchased by schools.

### 3. Inadequate Pedagogical Skills in Managing Students' Diverse Needs

It was challenging for teachers to accommodate students with wildly disparate skill levels in the same classroom. While some students can work independently or need more difficult assignments, others need more assistance. It took a lot of work to create worksheets that all students could participate in without becoming overwhelmed or bored. Too many teachers did not know how to divide up the work and make sure every student was challenged enough. More adaptable assessment instruments that work with differentiated worksheets are needed, according to teachers. Assessments ought to take into account the variety of ways in which students can demonstrate their understanding of the material, just as learning tasks do. This necessitates reconsidering conventional assessment procedures in favor of formative and customized evaluation techniques that are consistent with the Merdeka Curriculum's tenets.



#### 4. Insufficient Teachers' Training and Development

The majority of educators stated that they lacked adequate training in the creation of differentiated worksheets. Teachers need to be skilled at developing resources that represent differentiated instruction in light of the shift to the Merdeka Curriculum, which places a strong emphasis on personalized learning. Professional development initiatives that addressed this issue, however, were either nonexistent or inadequate. Systematic support is needed for the transition to the Merdeka Curriculum in terms of resource allocation and teacher training. According to the study, one of the biggest obstacles to teachers being able to create differentiated worksheets is a lack of professional development. There is a need for more thorough, continuous, and useful training programs that concentrate on differentiated instruction techniques. Teachers may find it easier to overcome the obstacles they encounter when putting these strategies into practice if they receive coaching or mentoring from more seasoned educators.

#### 5. Limited Resources

Some educators noted that their attempts to differentiate worksheets were made more difficult by their lack of access to a variety of teaching resources. For example, it was more difficult to provide alternative content or learning pathways for students with different needs in schools with limited access to digital tools, internet connectivity, or modern textbooks.

#### 6. Assessment Concerns

Assessing the efficacy of differentiated worksheets presented additional difficulties for teachers. Assessment techniques should be changed in a differentiated learning environment to correspond with the learning trajectories of the students. A significant number of educators believed that their evaluation techniques remained inflexible and inadequately matched the varied assignments and exercises found in differentiated worksheets.

Overcoming these challenges requires collaborative efforts between the government, educational institutions and teachers. The government needs to provide comprehensive and continuous training for teachers and ensure adequate resources and facilities are available. Schools should also support teachers by providing flexibility in the curriculum and encouraging collaboration between teachers to share strategies and experiences. With the right support, teachers can be more effective in designing worksheets suitable for differentiated learning, so that the Merdeka Curriculum's goal of liberating the potential of every student can be achieved.

It is crucial to give educators access to resources and continual professional development in order to overcome these obstacles. Teachers can gain the skills necessary to create successful differentiated worksheets through workshops, training sessions, and collaborative learning communities. By giving instructors access to technology and instructional resources that streamline the process of producing and disseminating content, schools may further assist educators. Promoting teacher collaboration can also be advantageous since it allows educators to exchange ideas, resources, and best practices. Several techniques can be used to get over the difficulties in creating worksheets for Merdeka Curriculum differentiated learning:



1. Professional development includes ongoing instruction in worksheet design and differentiated learning techniques.
2. Resource Provision: Making sure that teaching aids, templates, and digital tools are available.
3. Collaboration: Using professional learning forums to encourage educators to exchange ideas, worksheets, and best practices.
4. Support for Time Management: Providing administrative assistance to instructors in order to help them efficiently manage their time.

These steps can enable educators to design engaging worksheets that cater to a range of student needs.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The Merdeka Curriculum's implementation in Indonesia places a strong emphasis on student-centered learning, allowing students to explore their potential in accordance with their aptitudes and areas of interest. Teachers have a number of difficulties with this method, especially when creating worksheets for differentiated instruction. In the same classroom, teachers must design resources that meet the varied requirements, learning preferences, and skill levels of their students. This entails creating several iterations of worksheets with differing degrees of difficulty to keep every student interested and suitably challenged. Additionally, teachers frequently struggle to create thorough and successful differentiated worksheets due to time restrictions and a lack of resources. Since instructors must learn new techniques and resources to successfully apply differentiated learning, there is an obvious need for ongoing professional development and assistance. Although creating worksheets for varied instruction can be difficult for teachers using the Merdeka Curriculum, it also presents a chance for educational innovation and advancement. All students can benefit from meaningful and captivating learning experiences if teachers tackle the issues with professional development, resource allocation, and teamwork. Although the path may be difficult, it may be beneficial given the possible advantages for students' growth and learning.

Teachers face a number of formidable obstacles when creating worksheets for the Merdeka Curriculum's differentiated learning approach. These include managing time effectively, developing materials at different levels of difficulty, comprehending and meeting the diverse needs of students, and making sure that the worksheets are interesting, pertinent, and in line with curriculum goals. Teachers' attempts to create useful learning materials may also be hampered by a lack of resources and adequate training in differentiated instruction.

Nevertheless, there are methods that can assist in getting beyond these difficulties. Worksheet design can be made more effective and flexible for teachers by involving them in ongoing professional development, working together with colleagues, utilizing digital tools, and conducting frequent formative assessments. Teachers can better meet the diverse needs of their students by addressing these issues and making use of the resources at their disposal. This will help to achieve the Merdeka Curriculum's objective of encouraging a more flexible and personalized approach to learning.



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