

# Implementation of Differentiated Learning in English Lesson Using Independent Curriculum at MAN Surabaya

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## Abstract

This study explores differentiated learning in English classes at MAN Surabaya within the Independent Curriculum framework. Differentiated learning adapts teaching strategies, content, and assessments to meet students' varying needs, readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles. The research identifies strategies used by the teacher, student preferences, and implementation challenges. Using qualitative methods such as observations, interviews, and document analysis, the study finds that the teacher employs flexible grouping, tiered assignments, and individualized instruction to cater to diverse student needs. Students favor activities aligned with their interests and readiness, finding them more engaging and effective. However, challenges include limited resources, time constraints, and the need for ongoing professional development. The study concludes that differentiated learning can improve student engagement and achievement but requires significant support for the teacher, including resources, time for planning, and continuous professional development. These findings highlight the importance of educational policymakers and school administrators providing necessary support and resources to enable effective differentiated learning implementation in classrooms.

*Keywords: Differentiated Learning, English Lesson, Independent Curriculum.*

## Introduction

Curriculum development is a fundamental aspect of every educational process, including in Indonesia. The educational system in Indonesia has undergone at least eleven curriculum reforms, starting from the 1947 Rencana Pelajaran to the current Kurikulum Merdeka, the Independent Curriculum. These revisions are often driven by various factors such as unsatisfactory learning outcomes, high dropout rates, stress levels among teachers and students, and the need to develop skills that meet labor market demands (Gouëdard et al., 2020).

In response, the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, later stated as Kemendikbudristek in this article, introduced a new curriculum called Kurikulum Merdeka, the Independent Curriculum. This curriculum includes four main programs: comprehensive National Standardized School Exams (USBN) assessment, replacement of national exams with assessments, streamlined learning implementation plans (RPP), and more flexible school enrolment (PPDB) zoning. The Independent Curriculum aims to make students more active, creative, innovative, and independent learners while developing essential competencies like literacy, numeracy, and 21st-century skills such as collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and creativity.

Under the Independent Curriculum, students are encouraged to be more creative, allowing teachers to implement differentiated learning (MS, 2023). Teachers employ

various teaching methods to meet the individual needs of each student, which may include learning styles, interests, and subject understanding.

Kemendikbudristek designed the Independent Curriculum to provide flexibility and support for quality learning, giving students the freedom to create and learn. "From the child's perspective, there is a broad opportunity to solve problems presented in certain materials," said Sugiyo at the Ministry of Education and Research's Merdeka Curriculum Festival, quoted Thursday (18/5/2023). He noted that the biggest challenge lies with the teachers, who must master a broader range of material. To regulate the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, the Ministry issued Ministerial Regulation Number 5 of 2022, concerning graduate competency standards in early childhood, basic, and secondary education.

The Independent Curriculum also addresses the post-pandemic education crisis, formulating new policies that grant freedom to institutions and students in the learning process. Conceptually, it emphasizes character development and soft skills based on competencies (Indarta et al., 2022).

Differentiated learning allows teachers to engage with students according to their knowledge level and learning preferences, creating a challenging and stimulating learning environment. In practice, this means teachers continually monitor progress, identify specific learning needs, and adapt their teaching methods accordingly. Subban (2006) suggests that in differentiated classrooms, teachers should engage students by tapping into their interests and involving them in classroom activities.

Research by Merliza et al. (2023) found that workshops on differentiated learning for the Independent Curriculum received positive feedback from participants, who demonstrated a thorough understanding of learner-centered teaching strategies.

High schools and Madrasahs in Indonesia differ in several aspects, particularly in curriculum focus, teaching methods, and environment. High schools emphasize general subjects like math, social science, science, and language, while madrasahs prioritize Islamic education, including the Quran, hadiths, fiqh, and Islamic history. Teaching methods in high schools are diverse, encompassing lectures, discussions, presentations, and practicums. In contrast, madrasahs often focus on lectures and memorization. Environmentally, high schools are typically located in urban areas, whereas madrasahs can be found in both urban and rural settings, including *pesantren*, an Islamic boarding school, environments.

Despite these differences, both high schools and Madrasahs are adopting the Independent Curriculum, which supports the implementation of differentiated learning. This research focuses on the implementation of differentiated learning in English lessons using the Independent Curriculum at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) Surabaya. By conducting this study, it is hoped that teachers will effectively apply differentiated learning strategies.

## **Research Method**

This study employed qualitative descriptive research. According to research by Sandelowski and Barroso (2003), research findings can be placed on a continuum that shows the level of data transformation during the data analysis process from description to interpretation. The use of descriptive qualitative approaches such as descriptive phenomenology, content analysis is suitable for researchers who want to use a relatively low level of interpretation. Researchers who wish to use relatively low levels of interpretation, in contrast to grounded theory or hermeneutic phenomenology, which require higher levels of interpretation. Therefore, according to Sugiyono (2010), the current research was a descriptive qualitative study in which the writers studied factual

conditions which were natural. In this study, the researchers played a key role. The steps that the researchers took were as follows; 1) pre-observation, 2) data collection, and 3) data analysis and writing of results.

Research subjects are a group of people who are studied to obtain research data. In this study the research, the subjects included English teachers and students in grades 10 and 12, and researchers took two classes to see if teachers utilized differentiated learning using the independent curriculum at MAN Surabaya. Grade 11 was not involved as it was still using the 2013 Curriculum.

The participants in this study were for English subjects involving grade 10 and grade 12 teachers and 42 students consisting of 30 grade 10 students and 12 grade 12 students.

*Table 1. Research Observation Schedule*

Date	Activities
January 10, 2024	The first meeting observation in tenth grade J
January 17,2024	The second meeting in tenth grade J
January 09,2024	The first meeting observation in twelfth grade M
January 15,2024	The second meeting observation in twelfth grade M

The questionnaire dissemination began on January 22, 2024, and continued until February 2, 2024. It was distributed to all students in classes X-J and XII-M, who were selected for observation. Following the distribution, data processing took place from February 5, 2024, to February 12, 2024.

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***Teacher Observation class X - J***

In meeting 1, with a time allocation of 2 x 40 minutes, the X-J class of 30 students was observed. The teacher greeted the students but did not check attendance, inquire about their well-being, nor prepare them mentally and physically for the lesson. Motivation and encouragement were also lacking, and essential steps of opening the lesson were overlooked. The teacher explained the competencies, reviewed the previous material, and conveyed the learning objectives and material coverage for the session. In the main activity, the teacher discussed recount text (daily routines), displayed and described pictures of a tiger, conducted question-and-answer sessions classically and individually, and addressed students' difficulties one by one.

In the second meeting, the teacher's approach to classroom management and instruction was noted. Upon the students' arrival, the teacher greeted them and proceeded to take attendance individually, allowing little time for mental preparation or checking on the students' well-being. Moreover, there was no assessment of the students' physical readiness for the lesson, as the teacher neglected to inquire about their health status. Regarding instructional activities, the teacher began by reviewing the previous lesson on recount text. Following the review, the teacher assessed the students' assignments on the usage of verb 2, addressing each student individually. The main material on recount text (daily activities) was then summarized and explained. Before concluding the lesson, the teacher reminded students who had not yet presented their assignments to do so in the next meeting. However, the teacher concluded the lesson without engaging in any reflective practice.

### ***Teacher Observation Sheet Class XII – M***

In the first meeting of the XII-M class, the research included 12 students. In this study, it can be explained that the teacher greeted the students when they entered the class. Next, the teacher checked the student's individual attendance in the class as they were about to start learning. After that, the teacher did not mentally prepare the students to follow teaching learning process and did not ask how the students are doing that day. Then, the teacher needed to check the physical preparation of students to take part in teaching learning process because he did not ask students about their state of health that day. Furthermore, the teacher needed to motivate students and encourage them to participate enthusiastically in teaching learning process. In addition, the teacher needed to liven up the classroom environment, such as having a casual discussion with students before entering core learning.

According to the teacher who taught the class, it is considered chit-chat, and sometimes the teacher forgets. The teacher needs to remember the steps of the teacher's learning activities when opening teaching learning process. This needs to be changed from a teacher.

Next, the teacher explained the competencies to be learned, and the teacher asked about the material given at the previous meeting. And then, the teacher conveyed the learning objectives that would be achieved. Then, the teacher conveyed the coverage of the material to be learned by giving the learning outcomes of the previous meeting. Finally, the teacher explained the steps to understand the competencies to be taught, such as the teacher reviewing the material that will be given to students before starting learning.

In the second meeting of class XII-M. Upon students' arrival, the teacher greeted them individually. Subsequently, attendance was taken individually to ensure readiness for the learning session. Following this, the teacher focused on preparing students mentally for the upcoming lesson, refraining from personal inquiries about their well-being. Physical readiness was also assessed, emphasizing students' readiness to engage in the learning process. Motivation and encouragement were key aspects emphasized by the teacher to foster enthusiastic participation in the learning process. To create a vibrant classroom environment, casual discussions were encouraged before transitioning to the core learning content. The teacher then outlined the competencies to be acquired and revisited material covered in the previous meeting. Clear learning objectives were communicated, along with a review of the previous session's outcomes. Guidance on understanding the taught competencies was provided, including a review of upcoming learning materials. Small group discussions were facilitated to encourage active participation. Before concluding the session, students were consulted on the agenda for the next meeting, particularly regarding the analysis of the script's themes, verb usage, and vocabulary. The teacher concluded the activity by again greeting the students, ensuring a positive end to the session.

### ***Student's Observation class X-J***

In the first meeting of the X-J class, which included 30 students, the lesson progressed with a series of structured activities. Students began by listening to an audio recording about animals displayed on the screen. They then paid attention to the teacher's explanation of the topic of animals. After this, students had an opportunity to ask questions to the teacher collectively. Following the question session, students completed daily activity tasks assigned by the teacher and waited for their turn as the teacher checked each student's work individually. Some students were then appointed by the teacher to

read aloud their daily activities from the previous day. The teacher also explained the use of verbs, and students listened attentively. Before the lesson ended, students were assigned homework to complete their daily activities using the correct verbs.

In the second meeting, students listened to the teacher review the previous material on recount text, focusing on daily activities. They then prepared their homework on recount text and waited their turn to present it individually. After the presentations, the teacher provided a conclusion about recount text. Students who did not get a chance to present were expected to be ready to present in the next meeting. The lesson concluded with students answering the teacher's greetings.

### ***Student's Observation class XII - M***

In the first meeting, students listened to the teacher as they provided material about discussion texts, including their structure and examples. Afterward, the students answered questions posed by the teacher in a classical format. Following the teacher's instructions, students formed small groups to discuss the discussion text. After forming these groups, students watched a video that presented an example of a discussion text. They then listened to a video description of the discussion text example on the screen. Before concluding the lesson, students were instructed to create their own videos about discussion texts, encouraging creativity. Finally, the session ended with students responding to the teacher's closing greetings.

In the second meeting, students watched a video showcasing an example of a procedure text on the screen. Following this, they listened to a video description of the procedure text. After viewing the video, students answered the teacher's questions in a classical format. They then listened to the teacher's summary about recount texts. Subsequently, students individually shared their difficulties with the teacher and responded to further questions. After discussing these challenges, the students formed small groups to discuss procedure texts.

### ***Teacher's Response to the Differentiated Learning***

In the teacher's response about differentiated learning attached to the Google form, the differentiation in the learning process was based on students' learning styles, such as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. Differentiated learning is essential due to students' varying abilities and diverse learning styles. The teacher ensures the implementation of differentiated learning by assigning tasks such as PowerPoint presentations or video recordings on specific themes in English.

The challenges or obstacles faced in differentiated learning require patience and extended time, starting with assessing each student's level and then individually addressing their difficulties and finding solutions. This process cannot be done classically. Consequently, one learning material might span several sessions, making it challenging to meet curriculum targets within the limited time available. The independent curriculum offers some relief, as it allows for more flexible organization and delivery of the material.

The application of differentiated learning in the classroom involves several stages: initial grouping, linguistic consultation, and finally, presentation or video creation. Examples of differentiated learning practices include student leveling, grouping, language consultation, presentation or video creation, viewing the videos or presentations, and conducting reviews or evaluations. The teacher creates diagnostic tools tailored to the specific needs of students in each class. Additionally, the teacher can categorize students' learning readiness into more than three groups, enabling students with higher abilities to assist those with medium or low abilities.

**Interview**

In interviews conducted by researchers, the 10th and 12th-grade English teacher explained the concept of differentiated learning and how it can be implemented in the classroom. Differentiated learning involves three types of students: audio, visual, and kinesthetic learners, each requiring unique approaches since they cannot be treated the same. To effectively differentiate in the classroom, the teachers must understand each student's abilities. For example, advanced students can help teach intermediate students, who in turn can assist those at a lower level. This peer-to-peer teaching can be more effective, as students might better understand explanations from their peers.

The teacher has been implementing differentiated learning for the past two years and are now trying a direct approach by interacting with students individually. Initially, the teacher uses classical teaching methods to assess how well students grasp the material.

To ensure effective differentiation, the results of differentiated teaching are measured based on each student's abilities. For instance, when assigning group work, the teacher creates groups of three students with varied learning speeds: one fast learner, one intermediate, and one slower learner. This allows for peer teaching within the groups, where slower learners can be supported by intermediate learners, who in turn learn from fast learners. Each student engages in activities suited to their abilities, without being forced to match the pace of faster learners. The goal of differentiation is to complement each other's strengths, not to impose uniformity.

The teacher employs a gradual and detailed approach to teaching materials, starting with speaking skills and then advancing to writing skills. Once the students have progressed, the teachers call on them individually to assess their understanding of the material. This method ensures that all students can follow and comprehend the lessons effectively.

**Student's Responds to the Differentiated Learning**

*Table 2. Tabulation of students' responses to questionnaire number 1*

Question 1. Is there a learning model that can improve your understanding or skills in English learning?	
listening to music / through the app	38.46%
problem based / contextual / practice	19.23%
project based learning	11.54%
Role Play and Simulation	7.69%
Discovery Learning	15.38%
Others	7.69%

From Table 2, it can be seen that in Question 1, the learning model that most improves understanding in English learning activities using differentiated learning is through listening to music or using technology, with a significant percentage of 38.46%. Additionally, another effective approach to enhance understanding is through problem-based learning or practicum, which accounts for 19.23%.

*Table 3. Tabulation of students' responses to questionnaire number 2*

Question. 2 Do you understand what the teacher is saying in class? Can you give a reason?	
Understand	57.50%
Sometime	32.50%
little or nothing	10.00%

This data in Table 3 above indicates that a majority of students (57.50%) have a good comprehension of the teacher's instructions and explanations during class. However, a significant portion (32.50%) still experiences occasional difficulties in understanding.

*Table 4. Tabulation of students' responses to questionnaire number 3*

Question 3. Do you often explain to your friends what the teacher has just told you in class?	
Often	42.50%
Sometime	35.00%
Rarely or nothing	22.50%

As shown in table 4, 42.50% of respondents often explain to their friends what the teacher has just told them in class. This indicates that a significant portion of students are comfortable with the material and feel confident enough to help their peers. 35.00% of respondents sometimes explain to their friends. This shows that while they do help their friends occasionally, it is not a consistent behavior. 22.50% of respondents rarely or never explain to their friends. This could suggest that these students either do not feel confident enough in their understanding, prefer not to engage in peer teaching, or perhaps their friends do not seek their help.

*Table 5. Tabulation of students' responses to questionnaire number 4*

Question 4. What is a teacher's teaching style that you find enjoyable? (e.g., talking and writing on the board, discussion by asking questions, practicum and discussion). What are the reasons?	
Various	12.50%
practicum and discussion	62.50%
With games	2.50%
Discussion	10.00%
explain and write on the board	12.50%

From this data, it is clear that the most preferred method is Practicum or Discussion with 62.50%. This method combines hands-on activities with collaborative learning, making it more interactive and engaging than other methods like lectures or writing on the board. The high percentage indicates that students find this approach significantly more enjoyable and effective.

*Table 6. Tabulation of students' responses to questionnaire number 5*

Question 5. Have you ever felt like asking your teacher a question but didn't or couldn't? Why?	
Ever	70.00 %
No	20.00 %
Sometimes	10.00%

In table 6, it is evident that a significant majority of students (70.00%) have experienced a situation where they wanted to ask their teacher a question but did not or could not. Only 20.00% of students have never faced this issue, and 10.00% experience it sometimes.

*Table 7. Tabulation of students' responses to questionnaire number 6*

Question 6. When your teacher shows you a picture or video related to the material (e.g., recount text or something else) you are studying, what do you do with the picture or video?	
Learn more	42.50%
Observing	30.00%
Listening	17.50%
Taking notes	10.00%

Based on the data in Table 7, it is apparent that the most prevalent response (42.50%) is that students use the picture or video to learn more. This indicates that a significant number of students actively engage with visual or multimedia content to deepen their understanding of the material.

*Table 8. Tabulation of students' responses to questionnaire number 7*

Question 7. How do you think the teacher should teach so that you can understand what they are saying?	
clear or simple	15.00%
provide examples	12.50%
Practicum	30.00%
slow down	15.00%
Discussion	12.50%
Other	15.00%

Based on the data in table 8, it is clear that students perceive various strategies as beneficial for improving their comprehension of the teacher's instructions. The predominant choice, selected by 30.00% of respondents, is Practicum, indicating a preference among a considerable number of students for hands-on activities or real-world applications.

*Table 9. Tabulation of students' responses to questionnaire number 8*

Question 8. In terms of understanding your lessons, how do you think your teacher should teach you?	
Practicum	17.50%
Repetition	12.50%
practice questions or games	7.50%
giving examples	7.50%
relax and positive vibes	35.00%
Discussion	7.50%
varied or not monotonous	12.50%

Relating to table 9, the students have varied preferences regarding the teaching methods that facilitate their understanding of lessons. The most prominent response, selected by 35.00% of respondents, is Relax and positive vibes, suggesting that creating a relaxed and positive classroom environment is crucial for many students' comprehension. Other notable preferences include Practicum (17.50%) and Varied or not monotonous (12.50%), indicating a desire for hands-on activities and diverse instructional approaches that keep the lessons engaging. Repetition (12.50%) and giving examples (7.50%) also emerged as preferred methods, indicating the importance of reinforcing concepts through repeated exposure and practical illustrations. Practice questions or games (7.50%) and Discussion (7.50%) were less commonly chosen but still considered valuable by some students for enhancing understanding.

### ***Discussion***

The challenges faced by teacher in implementing differentiated instruction, as highlighted by Benjamin (2002), resonate with the findings in MAN Surabaya school. Despite the teacher's efforts to implement differentiated learning within an independent curriculum, time constraints often hinder the ability to fully realize the intended learning process. The acknowledgment of these challenges by the teacher is crucial, especially regarding instances where her efforts might be perceived as casual conversation rather than structured instruction, or where steps in the learning process are overlooked. Despite these

obstacles, the teacher has effectively conveyed the products of differentiation to students for future sessions. Benjamin (2002) underscores the importance of addressing time constraints and providing additional support and resources for teachers to successfully implement differentiated instruction. By recognizing and addressing these challenges, educators can work towards optimizing the implementation of differentiated learning strategies, ultimately enhancing student engagement and achievement in MAN Surabaya schools.

The implementation of differentiated learning involves recognizing and accommodating the diverse learning styles of students, such as auditory, visual, and kinesthetic. Each of these styles requires tailored approaches, acknowledging that one size does not fit all in education. Tomlinson and Allan (2000) emphasized the importance of recognizing students' varying abilities, interests, and learning styles in educational settings. Similarly, studies by Hall et al. (2003) highlighted the effectiveness of differentiated instruction in promoting student engagement and achievement. In one observed class (X-J), the teacher directly engages in differentiated learning by individually assessing students' understanding through spoken and written communication, followed by project-based learning activities. In contrast, in another class (XII-M), the teacher begins with detailed explanations and examples, facilitates group discussions, and utilizes video examples for further comprehension. Previous studies have underscored the significance of differentiated instruction in catering to diverse student needs and enhancing learning outcomes.

The students' responses reveal a preference for diverse and interactive teaching methods to enhance English learning, with listening to music or using technology being favored alongside problem-based learning. While a majority understand the teacher's instructions, many still encounter occasional difficulties and desire more opportunities for asking questions. Students often engage in peer teaching, indicating confidence in their understanding. Practicum or discussion emerges as the most enjoyable teaching style, emphasizing hands-on activities and collaboration. Visual and multimedia aids are actively utilized for deeper learning. Students advocate for clear instruction, examples, and a positive classroom atmosphere, underscoring the importance of varied and engaging approaches for comprehension and retention of lessons. Previous studies corroborate these findings, highlighting the efficacy of differentiated learning approaches in enhancing language acquisition. Using music technology in foreign language learning, for instance, is believed to be a motivating aspect for the students (Turnbull et al., 2017). In another example, a study by Johnson et al. (2014) emphasizes the benefits of problem-based and project-based learning in fostering active learning which can promote critical thinking skills and language proficiency. Peer teaching, as noted by Topping (2017), not only reinforces understanding but also promotes collaborative learning and communication skills. Additionally, research by Anderson et al. (2001) underscores the importance of interactive and hands-on methods, such as practicum and discussion, in facilitating deeper comprehension and retention of language concepts. These findings align with the students' preferences for varied teaching styles and highlight the significance of personalized and engaging instruction in optimizing language learning outcomes.

## **Conclusion**

Implementing differentiated instruction poses significant challenges for the teacher, especially regarding time constraints that hinder the full execution of tailored learning processes. At MAN Surabaya school, despite these obstacles, the teacher strives to adapt teaching methods to accommodate diverse learning styles, enhancing student engagement

and achievement. Recognizing and addressing these challenges is vital for optimizing instructional strategies and ensuring that differentiated approaches are effective and structured. Students at MAN Surabaya show a clear preference for interactive and varied teaching methods, including the use of technology, music, problem-based learning, and peer teaching. These preferences highlight the importance of creating a dynamic and engaging classroom environment. Ultimately, providing the teacher with the necessary support and resources to overcome barriers will enable better implementation of differentiated instruction, fostering a more inclusive and effective learning experience for all students.

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