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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Implementation of Differentiated Learning and Development of English Teaching Materials within the Context of the Merdeka Curriculum

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Abstrak

Pembelajaran yang terdiferensiasi merupakan strategi penting dalam mengatasi keberagaman siswa dan menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang inklusif, namun penerapannya sering kali menghadapi tantangan dalam memenuhi beragam kebutuhan siswa secara efektif. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi implementasi pembelajaran diferensiasi dan pengembangan bahan ajar bahasa Inggris dalam konteks Kurikulum Merdeka. Penelitian dilaksanakan pada semester II kelas X di Madrasah Aliyah YPIP Panjeng. Metodologi penelitian yang digunakan adalah analisis kualitatif terhadap langkah-langkah yang dilakukan guru bahasa Inggris dalam merancang materi yang responsif terhadap kebutuhan dan kemampuan siswa. Eksplorasi evaluasi hasil belajar siswa dan monitoring proses pembelajaran juga dilakukan untuk memahami dampak penerapan pembelajaran diferensiasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pembelajaran yang berdiferensiasi memberikan manfaat yang signifikan dalam meningkatkan pemahaman siswa dan menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang inklusif. Namun, tantangan seperti keterbatasan sumber daya dan penilaian yang berbeda-beda untuk setiap siswa juga teridentifikasi. Dari penelitian ini disimpulkan bahwa pelatihan dan dukungan yang tepat bagi guru, pengembangan sumber belajar yang beragam, dan evaluasi proses pembelajaran yang berkelanjutan diperlukan untuk meningkatkan efektivitas penerapan pembelajaran yang berdiferensiasi. Langkah-langkah tersebut diharapkan dapat memperkuat pendekatan pembelajaran inklusif dan berkelanjutan di Madrasah Aliyah YPIP Panjeng.

Key Word:
Differentiated Learning, English Teaching, Inclusive Learning Environment, Merdeka Curriculum, Student Diversity.

Abstract

Differentiated learning is a vital strategy in addressing student diversity and creating an inclusive learning environment, however, its implementation often faces challenges in effectively meeting the diverse needs of students. This research aims to explore the implementation of differentiated learning and developing English language teaching materials within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum. The study was conducted in the second semester of Grade X at Madrasah Aliyah YPIP Panjeng. The research methodology employed is qualitative analysis of the steps taken by English teachers in designing materials that are responsive to the needs and abilities of students. Exploration of student learning outcomes evaluation and monitoring of the learning process is also conducted to understand the impact of implementing differentiated learning. The results indicate that differentiated learning provides significant benefits in enhancing student understanding and creating an inclusive learning environment. However, challenges such as resource limitations and varying assessments for each student are also identified. From this research, it is concluded that appropriate training and support for teachers, development of diverse learning resources, and ongoing evaluation of the learning process are necessary to enhance the effectiveness of implementing differentiated learning. These measures are expected to strengthen inclusive and sustainable learning approaches at Madrasah Aliyah YPIP Panjeng.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a crucial foundation in preparing the younger generation to face the evolving demands of the times (Akour & Alenezi, 2022). In the context of education in Indonesia, the Merdeka Curriculum emerges as the forefront, recognizing that every educational institution has the freedom to develop curriculum according to the characteristics, needs, and potentials of its learners (Prayitno et al., 2023). Madrasah Aliyah YPIP Panjeng, as one of the educational institutions committed to providing quality education, participates in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

In the effort to implement the Merdeka Curriculum, several challenges arise (Lestari, 2023). One of the main challenges is how to develop English learning materials that are suitable for the context of the Merdeka Curriculum while still considering the needs and characteristics of students (Krishnapatria, 2021). This issue

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becomes increasingly complex with the variation in abilities, interests, and cultural backgrounds among students. Another challenge lies in ensuring that the developed English learning materials align with the pedagogical principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, promoting critical thinking, creativity, and active engagement. Furthermore, addressing the linguistic diversity within the student body poses a significant challenge, requiring inclusive approaches that cater to learners with diverse language proficiencies.

Differentiated learning has emerged as a pivotal strategy in addressing the diverse needs of students within the Merdeka Curriculum framework (Digna et al., 2023). This approach recognizes that students have varied learning styles, interests, and readiness levels, and aims to provide tailored instruction to accommodate these differences (Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2023). By differentiating instruction, educators can effectively engage students in their learning process and promote deeper understanding (Ginja & Chen, 2020). This approach not only enhances academic achievement but also fosters inclusivity and equity in education (Ainscow, 2020).

One subject that receives special attention in the learning process is English (Elbes & Oktaviani, 2022). English has become an important international language in this era of globalization, and success in learning it has significant impacts on academic and career opportunities in the future (Tan et al., 2019). Therefore, the development of effective and contextually relevant English learning materials becomes crucial. Effective English learning materials are essential for facilitating students' language acquisition and proficiency development (Alshuraiaan, 2023). These materials should not only cover essential language skills such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening but also be designed to engage students and cater to their diverse learning needs and interests. Contextually relevant materials incorporate real-life situations, cultural references, and topics that resonate with students' experiences, making the learning process more meaningful and enjoyable.

In efforts to enhance the effectiveness of English learning at Madrasah Aliyah YPIP Panjeng, a differentiated learning approach becomes a primary focus. This approach acknowledges that each student has different needs, interests, and abilities. By implementing differentiated learning, it is hoped that the learning process can be tailored to the needs and characteristics of each student, thus creating an inclusive learning environment that supports the optimal development of every individual.

In this context, this research aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the implementation of differentiated learning in the development of English learning materials at Madrasah Aliyah YPIP Panjeng. With a focus on the Merdeka Curriculum, this research will explore the best strategies and practices in developing learning materials that can meet the diverse needs of students, as well as evaluate their impact on student learning achievement. Through a deeper understanding of the implementation of differentiated learning in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, it is hoped that this research can make a meaningful contribution to efforts to improve the quality of English learning at Madrasah Aliyah YPIP Panjeng, as well as provide valuable insights for the development of curriculum and learning at the national level.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research method employed in this study was a qualitative approach, enabling researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of differentiated learning in the development of English learning materials at Madrasah Aliyah YPIP Panjeng. The research participants consisted of English teachers and the Vice Principal for Student Affairs at Madrasah Aliyah YPIP Panjeng. The study was conducted in the second semester of Grade X, focusing on materials such as descriptive text, recount text, narrative text, starting and ending conversations, and congratulating and complimenting someone. The data collection process involved several methods aimed at gathering comprehensive insights into the implementation of differentiated learning. These methods included semi-structured interviews with English teachers and the Vice Principal for Student Affairs, direct classroom observations, and analysis of documents related to the Merdeka Curriculum and the specified English learning materials. The qualitative approach, particularly through narrative inquiry, allowed researchers to explore and understand the experiences and perspectives of the participants in implementing differentiated learning strategies.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with English teachers to obtain their perspectives, experiences, and perceptions regarding differentiated learning in the development of English learning materials. These interviews allowed for open-ended discussions, enabling researchers to explore various aspects of the topic in depth. In addition to interviews, direct observation was carried out during the process of developing learning materials in the classroom. This involved observing teachers as they engaged in differentiated instructional practices, interacted with students, and facilitated learning activities. Observation provided researchers with firsthand observations of how differentiated learning was being implemented in practice, offering valuable contextual information.

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Furthermore, analysis of documents related to the Merdeka Curriculum and English learning materials was conducted. These documents included curriculum guidelines, teaching resources, lesson plans, and student materials. Document analysis allowed researchers to examine the official framework and instructional materials used in the implementation of differentiated learning, providing a comprehensive understanding of the context and resources available.

Following data collection, thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns, themes, and key findings related to the implementation of differentiated learning. This involved organizing and categorizing the collected data to extract meaningful insights and draw conclusions. Through iterative processes of coding, categorizing, and interpreting the data, researchers were able to uncover underlying patterns and themes that emerged from the data, shedding light on the effectiveness and challenges of differentiated learning in the context of English language teaching.

The trustworthiness of this research was ensured using data triangulation and method triangulation. Data triangulation involved gathering information from various sources, such as semi-structured interviews with english teachers, direct observations in classrooms during the development of learning materials, and analysis of documents related to the Merdeka Curriculum and English learning materials. Meanwhile, method triangulation was conducted by applying various data collection techniques, including interviews, observations, and document analysis, to examine the consistency of the findings. By employing both strategies, the research aimed to ensure that the data obtained were trustworthy, reliable, and that the interpretations made were accurate and verified from various perspectives interpretation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Concept of Differentiated Learning

Definition of Differentiated learning

Differentiated learning is an instructional approach aimed at ensuring that students remain motivated and successful in their educational endeavors. It involves tailoring the learning experience to accommodate students' individual talents, interests, and particular requirements, thereby fostering their active engagement with the content (Tomlinson, 2001). Educators need to recognize that there exist diverse methods of comprehending a subject when implementing differentiation strategies. (Pozas et al., 2020). In differentiated learning, educators are required to integrate three essential elements: content, process, and products (Ismajli & Morina, 2018). Moreover, when implementing differentiated instruction, teachers should utilize a range of approaches in teaching a subject (Boelens et al., 2018). Educators strategize and arrange materials, tasks, activities to be carried out either in the classroom or remotely, as well as culminating assessments, all customized to accommodate the varying readiness levels, interests, and preferences of their students.

Differentiated learning acknowledges that students possess distinct abilities, interests, and learning styles, and thus requires educators to tailor their instructional methods accordingly (Valiandes & Neophytou, 2018). While it does not imply a one-on-one approach for each student, it advocates for flexible teaching strategies that address diverse student needs within the classroom setting. This approach encourages teachers to provide various learning opportunities and support systems, such as offering different levels of difficulty in assignments or providing alternative learning materials, to cater to students' individual strengths and areas for growth. By embracing differentiated learning, educators empower students to take ownership of their learning journey while ensuring that all learners have equitable access to educational opportunities and resources.

Principles of Differentiated Learning

In implementing differentiated learning, educators should adhere to several core principles. According to Tomlinson, there are five fundamental principles associated with differentiated learning (Gusteti & Neviyarni, 2022). These five principles can be summarized as shown in Figure 1.

These are the five fundamental principles related to differentiated learning that educators should keep in mind when implementing it in the classroom: a) Classroom Leadership and Routines: This principle emphasizes the importance of effective classroom management and organization. Teachers should establish clear routines, expectations, and procedures to create a conducive learning environment. Strong leadership skills are essential for guiding students through differentiated activities and ensuring that all learners feel supported and engaged; b) Continuous Assessment: Continuous assessment involves ongoing monitoring of students' progress and understanding. Rather than relying solely on traditional tests and exams, teachers use a variety of assessment methods, such as observations, quizzes, and informal assessments, to gather data about student learning. This allows educators to adjust their instruction and provide timely feedback to students, facilitating continuous growth and improvemen; c) Quality Curriculum: A quality curriculum is essential for differentiated learning. It should be well-designed, relevant, and aligned with learning objectives. Teachers

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must select and adapt instructional materials that cater to the diverse needs and interests of students. This may involve incorporating various resources, texts, and activities to accommodate different learning styles and abilities; d) Responsive Teaching: Responsive teaching involves adapting instruction based on students' individual needs, interests, and abilities. Teachers must be flexible and responsive to students' feedback and performance, adjusting their teaching strategies accordingly. This may include providing additional support for struggling students, offering enrichment activities for advanced learners, and differentiating instruction to meet diverse learning preferences; e) The Learning Environment: The learning environment plays a crucial role in differentiated instruction. Teachers should create a supportive and inclusive atmosphere where all students feel valued, respected, and motivated to learn. This may involve fostering positive relationships, promoting collaboration and peer learning, and designing flexible learning spaces that accommodate different modes of instruction and interaction.

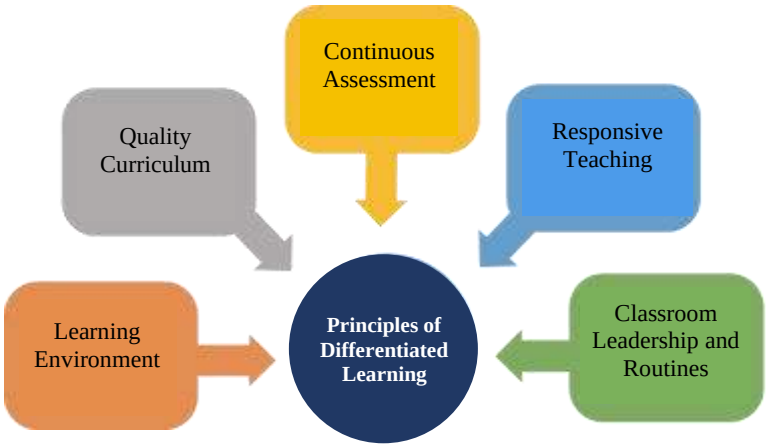


Figure 1. Principles of Differentiated Learning

Differentiated learning acknowledges the individual learning styles, capacities, and requirements of students. Through integrating these principles into their teaching methodologies, instructors can more effectively accommodate these diversities and deliver a more efficient and encompassing education to all students.

Differentiated Elements

There are four distinct aspects of learning that can be mastered or controlled by the teacher: Content, process, products, and classroom environment or learning climate (Gusteti & Neviyarni, 2022). Here are explanations for these four aspects:

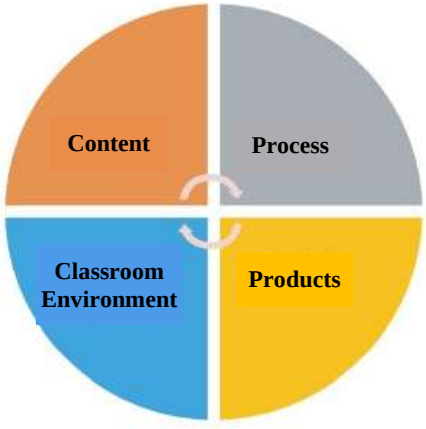


Figure 2. Aspects of Differentiated Learning

Content: This refers to the subject matter or what students are expected to learn. It includes the topics, concepts, and knowledge that are part of the curriculum. Teachers have control over the content by selecting relevant and appropriate materials, textbooks, and resources. They should ensure that the content aligns with the learning objectives and the needs of their students. Differentiation in content means adapting what is taught to match the readiness, interests, and learning profiles of the students.

Process: The process of learning involves how students engage with the content. It pertains to the methods, strategies, and activities used in the teaching and learning process. Teachers can differentiate the process by varying instructional techniques, providing choices in how students access information, or offering

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different paths for students to explore the content. This accommodates diverse learning styles and preferences among students.

Products: Products represent the ways students demonstrate their learning and understanding of the content. These can take various forms, such as assignments, projects, assessments, or presentations. Teachers can differentiate products by allowing students to showcase their knowledge in ways that suit their strengths and interests. Some students may excel in written assignments, while others may prefer creating multimedia presentations or engaging in hands-on projects.

Classroom Environment: The learning climate in the classroom significantly impacts the teaching and learning process. It includes factors like the physical arrangement of the classroom, classroom routines, and the emotional environment. Teachers can differentiate the classroom environment by creating a safe and inclusive space where students feel respected and valued. A positive classroom environment encourages student engagement, risk-taking, and a sense of belonging.

By mastering and adjusting these four aspects, teachers can effectively implement differentiated instruction, ensuring that every student's unique needs, interests, and abilities are accommodated in the learning process. This approach fosters a more inclusive and student-centered educational experience.

Development of Differentiated Learning Materials

The development of differentiated learning materials is a key step in implementing differentiated learning at Madrasah Aliyah YPIP Panjeng. Based on interviews with English teachers, direct observations, and related document analyses, several important findings can be identified. *First*, it was found that English teachers have adopted various strategies in developing learning materials that can adapt to the needs and characteristics of students. These strategies include using diverse teaching materials, selecting learning activities that suit students' learning styles, and assigning challenging tasks according to each student's abilities. For example, some teachers have utilized technology in teaching, such as multimedia and online learning platforms, to provide variation in material presentation and enhance student engagement.

Second, efforts are made to address the specific needs of students in developing learning materials. These teachers have endeavored to understand the individual needs and interests of students, as well as to create learning materials that stimulate interest and enhance student motivation. For instance, in the use of reading texts, teachers have selected texts relevant to students' daily lives and linked them to local cultural contexts to reinforce students' understanding of the material.

However, several challenges also emerged in the process of developing differentiated learning materials. One of them is resource limitations, both in terms of time and materials. Some teachers expressed difficulties in adapting learning materials to various levels of student abilities in large classes. Additionally, the lack of adequate training and support for teachers in implementing differentiated learning also hinders the development of effective learning materials.

From these findings, it can be concluded that the development of differentiated learning materials has positively contributed to students' learning experiences at Madrasah Aliyah YPIP Panjeng. However, further efforts are needed to enhance teachers' capacity and expand access to resources that support the effective implementation of differentiated learning. This will help ensure that every student can benefit maximally from learning tailored to their needs and potentials.

Application of Differentiated Learning Strategies

In efforts to enhance the quality of English learning at Madrasah Aliyah YPIP Panjeng, the implementation of differentiated learning strategies becomes the primary focus for teachers. This step is taken after developing the necessary learning materials and tools. The implementation steps are crucial in the implementation of differentiated learning. The following are the steps taken by English teachers at Madrasah Aliyah YPIP Panjeng in implementing differentiated learning strategies: 1) Flexible Grouping Usage: English teachers have implemented flexible grouping as one strategy to align learning with students' needs. Through this grouping, students with similar or different ability levels are placed in the same group, allowing them to support and collaborate with each other in understanding the learning material; b) Project-Based Learning: Some teachers also employ project-based learning or open-ended assignments. In this approach, students are given the freedom to explore their own interests and skills to gain a deeper understanding of the learning material; c) Utilization of Technology: Efforts to utilize technology in supporting differentiated learning are evident through the use of online learning platforms or educational apps. This enables students to access additional materials, interactive exercises, or learning resources tailored to their individual needs; d) Challenges in Implementation: Despite efforts made in implementing differentiated learning strategies, there are still some challenges faced. One of them is the time constraints in adjusting teaching to the individual needs

e-ISSN: 2775 – 8672
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of each student in large classes. Additionally, constraints in assessing individual student progress and providing relevant feedback also pose challenges that need to be addressed.

Through the implementation of differentiated learning strategies, English teachers at Madrasah Aliyah YPIP Panjeng have made a positive contribution to students' learning experiences. However, to enhance its effectiveness, further efforts are needed to improve teacher capacity, address challenges related to resource limitations, and strengthen the comprehensive implementation of differentiated learning strategies.

Evaluation and Monitoring of the Learning Process

Careful evaluation and monitoring are key to ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of the implemented learning strategies. Through evaluation, teachers can assess the success of implementing differentiated learning strategies, identify strengths and weaknesses, and determine necessary improvement measures. The following are the steps taken by English teachers at Madrasah Aliyah YPIP Panjeng in evaluating and monitoring the differentiated learning process: 1) Various evaluation Methods: English teachers use various evaluation methods to measure students' understanding and learning progress. These methods include written tests, performance-based projects, student portfolios, and direct observation. By combining various evaluation methods, teachers can gain a comprehensive understanding of each student's learning progress; b) Monitoring the Learning Process: Teachers actively monitor the learning process in the classroom to ensure that each student receives appropriate support according to their needs. This is done through direct observation, interaction with students, and analysis of evaluation results. By continuously monitoring the learning process, teachers can identify potential problems or difficulties faced by students and take necessary corrective measures; c) Use of Evaluation Data: Evaluation results are used by teachers to make adjustments in the learning process. For example, if evaluation results indicate that some students are having difficulty understanding a particular concept, teachers can provide additional assistance or adopt different learning strategies to facilitate their understanding; d) Materials for Remedial and Enrichment: Based on evaluation results, teachers prepare specific materials for remedial and enrichment purposes. For students who struggle with certain topics, remedial materials and activities are designed to help them catch up and master the required concepts. Conversely, for students who excel and demonstrate a higher understanding, enrichment materials and activities are provided to challenge and further develop their skills and knowledge; e) Feedback to Students: Additionally, teachers also provide constructive feedback to students based on evaluation results. This feedback aims to provide clear guidance to students on areas that need improvement and steps they can take to enhance their learning achievements.

Through careful evaluation and monitoring of the learning process, English teachers at Madrasah Aliyah YPIP Panjeng can identify areas for improvement and take appropriate steps to enhance the effectiveness of differentiated learning. Thus, the sustainability of implementing differentiated learning strategies can be maintained, and each student can continue to receive support tailored to their needs and potentials.

Challenges and Constraints

The implementation of differentiated learning strategies is not without its share of challenges and constraints faced by English teachers at Madrasah Aliyah YPIP Panjeng. Through identifying these challenges and constraints, a better understanding can be gained regarding the obstacles that hinder the success of implementing differentiated learning. Here are the results and discussions regarding the challenges and constraints faced: 1) Resource Limitations: One of the major challenges faced is resource limitations, both in terms of time and materials. Teachers often feel restricted in developing and implementing differentiated learning due to limited time, large class sizes, and the availability of teaching materials suitable for diverse student needs; b) Teacher Capacity: Another challenge is the lack of adequate training and support for teachers in implementing differentiated learning. Some teachers may not have a deep enough understanding of differentiated learning strategies or may feel less confident in applying them without adequate support; c) Differentiated Assessment: Differentiated assessment for each student is another constraint in implementing differentiated learning. Teachers need to face challenges in assessing individual student learning progress and providing relevant feedback according to their abilities; d) Student Engagement: Some students may not actively engage in the differentiated learning process, either due to lack of motivation or inability to adapt to the new learning environment. This can hinder the achievement of set learning objectives.

Despite facing several challenges and constraints, it is important to acknowledge that efforts to overcome these obstacles can enhance the effectiveness of differentiated learning at Madrasah Aliyah YPIP Panjeng. With awareness and commitment to addressing these barriers, teachers can develop strategies and solutions to improve the quality of learning for all students.

Benefits and Implications

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The implementation of differentiated learning strategies at Madrasah Aliyah YPIP Panjeng brings several significant benefits and important implications for the learning process. By identifying these benefits, a better understanding can be gained regarding the positive impact of implementing differentiated learning. Here are the results and discussions regarding the benefits and implications of differentiated learning: 1) Improved Student Understanding: One of the main benefits of differentiated learning is the improvement of students' understanding of the learning material. By providing material tailored to the needs and abilities of each student, differentiated learning allows every student to learn in the most effective way for them;2) Increased Learning Motivation: Differentiated learning can also increase students' learning motivation. By providing engaging and relevant learning activities that match students' interests and needs, differentiated learning can help enhance student engagement in the learning process; 3) Development of Individual Skills: Through differentiated learning, every student has the opportunity to develop their skills and abilities individually. Teachers can provide additional support to students who need it, as well as challenge students with higher abilities to reach their full potential; 4) Creation of an Inclusive Learning Environment: Implementing differentiated learning creates an inclusive learning environment where every student is valued and supported in achieving academic success. By considering the unique needs and characteristics of each student, differentiated learning creates an environment that respects diversity and provides opportunities for all students to thrive; 5) Preparation for the Future: Differentiated learning also helps students become better prepared to face challenges in the future. By acquiring learning experiences tailored to their needs, students become more capable of overcoming obstacles and achieving success in their personal and professional lives.

Through understanding the benefits and implications of differentiated learning, stakeholders can recognize the importance of this approach in improving the quality of learning and providing greater opportunities for every student to reach their full potential. With the right commitment and support, differentiated learning can become a strong foundation for inclusive and sustainable education at Madrasah Aliyah YPIP Panjeng.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The implementation of differentiated learning strategies at Madrasah Aliyah YPIP Panjeng has brought significant benefits to the learning process. The steps taken by English teachers in developing differentiated learning materials, applying teaching strategies according to students' needs, and evaluating and monitoring the learning process have provided opportunities for each student to learn according to their needs and potential. As a result, students' understanding, motivation, and engagement in learning have significantly increased. Differentiated learning also creates an inclusive environment that respects students' diversity and provides better preparation for their future. However, challenges such as limited resources and teacher capacity, as well as the need for diverse assessment approaches, still need to be addressed to improve implementation effectiveness. Therefore, it is important for the school to provide adequate support and training to teachers, allocate resources for the development of diverse teaching materials, and encourage active student participation in the learning process. By taking these steps, Madrasah Aliyah YPIP Panjeng can strengthen the implementation of differentiated learning and improve overall education quality. Hopefully, the successful approach taken at Madrasah Aliyah YPIP Panjeng can be adopted and replicated by other educational institutions, so that every student can achieve their maximum potential in learning.

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