

Implementing Diagnostic Assessment in Designing Differentiated Learning for English Language Learning at the Junior High Schools

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Abstract

The Merdeka Curriculum is an educational framework in Indonesia that emphasizes core subjects, personality development, and student skills. It integrates various assessments, including diagnostic, formative, and summative, to tailor education to individual student needs. Diagnostic assessments, in particular, are used to identify students' strengths and weaknesses, facilitating personalized learning experiences. Therefore, this study focuses on the implementation of diagnostic assessments in designing differentiated learning modules for English language learning in junior high schools in East Lombok. The purpose of this study is to investigate how teachers use diagnostic assessments to identify students' learning profiles, interests, and readiness, and how they subsequently design and implement differentiated teaching modules. This qualitative study involves interviews and observations with teachers who are implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Data were collected through participatory observations and in-depth interviews to understand the practical application. The study revealed that teachers use three main tools for diagnostic assessment: the Quizizz application, the Akupintar.id website, and questionnaires. These tools help identify students' learning profiles and interests at the beginning of the school year. The research also identified five steps to develop differentiated learning modules: assessing students' needs, setting learning objectives, designing learning activities, incorporating different learning styles, and conducting regular formative assessments. Additionally, seven steps were found to be crucial for implementing differentiated learning, including classroom layout, use of varied learning materials, flexible teaching approaches, and regular assessment and feedback. The study can be concluded that the implementation of diagnostic assessments in the Merdeka Curriculum significantly aids in designing effective differentiated learning modules. This approach helps cater to individual student needs, enhancing their learning experiences and outcomes.

Keywords: Merdeka Curriculum; Diagnostic Assessment; Differentiated Learning model; English Language Learning

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INTRODUCTION

The Merdeka Curriculum represents a pioneering educational framework implemented in Indonesia with the objective of enhancing students' learning experiences. It achieves this by emphasizing core subjects, personality development, and skill acquisition. This curriculum is distinct for its holistic approach, which integrates various forms of assessment to cater to the diverse needs of students. Among these assessments, diagnostic assessments are particularly crucial as they identify students' strengths and weaknesses at the beginning of the academic year. This early identification facilitates the creation of personalized learning pathways, ensuring that the unique needs of each student are effectively addressed.

The implementation of diagnostic assessments is globally recognized as a best practice for fostering individualized learning. Research by Wiggins (2021) and Tomlinson

(2017) underscores the importance of these assessments in providing critical insights into students' cognitive and non-cognitive abilities. This enables educators to design targeted instructional strategies. Within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, diagnostic assessments are pivotal in nurturing students' interests and talents through differentiated learning. Differentiated learning is an instructional approach tailored to meet the diverse needs of students, acknowledging their varying levels of readiness, interests, and learning profiles. The growing body of literature highlights the positive impact of differentiated learning on student engagement and achievement (Brown & Lee, 2021; Malacapay, 2019). However, the practical implementation of differentiated learning in Indonesian schools, particularly within the Merdeka Curriculum, remains underexplored.

This study aims to fill the gap in the literature by examining how diagnostic assessments are utilized to design differentiated learning modules for English language learners in junior high schools in East Lombok. The shift towards the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia represents a significant change in educational practice, necessitating a deeper understanding of how diagnostic assessments can be effectively integrated into teaching strategies. Previous studies have highlighted several challenges, such as a lack of teacher training in diagnostic assessment techniques, insufficient resources, and the persistence of traditional, teacher-centered instructional methods (Kamilah & Anugerahwati, 2019; Wulandari et al., 2023). These challenges hinder the full realization of the curriculum's potential, making it imperative to explore practical solutions and best practices.

Learning and assessment should be integrated. Educators and students must comprehend the essential competencies and complete the learning process to attain them. The connection between learning and assessment in achieving learning goals is essential (Rido, & Wahyudin. (2020). Proper assessment provides accurate feedback and information about the level of achievement (desired outcomes). Krikulum Merdeka has a diagnostic assessment for student profiles, interests, and readiness to learn. Diagnostic assessments determine student readiness, pre-implementation understanding, and learning needs, enabling differentiated learning for teachers. Grant Wiggins, an education expert, suggests that diagnostic assessments should provide a clear understanding of a student's knowledge. Good diagnostic assessments help teachers identify strengths and weaknesses, allowing them to tailor lessons to meet individual needs.

Diagnostic assessment is a specific component within the Merdeka Curriculum aimed at identifying and understanding students' characteristics, competencies, strengths, weaknesses, and learning styles. This facilitates the design of learning experiences that align with diverse competencies and student conditions, as outlined in Ministerial Regulation No. 719/P/2020. Diagnostic assessment is divided into two categories: cognitive and non-cognitive assessments. Cognitive diagnostic assessment aims to demonstrate students' strengths and weaknesses concerning their knowledge structure and processing skills. Diagnostic assessment is vital for student understanding, providing feedback and shaping learning for overall development. Educators can create better procedures to support students by combining professional approaches and principles. Graduate competency standards outline qualifications, including attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Content standards set by the government also need consideration, noting diverse options for teaching students (Ayodele, 2017). The government has set educational assessment standards to achieve graduate competency. One promising approach to enhance learning effectiveness is differentiated learning. A differentiated learning model recognizes that students have varying needs, interests, and abilities. Therefore, teachers must differentiate instruction, content, and assessment to meet these diverse needs. Tomlinson (2017) defines differentiated learning as adapting classroom to individual student needs.

The differentiated learning approach in Kurikulum Merdeka is not equitable in practice, requiring further research for implementation in the East Lombok region. Teachers in Indonesia should use evaluation diagnosis to design differentiated learning, but currently use teacher-centered, monotonous methods that do not respond to student demands. The ignored outcomes are not of use to the student. Based on the report from Directorate's Guru Pendidikan Dasar website, there are 160 Guru Pengerak, 269 Pegerak schools, and 1,218 Krikulum Merdeka schools in East Lombok. Researchers have conducted five studies on these schools. Insani et al. (2023) Nurmayana et al. (Wulandari et al., 2012) (2023) Umami et al (2023). This study examines diagnostic assessment results in English subjects and how they can be used to design differentiated learning strategies.

By situating this study within the broader context of educational assessment and differentiated instruction, it becomes evident that understanding the practical application of these concepts is crucial for improving educational outcomes. The findings from this research will provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers, contributing to the ongoing efforts to enhance the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum and support student-centered learning approaches. In summary, this study addresses a significant gap in the literature by exploring the integration of diagnostic assessments into the design and implementation of differentiated learning modules within the Merdeka Curriculum. Its relevance is anchored in the potential to inform best practices and policy decisions, leading to more personalized and effective educational experiences for students in Indonesia and beyond.

Considering the importance of this diagnostic assessment in designing differentiated learning in EFL classroom in the Merdeka curriculum, this study aims to investigate 1) how do teachers identify students' learning profiles, interests, and readiness through diagnostic assessments. 2) how do teachers design differentiated teaching modules based on diagnostic assessment results, 3) how teachers apply differentiated learning in English language teaching. By gaining a deeper understanding of the implementation of cognitive diagnostic assessments in designing differentiated English language learning, this research will be valuable to educators and schools in developing more effective educational programs that meet the diverse needs of students entering the area of Merdeka curriculum. The study addresses a critical gap in the literature by examining the real-world challenges and solutions associated with implementing differentiated learning strategies, offering practical recommendations for educators and policymakers.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

The research methodology employed in this study is a qualitative approach, chosen primarily to gain an in-depth understanding of the perspectives and experiences of English teachers at SMP Islam Kumbung. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is a process that aims to understand social phenomena and human problems by studying methods that delve deeply into these issues. This approach is particularly suitable for this study as it focuses on the rich, detailed exploration of teachers' viewpoints and the contextual factors influencing their teaching practices. The descriptive qualitative method aims to provide a comprehensive overview of various aspects, such as students' learning profiles, their interests, and their motivation to learn. This understanding is achieved through the implementation of diagnostic assessments, the development of educational modules, and the practice of differentiated learning.

Creswell (2017) supports this approach, highlighting that descriptive qualitative research involves immersing oneself in the field and collecting data directly from the area under study. This could involve local communities, schools, educational institutions,

community organizations, or government agencies. In this context, the qualitative approach is well-suited to address the research questions because it allows for a nuanced and holistic examination of the educational environment at SMP Islam Kumbung. By engaging directly with the teachers and understanding their experiences and challenges, the study can uncover insights that might not be visible through quantitative methods. This approach ensures that the data collected is rich, detailed, and reflective of the actual conditions and experiences of the participants, providing a deeper understanding of the educational dynamics at play.

Research Participant

The research participants in this study were eight English teachers who play pivotal roles in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka at their schools. These teachers are members of the Guru Penggerak, a group of educators dedicated to driving educational innovation and improvement. Specifically, they are involved in applying diagnostic assessments and differentiated learning models, which are key components of the new learning paradigm under the Kurikulum Merdeka. This selection of participants is particularly relevant to the study's objectives. By focusing on these teachers, the research aims to gain insights into the practicalities and challenges of implementing these innovative educational strategies. Their firsthand experiences and perspectives are invaluable in understanding how the Kurikulum Merdeka is enacted in real classroom settings and how it affects teaching and learning processes.

Dealing with the selected participant of the study, it aligns with Yani et al. (2023), who emphasize that research subjects in studies on educational innovation should be those directly involved in the implementation of the curriculum and the differentiated learning model. By engaging with these active participants, the study ensures that the data collected is grounded in the realities of educational practice, providing a comprehensive view of the impact and effectiveness of the Kurikulum Merdeka. The involvement of these eight English teachers, who are at the forefront of educational reform through the Kurikulum Merdeka, is crucial for the study. Their experiences and insights will shed light on the practical applications of diagnostic assessments and differentiated learning, offering valuable contributions to the ongoing discourse on educational innovation and effectiveness.

Data Collection Technique

Data collection techniques include activities used to gather data for a study. In qualitative research, data collection happens in the natural environment through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and written documentation. This study used interviews and observations to collect research data. An interview was conducted in a two-way communication where relevant information is gathered. The purpose of this interview is to gather study-relevant information, (Yusuf, 2014), he further argues that an interview is a direct interaction between an interviewer and an interviewee, involving communication and questioning about the subject of investigation. This study used unstructured interviews among different types of interviews or informants. Arikunto (2016) defines unstructured interviews as open-ended questions following interview guidelines.

The second data collection technique used in this study was observation embracing nonverbal behavior at SMP Islam Kumbung, Sugiyono (2018), says that observation is a

unique method of data collection that applies to both humans and natural objects. This observation is done after conducting interviews to prepare the teacher's lessons. The data obtained is original and does not use techniques. Yusuf (2014) states that the success of observation as a data collection method depends on the researcher. By combining interviews and document analysis, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of diagnostic assessments in designing differentiated English teaching at SMP Islam Kumbung.

Data Analysis

The analysis technique employed in this study is qualitative analysis, which utilizes the researcher's perspective as the primary analytical tool. This method is chosen to deeply understand the complex and nuanced data collected through diagnostic assessments. Before entering the field, the researcher conducts a thorough analysis by reviewing relevant previous studies and engaging in discussions with teachers and principals. These preliminary steps help the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of differentiated learning, ensuring the accuracy of the research and avoiding repetition of existing studies. The qualitative analysis approach is well-suited for this study as it allows for a detailed examination of the diagnostic assessment data. This method involves interpreting and making sense of the data in a way that captures the rich, contextual insights provided by the participants. In accordance with the methodology outlined by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), this study follows a structured analysis procedure comprising three main stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data Condensation involves selecting, focusing, simplifying, and transforming the raw data collected during the study. This step helps in managing the large volume of data and identifying the key themes and patterns relevant to the research questions.

Following this, data display is the process of organizing the condensed data into a visual format, such as charts, diagrams, or matrices, which makes it easier to draw meaningful insights and identify relationships within the data. Finally, Conclusion Drawing/Verification involves interpreting the displayed data to draw conclusions and verify their validity. This stage includes revisiting the data to confirm the findings and ensure they are supported by the evidence. By following this systematic approach, the study aims to provide a comprehensive and accurate analysis of the diagnostic assessment data, offering valuable insights into the implementation and effectiveness of differentiated learning in the context of the Kurikulum Merdeka. In summary, the qualitative analysis technique applied in this study, guided by the procedures of Data Condensation, Data Display, and Conclusion Drawing/Verification, ensures a thorough and systematic examination of the research data. This approach not only enhances the accuracy and depth of the analysis but also aligns with the study's goal of understanding the complex dynamics of differentiated learning through diagnostic assessments.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Finding

This study present the key findings of research, which focused on the implementation of diagnostic assessment in desgning diferenciated learning of the "Merdeka Curriculum" for English language learning. Our study aimed to gain insights into how teachers effectively employ diagnostic assessment to enhance students' learning experiences and outcomes within this curriculum.

This study used interviews and observations to collect data to address research questions. Interviews gathered oral information on students' learning profiles and interests through diagnostic assessments. This data was then used to design differentiated teaching

modules. Observations focused on differentiated learning processes used by teachers in the classroom. Data was analyzed using three methods: condensation, display, and conclusion drawing. The findings from interviews and observations are presented as follows:

Steps of Identifying Students' Learning Profiles, Interests, and Readiness

The study aims to understand students' learning profiles, interests, and readiness. Diagnostic assessment was used to help teachers plan tailored instruction. Diagnostic assessment is essential for planning differentiated instruction (Faiz, & Kurniawaty, 2022; Hasanah et al., 2022, 2023). This stage identifies students' learning strategies to inform instructional design that suits their diverse conditions. Teachers can then adjust and determine appropriate instructional approaches based on students' abilities, (Brown, & Lee, 2021; Rahmatika & Fajriawan, 2024). Two types of diagnostic assessment are used in this study: cognitive and non-cognitive. Cognitive assessment tests students' learning abilities and achievements (Malacapay, 2019; Yusuf, 2023). Non-cognitive diagnostic assessment explores students' psychological and socio-emotional aspects, remote learning activities, family conditions, social interactions, learning styles, character, and interests (Widodo et al., 2022). Teachers use the non-cognitive diagnostic assessment to evaluate students' psychological condition and design service programs (Munawwar et al., 2023). Teachers use both cognitive and non-cognitive assessment to identify students' learning profiles, interests, and readiness.

Non-cognitive diagnostic assessment

Non-cognitive diagnostic assessment is conducted to determine the psychological, emotional, and social conditions of students (Supriyadi, et, al., 2022; Yani, et, al., 2023; Yusuf, 2023). This assessment is aimed at evaluating the personal conditions of learners (Fan, & Guan, 2021; Yusuf, 2023). The results determine the efforts of intervention that teachers will undertake. These personal conditions are considered to influence the learning process of the students.

Cognitive diagnostic assessment is used to determine competency achievements. The method for conducting cognitive diagnostic assessment tests is to measure the competency achievements of students periodically. Cognitive diagnostic assessment is conducted at the beginning and end of learning to determine the extent to which students are able to master the taught material. This assessment is carried out routinely at the start and end of learning, or can also be known as formative assessment.

Evaluating learning readiness is called cognitive diagnostic assessment

Based on the interview and observation results, the steps for conducting diagnostic assessment involve several stages that involve collecting information about the needs, abilities, and characteristics of students at the beginning of the learning process. The steps are as follows:

Table.1 Diagnostic Assesment Steps for Students' needs, Ability and Characters

Assessment Steps	Aims
Assessment Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine the objectives of diagnostic assessment. Select appropriate media and instruments for the assessment objectives, such as tests, interviews, observations, or utilizing online media like quiz applications such as Quizizz, Akupintar. Plan the schedule, space, and resources needed to carry out the assessment
Assessment Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct the assessment by collecting data through the selected media and instruments. Ensure that the assessment process is

	carried out objectively and in accordance with the predetermined procedures
Data Analysis and Interpretation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate the assessment results to identify patterns, needs, and learning strengths of students. Analyze the assessment results deeply to understand the students' level of understanding and draw conclusions about their abilities and learning needs.
Follow-Up:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on the assessment results, develop a lesson plan that aligns with the needs and learning characteristics of the students. Identify strategies and interventions needed to support students who require additional assistance in learning.

Table.1 shows that teachers apply cognitive diagnostic assessment and non-cognitif assesment altogether to identify Students' Learning Profiles, Interests, and Readiness according to assesment stages as mentioned in the table.

Media and instruments of diagnostic assessment

There are no specific provisions regarding the media and instruments of Diagnostic Assessment, (Nasution, 2021; Hikmawati, & Hosnan, 2022; Supriyadi, et, al., 2022; Wulandari, et, al., 2023). Teachers are given the freedom to determine the media and instruments according to the needs and conditions of their respective schools. From the interview results, several media and instruments were found to be used, including the quizizz application/website, akupintar, and questionnaires. GT stated: "...the assessment is conducted through <https://quizizz.com/>" while ER explained: "...by conducting non-cognitive diagnostic assessments through the website <https://akupintar.id/>"

Designing Differentiated Learning Modules

Analysis of Assessment Results; Based on interview results, the researcher found that the analysis of diagnostic assessment results using the website/application Quizizz and Akupintar.id is automatically readable by the application. This was conveyed by GT: "I conduct non-cognitive diagnostic assessments using the Quizizz application, where the application automatically reads the students' answer results, as well as cognitive diagnostic assessments."

Meanwhile, for assessments using questionnaires developed independently by teachers, the assessment results are manually conducted with predetermined criteria and formulas. Thus, teachers can gain valuable insights into students' learning needs and plan appropriate interventions to support their learning.

Differentiated learning

Differentiated learning is an instructional approach designed to meet the diverse learning needs of students. This approach enables teachers to provide learning experiences tailored to students' learning styles, interests, levels of understanding, and individual needs. Forms of differentiated learning in the classroom may include three types: content differentiation, process differentiation, and product differentiation, as GT stated: ".... in planning differentiated content and product learning. As for utilizing assessment results in the learning process, I use them for differentiated process learning."

The steps to develop differentiated instruction learning modules

The development of differentiated instructional modules is crucial as it enables teachers to tailor learning to the diverse learning needs of students. Consequently, students become more motivated and engaged in learning, thereby enhancing their understanding

of the material. To develop differentiated instructional modules, the following steps are required:

Table.2 Steps in developing differentiated instruction learning modules

Stages in developing differentiated instruction learning modules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying the needs and characteristics of students through diagnostic assessment to understand their learning styles, interests, and levels of understanding. • Establishing clear learning objectives and aligning them with students' needs. • Preparing diverse learning materials and activities in accordance with the identified learning needs. • Preparing varied instructional media, learning resources, and strategies according to students' learning needs. • Regularly evaluating student progress and making adjustments as needed.
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Tomlinson (2017) emphasizes the importance of identifying students' needs and designing responsive instruction to create an inclusive and effective learning experience for all students. By following these steps, teachers can create instructional modules that enable each student to learn to their fullest potential. Similar steps are also described by ER: "... through differentiated instruction. Here are some steps that can be taken: conducting a Learning Profile Analysis, developing Diverse Learning Materials, adjusting Learning Activities, Flexibility in Delivery, utilizing Additional Resources, developing Differentiated Assignments, providing Ongoing Formative Evaluation."

Implementation of Differentiated Instruction

This study explores the extent to which teachers implement differentiated instruction in the context of teaching English language subjects. The concept of differentiated instruction refers to teaching strategies tailored to the individual needs and characteristics of students, thereby enabling each student to reach their maximum potential. As exemplified by Ahyar in his teaching approach, classroom arrangements are adjusted to accommodate predetermined student groups to support group work or individual needs. The following are the steps of implementing differentiated instruction based on students need:

Table.3 Steps of Implementing Differentiated Instruction

Steps of Implementation of Differentiated Instruction	<p>Classroom Arrangement and Physical Setting: The classroom space is adjusted to support differentiated learning that facilitates group work or individual needs.</p> <p>Use of Materials and Learning Resources: Provided learning materials are varied and accessible to students according to their learning styles and readiness.</p> <p>Flexible Teaching Approaches: Teachers utilize teaching strategies adaptable to students' learning styles, such as visual students with videos, auditory students with podcasts, and kinesthetic students with hands-on activities, adjusting approaches according to individual students' abilities and needs.</p> <p>Assignment and Activity Distribution: Assignments and activities given vary according to students' comprehension levels and abilities, and teachers provide challenging yet appropriate tasks for each student.</p>
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Time Management and Teacher-Student Interaction: Teachers manage classroom time to ensure all students receive equal attention and foster deep interaction accommodating individual needs.

Evaluation and Feedback: Teachers evaluate individual student learning progress periodically and provide specific feedback to facilitate each student's development.

Collaboration and Collaborative Support: Collaboration among students in different learning situations is encouraged, and teachers provide support to students needing additional assistance.

Table. 3. Indicates that the implementation of differentiated instruction involves an approach designed to accommodate individual differences within the classroom, including students' learning styles, interests, and readiness. Based on the data classroom observation, the study found that teachers implement differentiated instruction according to students' needs, effectively responding to students with different levels of understanding in the English language subject.

Discussion

This study examines how teachers use diagnostic assessments to identify students' learning profiles, interests, and readiness for learning, and how teachers design different instructional modules based on the results of diagnostic assessments. Data were presented on the extent to which teachers are implementing differentiated English instruction. The researchers will discuss these results separately.

How teachers use diagnostic assessments to determine students' learning profiles, interests, and readiness to learn

This study employs three distinct models of tools to identify students' learning profiles, interests, and readiness: the Quizizz application/website, the akupintar.id platform, and a self-developed manual tool referred to as the Questioner. These tools are instrumental in performing non-cognitive diagnostic assessments, which are crucial for understanding and catering to the diverse needs of students. The Quizizz application is a versatile online tool widely used in educational settings for its interactive and engaging approach to assessments. It allows educators to create customized quizzes that students can complete in a fun, gamified environment. In this study, Quizizz is utilized at the beginning of the academic year to assess students' learning profiles and interests. By analyzing the results, educators can gain insights into students' preferences, strengths, and areas that may require additional support. The interactive nature of Quizizz also helps to engage students right from the start, making the diagnostic process enjoyable and less intimidating. Akupintar.id is another valuable platform employed in this study to identify students' learning profiles and interests.

The Indonesian educational website offers a range of tools and resources tailored to students' needs. It includes various assessments designed to evaluate different aspects of student learning, such as cognitive abilities, interests, and learning styles. By leveraging the capabilities of akupintar.id, educators can gather comprehensive data on their students, which is essential for designing effective and personalized learning experiences. The platform's user-friendly interface ensures that students can easily navigate and complete the assessments, providing reliable data for analysis. In addition to the digital tools, researchers have developed a manual tool called the Questioner to perform diagnostic assessments. This tool consists of a series of structured questions aimed at eliciting information about students' learning profiles and interests. The Questioner is

administered at the beginning of the academic year, alongside the Quizizz and akupintar.id assessments. The manual nature of the Questioner allows for a more personalized and in-depth understanding of each student, as it can be tailored to address specific areas of interest and concern. By combining the results from all three tools, educators can create a holistic profile of each student, which is crucial for differentiated instruction. These assessments are conducted at the beginning of the academic year to provide a baseline understanding of students' learning profiles and interests (Nasution, 2021; Yani, 2023; Wulandari, 2023).

Additionally, during the learning process, particularly at the beginning of each lesson, assessments are carried out to determine students' readiness. These readiness assessments usually take the form of questions related to the required materials for the lesson. By assessing readiness at the start of each lesson, educators can identify any gaps in knowledge or understanding that may need to be addressed before proceeding with new content. This approach ensures that students are adequately prepared and can engage meaningfully with the lesson. The use of Quizizz, akupintar.id, and the self-developed Questioner provides a comprehensive approach to diagnosing students' learning profiles, interests, and readiness. These tools enable educators to gather essential data that informs the design and implementation of differentiated instruction. By understanding students' unique needs and preferences, educators can create more effective and engaging learning experiences that cater to all students, fostering an inclusive and supportive educational environment. The systematic application of these diagnostic tools at the beginning of the academic year and throughout the learning process ensures that instruction is continuously tailored to meet the evolving needs of students.

How teachers design different educational modules based on the results of diagnostic assessments

Differentiated instruction is an educational approach that caters to the diverse learning needs of students by acknowledging their unique learning styles, interests, and motivations. The study identified five steps to developing differentiated instructional modules: identifying student needs, setting learning goals, designing diverse learning activities, considering student learning styles, interests, and readiness, and conducting regular formative assessment. Tomlinson (2017; Purba, & Susanti, 2021; Ismajli, & Imami-Morina, 2018; Pane, & Simanjuntak, 2022; Nurhudayana & Rukli, 2023) outlined key principles for differentiated instruction design are a) understanding students' learning needs: Teachers must identify students' needs, interests, ability levels, and learning styles to design appropriate instruction. a) Providing Choice and Flexibility: Provide choices in learning materials, activities, and assessments to meet the needs of individual students, b) providing Additional Support: Provide additional help, support, and supplemental materials to students who need them, c) alignment with Standards: Ensure that differentiated instruction remains aligned with applicable learning standards.

The Implementation of differentiated English Language Instruction

This study revealed that there are seven steps in implementing differentiated learning in ELT, namely: 1) classroom Layout and Physical Arrangement: Classrooms are adapted to support differentiated learning that facilitates group or individual work depending on student needs, 2) use of materials and learning resources: The learning materials provided vary and can be accessed by students depending on their learning style and motivation, 3) flexible teaching approaches: Teachers use teaching strategies that can adapt to students' learning styles, 4) this means videos for visual students, podcasts for auditory students, exercises for kinesthetic students, and tailoring the approach to each student's abilities and needs, 5) assigning tasks and activities: Tasks and activities assigned vary according to students' level of understanding and ability, and teachers provide tasks that are challenging but appropriate to each student's ability, 6) time Management and

Teacher-Student Interaction: Teachers manage class time to ensure that all students receive equal attention and that intensive interaction between teachers and students takes into account their individual needs, **7) assessment and Feedback:** Teachers individually and regularly assess student progress and provide tailored feedback to support each student's development, **8) collaboration and joint support:** Collaboration occurs between students in different learning situations, and teachers support students who need additional support.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of diagnostic assessment plays a crucial role in shaping differentiated English teaching and learning within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum in Junior Islamic schools. Diagnostic assessments serve as a foundational tool for teachers, enabling them to identify the diverse needs and characteristics of their students. This initial assessment process is essential for tailoring instruction to meet the varied learning profiles present in the classroom. The conclusion of the study offers a comprehensive overview of the research findings on the use of diagnostic assessment in designing differentiated learning. Firstly, it highlights the importance of teachers understanding the unique characteristics of their students. Teacher knowledge of student diversity is fundamental to creating instructional plans that are responsive to these differences. This requires teachers to invest ample time in developing instructional designs that are aligned with the varied conditions of their students. Secondly, the study emphasizes the necessity for teachers to develop both cognitive and non-cognitive diagnostic assessments at the beginning of instruction. These assessments are crucial for gaining a comprehensive understanding of student diversity. Cognitive diagnostic assessments are particularly important at the outset of instruction, as they help ascertain students' achievement levels. This information allows teachers to design competency-based instruction tailored to each student's needs, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to succeed. Thirdly, the study advocates for the use of a variety of methods, media, and learning resources to accommodate the different learning styles of students, including visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners.

By implementing diverse instructional strategies, teachers can create a more inclusive learning environment that addresses the individual preferences and strengths of each student. This approach not only enhances engagement but also promotes more effective learning outcomes. Finally, the implementation of differentiated instruction is seen as an effort to improve the quality of instruction, ensuring that each student has equal access to effective learning tailored to their needs. This individualized approach helps students grow and develop to their fullest potential. However, achieving this goal requires teachers to remain committed to continuous learning and hard work. Teachers must constantly update their knowledge and skills to effectively meet the diverse needs of their students and provide high-quality education. In summary, the study underscores the critical role of diagnostic assessments in facilitating differentiated instruction within the Merdeka Curriculum. By understanding student diversity, employing various assessment strategies, and utilizing diverse instructional methods, teachers can create a more equitable and effective learning environment that supports the optimal growth and development of all students.

RECOMMENDATION

The results of this study provide several recommendations for English teachers, schools, and future researchers regarding the effective implementation of differentiated instruction. These recommendations aim to optimize student learning experiences and create inclusive educational environments. To implement differentiated instruction effectively, English teachers need to thoroughly understand their students' individual

needs and learning styles. This understanding enables teachers to design and plan diverse lessons that consider students' preferences and interests, making learning more engaging and effective. Regular use of formative assessments is crucial, as it helps teachers monitor student progress and adjust their instruction to meet individual needs. By continuously assessing student performance, teachers can provide targeted support and interventions as needed. Collaboration with other teachers is also essential for sharing differentiated teaching strategies and best practices. Working together provides inspiration, support, and practical ideas that can enhance the effectiveness of differentiated instruction.

Additionally, teachers should remain open to new insights and developments by participating in relevant training and workshops. Continuous professional development helps teachers stay updated with the latest educational strategies and technologies, which can further optimize students' learning experiences. For schools to implement differentiated instruction effectively, several key steps need to be taken. First, schools should provide adequate training and support for teachers to develop the necessary skills and strategies for differentiated instruction. This includes offering professional development opportunities and creating a supportive environment where teachers can collaborate and share best practices. Second, schools need to adjust the curriculum to accommodate individual student needs. This may involve tailoring learning materials and activities to different learning styles and abilities. Investing in the right software and learning platforms is also crucial, as these tools can facilitate personalized learning and provide students with access to a wide range of resources. Introducing flexible student grouping is another important strategy. By organizing students into groups based on their abilities and needs, teachers can provide more targeted instruction and support. Schools should also consider offering additional support services, such as individualized advising, to help students navigate their learning paths and address any challenges they may encounter.

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