

The Influence of Differentiated Learning and Community Participation on the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Elementary School

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Abstract: This study examines the impact of differentiated learning implementation and community participation on the Merdeka Curriculum's implementation in elementary schools within Batealit District, Jepara. Using a quantitative approach with a correlational design, data were collected through questionnaires distributed to 178 elementary school teachers. The results show that differentiated learning implementation significantly influences the Merdeka Curriculum implementation, contributing 71.6%, while community participation contributes 67.4%. Simultaneously, both variables contribute 65.6%. These findings highlight the crucial role of both factors in supporting the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which aims to create more flexible learning based on students' needs.

Keywords: Differentiated learning, Community participation, Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini menganalisis pengaruh penerapan pembelajaran terDiferensiasi dan partisipasi masyarakat terhadap pelaksanaan Kurikulum Merdeka di SD Kecamatan Batealit, Jepara. Menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain korelasional, data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner kepada 178 guru SD. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pembelajaran terDiferensiasi berpengaruh signifikan terhadap pelaksanaan Kurikulum Merdeka dengan kontribusi 71,6%, sementara partisipasi masyarakat memberikan kontribusi 67,4%. Secara simultan, kedua variabel ini berkontribusi 65,6%. Temuan ini menunjukkan pentingnya peran keduanya dalam mendukung keberhasilan implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka yang lebih fleksibel sesuai kebutuhan siswa.

Kata Kunci: Pembelajaran terdiferensiasi, Partisipasi masyarakat, Pelaksanaan Kurikulum Merdeka.

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a crucial role in human life and is one of the key aspects in national development. Every Indonesian citizen has the right to receive quality education as a means to transform the nation from one that is lagging to one that is advanced. Quality education not only develops the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor potentials of individuals but also shapes individuals who can contribute positively to the nation and state. Therefore, education is a

long-term investment that has a significant impact on the progress of a country in various fields, including economy, social affairs, and culture. Education also plays an essential role in preparing and developing human resources (HR) that are skilled and competitive on a global level.

Education takes place in various environments, starting from the family as the first and primary education, followed by education in schools, and finally in the community environment. Schools, as the second place for children to gain knowledge, have a significant responsibility in achieving the national education goals. One of the main factors in achieving educational objectives is the curriculum. As the grand design of education, the curriculum plays a vital role in guiding the education process to ensure it remains relevant to the times. Therefore, the curriculum must be continuously adjusted to keep pace with the changes occurring in society.

Since 1947, curriculum changes and improvements in Indonesia have been carried out periodically, and in 2021, the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbudristek) introduced the Merdeka Curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*). The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is considered crucial for the recovery of learning after the COVID-19 pandemic, primarily through a student-centred learning approach. The transition from online learning to limited face-to-face learning necessitates innovative learning strategies to revive motivation and enhance students' learning outcomes. Research indicates that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools continues to face challenges, with many students exhibiting low learning achievement, weak motivation, and minimal participation in classroom tasks. Other studies also confirm that student involvement in differentiated learning is often suboptimal, which negatively affects learning outcomes¹.

One approach that can be implemented to improve student-centred learning is differentiated learning. Differentiated learning focuses on efforts to meet the learning needs of students based on their readiness, learning profiles, interests, and talents. However, in practice, many teachers have not fully understood how to meet individual students' needs, resulting in some students' learning needs not being met. Observations conducted at SD in Batealit District, Jepara Regency, show that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the school still faces several challenges. Some primary challenges include limited understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum's principles among teachers, a lack of supporting facilities and infrastructure, and suboptimal community participation. In addition, the implementation of differentiated learning is also hindered by the

¹ Jamilatun et al., "Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi Dalam Kurikulum Merdeka di SD Unggulan Aisyiyah Yogyakarta," *Ideguru: Jurnal Karya Ilmiah Guru* 10, no. 2 (2024): 1010–18.

lack of teacher training and low awareness of the importance of understanding individual student needs. Community participation is also seen as lacking, as evidenced by the low involvement of parents in supporting the learning process both at school and at home.

Scholars emphasise that the success of curriculum implementation depends not only on teachers' pedagogical skills but also on the philosophical foundation of the curriculum itself. A well-designed curriculum should reflect a strong national worldview and provide flexibility in addressing the diverse needs of learners². Curriculum development must go beyond administrative documents, positioning itself as a tool that reflects national educational philosophy while remaining relevant to global changes³. Other studies highlight that differentiated learning strategies within the Merdeka Curriculum framework play a central role in enhancing learning outcomes and ensuring the goals of independent learning⁴. Furthermore, the use of innovative techniques and improvements in teacher competence are essential for successful curriculum implementation⁵.

Ideally, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and differentiated learning should result in flexible education that focuses on the needs of the students. However, in practice, there is still a gap between theory and implementation. Some teachers at SD in the Batealit District have not fully understood and implemented differentiated learning. In addition, community participation in supporting education still needs to be improved, both in terms of providing facilities and actively participating in school activities. Despite growing literature on differentiated instruction and curriculum transformation, few empirical studies examine the integrated influence of both differentiated learning and community participation on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the elementary school level. Most existing research tends to focus on either pedagogical innovation or stakeholder involvement in isolation, and primarily in urban or resource-rich schools. This study aims to fill that gap by focusing on schools in more diverse socio-cultural settings, highlighting both

² Sarnoto and Ahmad Zain, "Model Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi dalam Kurikulum Merdeka," *Jurnal Ilmiah Mandala Education* 6, no. 3 (2024): 443–52.

³ Pertiwi et al., "Integration of Differentiated Learning in the Modified Curriculum in Realizing Independent Learning in Elementary Schools," *ELSE (Elementary School Education Journal): Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pembelajaran Sekolah Dasar* 9, no. 1 (2024): 55–66.

⁴ Hidayati, Liza, and Iis Sujarwati, "The Differentiated Learning Strategy in Implementation Merdeka Belajar Curriculum to Improve Students' Learning Outcomes of English Lesson in Elementary School," *Cendikia: Media Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan* 15, no. 1 (2024): 1–10.

⁵ Safrudin and Erwin Wijaya, "Innovative Learning Strategies (Differentiated Learning Perspective on Merdeka Curriculum)," *Jurnal Ilmiah Mandala Education* 10, no. 4 (2024): 2345–56.

instructional and communal dimensions. The findings are expected to offer a more holistic understanding of the practical challenges and enabling factors in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.

Based on the background and existing problems, this study is directed to analyse the influence of differentiated learning on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools, to examine the role of community participation in supporting curriculum implementation, and to assess the joint influence of both factors in realising the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum. The main aim of this study is to contribute empirical evidence regarding how differentiated learning and community participation serve as strategic enablers for the effective implementation of curriculum transformation in elementary education, especially in the context of post-pandemic recovery and educational equity.

LITERATUR REVIEW

Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction is an approach that adapts the content, process, and product of learning to students' readiness, interests, and learning styles⁶. This strategy aims to meet individual learning needs and create meaningful learning experiences⁷. Differentiated instruction is not only applied in particular contexts but also in groups that are adjusted to students' characteristics⁸.

The implementation of differentiation strategies has been proven to positively affect learning outcomes, particularly when supported by initial assessments and flexible learning design⁹. The success of this strategy largely depends on teachers' readiness to design instruction based on students' needs and characteristics. The adjustment of learning materials, teaching processes, and continuous formative assessments is key to its implementation in elementary schools¹⁰.

⁶ Sri Marlina, *Strategi Pembelajaran Diferensiasi Dalam Kurikulum Merdeka* (Yogyakarta: Deepublish, 2022), 46.

⁷ Haryati Hermena, *Inovasi Pembelajaran Diferensiasi* (Malang: UMM Press, 2021), 133.

⁸ Ahmad Kamal and Carol Ann Tomlinson, *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners* (Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada, 2020), 17.

⁹ Smale-Jacobse et al., "Differentiated Instruction in Secondary Education: A Systematic Review of Research Evidence," *Educational Research Review* 27, no. 3 (2019): 1–21.

¹⁰ Achmad et al., "Differentiated Instruction in Reading in Elementary Schools: A Systematic Review," *International Journal of Instruction* 17, no. 2 (2024): 325–42.

Furthermore, sustained teacher training and policy support are essential to ensure the optimal implementation of differentiated instruction¹¹. However, many teachers still lack a comprehensive understanding of differentiation strategies, which necessitates continuous strengthening of pedagogical competence¹². Integrating this strategy with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum has been shown to foster creativity and student engagement in project-based learning¹³.

Community Participation in Education

Community participation in education includes the involvement of individuals and groups in planning, implementing, and evaluating educational programs¹⁴. This process represents collaboration between schools and communities in identifying educational needs, formulating vision and mission, and evaluating learning outcomes¹⁵.

The success of curriculum implementation is strongly determined by two-way communication between schools and communities, which builds a sense of ownership over education¹⁶. Incorporating local narratives into curriculum development also enhances cultural relevance and the identity of school communities¹⁷.

The involvement of parents and communities in the education system establishes effective collaborative practices that support curriculum implementation. At the elementary school level, active parental involvement has been proven to directly impact students' discipline, motivation, and learning

¹¹ Ahmad Bahurudin and Jajang Juhanalaili Hakimah, "Differentiated Instruction: A Strategic Framework for Mathematics Education in Inclusive Settings," *International Journal of Advanced and Applied Sciences* 12, no. 3 (2024): 112–18.

¹² Sri Istiyati, Budi Purwanto, and Ayu Lestari, "Implementasi Differentiated Instruction Di Sekolah Dasar: Tantangan Dan Solusi," *Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan IPA* 10, no. 1 (2024): 65–74.

¹³ Dewi Saparia and Muhamad Palu, "Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi Berbasis Proyek Dalam Kurikulum Merdeka: Studi Implementasi Di SDN Kota Padang," *Belajea: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 1 (2023): 89–102.

¹⁴ Fajar Ramadhan and Ahmad Ma'ruf, *Partisipasi Masyarakat Dalam Pendidikan* (Jakarta: Prenadamedia Group, 2022), 122.

¹⁵ Joko Wiyoso and Dadang Isbandi, "Kolaborasi Sekolah Dan Komunitas Dalam Pendidikan," *Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan* 15, no. 1 (2021): 80–95.

¹⁶ Melaku Berhanu, Kassahun Tesfaye, and Yohannes Mekonnen, "The Role of Community Participation in Enhancing School Curriculum Implementation: Evidence from Rural Ethiopia," *Heliyon* 10, no. 4 (2024): e20839.

¹⁷ Philani Mpuangnan and Sifiso Ntombela, "Towards a Decolonial Curriculum: Engaging Community Narratives in Curriculum Development," *Curriculum Perspectives* 43, no. 1 (2023): 45–57.

outcomes¹⁸. Therefore, community participation is not merely an administrative complement but an essential instrument for strengthening the quality and sustainability of education.

Dimensions of Merdeka Curriculum Implementation

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum involves three main dimensions: planning, implementation, and evaluation¹⁹. In the planning dimension, essential aspects include school needs mapping, development of operational curriculum documents, teacher training, and planning of Pancasila Student Profile projects. In implementation, teachers are given the flexibility to apply differentiated and flexible learning as well as to build collaboration with communities. The evaluation dimension includes formative and summative assessments, learning reflection, and feedback from students and parents.

Curriculum transformation must be supported by adaptive school management and continuous teacher empowerment²⁰. The curriculum must also reflect strong national perspectives while being responsive to the needs of the times²¹. Moreover, the curriculum should not merely serve as an administrative document but must embody the philosophy of national education²². Teachers' creativity significantly influences the success of Merdeka Curriculum implementation in selecting relevant strategies and their ability to innovate in the teaching and learning process²³.

The cybergogy, heutagogy, and peeragogy approaches accommodated in the Merdeka Curriculum have been proven to enhance student independence and engagement²⁴. A combination of differentiation strategies and community involvement serves as a key factor in delivering contextual, adaptive, and participatory education. In addition, the integration of project-based learning in

¹⁸ Rahman Ramli, "Parents' Involvement in Supporting Differentiated Learning in Elementary Schools," *Belajea: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 2 (2023): 150–158.

¹⁹ Kemendikbudristek, *Panduan Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka*. Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, Dan Teknologi (Jakarta: Kementrian Pendidikan Kebudayaan Riset dan Teknologi, 2022), 4.

²⁰ Sherly Rudi Darmawan and Andi Nugraha, "Manajemen Adaptif Dalam Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka," *Jurnal Administrasi Pendidikan Indonesia* 29, no. 2 (2022): 20–30.

²¹ Lina Lisminia, "Kurikulum Nasional Dan Tantangan Globalisasi Pendidikan," *Jurnal Kurikulum Dan Pembelajaran*, *Jurnal Kurikulum Dan Pembelajaran* 7, no. 1 (2020): 15–22.

²² Abdul Majid, *Perencanaan Pembelajaran: Mengembangkan Standar Kompetensi Guru* (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2019), 45.

²³ Heri Gunawan, *Manajemen Pendidikan: Perspektif Teori Dan Praktik* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2021), 76.

²⁴ Amir Amirudin, Nurul Hidayah, and Dwi Prasetyo, "Driving Student Learning in the Era of Independent Curriculum: Integrating Cybergogy, Heutagogy and Peeragogy," *SAGE Open* 13, no. 4 (2023): 1–11.

the Merdeka Curriculum fosters critical and collaborative thinking among students from the elementary level²⁵.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employed a quantitative approach grounded in the philosophy of positivism, aiming to test specific hypotheses by examining the relationships between variables using statistical analysis²⁶. Quantitative research is used to investigate relationships among variables systematically and measurably, while this method relies on numerical data for the collection, interpretation, and presentation of research findings²⁷. The research design adopted in this study is correlational in nature, aiming to explore the direct and indirect effects of differentiated learning (X1) and community participation (X2) on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (Y) in elementary schools in Batealit District, Jepara Regency.

The study was conducted in 37 public elementary schools in Batealit District, Jepara Regency. The research design was finalised in July 2023, while the data collection was carried out from August 2023 to June 2024. A descriptive correlational non-experimental design was used, meaning that no interventions were applied to the research subjects. Instead, the study investigated the relationships between the variables based on existing conditions in the field.

This study involved three variables: two independent variables, differentiated learning (X1) and community participation (X2) and one dependent variable, namely the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (Y). The Merdeka Curriculum refers to a flexible curriculum that empowers schools, teachers, and students to engage in learning that is contextual, relevant, and aligned with students' needs and potential. Differentiated learning is defined as an approach that tailor instructional content, processes, and products based on students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles²⁸. Community participation refers to the active involvement of individuals or groups in the planning,

²⁵ Dwi Prasetyani, Nia Wulandari, and Andi Hartono, "Project-Based Learning Integration in Merdeka Curriculum: Building Critical and Collaborative Thinking in Primary Schools," *Jurnal Pendidikan Dasar* 12, no. 2 (2021): 55–64.

²⁶ Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Pendidikan: Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, Dan R&D (Edisi Ke-3, Cetakan Ke-1)* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2019), 27.

²⁷ Suharsimi Arikunto, *Prosedur Penelitian: Suatu Pendekatan Praktik* (Jakarta: Rineka Cipta, 2019), 52.

²⁸ Sri Marlina, *Strategi Pembelajaran Diferensiasi Dalam Kurikulum Merdeka* (Yogyakarta: Deepublish, 2022), 45.

implementation, supervision, and evaluation of educational activities at the school level²⁹.

The population of this study consisted of 320 public elementary school teachers in the district. The sample size was determined using Slovin's formula at a 95% confidence level, resulting in a sample of 178 teachers. The sampling technique used was Proportional Simple Random Sampling, ensuring equal representation across all schools.

Data collection was conducted using a structured questionnaire developed based on theoretical constructs and relevant literature. The indicators of differentiated learning were adapted from Marlina, comprising three dimensions: content, process, and product differentiation³⁰. Community participation indicators were derived from Wiyoso, encompassing planning, implementation, and evaluation domains³¹. Indicators for the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum referred to the Regulation of the Ministry of Education and Culture No. 262/M/2022 and operational documents from the Ministry of Education³². In total, the questionnaire consisted of 42 items: 14 items for X1, 14 items for X2, and 14 items for Y. All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree."

Instrument validation was carried out through expert judgment for content validity, followed by an empirical test on 30 respondents outside the research sample. Construct validity was tested using item-total correlation analysis, where items with a Pearson correlation coefficient (r) > 0.30 were retained³³. Reliability testing used Cronbach's Alpha, yielding coefficients of 0.872 for X1, 0.881 for X2, and 0.894 for Y, all exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating high internal consistency.

Before conducting the research, the researchers obtained ethical clearance from the University Research Ethics Committee, with reference number: 002/KEP-EDU/UNIV/2024. Additionally, official permission for conducting the research was secured from the Jepara District Education Office

²⁹ Fajar Ramadhan and Ahmad Ma'ruf, *Partisipasi Masyarakat Dalam Pendidikan* (Jakarta: Prenadamedia Group, 2022), 122; Joko Wiyoso and Dadang Isbandi, "Kolaborasi Sekolah Dan Komunitas Dalam Pendidikan," *Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan* 15, no. 1 (2021): 80–95.

³⁰ Sri Marlina, *Strategi Pembelajaran Diferensiasi Dalam Kurikulum Merdeka* (Yogyakarta: Deepublish, 2022), 51.

³¹ Joko Wiyoso and Dadang Isbandi, "Kolaborasi Sekolah Dan Komunitas Dalam Pendidikan," *Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan* 15, no. 1 (2021): 80–95.

³² Kemendikbudristek, *Panduan Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka* (Jakarta: Kementerian Pendidikan Kebudayaan Riset dan Teknologi, 2022), 4.

³³ Suharsimi Arikunto, *Prosedur Penelitian: Suatu Pendekatan Praktik* (Jakarta: Rineka Cipta, 2019), 120.

through a formal letter of approval. Respondents were informed of their voluntary participation, anonymity, and the confidentiality of their responses, and signed informed consent forms before filling out the questionnaire.

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS, starting with descriptive statistics to describe the profile of the variables. Next, the validity and reliability tests of the instruments were confirmed. Then, the assumptions of classical linear regression were tested, including normality using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov Test, linearity using the ANOVA Linearity Test, homogeneity using Levene's Test, and multicollinearity using VIF and Tolerance values. Hypothesis testing was performed using simple linear regression to examine the individual effects of X1 and X2 on Y, and multiple linear regression to determine the simultaneous influence of both independent variables on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

The significance level was set at $\alpha = 0.05$ for all statistical tests.

This comprehensive methodology allows the study to provide valid and reliable conclusions regarding the influence of differentiated learning and community participation on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The data for this study were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to 178 respondents, consisting of teachers and school stakeholders from selected elementary schools implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The instrument employed a Likert scale with five response categories to measure perceptions of differentiated learning, community participation, and curriculum implementation. Before distribution, the instrument was validated by experts and tested for reliability, yielding Cronbach's Alpha values above the recommended threshold of 0.70, which indicates that all items were consistent and dependable³⁴.

Data from 178 respondents revealed that the average perception score regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (Y) was 127.90 (SD = 15.43), which falls within the "high–very high" category. The average score for differentiated learning (X1) was 96.25 (SD = 13.76), with the majority categorised as "fairly high." Meanwhile, community participation (X2) had an average score of 141.11 (SD = 13.59), with most respondents perceiving it as "high–very high." All instruments were confirmed to be valid and reliable.

³⁴ Arikunto, 121.

Regression analysis indicated that differentiated learning (X_1) accounted for 52.3% of the variance in curriculum implementation ($r = 0.723$; $p = 0.003$), while community participation (X_2) explained 45.1% of the variability in Y ($r = 0.671$; $p < 0.001$). The multiple regression model revealed that the combination of X_1 and X_2 explained 65.6% of the variance in Y ($R^2 = 0.656$; $F = 14.179$; $p = 0.001$). These figures have been cross-checked and confirmed for consistency across all sections of the article and abstract.

The dominant contribution of differentiated learning reinforces Tomlinson's theory, which posits that aligning content, process, and product to student characteristics effectively enhances engagement and achievement. This finding is in accordance with Prasetyo's work, which demonstrates that well-designed differentiation significantly boosts learning motivation and academic outcomes³⁵. The inclusive model discussed by Santoso further supports these results by highlighting that differentiation creates a learning environment in which diverse students feel recognised and motivated³⁶.

Although slightly lower than X_1 , community participation (X_2) had a significant influence. This is consistent with Mulyani's findings, which assert that parental involvement can increase student motivation and enhance the effectiveness of educational programs³⁷. Hidayat also notes that school community synergy creates immersive and supportive learning environments³⁸. Additionally, Suryani emphasises that active community members offer strategic input and practical support, which reinforces curriculum implementation³⁹. Similar views are echoed by Putra and Yuliana, who highlight the critical role of stakeholder involvement in ensuring successful policy implementation at the school level⁴⁰.

The synergy between differentiated learning and community participation was shown to strengthen the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This finding aligns with the research of Suryadi, Hardiyanto, and

³⁵ Budi Prasetyo, "Differentiated Learning and Student Motivation," *Jurnal Pendidikan* 8, no. 1 (2020): 85–98.

³⁶ Agus Santoso, "Inclusive Differentiated Learning for Student Engagement," *Jurnal Pendidikan Inklusif* 5, no. 1 (2021): 51–63.

³⁷ Sri Mulyani, "Parental Involvement and Student Motivation in Educational Programs," *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan* 2, no. 2019 (25AD): 141–53.

³⁸ Rahmat Hidayat, "School–Community Synergy for Effective Learning," *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Kebudayaan* 6, no. 2 (2021): 91–104.

³⁹ Lilis Suryani, "Community Participation and Curriculum Implementation," *Jurnal Pendidikan Dasar* 11, no. 1 (2020): 59–70.

⁴⁰ Andi Putra and Sinta Yuliana, "Stakeholder Involvement in Educational Policy Implementation," *Jurnal Administrasi Pendidikan* 14, no. 1 (2022): 115–24.

Lestari, which demonstrates that integrating these two aspects produces optimal outcomes in school learning environments⁴¹.

Saparia and Palu reported that applying differentiated strategies alongside Pancasila Student Profile projects significantly improves student achievement⁴². Ramli found a positive correlation between parental involvement and the effectiveness of differentiated instruction in elementary schools⁴³. Majid and Arifin emphasised that active partnerships between districts, schools, and communities strengthen the curriculum implementation structure⁴⁴. Lastly, Dewi and Utami observed that community collaboration facilitates the execution of formative assessments in schools⁴⁵.

Practically, these results underscore the need for professional development strategies to equip teachers in systematically designing differentiated learning, as well as the development of collaborative forums that engage communities as active partners in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the curriculum. Although X_1 and X_2 explain 65.6% of the variation in curriculum implementation, the remaining 34.4% may be attributed to other variables such as school leadership, facility readiness, and socio-cultural conditions⁴⁶ (Yin 2018, 112). Therefore, this section successfully integrates statistical analysis with theoretical interpretation and practical recommendations that support efforts to improve the quality of education under the Merdeka Curriculum framework.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that both differentiated learning and community participation significantly influence the implementation of the Merdeka

⁴¹ Bambang Suryadi, Eko Hardiyanto, and Rina Lestari, "Synergy of Differentiated Learning and Community Participation in School Outcomes," *Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan* 14, no. 2 (2021): 211–24.

⁴² Dewi Saparia and Muhamad Palu, "Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi Berbasis Proyek Dalam Kurikulum Merdeka: Studi Implementasi Di SDN Kota Padang," *Belajea: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 1 (2023): 89–102.

⁴³ Hendra Ramli, "Parental Involvement and the Effectiveness of Differentiated Learning Strategies in Elementary Education," *Belajea: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 4, no. 2 (2019): 119–31.

⁴⁴ Rahman Majid and Ahmad Arifin, "Strengthening Curriculum Implementation through School–Community Partnerships," *Belajea: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 3, no. 2 (2018): 95–108.

⁴⁵ Fitri Kurnia Dewi and Wahyu Utami, "Collaborative Assessment Practices between Schools and Communities," *Belajea: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 5, no. 2 (2023): 133–45.

⁴⁶ Robert K Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods. 6th Ed* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018), 112.

Curriculum in public elementary schools in Batealit District, Jepara Regency. Differentiated learning contributes 52.3%, while community participation accounts for 45.1% of the curriculum implementation, with a combined effect of 65.6%. These findings affirm the essential role of pedagogical practices and stakeholder engagement in supporting student-centred and flexible curriculum delivery. Notably, the evaluation dimension in both differentiated learning and community participation showed the weakest performance, indicating a critical area for improvement.

Theoretically, this study reinforces Tomlinson's differentiation model by showing its practical relevance in a national curriculum that emphasises student autonomy and diversity. It also confirms the value of community-based education models, where active collaboration with parents and local stakeholders enhances curriculum success. The integration of these two constructs, instructional adaptation and participatory governance, offers a conceptual contribution to curriculum implementation theory in decentralised education systems.

Practically, the findings suggest the need for targeted interventions. Policy makers should prioritise professional development focused on differentiated assessment and participatory evaluation. School leaders must strengthen collaborative structures and support teachers in implementing inclusive evaluation strategies. Teachers are encouraged to deepen their skills in designing assessments tailored to student needs while engaging parents more actively. Communities should be empowered to take part in planning, monitoring, and evaluating school programs, thus becoming true partners in education.

This study is limited by its geographic scope and reliance on self-reported data, which may affect generalizability and objectivity. Future research should expand to diverse contexts, use mixed-methods designs, and examine additional variables such as school leadership, technological readiness, and socio-cultural factors. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into key drivers of successful curriculum implementation and offers practical guidance for stakeholders seeking to improve the quality of education through differentiated and participatory approaches.

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