

Differentiated Learning: Teachers' Understanding of *Sekolah Penggerak* Program at Deli Serdang District North Sumatera

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to describe the level of understanding of secondary school teachers in the Deli Serdang area regarding differentiated learning in the Independent Curriculum that applies in Indonesia. This research is quantitative survey research. Population: The subjects of this research were high school teachers in Deli Serdang Regency, totalling 366 people, with a sample of 216 people selected by random sampling. Data was collected through a survey using a closed questionnaire. The data analysis technique uses the Mann-Whitney test to see differences in teachers' understanding of differentiated learning in public and private schools participating in the Driving School Program. The research results show that the level of teacher understanding of differentiated learning in private schools is moderate, and the level of understanding of teachers in state schools is in the high category. Based on the *Sekolah Penggerak* Program, which does not differentiate between the status of public and private schools in funding and program assistance, differences in understanding occur due to several internal and external factors found in schools, such as principal leadership, teacher competency, and different teacher statuses in the two types of schools. In conclusion, the *Sekolah Penggerak* Program provides the same treatment in public and private schools and has the same programs and assistance. However, teachers' understanding of learning varies, which certainly impacts the learning process and learning outcomes.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Merdeka Curriculum has been implemented in Indonesia since 2021 as the government's effort to overcome "lost learning" due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Implementing a Merdeka Curriculum, known as the implementation of a Merdeka Curriculum, is carried out in stages. The government implements various policy programs to support the implementation of IKM, including the *Sekolah Penggerak* Program. The main goal of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum is to realize student-centred learning (Uly, 2023). There is a variety of learning content to help students deepen learning and strengthen their competence (Ainia, 2020), which follows students' character and maintains morals and attitudes through the Pancasila student profile. Every individual is different from one another. Likewise,

every student in the class must be different from one another. These differences are seen from the ecological systems in each individual (family background, culture, politics, economy, environment), multiple intelligences, zone of proximal development (ZPD), learning modalities, or what we know as learning styles.

Learning in the Merdeka Curriculum is designed with six learning principles, namely: firstly, considering the stages of development and current levels of achievement of students according to learning needs, and reflecting the characteristics and development of various students; Second, learning is designed and implemented to build capacity to become lifelong learners, third, the learning process supports the development of the competence and character of students holistically, fourth, relevant learning, namely learning that is designed according to the context, environment, and culture of students, fifth, involving parents and the community as partners, and sixth, sustainable future-oriented learning (Anindito, 2022). Implementing *Merdeka* Curriculum means not being separated from differentiated learning as one of the strategies in the Merdeka Curriculum implementation program (Usman et al., 2022) as a manifestation of Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy.

Differentiated learning is a learning process in which students can learn content based on their talents, according to things that students like, and according to the specific learning needs of students (Tomlinson, 2001); (Haelermans, 2022); (Komalasari, 2023). To create learning that follows the characteristics or uniqueness of students (readiness, interests, and learning styles) so that students develop according to their potential talents and interests (Kristiani et al., 2021). Differentiated learning opens opportunities for each teacher to meet and interact with students at a level comparable to the level of knowledge of students to prepare their learning preferences. For this reason, differentiated learning aims to create learning equality for all students and bridge the learning gap between achievers and those who do not achieve so that students feel challenged to learn.

The implementation of differentiated learning must be formed through the way of thinking of the teacher, who considers that students can grow and develop optimally according to their respective capacities. There are five basic principles in differentiated learning: a conducive learning environment, a quality curriculum with clear learning objectives, continuous assessment, responsive learning, and teachers having leadership and classroom routines (Kristiani et al., 2021) (Kusadi, 2022). Teachers must be able to map and identify students' conditions to carry out differentiated learning, which is one of the IKM programs that realize student-centred learning. Where students' interest and learning achievement also increases (Kusadi, 2022); (Gusteti & Neviyarni, 2022).

In Indonesia, education is implemented by the government and non-government (private) in terms of financing. However, the government does not let go of the education process in private schools by trying to provide equal rights between public and private schools without dichotomy (Kementerian Pendidikan Kebudayaan Riset dan Teknologi, n.d.-a). However, there are still differences in the quality of public and private schools, especially in allocating financial and learning resources (Suprayogi et al., 2021); (Mongi & Hatidja, 2016). In the initial stage of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, the educational units (schools) involved in the Sekolah Penggerak Program consist of public and private schools with their characteristics. There is no special treatment in this program for those differences. All schools follow the same program nationally with the target of school principals and teachers who impact the quality of learning. Ideally, the results achieved in the two categories of schools are relatively the same.

The teacher's perception of learning is closely related to the design and learning process (Buabeng & Akuamoah-Boateng, 2019). It also applies to differentiated learning in the Merdeka Curriculum. Several previous researchers have researched differentiated learning. For example, Usman et al. (2022) studied the understanding of one teacher in Tangerang regarding differentiated learning in the Merdeka Curriculum. The study showed that the teacher needed to learn about differentiated learning because it was the first time he had heard of it. This research still uses minimal data sources, so it needs to be expanded with more comprehensive data. Research from Mulyawati et al. (2022) found that the teacher must be able to guide students to develop according to their characteristics and potential. However, this research has yet to measure teachers' understanding of differentiated learning and has focused on how it

is implemented. Related research has also been conducted by Suprayogi et al. (2021) by presenting data on differentiated learning in public schools and private schools from the aspect of implementation level, nature of implementation, dimensions of addressing student diversity, adopting specific learning strategies and monitoring the needs of students in public schools and private sector, by taking a sample of teachers in schools in DKI Jakarta. Unfortunately, this research did not go beyond measuring teachers' understanding of differentiated learning first. So, it is also necessary to study how teachers in public and private schools understand differentiated learning, especially in the Merdeka Curriculum, because implementing differentiated learning is related to the teacher's understanding of differentiated learning, whether the teacher understands it or vice versa. The teacher's teaching style is much influenced by the teacher's understanding and perception of learning (Safaei & Shahrokhi, 2019).

Teachers' understanding of learning is closely related to the teacher's competence. Teachers who are classroom learning leaders must have competencies supporting the education and learning system. Teachers' competencies must be comprehensive in all aspects of competency, namely at least pedagogical, personal, social and professional competencies. Teacher competency is closely related to values, behaviour, communication, goals, and practice (Teachers' Competencies Kiymet Selvil). Reviewing how teacher competence ultimately impacts the learning process is an exciting discussion. The principal is a learning leader in his school and must be able to encourage efforts to increase teacher competency. An effective school principal is a principal who can create an effective school (Anindito, 2022), one of which is by empowering an essential component of the school, namely existing teacher resources, for example, with the school principal's efforts to improve teacher pedagogical competence. In implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, school principals must be able to encourage increased pedagogical, professional and social competence as well as individual teachers to achieve learning goals that emphasize student-centred learning with a differentiated learning approach.

The *Sekolah Penggerak* Programm for implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum began to be implemented in the 2021-2022 academic year and is now in stages. There are various mentoring programs, including assistance to school principals, administrators, and teachers to encourage effective implementation; the government also provides significant funds for schools that pass the program selection. From the aspect of classroom learning, changing the teacher's paradigm is one of the essential goals for realizing student-centered learning through differentiated learning. It would be an exciting study to review the level of teachers' understanding regarding differentiated learning in schools that take part in the *Sekolah Penggerak* Program, especially in the Deli Serdang district, North Sumatra.

2. METHODS

This quantitative descriptive study uses survey methods (Goodfellow, 2023). The survey asked the teacher to complete a differentiation learning questionnaire with random sampling methods. The study population included 366 teachers consisting of 145 teachers from public schools and 221 from private schools. *Sekolah Penggerak* Program and class 2 in Deli Serdang Regency came from 15 public and private schools. The research sample consisted of 216 teachers randomly surveyed using Slovin. Three public high schools are 33.3%, and 12 private high schools are 66.7% of the total respondents. The instrument used was a closed questionnaire based on the principles of differentiated learning and a validity test using a content validity test conducted by Dr. Syarifah, M.Pd as an educational evaluation expert and Dr. Sarwa as the *Sekolah Penggerak* facilitator and 1 teacher from the guru penggerak aspect, namely Dini Widiastuti, with valid results. The questionnaire was developed using the Google form and distributed online through the involvement of All School Principals and School Facilitators in each school to fill out the form so that all teachers' response rates are very high and can represent the research sample. Data analysis describes the findings obtained through instruments developed based on the principles and characteristics of differentiated learning in the Merdeka Curriculum, which includes five principles that develop into 24 question items.

The instrument's design follows four core components of differentiated learning, where each piece grows in several questions based on the principles of differentiated learning. The instrument was developed in the form of positive and negative statements. Then, the respondents chose their opinion according to their understanding based on strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree. The instrument includes five principles of differentiated learning, including a conducive learning environment, a quality curriculum with clear learning objectives, continuous assessment, responsive learning, and teachers having leadership and classroom routines. To see the differences in understanding between the two groups of public and private schools using the prerequisite tests of Normality and Homogeneity. The results of calculating the normality test with Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Liliefors showed that the distribution was not expected, while the result of the homogeneity test showed homogeneous data. The following table presents the calculation of the normality test and homogeneity test as follows:

Table 1. Result Test of Normality by Kolmogorov-Smirnov

| School | Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a | | | Shapiro-Wilk | | |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|-----|-------|--------------|-----|------|
| | Statistic | df | Sig. | Statistic | df | Sig. |
| Score Public Schoola | ,085 | 72 | .200* | ,963 | 72 | ,031 |
| Private Schooll | ,129 | 141 | ,000 | ,948 | 141 | ,000 |

Based on the table data above, the sig value can be seen. Normality is smaller than sig. 0.05, namely the sig value. 0.200 and 0.000 can be concluded that the sample group is declared abnormal. because in one of the sample groups it is not greater than sig. 0.05. The results of calculating normality using Liliefors Signification correction also show similar results. For the homogeneity test carried out using SPSS, it was found that there were similarities between the two groups with the homogeneity calculation results as follows:

Table 2. Test of Homogeneity of Variances

| Levene Statistic | df1 | df2 | Sig. |
|------------------|-----|-----|------|
| 2,755 | 1 | 211 | ,098 |

Based on the table data above, the sig value can be seen. Homogeneity is greater than sig. 0.05, namely the sig value. 0.98, it can be concluded that the sample group is declared homogeneous. Considering these results, the difference test was continued with a non-parametric test with the Mann-Whitney Test. Non-parametric statistical tests do not use particular parameters or provide conditions for meeting certain assumptions, including the assumption of normality of data, unless the data is continuously distributed. Non-parametric statistics are used in certain conditions. Meanwhile, the Mann-Whitney Test is a non-parametric test used to determine the difference in medians of two independent samples. This test is used when the data does not meet the normality assumption. This test is an alternative to the independent t-test in parametric tests with one requirement that the data come from 2 independent and homogeneous groups. To find out the percentage of ability to understand the principle of differentiation learning using the following grouping categories:

Table. Percentage Value Intervals

| Score Interval(%) | Category |
|-------------------|----------|
| 76 – 100 | High |
| 51 – 75 | Medium |
| 26 – 50 | Low |

Source: (Sugiyono, 2017)

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Findings

Differentiated learning is a learning model and approach that adapts learning to different students' learning needs and learning profiles. Namely, learning readiness, interests, and learning styles of students. The success of learning processes and outcomes in differentiated learning is related to the application of differentiated learning principles which include the following five principles: Learning environment, Quality curriculum, Continuous assessment, Responsive teaching, and Leadership and routine in the classroom. Many as 366 teachers, consisting of 145 public school teachers and 221 private school teachers, filled out a questionnaire to determine the teacher's level of understanding of the principles of differentiated learning. The results of the analysis can be seen as follows.

The first principle in differentiated learning is the learning environment. The learning environment is all conditions that can influence the behaviour of the subjects involved in learning, especially teachers and students. The following is the public and private teachers' understanding of the principles of the learning environment in differentiated learning.

Table 4. Teacher's Understanding of the Principles of the Learning Environment in Differentiated Learning

| No. | Statement | State Teacher | | Private Teacher | |
|-----|---|---------------|------------|-----------------|------------|
| | | Percentage | Conclusion | Percentage | Conclusion |
| 1. | The learning environment includes the school's physical environment and classroom where students spend their time studying at school. | 84.38 | High | 82.68 | High |
| 2. | Teachers can arrange classrooms comfortably, and chairs and student study tables can adjust their shape to create a learning environment. | 90.28 | High | 91.43 | High |

Based on Table 4, both public and private teachers have an understanding that aligns with the learning environment's scope. Both public and private teachers understand that as a place for students to spend their time in school and class, study chairs and desks need to be arranged so that students are comfortable while studying. Adjusting the layout of chairs and study tables is one of the teacher's efforts to organize a comfortable classroom. This understanding shows that teachers are aware that creating a learning environment in the classroom must encourage the creation of differentiated

learning. There are various patterns of student seating arrangements that teachers can use. This pattern adapts to the activities and learning experiences that students carry out.

The second principle in differentiated learning is a quality curriculum. A quality curriculum encourages students to understand the material being taught appropriately. The following is the understanding of public and private teachers on the principles of a quality curriculum in differentiated learning.

Table 5. Teacher's Understanding of Quality Curriculum Principles in Differentiated Learning

| No. | Statement | State Teacher | | Private Teacher | |
|-----|--|---------------|------------|-----------------|------------|
| | | Percentage | Conclusion | Percentage | Conclusion |
| 1. | A curriculum that makes students memorize the material provided by the teacher. | 68.40 | Medium | 63.75 | Medium |
| 2. | A quality curriculum must be able to clearly describe the involvement of students in learning through the assignments given and the assessments carried out by students. | 84.03 | High | 85.36 | High |
| 3. | If there are students who have more abilities, educators must be able to challenge them to do other assignments so that their skills develop. | 85.07 | High | 83.57 | High |
| 4. | If there are students who have less ability, the teacher changes the learning objectives from before so that they can achieve the specified learning objectives. | 50 | Medium | 53.57 | Medium |

Based on Table 5, most public and private teachers agree that a curriculum that makes students memorize learning material is a quality curriculum. Teachers also agree that a quality curriculum involves students through assignments and assessments the teacher gives. For students with more abilities, the teachers agree that these students should be given other challenging assignments so that their skills will develop further. However, some students have less ability; half of the total respondents, both public and private teachers, agree that learning objectives must be changed so that learning objectives can be achieved. In the question item regarding "A curriculum that makes students remember the material provided by the teacher," the results show the medium category, meaning that there are many teachers who agree and vice versa in the two types of schools. Suppose you look at the context of this statement. In that case, it is that the orientation of the Merdeka Curriculum is not for students to memorize the material but to focus on achieving lifelong life skills. It shows that there are still many teachers who still need to change their paradigm regarding the material from the previous curriculum.

The third principle in differentiated learning is continuous assessment. The teacher carries out continuous assessment throughout the learning process. Based on its function, assessment is divided

into three: assessment as a learning process, assessment for the learning process, and assessment at the end of the learning process. Assessment as a learning process is a measuring tool for diagnosing students' initial abilities to understand the material to be studied and reflect on the learning process. Assessment of the learning process is a measuring tool to improve the learning process. Assessment at the end of the learning process serves as a tool to measure student learning outcomes or evaluation at the end of the learning process. Public and private teachers' understanding of the principles of continuous assessment in differentiated learning can be seen in the following table.

Table 6 Teacher's Understanding of the Principles of Continuous Assessment in Differentiated Learning

| No. | Statement | State Teacher | | Private Teacher | |
|-----|--|---------------|------------|-----------------|------------|
| | | Percentage | Conclusion | Percentage | Conclusion |
| 1. | The initial assessment aims to determine the extent to which students understand the subject matter to be studied and to measure the extent to which students are prepared for learning objectives. | 91.32 | High | 87.68 | High |
| 2. | In differentiation learning, the teacher also pays attention to how students learn, whether someone needs help in doing their assignments or students who need help understanding the task instructions given. | 87.5 | High | 84.64 | High |
| 3. | After learning ends, the teacher is not justified in evaluating an assessment of learning outcomes at the end of studying a learning material that is a project. | 64.93 | Medium | 66.96 | Medium |
| 4. | Recognizing the characteristics of these students can be done with observation during learning activities and diagnostic assessment through interviews or questionnaires. | 87.85 | High | 83.04 | High |
| 5. | After knowing the characteristics of students, the teacher can divide them into several groups based on their interests or learning styles. | 87.85 | High | 84.46 | High |
| 6. | By paying attention to the diversity of students in terms of motivation, interests, and learning | 79.86 | High | 79.82 | High |

| | | | | | |
|----|--|-------|------|-------|------|
| | expectations, the teacher chooses learning topics. | | | | |
| 7. | The teacher conducts an assessment at the beginning of the lesson to find out how far students understand the subject matter to be studied and to measure students' readiness for learning objectives. | 91.32 | High | 84.11 | High |
| 8. | Assessments are carried out during learning activities, and at the end of the lesson, the teacher evaluates them by asking students to make a particular product. | 82.64 | High | 77.50 | High |
| 9. | In implementing differentiated learning, the teacher needs to know the extent to which students' understanding is at the start of the lesson and the extent to which new understanding is after following the learning process. With this, the assessment is used to guide differentiated learning activities. | 87.85 | High | 83.75 | High |

As shown in Table 6, the research results show that both public and private teachers understand continuous assessment. Public and private teachers understand that continuous assessments carried out by teachers are useful as guidelines for planning differentiated learning activities because, through assessments, teachers can determine students' level of understanding when starting lessons and a new level of understanding after following the learning process. The initial assessment helps the teacher measure understanding of the material to be studied and students' readiness towards learning objectives. In addition, teachers also have the same understanding that teachers need to pay attention to the needs of students and help students who have difficulty understanding the task instructions given during learning.

During the learning process, both public and private teachers understand that recognizing the characteristics of students is needed in the learning process using observation and diagnostic assessment methods through interviews or questionnaires. Teachers also understand that after recognizing the characteristics of students, the teacher divides students into several groups according to their interests and learning styles. By paying attention to the characteristics of students, teachers agree that teachers can choose learning topics.

Public and private teachers conduct assessments during and after learning by instructing students to make products. However, most public and private teachers agree that in project-based material, the teacher should not assess learning outcomes at the end.

The fourth principle in differentiated learning is responsive teaching. Responsive teachers understand students' shortcomings and adjust learning plans and strategies according to the learning

needs of students. The following is the understanding of public and private teachers on responsive teaching principles in differentiated learning.

Table 7. Teacher's Understanding of Responsive Teaching Principles in Differentiated Learning

| No. | Statement | State Teacher | | Private Teacher | |
|-----|--|---------------|------------|-----------------|------------|
| | | Percentage | Conclusion | Percentage | Conclusion |
| 1. | The teacher proactively from the start, anticipated the class he would teach by adjusting his learning to students as a reaction to an evaluation of the failure of the previous lesson. | 40.97 | Low | 45.54 | Low |
| 2. | The teacher always assesses (conducts assessments) of students in various ways to find out their situation in each lesson so that based on the results of the assessment, the teacher can adapt their learning to their needs. | 88.54 | High | 82.14 | High |
| 3. | Assignments are given based on the level of students' initial knowledge of the material to be taught so that the teacher designs learning according to the level of student needs. | 85.42 | High | 81.43 | High |

Table 7 shows that public and private teachers need a better understanding of adapting learning to students as a reaction to evaluating the failure of previous lessons. However, public and private teachers understand that teachers always carry out assessments and use the results to adapt learning to students' circumstances. Public and private teachers also understand that teachers need to design learning according to the level of needs of students by giving assignments based on the level of student's initial knowledge of the material to be taught. Based on this data, the aspect of how the teacher views the evaluation results is that the teacher proactively from the start anticipates the class he would teach by adjusting his learning to students as a reaction to an evaluation of the failure of the previous lesson, it turns out that the teacher's understanding is relatively low in this aspect. It means that teachers need to improve their knowledge of the assessment principles in the Merdeka Curriculum.

The fifth principle in differentiated learning is leadership and routine in the classroom. Teacher leadership in the class is needed to set the classroom atmosphere conducive. In contrast, the routine in class refers to the teacher's skills in managing the class so that learning takes place effectively and efficiently. The following is the public and private teachers' understanding of the principles of leadership and routines in class in differentiated learning.

Table 8 Teacher's Understanding of Leadership Principles and Classroom Routines in Differentiated Learning

| No. | Statement | State Teacher | | Private Teacher | |
|-----|---|---------------|------------|-----------------|------------|
| | | Percentage | Conclusion | Percentage | Conclusion |
| 1. | Educators give students choices regarding the tasks to be done, learning methods, and learning media to be used. | 84.38 | High | 77.5 | High |
| 2. | In differentiation learning, students who are clever after completing their assignments will be given the same additional assignments. | 61.46 | Medium | 62.68 | Medium |
| 3. | In differentiation learning, the teacher manages more time, space, and activities to be carried out by students rather than presenting information to students. | 73.26 | Medium | 70.54 | Medium |
| 4. | Teachers provide opportunities for students to always study together classically and can also study individually. | 39.24 | Low | 42.32 | Low |
| 5. | Teachers collaborate with students continuously including to develop class and individual goals for students. | 83.33 | High | 79.29 | High |
| 6. | In differentiated learning, educators do not have to be able to lead their students so that they can participate in learning in a conducive learning climate and situation, through mutually agreed class agreements. | 48.26 | Low | 54.46 | Medium |

Based on Table 8, public and private teachers have the same understanding that teachers can provide choices to students regarding tasks to be done together, learning methods, and media to be used through mutual agreement. Some public and private teachers agree that smart students are given the same additional assignments in differentiated learning. In addition, some teachers understand that the teacher manages more time, space, and activities that students will carry out than presenting information to students. Public and private teachers need a better understanding of the opportunities given to students to always study together classically and individually by the teacher. Public and private teachers have a strong understanding that teachers collaborate continuously with students, including setting class goals for individual students. Public and private teachers have a low understanding that educators do not have to be able to lead students so they can participate in conducive learning through mutual agreement.

To determine the level of difference in understanding between two groups, namely a group of teachers from state schools with a sample size of 72 people from 2 state schools and teachers from private schools with a sample size of 141 people from 7 schools, with analysis using the interdependent difference test with the Mann-Whitney-test, the calculation results using SPSS is as follows:

Table 10. Mann-Whitney Calculation Results

| | Score |
|------------------------|-----------|
| Mann-Whitney U | 3848,000 |
| Wilcoxon W | 13859,000 |
| Z | -2,892 |
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | ,004 |

Based on the statistical output with the help of SPSS in the Mann-Whitney test above, the value of Asymp is known. Sig. (2 tailed) of 0.004 is more minor than the <0.05 probability value. Therefore, as is the basis for making the Mann-Whitney test decision, it can be concluded that "Ha is accepted". Thus, it can be said that there are differences in teachers' opinions regarding differentiated learning in state schools and private schools at the high school level in the Deli Serdag district. Teachers in state schools got an average score of 73.125 and a percentage of 76.17% with high understanding criteria. In contrast, teachers in private schools got an average score of 71.0212766 and an understanding presentation of 73.98 with understanding criteria in the medium category. This difference in understanding will likely significantly impact the learning process and student learning outcomes.

3.2 Discussion

The results show that teachers' understanding of differentiated learning in the Merdeka Curriculum implemented in Sekolah Penggerak Program in the Deli Serdang district has differences in categories between state schools and private schools, where, on average, state schools have a higher level of understanding than private schools. These results show that research conducted by Sopiana & Rusli (2013) compared the performance of teachers in state schools and private schools in Pekanbaru by raising results regarding the low performance of teachers in state schools accompanied by low levels of teacher development activities when compared to private schools, and research from Suprayogi et al. (2021) where in addressing student diversity in elementary schools in Jakarta, the majority of teachers in state schools (94%) and private schools (99%) felt it was realistic to address student diversity. These results compare best with the understanding of teachers in schools participating in the *Sekolah Penggerak* Program in Deli Serdang Regency.

The aspect of Teacher's Understanding of Responsive Teaching Principles in Differentiated Learning, where the results show that public and private teachers' understanding of this aspect is in a low category, needs to be a discussion of how such an important concept can occur and not occur in other aspects. It shows that teachers' pedagogical competence, especially regarding differentiated learning in this aspect, still needs to be improved, considering that teachers' pedagogical abilities have a significant influence on student achievement (Kporyi & Arko, 2021) which influences how the design, implementation, methods, guidance and evaluation are carried out. What teachers do to realize student potential under student characteristics (Sumarno et al., 2023); (Fauziyah et al., 2022) so it is very important how these abilities can be improved.

In the *Sekolah Penggerak* Program, which consists of state schools and private schools which have been declared to have passed or are eligible to take part in the program by the government, all schools involved receive the same treatment in terms of implementing the program, the results achieved including the teacher's understanding of differentiated learning should also have similarities. However, from the results of this research, there is a significant difference in understanding, where teachers in state schools have a higher understanding than teachers in private schools. These findings strengthen the results (Budiraharjo, 2015); (Heyneman & Stern, 2014); (Tej S et al., 2016), which state that public schools enjoy better resources than private schools, with funding, ease of access to learning resources, and freedom to work.

Something interesting from the research results found is that the teacher proactively anticipates the class he would teach from the start by adjusting his learning to students as a reaction to an evaluation of the failure of the previous lesson. The understanding of teachers in state schools and private schools still needs to improve in this aspect. Teachers still view assessment as an assessment of learning, meaning that assessment is still positioned separately from the learning process. In the Merdeka Curriculum, the assessment principle includes three aspects: assessment of learning, assessment for learning, and assessment as learning (Shadri et al., 2023). So, the teacher must be able to anticipate the assessment results that the teacher carries out and adjust the planning and implementation of subsequent learning based on the assessment results.

Likewise, the results show that in the aspect of Principles of Continuous Assessment in Differentiated Learning in the statement After learning ends, the teacher is not justified in evaluating an assessment of learning outcomes at the end of studying a learning material that is a project, it shows that there is confusion and teacher misconceptions regarding project-based learning. In fact, in the Merdeka curriculum, one of the recommended learning models is project-based learning, which is different from strengthening the Pancasila student profile project, which is included in the curriculum structure in the co-curricular. It is in line with research results, which show that there are still teacher misconceptions regarding project activities in the Merdeka curriculum. (Yoga Adi Pratama, 2018).

Based on the results, it also shows uniqueness, namely in the aspect of teachers' understanding of the results also show uniqueness in teachers' understanding of leadership principles and classroom routines in differentiated learning. The statement "Teachers provide opportunities for students always to study together classically and can also learn individually" shows exciting results, namely being included in the low category. This indicates that teachers still need to understand one of the principles of differentiated learning, namely, learning according to student characteristics.

The results of this research align with cognitive learning theory Bruner, which views perception and understanding of situations related to learning goals as determining a person's behaviour. This statement means that the teacher will learn according to the teacher's performance, which the teacher will then implement in the learning process. Then, the question arises: How can teachers improve their knowledge? This question, of course, goes back to the teacher himself: good teacher competence is a must for teachers, not only in one aspect of competence but must be present in a teacher as a whole. Teacher competency significantly influences students' abilities, especially in critical thinking. (Dahlan et al., 2020).

The research results show that teachers in state schools have a higher understanding of differentiated learning than in private schools, even though they receive the same assistance and programs in the *Sekolah Penggerak* Program. The different leadership methods in the two types of schools certainly impact the quality of education and learning in the school (Dahlan et al., 2020). It will be exciting to study how effective the principal's leadership is in the *Sekolah Penggerak* Program in implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum.

4. CONCLUSION

The level of understanding of the principles of differentiated learning between public and private school teachers, if calculated individually by the principles, shows a slight difference. In general, the

level of understanding of public and private teachers falls on the same criteria, either high, medium or low. The different levels of understanding of the two groups of teachers are only visible in one statement regarding the principles of leadership and routines in the classroom, namely that educators do not have to be able to lead their students so that they can participate in learning in a conducive learning climate and situation through a mutually determined class agreement. In this statement, state teachers have a low level of understanding, while private teachers have a medium level of understanding. However, if calculated based on the average level of understanding of teachers from state and private schools, there are significant differences. State school teachers are at the high understanding criteria with an average score of 73.125 and a percentage of 76.1%, while private school teachers are at the criteria of moderate understanding with a mean score of 71.021 and presentation of 73.98%. It shows that teachers' understanding of differentiated learning differs in schools implementing the Sekolah Penggerak Program in the high category. These results impact the emergence of obstacles to achieving the goals of the Sekolah penggerak program to implement an independent curriculum where learning must be student-centred. The teacher's inappropriate understanding impacts the learning process that the teacher applies. This will also have an impact on student learning outcomes. Therefore, the author suggests that future researchers study how differentiated learning is implemented in these schools by linking it to student learning outcomes.

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