



## Innovation Of Differentiated Instruction In Early Childhood Education Within The Framework of The Merdeka Curriculum: A Kindergarten Case Study

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### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menganalisis inovasi pembelajaran berdiferensiasi dalam Kurikulum Merdeka di TK Negeri Pembina Muara Tebo, yang berlandaskan keberagaman kesiapan, minat, dan cara belajar anak. Menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif dan data kuantitatif sederhana, data diambil dari kuesioner 35 butir (lima dimensi) pada enam pendidik terpilih. Rata-rata penguasaan mencapai 85,2% (sangat baik); aspek implementasi kelas tertinggi (92,9%), sedangkan pemahaman kebijakan kurikulum terendah (71,4%). Hasil menunjukkan praktik sudah berjalan baik, namun pemahaman kebijakan dan konsep perlu diperkuat. Penelitian ini menyajikan gambaran kesiapan lembaga serta rekomendasi peningkatan kapasitas melalui pelatihan, komunitas belajar, dan supervisi berbasis pembinaan.

**Kata Kunci:** Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi, Kurikulum Merdeka, Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini, Inovasi Pembelajaran, Asesmen Autentik

### ABSTRACT

This study analyzes differentiated instruction as a pedagogical innovation in the Merdeka Curriculum at TK Negeri Pembina Muara Tebo, focusing on children's diverse readiness, interests, and learning profiles. Using a descriptive method with simple quantitative data, data were gathered via a 35-item questionnaire covering five dimensions, administered to six selected educators. The average mastery reached 85.2% (very good), with classroom implementation highest (92.9%) and understanding of curriculum policy lowest (71.4%). Findings show strong practical application, while policy literacy and conceptual understanding need improvement. This study outlines institutional readiness and offers recommendations for capacity building through training, learning communities, and coaching-based supervision.

**Keywords:** Differentiated Instruction, Merdeka Curriculum, Early Childhood Education, Learning Innovation, Authentic Assessment

## Introduction

Curriculum reform in Indonesia has entered a new phase since the government introduced the Merdeka Curriculum as an effort to recover learning after the pandemic. Through Decree of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) Number 56/M/2022 concerning Guidelines for Curriculum Implementation in the Context of Learning Recovery, the Merdeka Curriculum began to be applied in the 2022/2023 academic year and positions education units, including Early Childhood Education (ECE), as curriculum developers oriented toward the needs and potential of learners [1]. This policy firmly encourages child-centered, flexible, and meaningful learning as the core principle most relevant to the developmental characteristics of young children. For the ECE level, this orientation is not merely an administrative adjustment, but an affirmation of the paradigm that good education begins from recognizing the diversity of children.

One pedagogical innovation that marks the Merdeka Curriculum is differentiated instruction. Differentiated instruction is an approach that deliberately adjusts content, process, product, and the learning environment based on children's diverse readiness, interests, and learning profiles [2], [3]. This approach rests on the conviction that no two children are truly alike, so that learning needs to be designed with various pathways toward the same goal. Differentiation does not mean preparing a different plan for each child every day, but rather providing a range of support, challenges, and choices so that every child can grow from their own point of readiness.

Empirical evidence from various systematic reviews and international meta-analyses strengthens the position of differentiated instruction as a promising practice. A review of research in secondary

education shows that differentiation applied in the classroom produces a small to moderate positive effect on students' academic achievement, while affirming that its effectiveness depends heavily on the quality of implementation and contextual support [4]. Another study in mixed-ability classrooms found that differentiation can accommodate high-achieving students without sacrificing other groups, provided that teachers receive adequate guidance and resources [5]. These findings indicate that the success of differentiation does not lie in the mere existence of a policy, but in the readiness and competence of educators in translating it into high-quality classroom practice.

In the ECE context, this idea aligns closely with the principle of learning through play and respect for the uniqueness of each child [6], [7]. Young children learn best when activities are meaningful, enjoyable, and connected to their interests and experiences, so that differentiation becomes a natural pedagogical language for ECE educators. A number of studies in Indonesia show that differentiated instruction provides significant benefits at the ECE level, particularly in enhancing children's motivation, independence, and engagement in learning activities [8], [9].

However, various studies also reveal that its implementation is not yet even. Many ECE educators do not fully understand the best way to apply differentiation in the classroom, so that the learning models used tend to be inconsistent across teachers and classes [10], [11]. This gap in understanding raises the urgency of empirically mapping the extent of educator readiness in a particular education unit, rather than merely assuming uniform competence based on the nationwide enactment of the policy.

TK Negeri Pembina Muara Tebo, as one of the state ECE units serving as a reference in its region, is in a strategic position to translate the Merdeka

Curriculum policy into practice. As a Pembina (model) kindergarten, this institution is expected to serve as an example of good-practice implementation for other ECE units around it. Therefore, mapping the understanding and practice of differentiated instruction in this institution holds important value, both for the institution's internal interests and for enriching the body of literature on Merdeka Curriculum implementation at the ECE level in the regions.

Although the literature on differentiated instruction in ECE continues to grow, most studies still focus on conceptual descriptions or single case studies without a structured mapping of the dimensions of understanding. Few studies have systematically mapped the level of ECE educators' mastery across the various dimensions of differentiated instruction, from understanding of policy, concept, implementation, and assessment, to collaboration and barriers. Such multidimensional mapping is important because it enables the precise identification of strengths and weaknesses, so that capacity-strengthening interventions can be designed more accurately on target. This is the gap that the present study seeks to fill.

Theoretically, this study rests on three complementary foundations. First, Tomlinson's differentiation framework, which distinguishes four adjustable aspects, namely content, process, product, and the learning environment, against three bases of children's diversity, namely readiness, interest, and learning profile [2], [3]. Second, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of the zone of proximal development, which positions scaffolding as the core mechanism in helping children move from their actual ability toward their potential ability [14]. Third, the perspective of continuous professional development, which affirms that the quality of learning is largely determined by the readiness, competence,

and ecosystem support available to educators [19]. These three foundations serve as the lens for reading the five-dimension data collected in this study.

The novelty of this study lies in its approach of mapping ECE educators' mastery in a multidimensional and item-based manner, so that it does not merely conclude whether differentiated instruction has "already" or "not yet" been applied, but shows precisely on which dimensions and which material the strengths and weaknesses lie. Such mapping provides diagnostic value that can be acted upon directly by school principals and policymakers in designing well-targeted capacity-strengthening programs, while also producing a conceptual framework that can be tested and developed in the context of other ECE units.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the innovation of differentiated instruction in ECE within the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at TK Negeri Pembina Muara Tebo, by mapping educators' level of mastery across five main dimensions, identifying aspects that are already strong and those that still require strengthening, and formulating a conceptual framework of implementation that can serve as a practical reference. The findings are expected to provide a basis for formulating strategies to enhance educator capacity so that the innovation of differentiated instruction can be carried out optimally and sustainably.

## Research Method

This study employed a descriptive approach supported by simple quantitative data to portray educators' level of understanding and readiness in applying differentiated instruction within the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The descriptive approach was chosen because the study intends to capture the phenomenon as it is in the field, namely the profile of educators' mastery across the

various dimensions of differentiated instruction, without providing any particular treatment to the subjects. This design is consistent with the study's aim of mapping rather than testing cause-and-effect relationships.

The study was conducted at TK Negeri Pembina Muara Tebo, Tebo Regency, Jambi Province. The research subjects numbered six people, consisting of the school principal, teachers, and education personnel. Subject selection was carried out purposively, considering their direct involvement in the daily planning and implementation of learning, so as to be relevant to the focus of the study [12]. Given that the number of educators and education personnel in this institution is relatively limited, the entire population of educators was involved as respondents (total sampling), so that the resulting portrait reflects the overall condition of the education unit.

The data collection instrument was a closed questionnaire consisting of 35 multiple-choice items. These items were grouped into five dimensions as presented in Table 1. Each item has one answer considered most correct according to the prevailing theoretical principles and regulations, so that respondents' answers can be scored objectively. The construction of a blueprint linking each dimension with indicators and item numbers aimed to maintain the content validity of all aspects of differentiated instruction to be measured.

**Table 1. Research Instrument Blueprint**

| Dimension | Key Indicators                                                                                                                                                 | Item No. | Total |
|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|-------|
| D1        | Understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum: policy foundations, year of enactment, structure of Learning Outcomes, Pancasila Student Profile, learning principles | 1–7      | 7     |
| D2        | Concept of differentiated instruction: definition and                                                                                                          | 8–14     | 7     |

|    |                                                                                                                                         |       |           |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-----------|
|    | key figures, four aspects (content, process, product, environment), readiness/interest/learning-profile bases                           |       |           |
| D3 | Implementation in the ECE classroom: environment/learning-center arrangement, scaffolding, variety of activities, classroom management  | 15–21 | 7         |
| D4 | Assessment and evaluation: authentic assessment, diagnostic–formative, observation/anecdotal/ checklist instruments, feedback           | 22–28 | 7         |
| D5 | Roles, collaboration, and barriers: roles of teacher and principal, learning community, parental collaboration, implementation barriers | 29–35 | 7         |
|    | <b>Total</b>                                                                                                                            |       | <b>35</b> |

*Source: Processed from the research instrument design (2026).*

The collected data were analyzed descriptively. Each respondent's score was calculated based on the number of answers matching the key, then converted into percentages and categorized using the criteria: very good (85–100%), good (70–84%), fair (55–69%), and poor (below 55%). In addition to per-respondent analysis, an analysis of the mastery level on each dimension and an item analysis were also conducted to identify the material most frequently not yet mastered. Data validity was supported by the alignment of the instrument with the theory of differentiated instruction and the Merdeka Curriculum regulations, and reinforced by observation of learning practices in the institution as a form of simple triangulation between the instrument data and the real conditions in the classroom.

## Results and Discussion

### Results

The study involved six respondents with varying backgrounds in position and

length of service. Most respondents were educators with more than fifteen years of work experience, indicating professional maturity in carrying out educational duties. The respondent profile is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Profile of Research Respondents**

| No | Respondent Name            | Position/Role       | Length of Service |
|----|----------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 1  | Desrita, S.Pd.             | Principal           | 18 years          |
| 2  | Estaurina, S.Pd.           | Teacher             | 18 years          |
| 3  | Ira Aswati                 | Teacher             | 16 years          |
| 4  | Nadia Tusyhabihah, S.Pd.   | Education Personnel | 1 year            |
| 5  | Padilah, S.Pd.             | Teacher             | 21 years          |
| 6  | Wiwiek Sawitri, S.Pd., AUD | Teacher             | 18 years          |

Source: Primary research data (2026).

The results of the instrument completion show that respondents' mastery of the differentiated instruction material is relatively high. Respondents' scores ranged from 25 to 33 out of a maximum of 35, with an average of 29.83, equivalent to 85.2%. This average falls within the very good category, although there is fairly meaningful variation between individuals. The details of each respondent's score are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3. Respondents' Scores and Mastery Categories**

| No | Respondent        | Score          | Percent age  | Category    |
|----|-------------------|----------------|--------------|-------------|
| 1  | Desrita           | 33/35          | 94.3%        | Very Good   |
| 2  | Nadia Tusyhabihah | 32/35          | 91.4%        | Very Good   |
| 3  | Wiwiek Sawitri    | 32/35          | 91.4%        | Very Good   |
| 4  | Estaurina         | 31/35          | 88.6%        | Very Good   |
| 5  | Ira Aswati        | 26/35          | 74.3%        | Good        |
| 6  | Padilah           | 25/35          | 71.4%        | Good        |
|    | <b>Average</b>    | <b>29.83/3</b> | <b>85.2%</b> | <b>Very</b> |

|  |  |   |  |      |
|--|--|---|--|------|
|  |  | 5 |  | Good |
|--|--|---|--|------|

Source: Primary research data (2026).

When examined by dimension, the findings reveal a consistent and informative pattern. The dimension of classroom implementation of differentiated instruction obtained the highest mastery level (92.9%), followed by the dimension of roles, collaboration, and barriers (90.5%) and the dimension of assessment and evaluation (88.1%). Conversely, the dimension of understanding the Merdeka Curriculum obtained the lowest mastery level (71.4%), while the dimension of the concept of differentiated instruction stood at 83.3%. The distribution of mastery per dimension is presented in Table 4.

**Table 4. Respondents' Mastery Level by Dimension**

| No  | Dimension                               | Mastery | Category  |
|-----|-----------------------------------------|---------|-----------|
| I   | Understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum | 71.4%   | Good      |
| II  | Concept of Differentiated Instruction   | 83.3%   | Good      |
| III | Implementation in the ECE Classroom     | 92.9%   | Very Good |
| IV  | Assessment and Evaluation               | 88.1%   | Very Good |
| V   | Roles, Collaboration, and Barriers      | 90.5%   | Very Good |

Source: Primary research data (2026).

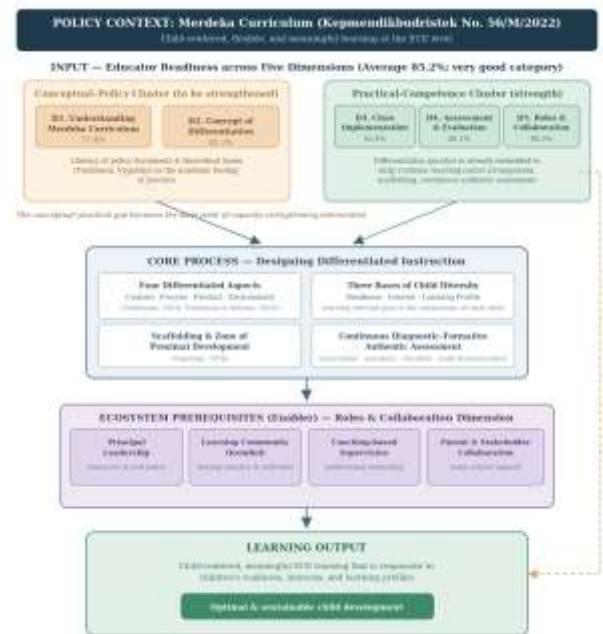
The item-level analysis reinforces these findings. Two items related to the technical-administrative aspects of the Merdeka Curriculum documents, namely the year of national enactment of the Merdeka Curriculum and the structure of the Learning Outcome (CP) elements in ECE, were not answered correctly by any of the respondents. Conversely, items related to actual classroom practice, such as managing the learning environment and applying scaffolding, were mastered very well. The items with the lowest mastery levels are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5. Items with the Lowest Mastery Levels**

| Item No. | Material Substance                                   | Correct Answers | Percentage |
|----------|------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|------------|
| 1        | Year of national enactment of the Merdeka Curriculum | 0 of 6          | 0%         |
| 4        | Structure of ECE Learning Outcome elements           | 0 of 6          | 0%         |
| 12       | Meaning of process differentiation                   | 3 of 6          | 50%        |
| 22       | Identifying types of formative assessment            | 3 of 6          | 50%        |
| 9        | Pioneer of differentiated instruction                | 4 of 6          | 66.7%      |
| 30       | Main barrier to implementing differentiation         | 4 of 6          | 66.7%      |

Source: Primary research data (2026).

These findings illustrate an interesting gap between mastery of the practical aspects and mastery of the conceptual-administrative aspects. Educators at TK Negeri Pembina Muara Tebo tend to be stronger in terms of how to carry out differentiated instruction than in their understanding of the policy foundations and theoretical bases behind it. To summarize the interrelation of these findings into one coherent flow, a conceptual framework for the implementation of differentiated instruction in ECE was developed, as presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for the Implementation of Differentiated Instruction in ECE within the Merdeka Curriculum**

Source: Developed by the authors based on the research findings (2026).

The framework in Figure 1 shows that the five dimensions of educator readiness can be grouped into two clusters. The conceptual-policy cluster (the dimensions of understanding the Merdeka Curriculum and the concept of differentiation) functions as the academic footing, while the practical-competence cluster (classroom implementation, assessment, and roles and collaboration) functions as the driving force that brings practice to life in the field. These two clusters flow into the core process of designing differentiated instruction that adjusts content, process, product, and the environment to children's readiness, interests, and learning profiles, supported by scaffolding and continuous authentic assessment. This core process can only run optimally when supported by ecosystem prerequisites, namely the principal's leadership, learning communities, coaching-based supervision, and parental collaboration, which ultimately culminate in child-centered learning and optimal child development. The feedback line from assessment back to planning affirms the

cyclical and reflective nature of the whole process.

### **Discussion**

The high average mastery among respondents (85.2%) indicates that the innovation of differentiated instruction has been well received and understood by educators at TK Negeri Pembina Muara Tebo. This finding is consistent with previous research stating that state ECE units generally receive earlier emphasis in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and therefore possess more mature implementation readiness [10]. This maturity is also supported by the length of service of most respondents, which exceeds fifteen years, a capital of experience that enriches pedagogical intuition in reading children's needs.

The dominance of mastery in the classroom implementation dimension (92.9%) shows that the differentiation principles formulated by Tomlinson, namely adjusting content, process, product, and the learning environment to students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles, have been embedded in educators' daily practice [2], [13]. Good mastery of arranging learning corners or learning centers and providing graduated assistance (scaffolding) indicates that educators are able to translate the theory of the zone of proximal development into real actions in the classroom [14]. This affirms that differentiated instruction in ECE does not demand preparing a different lesson plan for each child every day, but rather teachers' sensitivity in responding to diversity through a variety of flexible activities [15]. This pattern also supports the conclusion of systematic reviews that the quality of implementation, not merely formal adoption, is the main determinant of the effectiveness of differentiation [4].

The strength of the assessment and evaluation dimension (88.1%) is also an encouraging finding. Respondents

demonstrated a good understanding that assessment in early childhood should be authentic and continuous, conducted through observation, anecdotal records, developmental checklists, and documentation of children's work, and directed toward providing meaningful feedback rather than merely a final judgment [16]. This understanding is very important because appropriate assessment is both the starting point and the mainstay of differentiated instruction: the results of diagnostic assessment become the basis for teachers in designing activities suited to children's readiness and interests [17]. It is this close link between assessment and design that is depicted in Figure 1 as the feedback line that makes the whole process cyclical.

The strength of the roles, collaboration, and barriers dimension (90.5%) shows educators' awareness that differentiated instruction is not the individual work of the teacher alone, but an ecosystem involving the principal's leadership, collaboration with parents, and the learning community (KomBel). The principal plays a role in providing training, resources, collaboration time, and coaching-based supervision, while the learning community serves as a venue for sharing good practices and collective reflection to enhance shared competence [18]. The importance of this ecosystem is reinforced by meta-analytic evidence that continuous professional development programs for ECE educators consistently improve the quality of teacher-child interaction and ultimately have a positive impact on child development [19]. Awareness of barriers, such as high teacher-student ratios, limited resources, and administrative burdens, shows that educators are realistic about the challenges of implementation in the field.

On the other hand, the low mastery in the dimension of understanding the Merdeka Curriculum (71.4%) is an important note.



None of the respondents answered correctly the items concerning the year of national enactment of the Merdeka Curriculum and the structure of the Learning Outcome elements. Yet the Merdeka Curriculum officially took effect in the 2022/2023 academic year through Kepmendikbudristek Number 56/M/2022, with its main references being the Learning Outcomes and the Pancasila Student Profile [1]. This finding indicates a gap between practice and policy literacy: educators have carried out the substance of differentiated instruction, but have not fully linked it to the regulatory framework and theoretical bases that serve as formal references. A similar gap has also been observed in other studies, which found that ECE teachers often do not truly understand the conceptual foundations of differentiation even though they have practiced it [11], [20].

This gap between practical skills and conceptual understanding needs to be addressed proportionally. High mastery of practice is valuable capital, but practice that is not supported by strong conceptual understanding risks becoming a routine that loses direction when faced with new situations, for example when the curriculum is updated or when teachers must explain the rationale of their pedagogical decisions to parents and supervisors. Therefore, strengthening literacy in curriculum documents and the theoretical foundations of differentiated instruction becomes an urgent need so that the good practices already underway have a solid footing and can be accounted for academically [9], [7]. Within the framework in Figure 1, it is this conceptual-policy cluster that constitutes the most strategic point of intervention.

Overall, these findings reinforce the view that differentiated instruction in ECE is not a foreign concept for educators in the field, but a practice that is already alive and developing, albeit with varying degrees of theoretical awareness. This pattern is consistent with cross-context observations

showing that differentiation in ECE lives more in teachers' reflective actions than in formal documents [21]. TK Negeri Pembina Muara Tebo, with its very good mastery achievement, has the potential to become a laboratory of good practice for other ECE units, especially if accompanied by strengthening in the aspect of policy literacy and the alignment of practice with widely recognized conceptual frameworks [3], [8], [5].

The practical implications of these findings are fairly clear. At the education-unit level, the principal can use this multidimensional profile as a basis for planning targeted professional development, for example by prioritizing the strengthening of policy literacy without having to repeat training in practical skills that have already been mastered. At the regional policy level, such mapping can serve as a more informative instrument for monitoring ECE units' readiness than uniform administrative reports. In this way, differentiated instruction is viewed not only as a formal obligation, but as a practice whose quality can be measured, fostered, and gradually improved [19], [18].

At the theoretical level, this study affirms the importance of distinguishing between procedural competence (knowing how to do) and conceptual understanding (knowing why and on what basis) in assessing educator readiness. These two types of knowledge do not always develop in tandem; an educator can be highly skilled in practice yet not fully link their actions to the theoretical framework and regulations that underpin them. This finding complements the differentiation literature, which has thus far focused more on student learning outcomes [4], [5], by giving attention to the architecture of educator knowledge as a prerequisite for the sustainability of innovation. The conceptual framework in Figure 1 seeks to bridge these two types of knowledge into one coherent flow that can be tested further.



It is also important to note that the effectiveness of differentiated instruction is context-sensitive. Meta-analytic studies show that the magnitude of differentiation's impact can differ across countries and settings, influenced by factors such as class size, resource availability, and the intensity of professional support [4], [5]. In the ECE context in regions such as Tebo Regency, these factors become highly relevant: the teacher-child ratio, the availability of play materials, and the space and time for collaboration all help determine the extent to which differentiation principles can be realized consistently. Therefore, the high mastery achievement in this study should be read as potential that needs to be continuously nurtured through ecosystem support, not as a final end point.

The synthesis of all the findings of this study shows that the success of the innovation of differentiated instruction in Early Childhood Education (ECE) is determined not only by teachers' ability to apply various learning strategies in the classroom, but also by the strong interconnection among practice, conceptual understanding, and the support of the educational environment. Within the Merdeka Curriculum context, ECE teachers have demonstrated adaptive ability in adjusting learning activities to children's needs, interests, and developmental characteristics. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of such practice will be increasingly optimal when supported by a deep understanding of the principles, aims, and philosophical foundations of differentiated instruction itself.

The research findings reveal that many differentiation practices have taken place naturally in daily learning activities. Teachers adjust activities, media, and approaches based on students' abilities and needs. However, some of these practices are not always accompanied by a complete conceptual awareness of the differentiated

instruction framework. This condition indicates a gap between what teachers do in the field and the theoretical understanding that underlies it. Therefore, strengthening teacher capacity through training, mentoring, and continuous professional development becomes an important aspect in bridging that gap.

In addition to the conceptual aspect, policy literacy is also a component that strongly determines the sustainability of the innovation of differentiated instruction. Teachers' understanding of the regulations, the Merdeka Curriculum implementation guidelines, and the direction of national education policy enables differentiation practice to be carried out more systematically and purposefully. Policy literacy helps teachers understand that differentiated instruction is not merely a choice of teaching method, but an integral part of the learner-centered learning paradigm. In this way, teachers can connect the practices they carry out with broader educational aims and the demands of the prevailing curriculum.

On the other hand, this study also affirms the importance of a supportive ecosystem. Learning innovation cannot develop optimally if it relies solely on the initiative of individual teachers. Support from the principal, collaboration among teachers, parental involvement, the availability of learning facilities, and a school culture open to change are factors that strengthen the implementation of differentiated instruction. A positive ecosystem enables reflection, the sharing of good practices, and the continuous development of innovation so that the quality of early childhood education services can keep improving.

Based on all these findings, this study offers a conceptual framework that positions practical competence, conceptual understanding, policy literacy, and ecosystem support as four mutually

connected and mutually reinforcing elements. This framework explains that the innovation of differentiated instruction will become more robust when teachers are not only able to carry out effective practice, but also understand the theoretical and policy foundations behind it, and obtain support from a conducive institutional environment. In this way, this idea becomes an important contribution to the development of ECE practice and policy in facing the challenges of Merdeka Curriculum implementation, while also providing direction for efforts to improve the quality of learning that is more inclusive, adaptive, and centered on children's needs.

### **Research Limitations**

This study has several limitations that should be stated openly. First, the number of respondents is relatively small (six people) and limited to a single education unit, so the findings are not intended for broad generalization, but rather to portray the readiness profile within the context of that institution. Second, the main data were obtained through a multiple-choice instrument that measures cognitive understanding and self-perception, so it does not fully represent the actual quality of learning practice in the classroom. Third, the study has not measured the direct impact of applying differentiated instruction on child development. Therefore, further research is recommended to use a more comprehensive design, for example through in-depth classroom observation, interviews, analysis of planning documents, and measurement of the impact on child developmental outcomes, with a broader coverage of education units so as to increase generalizability.

### **Conclusion**

This study concludes that the innovation of differentiated instruction in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at TK Negeri Pembina Muara Tebo has been running well, with an average educator mastery of 85.2%, which

falls within the very good category. The classroom implementation dimension is the strongest aspect (92.9%), followed by the roles and collaboration dimension (90.5%) and assessment and evaluation (88.1%). This shows that at the level of practice, the differentiation principles centered on children's readiness, interests, and learning profiles have become embedded in educators' daily routines. Conversely, the dimension of understanding the Merdeka Curriculum policy documents is the aspect most in need of strengthening (71.4%), indicating a gap between practice that is already good and policy literacy as well as conceptual foundations that are not yet fully strong. The conceptual framework formulated in this study positions that gap as the main point of intervention for capacity strengthening.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that the strengthening of educator capacity be directed not only at technical skills in the classroom, but also at policy literacy and the theoretical foundations of differentiated instruction. Strengthening can be pursued through training that links practice with regulations and theory, the optimization of learning communities as venues for sharing good practices and collective reflection, and coaching-based supervision by the principal. Support from regional governments and stakeholders in providing resources, reducing administrative burdens, and facilitating collaboration time is also greatly needed so that the innovation of differentiated instruction in ECE can proceed optimally and sustainably.

Finally, this study affirms that the success of the innovation of differentiated instruction is determined not by the mere existence of a policy, but by the integration of educators' practical competence, conceptual understanding and policy literacy, and the ecosystem support of the education unit. The resulting conceptual framework is expected to serve as a

practical reference for principals, supervisors, and policymakers in designing targeted capacity-strengthening programs, while also serving as a starting point for further research that tests its applicability

across various ECE-unit contexts. In this way, the good readiness portrait at TK Negeri Pembina Muara Tebo can develop into sustainable good practice that can be transmitted to other ECE units.

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