

Implementation of Differentiated Learning Through Play Activities in Early Childhood

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Abstract

This study aims to determine the activities of teachers in the implementation of differentiated learning through play activities in early childhood. This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. The instrument used is an observation sheet to observe the actions of teachers and students. Written guidelines and observations serve as research tools and these are processed through observation, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis is organizing data, presenting data, and drawing conclusions. This study was conducted in a kindergarten school. The school was chosen because the researcher is one of the school's teachers, thus facilitating the research process. This study is field research, so the information reviewed in this article is data that occurred at the research location. The results of this study indicate that the process of planning differentiated learning through play activities in early childhood has been carried out following the rules of learning planning in Early Childhood Education Programs (ECEP). Implementing differentiated learning through play activities in early childhood follows the principles of child development. Differentiated learning through play activities in early childhood has succeeded in optimizing aspects of children's cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development. It is proven from the results of the evaluation reports given by the school to the parents of students showing that the aspects of student development have developed well. This is also reinforced by reports from parents of students that there is a significant improvement in the development of children at home. The assessment is carried out by the teacher using instruments prepared by the school.

Keywords: implementation, differentiated learning play, early childhood

1. Introduction

The development of the dynamics of cultural life, which is marked by the development of science and technology, has become an inevitable necessity. This has a significant impact on all aspects of the constellation of life, including education which must be able to give birth to future generations who have competence and character in line with the phase of world development in the era of the industrial revolution 4.0 in the context of society 5.0 without ignoring the noble values of the culture in life (Avelar et al., 2019). Therefore, the educational process must be oriented towards efforts to develop the potential of students as individuals who have unique characteristics that differ from one another (Robinson et al., 2014).

The development of education over time from time to time met many adjustments (Yusuf, 2006). One of the most prominent is in terms of learning media (Suprayogi et al., 2017). In the past, the process of transferring knowledge was enough with a blackboard, now it is no longer used. Education is transformed with various media that adapt to technological developments and advances (Warman et al., 2021). Likewise with the learning styles implemented in schools. In the past, certain people were able to receive education, but education was based on colonialism. Unlike today where the implementation of learning puts forward human values which are in line with Ki Hajar Dewantara concept which makes students human learners and teachers' facilitators so that growth and development and demand and talent or potential of each student can be explored in such a way that it becomes something that can be achieved. will be useful in the future (Thapliyal et al., 2022).

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Based on the explanation above, there needs to be a reorientation of education that is able to accommodate various potential differences for the development and optimization of the competencies and characters that students have as an effort to prepare students to be able to live life in the dynamics of a future life that is full of challenges (Santoso et al., 2022). In an effort to realize these expectations, it is necessary to revitalize critical and equitable education in order to realize the expected goals, one of which is through differentiated learning. Differentiated learning was introduced by Carol Ann Tomlinson in (1999), differentiated learning is learning that accommodates, serves, and recognizes the diversity of students in learning according to students' readiness, interests, and learning preferences. Meanwhile, in content differentiation learning, it focuses on what is taught to students (Trinanda & Yaswinda, 2022).

Content can be distinguished from responses, levels of readiness, combinations of readiness, interests, and learning profiles of learners. Differentiated learning is learning that accommodates serves, and recognizes the diversity of students in learning according to student's readiness, interests, and learning preferences (de Jager, 2013; Robinson et al., 2014). Meanwhile, expressing differentiation as a solution to be able to solve problems regarding the diversity of students' abilities when studying in one class, namely a pleasant learning atmosphere, speaking practice, collaborative learning, and the selection of materials and learning processes (Ismajli & Imami, 2018). This serves to measure the readiness or readiness of the students themselves in receiving lessons (Amon & Anggal, 2021). However, as we know learning cannot always be done without obstacles and obstacles. Support from both the school and the teacher itself should be needed in teaching students to use differentiation strategies.

The teacher must pocket the learning profile of each student in order to determine the right strategy for facilitating student learning activities (Tomlinson, 1999). Here the teacher's role is quite central, in addition to being proficient in managing to learn, he must also be good at making a media that can facilitate each student's learning activities, the hope is that there are no students who do not understand the lessons delivered (Ciaramella & Dall'Orso, 2021). Differentiated learning is learning that accommodates student learning needs. The teacher facilitates students according to their needs because each student has different characteristics, so they cannot be given the same treatment. In implementing differentiated learning, teachers need to think about reasonable actions that will later be taken, because differentiated learning does not mean learning by giving different treatment or actions for each student, nor learning that distinguishes smart students from those who are less intelligent (Ciaramella & Dall'Orso, 2021).

The characteristics or characteristics of differentiated learning include (Faiz et al., 2022); the learning environment invites students to learn, the curriculum has clearly defined learning objectives, there is an ongoing assessment, teachers respond to or respond to student learning needs, and effective classroom management (Handiyani & Muhtar, 2022). Examples of classes that apply differentiated learning are when the teacher's learning process uses various ways so that students can exploit the curriculum content, the teacher also provides a variety of activities that make sense so that students can understand and have information or ideas, and the teacher provides a variety of options where students can demonstrate what they learn (Lestarinigrum, 2022). An example of a class that has not implemented differentiated learning is that the teacher imposes his own will. Teachers do not understand the interests, and desires of students. Not all of the student's learning needs are met because when the learning process uses a method that according to the teacher is good, the teacher does not provide a variety of activities and various choices (Pane et al., 2022).

To be able to apply differentiated learning in the classroom, the teacher must do the following: Mapping learning needs based on three aspects, namely: learning readiness, interest in learning, and student learning profiles can be done through interviews, observations, or surveys using questionnaires, planning differentiated learning based on the results of the mapping, evaluating and reflecting on ongoing learning (Santoso et al., 2022). Mapping learning needs is our main key to being able to determine the next step. If the results of our mapping are not accurate, the lesson plans and actions that we make and do will be inaccurate. To map the learning needs of our students, we also need accurate data from students, parents/guardians, as well as from their environment. Especially during a pandemic like this, where students carry out distance learning so that direct interaction between teachers and students is very rare (Amon et al., 2022). As a result, the data we collect to map student learning needs is difficult to determine whether it is valid or not. Support from parents and students to provide complete and correct data according to reality.

The application of differentiated learning will have an impact on schools, classes, and especially students (Thapliyal et al., 2022). Every student has different characteristics, we can't give all students the same treatment. If we do not provide services according to the needs of students, it can hinder students from being able to progress and develop their learning (Pane et al., 2022). The impact of classes that apply differentiated learning include; everyone feeling welcomed, students with various characteristics feeling valued, feeling safe, there is hope for growth, teachers

teaching to achieve success, there is real justice, teachers and students collaborating, student learning needs being facilitated and well served. From some of these impacts, it is hoped that optimal learning outcomes will be achieved.

Differentiated learning is closely related to the educational philosophy according to Ki Hajar Dewantara, the values, and roles of teachers, and positive culture. One of the educational philosophies according to Ki Hajar Dewantara is the “among” system, the teacher must be able to guide students to develop according to their nature, which is very in line with differentiated learning (Faiz et al., 2022). One of the values and roles of teachers is to create learning that favors students, namely learning that liberates students' thoughts and potential. This is in line with differentiated learning. One of the visions of the driving teacher is to realize independent learning and the profile of Pancasila students, to realize this vision one way is to apply differentiated learning. We also have to build a positive culture so that it can support disorientated learning (Siagian et al., 2022).

Early childhood is a golden age because children experience growth and development that is quite rapid and cannot be replaced in the future (Saracho & Spodek, 2019). According to a scientist named Beeker, who explained that early childhood is grouped into children aged between 3-6 years, and children of that age usually follow early childhood education programs (Anggal, 2017). Early age is also called a "critical period" in life because early childhood will determine the development, of the next child. This period is the most appropriate time to lay the foundations for the development of physical, cognitive, language, emotional-social abilities, creativity, and other basic developments. Thus, efforts to develop the full potential of children must begin at an early age so that the growth and development of children are achieved optimally (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 2016).

Playing is a fun activity for children, especially in early childhood (Sriwahyuni et al., 2017). The meaning of play becomes important when viewed from the point of view of the development and growth of children. Therefore, to support the growth of children physically or psychologically, children need to play. Because playing is a place for children to freely channel and express what they want without being limited by rules. Through play, children will get pleasure and self-satisfaction. Playing is not only about doing what you want but can also train your imagination and increase creativity. The play has its own meaning and meaning for children. The play has a meaning as a means of bringing children into society. Introducing children to be members of a community, knowing and appreciating the community. Play is a means to measure children's abilities and potential. Children will master various kinds of games, and understand the nature and events that take place in their environment (Maimunah et al., 2018).

Along with the times, when technological developments make it easy to find information. In addition to making, it easier to find information, it seems that technological developments also make it easier for children to play (games). One of them is through gadgets, even playing can easily use gadgets. Now is the time for children to play instantly like playing with gadgets. Games that exist in gadgets do have positive and negative impacts on children (Saracho & Spodek, 2019). But gadgets are more directed towards tendencies that have a negative impact, such as fostering a sense of selfishness in a child because he is just busy playing alone without caring about his peers (Wulandari et al., 2018).

Get to know and observe more closely how children play at an early age in their daily lives, both when making direct observations or making their own interests for the author. With his innocence, honesty, and early childhood curiosity about something he has just met, the writer is interested in making early childhood the object of inspiration for this study. Based on this, teacher skills are needed in supporting the effectiveness of learning that can achieve the expected goals, especially in facilitating the diversity of potential differences, where the learning needs of each student can be met (Sriwahyuni et al., 2017).

Ki Hajar Dewantara said that the concept of good learning is learning that does not violate the nature of diversity possessed by humans, so education cannot homogenize something that cannot be generalized. Based on this opinion, in other words, good learning is learning that is able to accommodate various differences in the characteristics of the learning styles possessed by students. Related to this, diverse learning according to the interests of students in facilitating their needs as described in this article can help students achieve learning outcomes. Each student will compete to understand the lessons taught by the teacher with their respective learning styles.

2. Research Method

This study uses a descriptive-analytical method with a qualitative approach (Miles & Huberman, 2014). In this method, the researcher not only describes the events that have occurred but also analyzes the meaning of the phenomenon. Analysis in descriptive research can be divided into activity analysis and content or document analysis. Activity analysis is an analysis that aims to analyze the activities carried out during the execution of the task. Content

or document analysis is an analysis that aims to collect and analyze official documents, both legal and policy documents as well as research results (Mac Naughton, 2020).

Data collection is the most important step in this research because the main purpose of research is to obtain valid data. Qualitative research design requires careful planning of the research management framework, including the stages of research. The stages of research carried out are preparation, implementation, and data processing. The data collection techniques used in the study were interviews, observations, and document studies using tools in the form of interview guides, observation guidelines, and recording devices. The phases in this study help to collect as much data as possible, and describe the data accurately and systematically about their research.

Research instruments are tools needed or used to collect data. Written guidelines and observations serve as research tools and these are processed through observation, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis is organizing data, presenting data, and drawing conclusions. This study was conducted in a kindergarten school. The school was chosen because the researcher is one of the teachers of the school, thus facilitating the research process. This study is field research, so the information reviewed in this article is data that actually occurred at the research location.

This case study uses a qualitative approach to research. Four data validity criteria are needed in qualitative approach research. The four things are construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability.

3. Results and Discussion

Playing is a severe activity, through playing children explore their world and gain the benefits of learning something new. When a child wants to play, there seems to be such a great desire in him. Children do it voluntarily, without coercion, or expecting rewards. A child's thirst to play with exploration to discover something new is a reflection of the work of a scientist. Play is the best potential for children to develop their interest in learning and creativity, it is necessary to grow the potential for playing children from an early age.

Children's rapidly developing abilities and interests can be supported and encouraged with appropriate play tools. Such as water and sand play equipment, building construction tools, puzzles, making concern patterns, and sewing. Children at this level are interested in naming and classifying colors, shapes, numbers, letters, and natural shapes, as well as exploration of space. Children are interested in the physical world and enjoy exploring it.

The findings based on interviews, observations, and document studies regarding the learning planning process in early childhood can be described as follows; (a) learning objectives (b) learning materials, (c) learning implementation schedule, and (d) steps for preparing lesson plans. The first step taken in planning is to determine the learning objectives. The making of learning objectives is carried out by deliberation between teachers and the head of ECEP. Learning objectives are divided into two namely general objectives and specific objectives. Learning materials through play refer to the generic menu curriculum issued by the ECEP directorate.

3.1. Preparation of Learning Plans

The teacher explains that after studying, knowing, and understanding the structure of the ECEP curriculum according to the generic menu reference, the planning of learning programs is made jointly by the teachers. Learning planning is packaged using a learning approach through play. The next step is to integrate these development indicators with the theme, then the theme is divided into several sub-themes. The next step is to look at the academic calendar in one year. The steps taken by teachers in preparing their learning plans through playing include: (1) preparing annual activity plans, (2) preparing weekly activity units, and (3) preparing daily activity units.

The steps that must be taken in implementing differentiated learning include mapping learning needs with the aim that teachers can plan appropriate learning plans and get accurate results. In this study, mapping of learning needs was carried out based on students' learning readiness and student interests. According to Ismajli and Imami (2018) differentiated learning through play activities in early childhood is any adjustment effort in the learning process in the classroom to meet the learning needs of students. Differentiated learning is a combination of the rational choices made by the teacher to meet the needs of students based on the learning objectives, the teacher's response to the learning needs of students, a learning environment that invites students to learn, effective classroom management, and consistent assessment.

The results of interviews and documentation studies obtained about differentiated learning through play activities in early childhood indicate that the activities carried out are by the concept of early childhood education programs. The

material and types of activities lead to the concept of early childhood education programs (ECEP), which are aimed at developing all aspects of children's physical and spiritual growth and development. Curriculum content is created with materials or materials that lead to goals. While the learning materials according to Thapliyal et al., (2022) that material is determined based on the learning objectives.

Learning is a means used to achieve the learning objectives that have been set. Based on the study of documentation and interviews with teachers that the curriculum or learning materials are differentiated through play activities in early childhood have been sourced from a generic menu (Wulandari et al., 2018). Still, in terms of language, it has not been packaged as the learning menu that has been made by the ECEP Directorate which has been integrated with multiple intelligences (Donkoh & Baffoe, 2018). However, the material has met the minimum competencies that must be achieved in children aged 4-6 years.

3.2. Implementation of Differentiated Learning Through Playing Activities

Furthermore, data on the differentiated learning process through play activities in early childhood will be presented. Based on interviews with teachers, observations, and document studies about the series of implementation of differentiated learning through play activities in early childhood, including: (1) the learning process (2) the types of games used, (3) the media used, and (4) the teacher's role in learning.

The teacher explains that before carrying out differentiated learning through play activities, the teacher first arranges the environment that will be used for learning. The room used for learning activities is divided into several rooms according to the existing class. Thus, the arrangement and preparation of the learning environment can be permanent and flexible according to the sub-themes in early childhood learning. The types of games used in learning are differentiated through play activities in early childhood based on interviews with teachers as follows: (1) Dolanan games, (2) Beberan games, (3) Tap games, (4) Children's Islamic songs, (5) Role play with Islamic stories and 6) Play with objects.

Based on interviews with teachers and documentation studies, the evaluation used in the implementation of differentiated learning through play activities was carried out not specifically but in conjunction with other general assessments, namely; each teacher observes, child development, took anecdotal notes, and collects children's work as porto polio. For the assessment process, the teacher has a notebook that can be filled out at any time. Furthermore, knowing the results of differentiated learning through play activities, carried out several assessments in the form of (a) an assessment by the homeroom teacher, (b) an assessment by the teacher, and (c) an assessment by parents.

Several steps must be taken when implementing differential learning. 1) Develop a differentiation design based on the mapping of student learning needs that have been made at the previous meeting. The differentiation design is clearly different from the curriculum lesson plans that have been made so far. The difference lies in the three strategies mentioned earlier: content, process, and product, which are explored with students. Differentiation design has a different content, learning process, and learning product. Once made, the strategies set will be included in the core learning activities, and the rest are made like the previous lesson plans.

In the differentiated learning process through play activities in early childhood, before the implementation of learning refers to the things mentioned above, what the teacher does is arrange the place that will be used in learning or arrange the area that will be used for differentiated learning through play activities, as well as preparing knick-knacks needed in learning. According to Thapliyal et al., (2022) before the teachers plan and create the activity centers, they must think about the space needed.

The theme chosen for differentiated learning through play activities has also been in accordance with the signs from the selection of themes. As stated by Thapliyal et al., (2022) that the theme is a medium to introduce various concepts so that children are able to recognize them completely, quickly, and clearly. The theme is the context (focus material) that frames all activities to achieve goals. Self-reflection is important and can greatly assist teachers in planning effective lessons. Reflection is evaluating the results of evaluation work based on the stages of planning, implementation, and results (Bergmark, 2020). To implement differentiated learning effectively, teachers need to map the learning needs of their students. This is because each student has different learning needs. From mapping learning needs, teachers can plan which strategies to use. Although there are many challenges in implementing differentiated learning, teachers must always be positive because teachers' main goal is to optimally develop students' potential (Santoso et al., 2022). In reflection activities too, students are given questions to provide an assessment of the teacher so that the teacher can understand the shortcomings in the learning and as an improvement material for future learning (Ismajli & Imami, 2018).

The implementation of differentiated learning through play activities in early childhood in accordance with the principles of child development as stated above can be seen in the development of the creativity aspect, namely by getting used to practicing and socializing since childhood. Differentiated learning activities through play activities for children aged from the research results can be concluded that the application of learning based on learning theory is adjusted to the objectives to be achieved properly.

Based on the results of research for evaluating differentiated learning through play activities in early childhood, the evaluation carried out by each teacher was observing, anecdotes, and using a developmental checklist, as well as parental notes (Robinson et al., 2014). For the assessment process, the teacher already has notebooks, so that the assessment process is carried out at any time. Existing assessments are expected to be authentic and thorough (de Jager, 2013; Pane et al., 2022).

From the description above, it can be concluded that the results of implementing differentiated learning through play activities in early childhood through play have succeeded in facilitating the development of cognitive, affective, and psychometric aspects of early childhood optimally (Handiyani & Muhtar, 2022). The results achieved from the implementation of differentiated learning through play activities are in accordance with the program objectives, both in the form of general goals and special objectives.

The application of differentiated learning will impact schools, classes, and especially students. Every student has different characteristics, we can't give all students the same treatment. If we do not provide services according to the needs of students, it can hinder students from being able to progress and develop their learning (Siagian et al., 2022). The impact of classes that apply differentiated learning include; everyone feeling welcomed, students with various characteristics feeling valued, feeling safe, there is hope for growth, teachers teaching to achieve success, there is natural justice, teachers and students collaborating, student learning needs being facilitated and well served. It is hoped that optimal learning outcomes will be achieved from some of these impacts.

4. Conclusion

After conducting research and analyzing the results of research on differentiated learning through play activities in early childhood, with this the researchers can draw conclusions: the process of planning differentiated learning through play activities in early childhood has been carried out in accordance with the rules of learning planning in early childhood education. The process of implementing differentiated learning through play activities in early childhood in accordance with the principles of child development. Differentiated learning through play activities in early childhood has succeeded in optimizing aspects of children's cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development. It is proven from the results of the evaluation reports given by the school to the parents of students showing that the aspects of student development have developed well. This is also reinforced by reports from parents of students that there is a significant improvement in the development of children at home. The assessment is carried out by the teacher using instruments prepared by the school.

The impact of implementing differentiation through play activities in early childhood is: (1) all students will feel accepted, (2) different characteristics make them feel valued, safe, and full of hope for growth, (3) teachers can work effectively in the classroom, (4) teachers can improve their abilities as learning leaders, (5) teachers are more creative, confident and brave in implementing different strategies, (6) there is real justice and cooperation between students and teachers, (7) facilitate and fully meet the learning needs of students.

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