



RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION AND TASK-BASED INSTRUCTION IN TEACHING SPEAKING SKILLS WITHIN THE MERDEKA CURRICULUM (STUDY AT JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS OF SOUTH TANGERANG)

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Abstract: This study aimed to examine the implementation of Differentiated Instruction (DI) and Task-Based Instruction (TBI) in improving English speaking skills within the Merdeka Curriculum framework at junior high schools in South Tangerang. A qualitative research design was employed, utilizing semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving both teachers and students. The results indicate that both DI and TBI positively influence students' speaking proficiency. These approaches promote student engagement and the development of speaking fluency. Teachers reported difficulties in addressing diverse learning needs and overcoming students' speaking anxiety. Furthermore, while the Merdeka Curriculum offers flexibility that supports the integration of DI and TBI, its effective application is contingent upon factors such as teacher preparedness, access to resources, and contextual adaptation. In conclusion, the study suggests that the combined use of DI and TBI enhances students' speaking abilities, but successful implementation requires targeted teacher training, adequate resources, and an environment conducive to differentiated and Task-Based learning.

Keywords: Differentiated Instruction, Task-Based Instruction, Speaking Skill, Merdeka Curriculum Framework, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Junior High Schools.

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p-ISSN: 2615-8671

e-ISSN: 2615-868X

IMPLEMENTASI DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION DAN TASK-BASED INSTRUCTION DALAM PEMBELAJARAN KETERAMPILAN BERBICARA PADA KURIKULUM MERDEKA (STUDI PADA SEKOLAH MENENGAH PERTAMA DI KOTA TANGERANG SELATAN)

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguji penerapan Differentiated Instruction (DI) dan Task-Based Instruction (TBI) dalam meningkatkan keterampilan berbicara bahasa Inggris dalam kerangka Kurikulum Merdeka di sekolah menengah pertama di Tangerang Selatan. Desain penelitian kualitatif digunakan, memanfaatkan wawancara semiterstruktur, observasi kelas, dan analisis dokumen yang melibatkan guru dan siswa. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa DI dan TBI secara positif memengaruhi kemahiran berbicara siswa. DI memungkinkan guru untuk menyesuaikan tugas pengajaran sesuai dengan berbagai tingkat kemahiran siswa, sementara. Pendekatan ini meningkatkan keterlibatan siswa dan pengembangan kefasihan berbicara. Guru melaporkan kesulitan dalam memenuhi berbagai kebutuhan belajar dan mengatasi kecemasan berbicara siswa. Lebih jauh, meskipun Kurikulum Merdeka menawarkan fleksibilitas yang mendukung integrasi DI dan TBI, penerapannya yang efektif bergantung pada faktor-faktor seperti kesiapan guru, akses ke sumber daya, dan adaptasi kontekstual. Sebagai kesimpulan, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan gabungan DI dan TBI meningkatkan kemampuan berbicara siswa, tetapi implementasi yang berhasil memerlukan pelatihan guru yang terarah, sumber daya yang memadai, dan lingkungan yang mendukung pembelajaran yang dibedakan dan Berbasis Tugas.

Kata kunci: Pembelajaran Terdiferensiasi, Pembelajaran Berbasis Tugas, Keterampilan Berbicara, Kerangka Kurikulum Merdeka, Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL), Sekolah Menengah Pertama

INTRODUCTION

In an era defined by globalization and digital interconnectedness, proficiency in English speaking skills has become increasingly important, especially for those aiming to engage in international communication and academic success. English functions as a global lingua franca, facilitating interactions across diverse linguistic and cultural contexts, a role that has driven countries worldwide to prioritize English education. In Indonesia, English language instruction is a crucial component of the national curriculum, recognized for its importance in helping students access higher education and employment opportunities. However, fostering English speaking abilities in Indonesian classrooms remains a challenging task, as factors such as large class sizes, varied levels of student proficiency, and



limited exposure to English outside the classroom create obstacles for both students and educators. As Zein (2017) notes that large class sizes and diverse language proficiency levels among students make it challenging for teachers to provide sufficient individual practice in speaking, thus limiting the students' language development.

These issues hinder the development of students' speaking skills and make it difficult for teachers to implement effective, communicative language practices. One of the goals of teaching English is to improve skills in oral communication, which is crucial for students' academic and professional success (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012) emphasize that "The ability to speak English fluently and confidently is pivotal for students, as it not only enhances their academic success but also prepares them for the demands of a globalized workforce." However, after years of English instruction, students often lack confidence in using English both inside and outside the classroom. This issue arises in the English learning process, where the outcomes primarily emphasize mastery of language structure. Additionally, the teaching techniques implemented in the classroom tend to be monotonous and conventional, providing students with few opportunities to use the language in real communicative contexts that involve ideas, emotions, feelings, relevance, accuracy, fluency, and flow.

To address these challenges, the Indonesian government introduced the Merdeka Curriculum, or Freedom Curriculum, which emphasizes flexibility and a personalized approach to learning. This curriculum encourages educators to use strategies like Differentiated Instruction (DI) and Task-Based Instruction (TBI) to meet the diverse needs of students in skill-intensive subjects like speaking. Differentiated Instruction, or DI, is a teaching framework that aims to tailor content, processes, and products according to each student's readiness, interests, and learning preferences. Carol Ann Tomlinson, a leading proponent of DI, describes it as a method that allows educators to meet high academic expectations while addressing students' individual learning needs (Tomlinson, 1999). This approach is particularly relevant in language classrooms, where students' English abilities vary widely. For example, beginning learners may require structured language support, while advanced learners might benefit more from open-ended activities that promote fluency and critical thinking. In the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, DI aligns with its inclusive goals, enabling teachers to use varied materials and speaking tasks that match each student's language proficiency. Studies show that implementing DI in speaking classes fosters a supportive environment, helping students gain confidence and fluency (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010). Therefore, implementing DI in the classroom can be an alternative way to make students active, confident and attractive so the learning process more enjoyable and students don't feel bored.

Therefore, the integration of DI and TBI within the Merdeka Curriculum framework holds considerable promise for addressing the unique challenges of Indonesian classrooms. DI allows for differentiated tasks and assessments that cater to students' varied proficiency levels, while TBI provides a meaningful structure that helps students practice language in practical contexts. This combination enables teachers to offer both individualized support and opportunities for contextualized language practice, promoting the development of speaking skills that are relevant and applicable. Ansori et al. (2015) noted that pairing DI's flexibility with TBI's genre-based instruction creates a dynamic classroom environment that fosters critical thinking, contextual understanding, and language fluency. In Indonesian classrooms, where students often come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, integrating DI and TBI supports the Merdeka Curriculum's goal of nurturing independent and culturally aware learners prepared to communicate effectively in English.

Meanwhile, implementing DI and TBI together allow teachers to use a variety of texts and tailored activities that cater to students' differing levels of language proficiency. For instance, students who are developing basic language skills might engage with simplified texts to build foundational speaking abilities; while more advanced students might participate in discussions or presentations on complex topics. This differentiated yet text-focused approach not only accommodates diverse proficiency levels but also encourages students to apply English in authentic situations, improving both their confidence and communication abilities. It's emphasized that DI helps students develop language

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skills that are suitable for their current abilities while also providing challenges that foster growth. Meanwhile, TBI's emphasis on authentic texts enables students to practice language in ways that are both contextually and academically relevant.

Moreover, the integration of DI and TBI within the Merdeka Curriculum offers numerous benefits, it also presents practical challenges. Managing time effectively, addressing classroom management issues, and ensuring sufficient teacher preparation are essential for successful implementation. Teachers may require additional training and resources to effectively use these methods, as managing a DI- and TBI-focused classroom demands both instructional skills and adaptability (Ansori et al., 2015). Support from educational stakeholders, including school administrators and curriculum developers, is vital for equipping teachers with the necessary resources and professional development opportunities. Providing teachers access to a repository of instructional materials and ongoing training can improve the likelihood of successful implementation and positively impact student outcomes.

Previous similar studies have been conducted to investigate that Overall, the results of the study at MtsN 2 Tidore provide strong evidence of the effectiveness of the differentiated approach in English learning based on the Merdeka Curriculum (Djafar, 2024) so it means that differentiated instruction can be implemented through Merdeka Curriculum. Another researcher says that the use of the Task-Based Instruction method, supported by engaging newspaper media, enhances students' understanding of English learning materials, particularly in descriptive texts and activities related to mass media and also some simple expressions in their daily life. This approach allows students to grasp the content more quickly and effectively (Suhara Toteng, 2023). From that we can say that Task-Based Instruction is effectively use in teaching English because students are easy to understand the materials like speaking, reading, writing and also listening.

Meanwhile, according to Adiantika & Purnomo (2018) this study indicates that the implementation of TBI provides several contributions for students in particular speaking skill. There are three contributions or advantages found in this study i.e. contributing to students' engagement/active participation in teaching and learning process, intensifying and increasing students' speaking skill, and creating students' positive attitudes towards TBI. Those contributions or advantages enable students to encourage students to be more active in speaking, offering them an opportunity to comprehensively learn about the aspects of speaking skill (pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar), allowing them to share ideas, stimulating them to learn either individually/independently or with peers/in group, and providing them an environment to interact in English. It can be said that TBI is effectively use in teaching speaking because can give many advantages for students especially in speaking skill.

Although Differentiated Instruction (DI) and Task-Based Instruction (TBI) have been widely studied separately in English language teaching, there is still a significant lack of research that explicitly integrates both approaches within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia. Most previous studies have only examined the effectiveness of TBI in improving students' speaking skills (Adiantika & Purnomo, 2018; Nget et al., 2020) or focused on the general implementation of differentiated learning in the Merdeka Curriculum framework (Barlian et al., 2023). However, there has been limited investigation into how the combination of differentiated strategies and Task-Based learning can synergistically support learners' speaking skills in classrooms applying the Merdeka Curriculum.

Integrating DI and TBI is crucial because both approaches complement each other in addressing diverse learners' needs while simultaneously encouraging communicative language use. DI enables teachers to tailor instruction based on students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010), whereas TBI emphasizes students' active engagement in authentic tasks that foster speaking fluency (Nunan, 2004). Within the Merdeka Curriculum—which emphasizes student-centered, collaborative, and contextual learning—the integration of DI and TBI has strong potential to create



inclusive and meaningful learning environments that have yet to be fully utilized in current classroom practice.

This thesis contributes empirical findings on how the integrated implementation of DI and TBI can enhance students' speaking skills within the Merdeka Curriculum framework, particularly at the junior high school level. Using a qualitative approach, the study explores in depth how teachers adapt differentiated Task-Based instruction and its impact on students' participation and language development. The findings are expected to enrich the pedagogical discourse on contextual English language teaching innovations and provide practical recommendations for teachers to design relevant, adaptive, and effective instruction aligned with the principles of Merdeka Belajar (Barlian et al., 2023; Richards, 2008; Gibbons, 2014).

In conclusion, this study examines how DI and TBI can be effectively integrated into English language classes under the Merdeka Curriculum framework. By combining DI's personalized learning approach with TBI's emphasis on text-based, meaningful language practice, this research explores the potential for these methods to overcome key challenges in teaching speaking skills in classrooms. The study aims to provide insights into how DI and TBI can enhance students' speaking abilities, promote engagement, and address issues such as limited English exposure, diverse proficiency levels, and student motivation. By investigating the implementation of DI and TBI within the Merdeka Curriculum, this study contributes to an understanding of how these methods can prepare students for successful participation in an increasingly interconnected world. Therefore, the title of this research is *The Implementation of Differentiated Instruction and Task-Based Instruction in Teaching Speaking Skills within Merdeka Curriculum*.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research was conducted at two private schools in South Tangerang. Teachers taught Differentiated Instruction and Task-Based Instruction within Merdeka Curriculum. So the implementation of DI and TBI can have an effect for students to improve speaking skills. The research will be started from March 2025 to June 2025 along with the process of writing the research report.

This study employs a qualitative research design, which is to explore the implementation of Differentiated Instruction (DI) and Task-Based Instruction (TBI) in teaching speaking skills under the Merdeka Curriculum. A qualitative approach is deemed appropriate as it facilitates an in-depth understanding of teaching practices, teacher strategies, and student engagement in the classroom (Creswell & Báez, 2021). From this it is clear that a descriptive method is suitable for this research and can explore the implementation of DI and TBI in Junior High Schools deeper.

The following research steps are undertaken to explore Implementation of DI and TBI usage in language learning: 1. Topic and Context Selection, 2. Research Approach, 3. Preliminary Study and Problem Formulation, 4. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework, 5. Determination of Research Instruments and Participants, 6. Data Collection, 7. Data Analysis, and 8. Final Stage of the Research.

Duff (2008) stated that in applied linguistics, the "case" always refers to an individual language learner, teacher, speaker, or writer. Therefore, in this research, the subject of this research chosen were two teachers at a private Junior High School. Other than that, one teacher that implements DI and TBI as a complementary. There are three teachers who will be observed by the researcher. However, most of them are able to be observed in implementing DI and TBI while teaching English upon Merdeka Curriculum. To decide the sample, a purposive sampling technique was applied. Purposeful sampling is a technique extensively used in qualitative research to identify and select information-rich examples to make the most use of limited resources (Patton, 2002). Besides teachers who will be observed, the students also will be observed making an interview and asking the effect of implementation of DI and TBI while they are learning English in the classroom. This interview and observation will focus on the effect of DI and TBI on speaking skill.

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The most common data collection methods in qualitative design include observation, interviews, and documents. They are also utilized by researchers to elicit detailed information. Creswell (2012) defined observation as the practice of acquiring open-ended, firsthand information by observing people and places at a research site. According to Kvale (1996) said that an interview is a conversation whose objective is to elicit descriptions of the interviewee's life-world in order to interpret the meanings of the described phenomena. The data collection methods employed in this study included semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, which are aligned with qualitative research principles as advocated by Creswell (2018). These documents served as supporting evidence to identify patterns of student engagement, instructional alignment, and learning outcomes, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of effectiveness the Implementation of DI and TBI in developing Speaking skills.

A semi-structured interview was conducted. The researcher also used a content or document analysis to analyze teachers' in implementing DI and TBI upon Merdeka Curriculum in teaching and learning English in the classroom. The purpose of selecting these techniques was to investigate the teachers' implementation of DI and TBI within the Merdeka Curriculum while teaching English. The interviews were recorded on audio, transcribed, and tagged. The interviews run on teachers and students. Teacher as an object of implementation of DI and TBI, while students as object who get the effect after the implementation of DI and TBI while teaching and learning English process in the classroom. The research questions served as the foundational themes, and as more focused subthemes arose from the data, they were developed. According to Miles & Huberman (2014) there are three flows of activity:

1. **Data Condensation:** The process of choosing, narrowing down, streamlining, abstracting, and/or transforming the data found in the entire corpus (body) of written field notes, interview transcripts, papers, and other empirical materials is known as data condensation. We are strengthening the data by condensing it. Throughout the course of any qualitatively focused endeavour, data condensation takes place continuously. As the researcher chooses (sometimes without full knowledge) which conceptual framework, which cases, which research questions, and which data collection procedures to employ, anticipatory data condensation is taking place even before the data are actually collected. Writing summaries, coding, creating themes, creating categories, and creating analytical notes are other instances of data condensation that take place as data collecting continues. After fieldwork is finished, the data transformation and condensing process continues until a final report is finished.
2. **Data Display:** Data display is the second main flow of analysis activity. In general, a display is a condensed, well-organized collection of data that enables inference and action. Viewing displays enables us to comprehend what is occurring and act upon that understanding by conducting additional analysis or taking action. Our work has led us to believe that strong qualitative analysis can be achieved through effective displays. Numerous matrices, graphs, charts, and networks are among the displays covered and depicted in this book. All of them are made to compile structured data into a concise, instantly available manner so that the analyst can see what is going on and either make well-founded conclusions or go to the next stage of research that the display indicates would be helpful.
3. **Conclusion Drawing/Verification:** Drawing and verifying conclusions is the third stream of analysis activity. By seeing patterns, explanations, causal flows, and assertions, the qualitative analyst deduces meaning from the beginning of data gathering.

Figure 1 provides another representation of the three streams. According to this perspective, the data collecting process itself, along with the three categories of analytical activities, constitutes a dynamic, cyclical process. During data collection, the researcher alternates between these four nodes



steadily. For the rest of the study, they alternate between condensing, showing, and drawing/verifying conclusions. Below is the figure of data analysis in qualitative research by Huberman (2014).

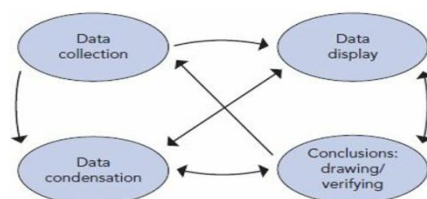


Figure 1

The Illustration of Component of Data Analysis: Interactive Model

Huberman (2014)

In this research, triangulation was employed by using three primary sources of data: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. According to Miles & Huberman (2014) said that triangulation is the process of validating findings by collecting multiple perspectives on the same phenomenon through different methods and sources. It involves cross-verifying the data to ensure its accuracy, consistency, and credibility.

To ensure that the data collected has transferability in trustworthiness, the researcher will conduct the study from January to June 2025 at two junior high schools in South Tangerang with three informants who are willing to join and participate in the study. Informants who are willing to join and participate in this research. These three informants work at the schools and were selected due to their own willingness to participate in the study and have met the stated sampling criteria. Data was collected through observation to the school, semi-structured interviews with the three informants face-to-face and face-to-face interviews. To support the findings, the researcher also collected to support the findings, the researcher also collected the document with DI and TBI method that has been taught by the teacher. Teachers' Implementation in improving the learning of speaking skills with DI and TBI methods seen from the autonomy of teachers as well as the core of the focus on research.

Building trust is also an important element to have valid research findings. The researcher enlisted the help of her peers to conduct peer do peer checking on the interview transcripts and the results of the Document interview on the students and teachers. The duration of the interviews varied from 20 to more than 25 minutes. To ensure the researcher could get the gist of the interview, to ensure that the researcher could get the gist of the interview, the researcher did repeat reading and checking up to 3 times back and forth until the researcher could categorize the points. Finally categorizing the interview points and finding themes in the thematic analysis process. In the process of thematic analysis, confirmability and credibility are also one of the important points in checking the validity of research results of a qualitative research design. To achieve this, this study asks other researchers to discuss the research being conducted, usually called member checking.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Research Results

Based on the coding and thematic analysis of the interview transcripts and document analysis, the researcher categorized several key themes related *the implementation of Differentiated Instruction and Task-Based Instruction In Teaching Speaking Skills Within the Merdeka Curriculum: A qualitative study at Junior High Schools of South Tangerang*. These themes provide insights into (1) the impact of the implementation of Differentiated Instruction (DI) and Task-Based Instruction (TBI)

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on students' English-speaking skills within the Merdeka Curriculum framework, (2) the challenges, do teachers face when applying DI and TBI in classrooms, particularly in developing students' speaking abilities, and (3) the ways does the Merdeka Curriculum support or hinder the effectiveness the use of DI and TBI in teaching speaking skills. The analysis resulted in the synthesis of three major themes aligned with these research goals, which are:

1. The Impact of the Implementation of Differentiated Instruction (DI) and Task-Based Instruction (TBI) on Students' English-Speaking Skills within the Merdeka Curriculum Framework

The findings of this study reveal that the implementation of *Differentiated Instruction* (DI) and *Task-Based Instruction* (TBI) positively influences students' English-speaking skills in junior high schools applying the *Merdeka Curriculum*. This outcome is drawn from both teacher and student responses, illustrating how these pedagogical approaches contribute to more personalized, engaging, and effective speaking instruction.

a. Differentiated Instruction for Students

Most students responded that their teachers provided tasks appropriate to their skill levels. They felt more confident when given challenges that were achievable but still pushed them to grow. This reflects Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development, which suggests optimal learning happens when tasks are slightly beyond a learner's current ability but still reachable with support.

Student 5 (S5) and Student 9 (S9) explained that:

Ya saya merasa tugas yang diberikan guru sesuai dengan kemampuan saya. (S5-Interview 4)

Ya, tugasnya sesuai kemampuan saya. (S9-Interview 4)

S12 and S20 also reacted that:

Ya, guru menyesuaikan tugas dengan kemampuan saya. (S12-Interview 4)

Iya, guru memberikan tugas yang sesuai kemampuan saya dan teman-teman saya. (S20-Interview 4)

The findings show that most students feel their teachers assign tasks that align with their individual ability levels. S5 and S9 expressed that the tasks given were appropriate and manageable based on their personal capabilities. Similarly, S12 and S20 confirmed that their teachers adjusted tasks to match not only their own skills but also those of their classmates. These consistent responses suggest that students generally perceive a thoughtful alignment between their abilities and the speaking tasks they are assigned, which contributes to a more supportive and confidence-building learning environment.

b. Task-Based Instruction for Students

Most students confirmed they frequently did speaking tasks in pairs or small groups, such as role-plays and discussions. These activities helped reduce anxiety and foster collaborative learning. Willis (1996) noted that working together on tasks promotes authentic interaction and engagement.

S5 and S9 claimed that:

Ya saya sering diminta menyelesaikan tugas berbicara secara berkelompok atau berpasangan. (S5-Interview 7)

Sering, biasanya berpasangan atau kelompok. (S9-Interview 7)

S14 and S15 told that:

Ya, cukup sering. Banyak tugas berbicara memang dirancang untuk dikerjakan secara berkelompok atau berpasangan, seperti role-play atau diskusi. (S14-Interview 7)

Ya, sering. Biasanya kami diminta berdialog atau presentasi bersama. (S15-Interview 7)

The findings show that students are frequently asked to complete speaking tasks in pairs or groups. S5 and S9 confirmed that such group-based speaking activities are commonly used in their classes. S14 added that many speaking assignments are intentionally designed for pair or group work, including role-plays and discussions. Similarly, S15 mentioned that students are often assigned to conduct dialogues or deliver presentations collaboratively. These responses suggest that collaborative speaking tasks are a regular part of classroom practice and are perceived as a normal and beneficial approach to learning.

2. The Challenges Teachers Face When Applying DI and TBI in Classrooms, Particularly in Developing Students' Speaking Abilities

The implementation of *Differentiated Instruction* (DI) and *Task-Based Instruction* (TBI) in English language classrooms offers great potential for enhancing speaking skills. However, this study found that both teachers and students face various challenges that hinder the full realization of these methods, especially at the junior high school level. These challenges are rooted in instructional design, classroom management, and learner-related factors.

a. General Experience in Learning Speaking for Students

Many students reported feeling nervous, shy, or anxious when asked to speak in English in front of others. This emotional barrier significantly affects their performance. Krashen (1982) explains that a high affective filter, caused by anxiety or low self-confidence, can block language acquisition.

S2 and S7 claimed that:

Ya, saya senang. (S2-Interview 1)

Perasaanku senang karena kita bisa mengetahui bahasa Inggris dan belajar berbicara pakai bahasa Inggris. (S7-Interview 1)

On the other side, S17 and S20 who experienced learning speaking by DI & TBI also described:

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Ya, sangat menyenangkan karena melatih kemampuan bahasa Inggris saya. (S17-Interview 1)

Saya merasa sangat bersemangat. (S20-Interview 1)

The findings indicate that most students have a positive emotional response when learning to speak English in class. S2 and S7 expressed that they feel happy during speaking activities, with S7 appreciating the opportunity to learn and practice using English. S17 and S20, who have experienced speaking instruction through DI and TBI methods, also reported feeling enthusiastic and excited, noting that the activities help improve their English skills. Overall, students generally enjoy the learning process and feel motivated when participating in speaking tasks.

3. The Ways the Merdeka Curriculum Supports or Hinders the Effectiveness of Using DI and TBI in Teaching Speaking Skills

This study explores how the Merdeka Curriculum influences the implementation of *Differentiated Instruction* (DI) and *Task-Based Instruction* (TBI) in developing students' speaking skills. Findings show that while the curriculum generally offers pedagogical flexibility, challenges remain in translating its principles into consistent classroom practice due to varying teacher readiness, school resources, and student mindset.

a. Merdeka Curriculum for Students

Many students were unaware of the term *Merdeka Curriculum*, but they recognized changes in learning style, such as more interactive tasks and freedom to choose how they complete assignments. This suggests a gap in curriculum socialization at the student level.

S5 and S6 described that:

Ya saya tahu. (S5-Interview 10)

Ya, saat ini di banyak sekolah di Indonesia, termasuk di daerah Serpong Utara, Tangerang Selatan, diterapkan kurikulum merdeka. (S6-Interview 10)

S12 and S14 also explained:

Ya, saya mengetahui bahwa saya belajar sudah memasuki kurikulum merdeka. (S12-Interview 10)

Ya, saya tahu bahwa sekolah kami sekarang menggunakan Kurikulum Merdeka. (S14-Interview 10)

The findings show that several students are aware that they are currently studying under the Merdeka Curriculum. S5 and S6 confirmed their knowledge, with S6 mentioning its implementation in various schools, including in their local area. Similarly, S12 and S14 stated that they understood the school was now using the Merdeka Curriculum. These responses indicate that while some students are informed about the curriculum change, further explanation and deeper understanding may still be needed to help all students grasp what the curriculum entails beyond just its name.

b. Evaluation and Reflection for Students

Students suggested more practice through games, group work, and supportive feedback. They valued safe spaces to practice without judgment. Krashen (1982) emphasizes that lowering the affective filter is key to promoting language acquisition, especially in speaking.

Based on their experience, S7 and S10 explained that:

Menurut ku cara lancar berbicara pakai bahasa Inggris seperti mendengarkan lagu luar dan memahami belajar di buku kamus bahasa Inggris. (S7-Interview 12)

Dengarkan dan tirukan, serta gunakan bahasa Inggris dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. (S10-Interview 12)

S14 and S15 also agreed:

Cara terbaik menurut saya adalah dengan praktik secara konsisten, bahkan di luar kelas. Jangan takut salah, karena dari kesalahan kita belajar. Selain itu, mencari teman bicara, menonton film atau serial berbahasa Inggris tanpa subtitle Indonesia, dan mendengarkan musik berbahasa Inggris juga sangat membantu meningkatkan keberanian dan kelancaran. (S14-Interview 12)

Dengan sering latihan speaking, menonton film berbahasa Inggris, dan berani mencoba walaupun masih banyak salah. (S15-Interview 12)

The findings show that students believe regular practice and consistent exposure to English are keys to becoming more confident and fluent speakers. S7 suggested listening to English songs and studying with a dictionary, while S10 emphasized the importance of listening, imitation, and using English in daily life. S14 provided a more comprehensive approach, recommending consistent practice both inside and outside the classroom, embracing mistakes as part of learning, and using English through activities such as watching English media without subtitles and talking with peers. Similarly, S15 highlighted frequent speaking practice and having the courage to try despite making mistakes. Overall, students agree that confidence and fluency develop through continuous practice, active engagement, and creating opportunities to use English in real-life contexts.

B. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of Differentiated Instruction (DI) and Task-Based Instruction (TBI) within the Merdeka Curriculum framework contributes significantly to enhancing students' speaking skills at junior high schools in South Tangerang. These results are consistent with the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter II, where DI is understood as a way to tailor instruction to students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles, while TBI is seen as an approach that promotes real-life communication through contextual and meaningful tasks.

The research findings show that most teachers apply DI by varying task complexity, grouping students by proficiency, and offering flexible formats (e.g., presentations, dialogues, videos). These align with Tomlinson & Imbeau's (2010) view that DI can address learner diversity effectively. Similarly, the integration of TBI is seen through the frequent use of role-plays, pair discussions, and student presentations, which support the claim that TBI fosters fluency and learner engagement.

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p-ISSN: 2615-8671

e-ISSN: 2615-868X

The data also reveals several challenges, including students' low motivation, limited vocabulary, and reluctance to speak English. Large class sizes and inconsistent support systems further hinder the implementation of individualized instruction. These findings partially revise existing theories that assume DI and TBI can be universally applied with ease. Instead, the study shows that practical barriers—such as infrastructure and teacher workload—must be addressed before these approaches can function optimally in real classrooms.

Compared to previous studies that report general success in implementing DI or TBI, this study offers a contextual reinterpretation, emphasizing that success depends on the degree of institutional readiness and student mindset adaptation, particularly under a new national curriculum. The Merdeka Curriculum is viewed positively by teachers and students for its flexibility and encouragement of student-centered learning. Teachers feel empowered to select suitable methods, and students enjoy more engaging and relevant learning experiences. However, the findings also highlight a gap in student awareness and understanding of the curriculum framework itself, indicating a need for better curriculum socialization.

This study contributes to the theoretical discourse by offering a new interpretation of how Differentiated Instruction (DI) and Task-Based Instruction (TBI) can be integrated within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum. While previous theories and studies have addressed DI and TBI as separate strategies, this research presents empirical evidence of their combined application in speaking instruction at the junior high school level in Indonesia. The findings confirm the relevance of DI in addressing learner diversity and the value of TBI in promoting real-world communicative competence. Furthermore, this study highlights that successful implementation of both approaches requires contextual adaptation, teacher autonomy, and curriculum alignment—thus offering a refinement to existing theoretical models by emphasizing the importance of national curriculum compatibility.

By doing so, the study does not propose a new theory but refines and extends existing pedagogical theories by situating them within a contemporary Indonesian policy context. It introduces the idea that the synergy of DI and TBI becomes more powerful when embedded in a flexible curriculum like Kurikulum Merdeka, suggesting that curriculum structure can either enable or constrain pedagogical innovation.

The practical implications of this study are directed toward educators, school administrators, and curriculum developers. For teachers, the study offers concrete examples of how to implement DI and TBI strategies effectively—such as through differentiated task formats, diagnostic assessments, and student-centered speaking projects. Teachers are encouraged to vary their instructional methods and provide students with choices that align with their ability and interest, thereby increasing engagement and participation in speaking activities.

For school leaders and policymakers, this research underlines the need to support professional development focused on integrated teaching approaches and to ensure that schools are equipped with sufficient resources (e.g., learning materials, multimedia tools, manageable class sizes) to enable flexible instruction. Curriculum developers are urged to provide clearer guidelines and examples on how DI and TBI can be practically realized in the classroom under the Merdeka Curriculum.

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of Differentiated Instruction (DI) and Task-Based Instruction (TBI) positively impacts students' speaking skills. These findings support Tomlinson (2014)'s theory, which emphasizes that DI allows teachers to tailor instruction to students' readiness, interests, and learning styles. By adjusting task difficulty levels and offering various task formats (such as presentations, videos, and dialogues), teachers can increase student motivation to engage in speaking activities. Additionally, the use of TBI, involving authentic communication tasks



like role-plays and group discussions, encourages students to actively use English in real-life situations. These findings align with Adiantika & Purnomo (2018)'s research, which showed that TBI implementation can enhance speaking skills by placing students in meaningful communication contexts. This supports both theory and prior research that highlight the effectiveness of DI and TBI in language teaching, particularly in improving speaking skills.

However, the findings of this study also provide a new perspective on the application of DI and TBI within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum. While the curriculum theoretically supports flexible teaching, the results reveal that challenges such as large class sizes, the diversity of student abilities, and students' lack of understanding about the curriculum's goals hinder effective implementation. This suggests that while Tomlinson (2014) and Nunan (2004)'s theories on flexibility and authentic communication support DI and TBI's application, in practice, the success of these approaches largely depends on institutional readiness and a clear understanding of the curriculum. These findings offer a different premise from previous studies, which focused more on DI and TBI implementation within traditional curricula, and suggest that curriculum socialization and teacher training are crucial for maximizing the effectiveness of these teaching approaches within the Merdeka Curriculum framework.

In sum, this study provides evidence-based strategies and insights that can be adopted and adapted by practitioners aiming to improve students' speaking competence through a balanced and responsive pedagogical approach. This research does not develop an entirely new theoretical framework, nor does it reject existing models. Instead, it provides a new interpretation and contextual validation of the combined use of DI and TBI under the Merdeka Curriculum. It confirms and extends existing theory by demonstrating how pedagogical differentiation and Task-Based learning can be harmonized in Indonesia's current educational context, offering practical strategies and highlighting limitations that future research and policy must address

CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to explore the implementation of Differentiated Instruction (DI) and Task-Based Instruction (TBI) in teaching speaking skills within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum. The research was conducted qualitatively through interviews and document analysis involving teachers and students at junior high schools in South Tangerang. The summary of the research findings is presented below in alignment with the stated research objectives.

The findings revealed that the integration of DI and TBI positively contributes to the improvement of students' speaking abilities. DI allows teachers to adjust task complexity and formats according to student needs, enabling more personalized learning experiences. TBI, on the other hand, provides meaningful, contextual speaking opportunities through activities such as role-plays, discussions, and presentations. Together, these approaches help build students' fluency, confidence, and motivation to communicate in English. Students responded positively to the variation and flexibility of tasks, which made speaking activities more engaging and relevant.

Although the benefits of DI and TBI were acknowledged, several challenges emerged. Teachers reported difficulties in managing large and diverse classrooms, motivating students with low English proficiency, and aligning personalized instruction with assessment standards. Some students were reluctant to speak due to fear of making mistakes or low self-confidence. These barriers affected the consistency and depth of DI and TBI implementation, indicating the need for greater support, training, and resource allocation to ensure sustainable application of these approaches.

The Merdeka Curriculum was generally seen as supportive of DI and TBI, offering teachers the freedom to select methods and materials suited to their students' characteristics. Both teachers and students appreciated the curriculum's emphasis on flexibility, relevance, and student-centered learning. However, its successful implementation is still dependent on contextual factors such as infrastructure,

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teacher preparedness, and clarity in curricular guidance. While the curriculum provides room for innovation, its impact is shaped by how effectively schools and educators adapt and apply its principles.

The study concludes that the combined use of DI and TBI, when implemented within a flexible curriculum framework like Kurikulum Merdeka, can significantly enhance students' speaking performance. However, success depends not only on pedagogical design but also on systemic readiness, ongoing teacher support, and student engagement.

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