



Selection of Essential Materials in Social Studies Subjects through a Differentiated Approach According to Carol Tomlinson

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Abstract

One of the key elements of the Merdeka Curriculum is the implementation of essential materials, which are deemed crucial and must be delivered to students. However, limited research has focused on essential materials within social studies subjects. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct an in-depth analysis of how teachers apply essential materials in social studies. Based on this need, the objective of this study is to analyze the selection of essential materials by social studies teachers using a differentiated approach, as proposed by Carol Tomlinson. This research employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, gathering secondary data sources relevant to the research topic. The data consists of journal articles from 2019 to 2024, retrieved using Harzing's Publish or Perish software. The subjects of this study are high school social studies teachers, with a focus on their practices in teaching essential materials. The findings reveal that teachers have selected essential materials that are both relevant and engaging for students. This is evidenced by the use of learning media that resonates with students' daily lives, as well as digital-based teaching methods such as problem-based learning (PBL), gamification, and field studies. As a result, students are able to easily grasp the material, enhancing their motivation, conceptual understanding, and engagement in the learning process.

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INTRODUCTION

The curriculum is a government effort aimed at improving the quality of education and revising previous curricula (Nurjanah & Mustofa, 2024). The Merdeka Curriculum was designed in

response to the COVID-19 pandemic to address learning loss experienced by students. Additionally, this curriculum was created to simplify the teaching process by reducing basic competencies in each subject and focusing on essential

materials, enabling teachers to implement literacy and numeracy education with sufficient time (Iskandar et al., 2023; Rohmatika, 2023; Sari et al., 2022).

The shift from the K-13 curriculum to the Merdeka Curriculum has brought new challenges, such as suboptimal implementation of teaching practices by teachers, who must adapt to the new curriculum (Tri Wahono, 2022). This transition requires a well-directed, planned, and continuous renewal of education to improve its quality (Rohmatika, 2023). The legal foundation for the Merdeka Curriculum can be found in the Preamble of the 1945 Constitution, which states the goal of “enlightening the nation's life.” Furthermore, Law No. 20 of 2003 defines the curriculum as “a set of learning plans related to objectives, content, teaching materials, and methods used as guidelines for educational activities to achieve national educational goals” (Ramadhan, 2024).

The Merdeka Curriculum provides teachers with flexibility in choosing essential materials that reflect real-life contexts to ensure the effective development of competencies. Consequently, it is important for teachers to incorporate local or contextual content into their teaching (Sampurna et al., 2023). The Merdeka Curriculum includes differentiated learning, the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), and flexibility in its implementation.

Differentiated learning in the context of Merdeka Belajar is applied by teachers during the teaching process based on each student's characteristics and learning styles. This approach aims to

meet students' learning needs while maintaining learning standards. Developed by Carol Tomlinson, an educator from the University of Virginia in 1995, differentiated learning requires teachers to understand students' characteristics when designing lessons. For instance, in social studies, students may have visual, auditory, or kinesthetic learning preferences. The differentiated approach is expected to help students build confidence in learning. When teachers assist students in understanding the material, students feel their learning needs are acknowledged, and teachers can effectively assess their learning outcomes. When applied correctly, the differentiated approach can lead to remarkable success in achieving learning goals (Arhinza et al, 2023).

Research by Moulina et al. (2023) shows that SMA Negeri 10 Palembang has implemented the Merdeka Curriculum effectively. However, there remain issues concerning teachers' competencies, students' literacy levels, and inadequate infrastructure. This suggests that strategies are needed to optimize the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

A study by Mahbubi & Aini (2023) found that Islamic knowledge learning is effective among digital natives by leveraging the popularity of the TikTok platform. Teachers can use this platform as a tool for enjoyable and effective learning activities.

Further research by Mahendra et al. (2023) examines the shift in 21st-century sociology teaching models by integrating 4C skills. This study reveals that the 4C skills—critical thinking, communication,

collaboration, and creativity—have transformed the learning model from teacher-centered to student-centered. Teachers have also incorporated 4C skills and contextual experiences into sociology lessons.

Ramadhan's (2023) research highlights the readiness of high schools to implement the Merdeka Curriculum through school and teacher leadership programs, with a focus on intracurricular, cocurricular, and extracurricular activities. Teachers emphasize the importance of essential materials in the teaching process, reinforced by the Pancasila Student Profile, along with evaluations of teaching approaches.

Another study by Ramadhan (2023) discusses the challenges of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in SMPN schools in Pontianak, focusing on the teaching process and learning tools. Teachers have received instructional materials for the Merdeka Curriculum, allowing them to master learning objectives (CP), formulate specific objectives (TP), develop learning designs, and conduct assessments. However, not all teachers are proficient in developing instructional tools, indicating the need for teacher adaptation to the new curriculum. This research offers solutions to the challenges faced by teachers, such as participating in training facilitated by schools.

Research on the selection of essential materials by social studies teachers and the use of a differentiated approach, as proposed by Carol Tomlinson, is crucial. Based on the issues presented and relevant studies, this research offers a novel contribution by

examining the selection of essential materials and their relationship with the differentiated approach in actual teaching practices. Previous research primarily focused on the general implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in high schools, excluding social studies. Issues such as teachers' preparedness in selecting essential materials have not been addressed, and no strategies have been proposed to tackle these challenges.

This study aims to address these gaps by exploring the topic under the title "Selection of Essential Materials with a Differentiated Approach According to Carol Tomlinson." The objective of this research is to analyze the selection of essential materials by social studies teachers, as previous studies have only discussed essential materials in a general context. Therefore, the novelty of this research lies in examining essential materials through the lens of Carol Tomlinson's differentiated approach. This study will be highly beneficial for teachers, the education system, schools, and the evaluation of Merdeka Belajar. In general, paying attention to essential materials can positively impact the differentiated learning process.

METHOD

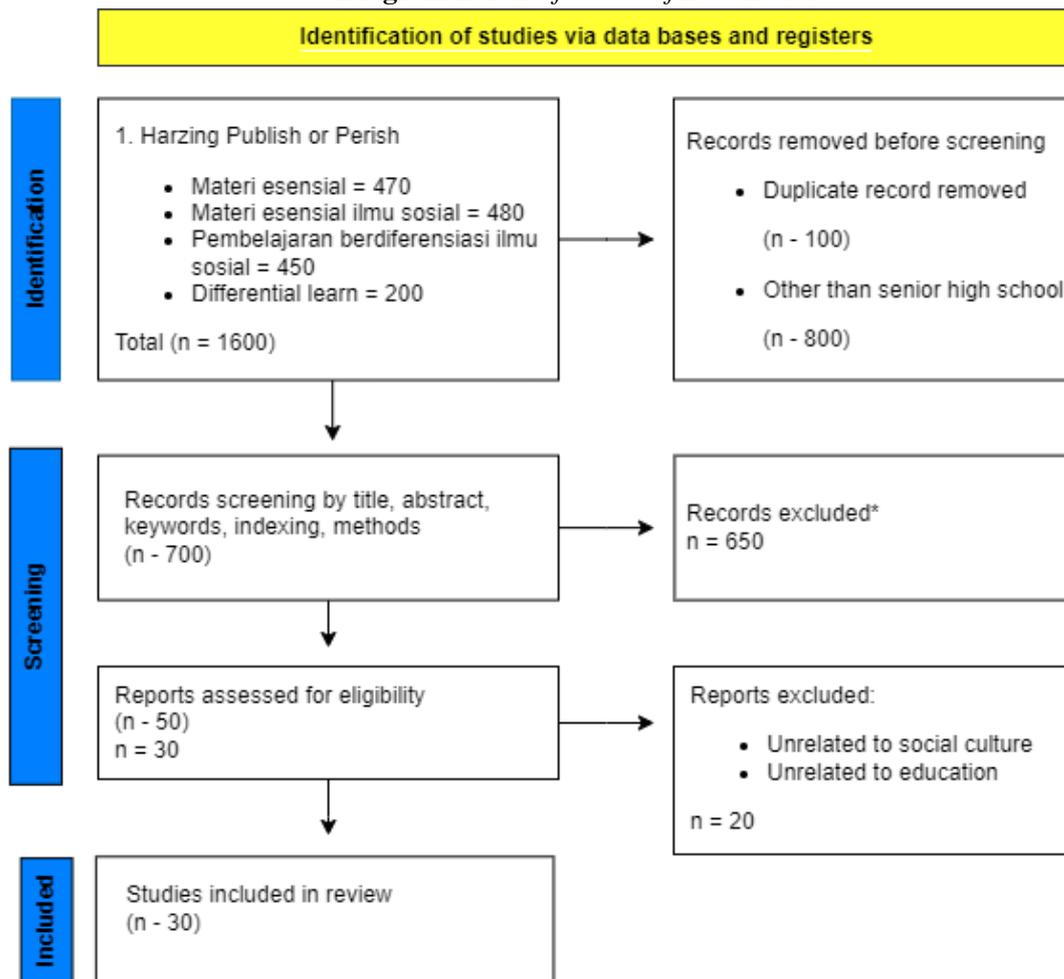
The approach used in this research is qualitative. According to Hardani (2020), qualitative research is a method used to gain a deeper understanding of social issues faced by individuals or groups. This study employs library research as the writing technique. According to Mestika (2014), library research involves a series of activities aimed at collecting various sources of literature, reading, noting, and

processing the collected data. The method used in this research is a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), which is a systematic approach to gathering secondary data sources, including scientific articles, journals, and books such as Carol Tomlinson’s works, *Assessment and Student Success in a Differentiated Classroom* and *How to Differentiate Instruction in Academically Diverse Classrooms*. There are several steps involved in conducting a systematic literature review:

1. Problem formulation: This is done by identifying specific research questions to focus on the core issues.

2. Data collection: This involves gathering various data sources relevant to the research topic.
3. Data eligibility evaluation: This step ensures the accuracy and reliability of the data.
4. Data analysis and interpretation: This step determines the relevant data sources in line with the research theme and presents them.
5. Data presentation (Rachmadani, 2023).

Diagram 1. Identification of Data Bases



The focus of this research is on the selection of essential material using Carol Tomlinson’s differentiated approach. As illustrated in the diagram 1, this study utilizes journal articles as data sources, spanning from 2019 to 2024, to ensure the findings are both current and valid in accordance with contemporary educational developments. Over the past five years, the Indonesian curriculum has undergone changes, particularly in emphasizing essential materials in teaching. Data collection was conducted using Harzing Publish or Perish, a tool that facilitates the search for data sources based on citations, indices, and keywords. Through this platform, the study was able to identify relevant literature, variables, and observe research trends over specific years.

The data collection for this research used keywords such as "essential material," "essential material in social studies," "differentiated learning," and "differentiated instruction." The subject of this study focuses on the teaching practices of high school (SMA) teachers in delivering essential material and differentiated instruction, particularly in the context of social studies, including geography, history, sociology, and economics. The discussion in this article is based on the results and analysis of teachers’ teaching practices in implementing essential material, which is then linked to Carol Tomlinson’s theory of differentiation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. *The Result of Literatures Analysis*

Author	Result
(Indrawati, 2021)	Problem-based learning (PBL) on the fundamental concepts of management can enhance students' retention abilities.
(Putri, 2021)	The use of Powtoon as a learning medium is beneficial for students in receiving the economic material being taught.
(Meliwati, 2021)	The problem-posing approach in teaching the overview of the accounting cycle for companies is effective in enhancing students' understanding.
(Setiaji & Farliana, 2022)	To enhance their pedagogical skills, high school economics teachers in Central Java are participating in training to implement economics education within the Merdeka Curriculum.
(Hildayati et al., 2023)	Teachers implement learning methods that are aligned with the material and the needs of students in economics education.
(Ahmad & Setiadi, 2023)	Economics education using the Teaching at the Right Level approach combined with the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model can significantly enhance students' learning outcomes.
(Jaya, 2023)	Active participation and student learning outcomes improve when the flipped classroom approach is implemented.
(Khafid, 2019)	The CLD (Constructivist Learning Design) approach by Gagnon and Collay effectively enhances student enthusiasm for the topic of geospheric phenomena.
(Pratama et al., 2021)	The development of multimedia in geography education on the solar system facilitates students' understanding.

(Nalatilfitroh & Banowati, 2021)	The natural and artificial resources in Candirejo Village are relevant to the basic competency material for Geography subjects in grades X and XI, including: fundamental geographic knowledge, the impact of lithospheric and hydrospheric dynamics on life, Indonesia's flora and fauna as well as that of the world, the management of Indonesia's natural resources, and the cultural diversity in Indonesia along with disaster mitigation.
(Darmi, 2022)	The simulation method in geography education on disaster mitigation is relevant to the implementation of learning related to the phenomena occurring in the students' surroundings.
(Seviana et al., 2023)	The improvement of education quality in geography can be realized through the use of the Volcano application, which facilitates students' understanding of the material.
(Hardianto et al., 2023)	The teacher has participated in the MGMP (Subject Teacher Consultation Group) training in Solok District. However, the implementation of essential materials in geography education has not yet been fully observed.
(Zulirfan et al., 2023)	Differentiated geography instruction on the topic of regions and spatial planning can develop students' spatial thinking skills.
(Fikri & Hasudungan, 2021)	The study provides alternative basic competencies that are contextual and relevant to students' lives, making the history material easier to understand.
(Ningrum & Agustini, 2021)	The learning media used is a local history module that contains material on the Dutch arrival in Jambi, supplemented with appropriate visualizations.
(Sudarto, 2021)	The tradition of "sedekah laut" can serve as a teaching material in history, particularly within the theme of the traditions of the Indonesian people.
(Darmawan et al., 2022)	The study encompasses local wisdom that holds value in disaster mitigation. However, no teachers have yet implemented this material.
(Birsyada et al., 2022)	Museums can serve as relevant learning media in history education, particularly regarding the topic of the Japanese occupation.
(Kurniawan et al., 2023)	Yogyakarta has historical sites that can be integrated into history education at the high school level.
(Azaniah Sofia & Basri, 2023)	The history learning process is conducted using differentiated teaching methods connected to daily realities. Teachers also organize outing classes to museums and historical sites as projects related to the subject.
(Mirzachaerulshah, 2023)	Differentiated history learning through content aspects is delivered using documentary films, visualizations, and the internet.
(Ripal et al., 2023)	Differentiated history learning on the topic of Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms enhances students' learning motivation.
(Rumianda et al., 2020)	The development of sociology lesson design through gamification on the topic of various social phenomena in society can create a more engaging and less monotonous learning experience.
(Prasetyaningrum, 2022)	Student participation is manifested in sociology learning on the topic of social conflict through the use of the sociodrama method.
(Widyastuti & Anwar, 2022)	The implementation of sociology learning on the topic of social research is conveyed through both theoretical approaches and field studies.

(Masyhuri et al., 2023)	The service team provides assistance to teachers in developing local wisdom-based sociology learning media, specifically in the North Lombok community.
(Martiana, 2023)	Differentiated product learning in sociology, particularly in the chapter on social change, can enhance students' creativity and understanding of the material.
(Purnamawati, 2023)	Sociology learning on the topic of social inequality resulting from social change through the LYP Sociology Rally is reported to be successful, meaningful, and enjoyable.
(Lisnawati et al., 2023)	The project method in sociology learning on the topic of globalization effectively creates an appropriate learning experience for students.

There are four subjects within the scope of social sciences in Senior High Schools (SMA), namely economics, geography, history, and sociology. Through the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, this study identifies the essential materials of these four subjects. The results are categorized and elaborated upon based on the essential materials of each subject and subsequently linked to the theory of differentiated instruction as proposed by Carol Ann Tomlinson. By implementing a differentiated approach, teachers in social science subjects can create more effective learning experiences for students as they delve into the material. The relevance of improved student learning outcomes in sociology can be observed through differentiated learning that adopts a blended learning model (Djagom et al., 2023).

The relevance of learning materials tailored to student needs plays a crucial role in enhancing learning outcomes (Hildayati et al., 2023). The differentiated approach according to Tomlinson (2001) is a teaching strategy applied by educators to meet the individual needs of students. Three main components of this approach include content, process, and product. Content encompasses the information and concepts that students must master to

achieve learning objectives (Tomlinson & Moon, 2013). The process refers to how students comprehend and process that content (Tomlinson & Moon, 2013). Meanwhile, the product represents how students convey what they know, understand, and can do (Tomlinson & Moon, 2013).

In economics education, teachers implement problem-based learning models. The issues raised can be real-world case studies, often encountered in everyday life. This approach encourages students to think critically when solving problems (Indrawati, 2021). By providing students with the freedom to select issues based on reality, teachers can relate them to concepts within the subject of economics. The content in economics learning emerges when teachers explain fundamental management concepts and provide opportunities for students to determine the topics of the problems they wish to solve (Indrawati, 2021).

The process of economics learning occurs when teachers grant freedom of thought and determine solutions to the selected problems. This indirectly supports students' independent learning and enhances their activity, collaboration, questioning, and answering skills (Ahmad & Setiadi, 2023). In this context, students

are trained to solve problems based on their understanding. The integration of the problem-based learning (PBL) method with a differentiated approach has been shown to enhance students' critical thinking skills (Mahmudah et al., 2023).

The essential material in geography lessons, particularly the topic of volcanism, is often challenging for students to grasp (Seviana et al., 2023). Teachers are required to develop strategies to ensure students can comprehend the material effectively. Contextual understanding is crucial in learning about volcanism in physical geography, as many ideas need to be assimilated (D. Kurniawati et al., 2019). In light of this challenge, teachers are expected to create innovative learning experiences that leverage technology to motivate Generation Z students. One proposed innovation is the development of a Volcano application as a learning medium. This application can visualize essential geographical material that poses high risks if direct observation is conducted. Presenting geography through an Android application is expected to clarify concepts through sensory engagement, making the material more comprehensible (Seviana et al., 2023).

Another case in Solok District indicates that despite teachers having attended MGMP training, the implementation of essential materials in geography lessons has not been thoroughly observed (Hardianto et al., 2023). This indicates the necessity for improvements and evaluations of geography teaching in every school within Solok District. Furthermore, the selection

of essential materials in history lessons is also of great importance. History materials that are perceived as tedious should be chosen based on students' interests and inclinations (Husna, 2021). Therefore, the selection of essential materials regarding the historical traditions of Indonesian society can inspire students' motivation to learn and enhance their appreciation for local wisdom.

In the context of geography lessons, content includes materials related to the lithosphere, such as the topic of volcanism and geospheric phenomena. The process in geography education requires students to observe content that is too dangerous to study directly. This poses a challenge for teachers to develop strategies for conveying complex and abstract materials (D. Kurniawati et al., 2019). As a solution, the product in geography education involves the Volcano application designed to assist students in learning and absorbing material through visualizations of the topic of volcanism. Thus, developing materials through visual representations of essential content can engage students' interest in understanding the complex material being taught.

One of the topics in history education is the coastal gratitude ceremony, which serves as historical learning material. This essential material encompasses how ancestors preserve and pass on historical values and local wisdom (Sudarto, 2021). History learning becomes more engaging when aligned with the contextual environment through local events. Each region in Indonesia possesses a diverse history, ranging from prehistoric times to contemporary periods, reflected in

various documents and artifacts (Syahputra et al., 2020). For instance, the Sundanese community has conservation traditions such as Leuweung Kaian (tree planting), Gawir Awian (bamboo planting on slopes), Sampalan Kebonan (creating gardens), and Legok Bolangan (creating ponds in low areas). These traditions are believed by indigenous communities to be ways of protecting and nurturing the environment (Darmawan et al., 2022). An observational approach within the community can facilitate students' understanding of history through firsthand experiences.

The content in history education involves local content that is relevant to the essential materials used. Additionally, essential historical materials also encompass local wisdom, providing students with real experiences and developing participatory dialogues. Teachers are required to possess skills in developing learning media to facilitate students in absorbing the presented material (Seviana et al., 2023). The process in history subjects is evident in the development of digital learning media, where students can identify unique and historical elements within their communities or local wisdom. The product in history education is applied through field learning methods that guide students to engage directly, thereby providing them with real experiences related to the essential materials being taught. Furthermore, students can share their experiences from field observations with their peers (Seviana et al., 2023).

Sociology, as a subject closely related to students' lives, enables teachers

to apply essential materials as one component within the independent curriculum. Consequently, the delivery of essential materials can occur more effectively. Many teachers strive to make learning engaging through the application of creative methods and media to facilitate students' comprehension of the material (Mayasari et al., 2023). In sociology education, teachers aim to design lessons that are not merely theoretical but rather incorporate gamification and field studies. The gamification method utilizes students' skills in technology, providing experiences related to social realities being addressed. Through field studies, students can actively engage and experience social realities, ensuring their knowledge extends beyond textbooks or lectures from teachers (Widyastuti & Anwar, 2022).

The content in sociology subjects includes the presentation of social phenomena using the gamification method (Rumianda et al., 2020). Meanwhile, for materials related to social environments, teachers invite students to conduct field studies (Widyastuti & Anwar, 2022). The process in sociology learning is apparent in students' efforts to think critically, quickly, and accurately to address issues related to social phenomena (Rumianda et al., 2020). Additionally, students' observational skills are also honed through field study activities (Widyastuti & Anwar, 2022). The products of sociology education that implement gamification models can serve as reinforcement tools for the materials that have been conveyed. Therefore, the integration of approaches focused on problem-solving, contextual understanding, and real experiences will

result in more meaningful and effective learning for students.

CONCLUSION

The application of a strong relationship between essential materials and differentiated approaches in education has proven to be both relevant and crucial for enhancing educational quality. This approach empowers educators to effectively meet the diverse needs of learners by considering differences in learning styles, interests, and skill levels. Consequently, this strategy not only enriches the learning experience but also ensures that each learner has an equal opportunity to maximize their potential.

In an ever-evolving educational landscape, integrating essential materials with differentiated approaches represents a significant step toward achieving inclusive and meaningful learning. Such integration positively impacts student achievement and development, reinforcing the importance of tailoring educational experiences to meet the varied needs of students.

However, one of the primary challenges in realizing this potential is the necessity for teacher readiness in designing and implementing effective differentiation strategies. A lack of understanding and skills in differentiation can hinder the effectiveness of this approach. To address these barriers, it is essential to provide further and continuous teacher training aimed at enhancing their competencies in applying adaptive and responsive differentiation strategies.

Furthermore, the development of a more flexible curriculum that allows for

adjustments based on the specific needs and characteristics of learners is vital. By adopting these strategies, the challenges associated with implementing differentiation can be overcome. Ultimately, optimizing the benefits of differentiated approaches will ensure that all learners have meaningful and relevant educational experiences tailored to their individual needs, thereby promoting an inclusive learning environment that fosters growth and achievement.

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