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Differentiated Learning Strategies in Enhancing German Speaking Skills of Class XI Students

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Abstract
Differentiated learning represents an educational method which adjusts teaching methods according to students' individual learning requirements and their personal interests and their preferred learning approaches. The research implements differentiated learning in German language instruction for speaking skills with class XI-10 students at SMAN 1 Batu while documenting student activities and learning results following this approach. The research used Classroom Action Research (CAR) as its design structure with two learning cycles that included 28 students as participants. The research data collection included observing student behavior and speaking proficiency assessments which were analyzed through qualitative and quantitative descriptive methods. The results demonstrated substantial growth in student speaking abilities because the mastery percentage increased to 89.28% during the second cycle. The students became more active in their learning activities because they used visual, auditory and kinesthetic learning styles. Differentiated learning proves effective for class XI-10 students at SMAN 1 Batu to improve their German speaking abilities while developing their creative communication skills and self-assurance in speaking.
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Keywords: *Differentiated learning, German language, speaking skills, Classroom Action Research, learning styles*

Introduction

Every learner in the educational process possesses unique characteristics, including varying levels of readiness, interests, and learning styles. Recognizing this diversity and individuality within the classroom is crucial for educators to design optimal teaching methods that focus on student needs, often referred to as Student-Centered Learning. This approach supports active student engagement by providing learning experiences tailored to their preferences (Ngaisah et al., 2023). Consequently, differentiated learning is applied to accommodate the diverse characteristics of learners. Differentiated learning bases its approach on the interests, needs, and strengths of each student to customize instruction (Karimah, 2023). This method offers students choices and flexibility in how they learn and assists teachers in personalizing instruction (Wulandari et al., 2024).

Clear instructional guidance and well-defined learning objectives are essential in this method, enabling students to achieve these goals more effectively. Tomlinson emphasizes that individual students have varied interests, with some choosing to delve deeper into topics that capture their attention. In her book *How to Differentiate Instruction*, Tomlinson

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highlights the differences among students in the learning process. The concept of differentiated learning provides teachers with the flexibility to modify learning objectives tailored to students' learning styles in terms of process, outcomes, and products.

Students differ in many aspects, including needs, motivation, abilities, interests, and learning methods (Pratiwi et al., 2023). Strong students are given opportunities to fully express their creative abilities, think creatively, and solve complex problems. Conversely, some students struggle to express their abilities or face challenges during the learning process (Wijayati et al., 2023). Currently, German language learning often resembles two sides of a coin—close yet not aligned. The teaching process tends to be standardized for all students, assuming uniform ability and interest (Purnawanto, 2023). If students are given tasks below their ability level, they cannot develop optimally (Prihandini et al., 2023). Conversely, students cannot solve problems at higher levels if their skills have not reached that stage. Differences among students often become problematic, affecting assessment outcomes. Moreover, one-way teaching methods without prior analysis and differentiated approaches are ineffective, as teachers find it difficult to identify students' needs, learning styles, interests, and potentials (Novitasari et al., 2020). Without understanding these factors, students struggle to grasp German language knowledge, leading to difficulties in learning (Wijayati & Lestari, 2021). Mastery of foreign languages is essential, as they serve as a gateway to global communities and a key means of acquiring knowledge (Kharis, et al, 2020).

German is often considered a challenging language due to its complex grammar, compound words, and pronunciation (Wijayati et al., 2021). One of the most daunting aspects for students is the extensive use of cases, where nouns, articles, adjectives, and pronouns change according to grammatical function. When students face difficulties in learning, they tend to lose interest and motivation (Wulandari et al., 2023). In the German learning process, differentiated learning allows teachers to understand students' learning styles, facilitating adjustments and efficient mastery of the language (Wijayati & Lestari, 2021). This correlates with findings that differentiated learning is an adequate method for learning German (Strohn, 2015). In the context of foreign language learning, especially German, this approach effectively enhances students' skills in listening (*hören*), speaking (*sprechen*), reading (*lesen*), and writing (*schreiben*).

This study focuses on speaking skills (*sprechen*). Speaking is a language ability involving the articulation of words and sounds to express opinions, thoughts, and feelings orally to individuals or groups (Tarigan, 2008). His study also highlights that podcasts contribute to improving learners' listening comprehension. As demonstrated in Lutfa's study, most participants acknowledged that podcasts enhance listening comprehension, support vocabulary acquisition, and improve speaking skills through repeated exposure and practice (Lutfa et al., 2024). Preliminary observations and interviews with the German teacher at SMAN 1 Batu, class XI-10, revealed a lack of speaking skills among students. One contributing factor is the low attitude and interest in speaking skills learning due to a uniform teaching system that disregards students' interests and learning styles. Consequently, students' German language abilities are uneven. Some students with low speaking skills tend to remain silent and feel shy when asked to speak in front of peers, while others lack proficiency due to insufficient speaking practice. Therefore, the researcher chose differentiated learning to improve students' German speaking skills.

Previous research on differentiated learning has been conducted by several scholars, such as Fitri & Nani Solihati (2023) and Pratama (2022). Fitri & Nani Solihati (2023) implemented differentiated learning in one session by dividing students into three learning styles: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. Their study used observation report text materials, aiming for students to analyze text structure and produce observation reports. Pratama (2022) applied differentiated learning to improve students' literacy comprehension by grouping students into three categories: those who understand reading, those who can read but do not

understand content, and those who read less fluently. After two weeks of reading habituation and evaluation through Q&A, comprehension improved, with 24 out of 27 students (88%) able to answer questions about their reading.

Based on these studies, the common strategy is differentiated learning. The difference lies in the subject and student skills, with this study focusing on German speaking skills. Despite existing research, no study has examined differentiated learning applied to German language subjects. Therefore, this research aims to implement differentiated learning in German language teaching, describe student activities during the learning process, and assess learning outcomes based on speaking ability tests after applying differentiated learning, to determine its effectiveness in improving student learning outcomes.

Method

This study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) because the researcher was involved in solving classroom learning problems and improving student learning. CAR is a practical research method intended to enhance classroom learning. The subjects were 28 students of class XI-10 at SMA Negeri 1 Batu, with the German language theme "Familie" as the research focus. Data sources included teaching and learning processes and evaluations during cycles I and II.

Data analysis techniques comprised qualitative and quantitative descriptive methods. Qualitative descriptive analysis was used to examine student activity data during the implementation of differentiated learning in German speaking skills. This analysis involved data collection, simplification, and presentation. Quantitative descriptive analysis was applied to assess students' speaking ability test results at the end of each cycle.

The researcher implemented differentiated learning as the teaching method for German language class XI-10 over two cycles, each consisting of two meetings. Each class session lasted 2 x 45 minutes. The initial steps in CAR included four stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting.

a. Planning

The planning phase involved a series of activities, including (a) collaboration with the German language teacher to identify the learning theme and sub-themes, specifically "Familie" (Family) with sub-themes "Meine Große Familie" (My Big Family) and "Probleme in der Familie" (Problems in the Family), (b) design of a comprehensive Lesson Plan (RPP) that integrated a differentiated instruction approach, encompassing content, process, and product differentiation, and (c) development of research instruments, including observation protocols and speaking assessment rubrics.

b. Acting

Implementing the differentiated learning actions in the German language class according to the planned procedures.

c. Observing

Monitoring the effects of the actions taken in each cycle.

d. Reflecting

Reviewing the activities after completing the acting stage, discussing observations, and using reflections to guide improvements for the next cycle.

The research instruments included observation sheets and learning outcome tests. Observation sheets contained statements to monitor all activities during the learning process. The German teacher at SMA Negeri 1 Batu acted as the model teacher, while the researcher and a colleague from the German language department served as observers, filling out the observation sheets. The learning outcome test consisted of questions to measure students' German speaking ability on the "Familie" topic, with a minimum completeness criterion (MCC) of 75.

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Results

This study consisted of two cycles, each involving planning, acting, observing, and reflecting stages. During planning, discussions were held regarding materials and the differentiated learning process with the German teacher. The main topic was "Familie," divided into two sub-themes: "Meine Große Familie" and "Probleme in der Familie." Subsequently, a lesson plan incorporating content, process, and product differentiation was developed.

Table 1. Content Differentiation Planning for Cycles I and II

Sub-theme	Visual	Auditory	Kinesthetic
Meine Große Familie (Dialog) (Cycle 1)	Exercise sheets with pictorial instructions	Exercise sheets with pictorial and audio instructions	Family card exercises with text-based instructions
Probleme in der Familie (Monologue) (Cycle 2)			

Content differentiation involved varied exercises to meet different learning styles. Process differentiation included (a) Visual: Observing images and describing their meaning; (b) Auditory: Listening to audio recordings via QR codes; and (c) Kinesthetic: Cutting and pasting family cards onto a family tree.

Product differentiation involved creating (a) Animated videos (Visual); (b) Audio recordings (Auditory), (c) Role-play videos (Kinesthetic).

The first meeting of cycle I lasted 90 minutes, including 5 minutes for opening, 75 minutes for core activities, and 10 minutes for closing. The differentiated learning process for each cycle is detailed in the following table.

Table 2. Differentiated Learning Process in Cycles I and II

Learning Style	**Activities**
Visual	- Selecting exercises with images of main characters and family members, ages, hobbies, jobs.
	- Observing and describing images of main characters and family members.
	- Filling in the family tree based on image information.
	- Presenting the family tree in group dialogues in front of the class.
Auditory	- Selecting exercises with images and QR codes containing audio information about family roles, ages, hobbies, and jobs.
	- Scanning QR codes, listening, and taking notes on audio information.
	- Filling in the family tree based on audio information.
	- Presenting the family tree in group dialogues in front of the class.

Kinesthetic	- Selecting exercises with family cards containing text information about family roles, ages, hobbies, and jobs.
	- Observing text information on family cards.
	- Cutting and pasting family cards onto the family tree according to family roles.
	- Presenting the family tree in group dialogues in front of the class.

Students were grouped based on learning styles identified through questionnaires: 11 visual, 9 auditory, and 8 kinesthetic learners, forming six groups from 28 students. Group discussions lasted 15 minutes, followed by dialogue presentations. Due to time constraints, homework was assigned to narrate family members, submitted via Google Forms in formats matching students' learning styles.

Student activity observations focused on speaking skills during learning, emphasizing the sentences produced during presentations and the final products. Speaking ability results based on product differentiation are shown below.

Table 3. Comparison of Student Product Results in Cycle I

Learning Style	Cycle 1 Presentation Example	Cycle 2 Presentation Example
Visual	Student A: Hallo, wie viele Geschwister hast du? Student B: Ich habe zwei Geschwister, einen Bruder und eine Schwester. Mein Bruder ist 14 Jahre alt und meine Schwester ist 12 Jahre alt. (Group 1)	Mein Bruder hat schlechte Noten in der Schule. Er spielt oft mit dem Handy. Unser Vater hat sein Handy genommen. (Visual Group 1)
Auditory	Student A: Hast du Geschwister? Student B: Nein, ich bin Einzelkind. Aber ich habe viele Cousins.	Meine Schwester bleibt lange draußen mit Freunden. Meine Eltern haben nicht genug Zeit. Sie wollen mehr Zeit für die Familie haben. (Auditory Group 2)
Kinesthetic	Student A: Wer ist das in deiner Familie? Student B: Das ist mein Vater, meine Mutter, und meine Brüder. (Group 4) **Pronunciation Error:** "meine Brüder" should be "mein Bruder" as it refers to one person.	Meine Schwester hat ihre Hausaufgaben vergessen. Sie spielst zu viele mit Handy. Sie darf kein Handy mehr während der Lernzeit benutzen. (Kinesthetic Group 2) **Pronunciation Error:** The sentence "Sie **spielst** zu viele mit Handy." should be "Sie **spielt** zu **viel** mit **dem** Handy." Immediate correction is needed for grammar and article use.

The Table 3 indicates that speaking skills in cycle I were not yet satisfactory due to incorrect sentence structures and limited vocabulary. In cycle II, students showed improvement with correct sentence structures and better vocabulary mastery. Supporting this description, the following table presents speaking ability test data for each cycle.

Table 4. German Speaking Ability Test Results for Cycles I and II

No.	Aspect	Cycle I	Cycle II
1	Number of Students Tested	28	28
2	Number of Students Passed	19 (67.85%)	25 (89.28%)
3	Number of Students Failed	9 (32.14%)	3 (10.71%)
4	Total Score	2252	2283
5	Highest Score	89	90
6	Lowest Score	67	75
7	Average Score	77.66	78.72

Table 4 shows varied student scores, with the highest score of 90 in cycle II and the lowest of 67. The average score in cycle I was 77.66. The learning outcomes for cycle I are illustrated in the following diagram.

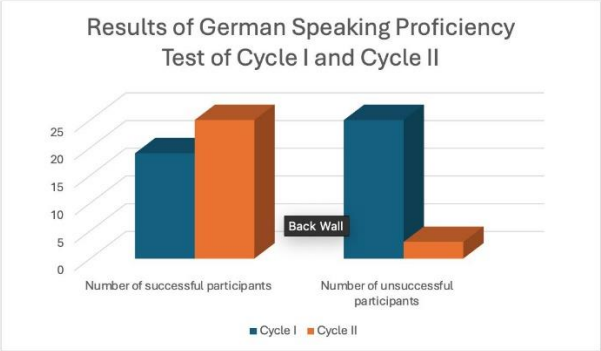

Figure 2. Results of Speaking Ability Test

Based on the figure 2, 67.85% of 28 students achieved the minimum completeness criterion (MCC), while 32.14% did not. This indicates that most students in cycle I reached mastery, but the percentage was below the 75% threshold. Reflections from this activity revealed issues such as inadequate learning facilities, including a malfunctioning projector that consumed significant class time. Some students did not fully express their speaking abilities, many interacted off-topic or used mobile phones, hindering timely completion of exercises or assignments. Student grouping was less effective due to random selection by the teacher. In cycle II, the highest score was 90, the lowest 75, and the class average was 78.72. The learning outcomes for cycle II are shown in the following diagram.

The data indicate that 89.28% of students achieved the MCC, with only 10.71% not meeting the criterion. This demonstrates that nearly all students in class XI-10 reached mastery, and the speaking skill learning outcomes in cycle II were satisfactory, exceeding the 75% mastery threshold.

Discussion

Differentiated learning has proven to be an effective strategy in teaching German, particularly speaking skills. This approach allows students to learn according to their individual needs and learning styles, making the learning experience more meaningful (Tomlinson, 2001). Variations in content, process, and product enable active student engagement and development of oral communication skills (Sousa & Tomlinson, 2018).

Students who initially struggled to express sentences directly began to show progress by expanding vocabulary through reading, listening, and vocabulary card exercises. Group discussions, presentations, and exercises tailored to learning styles enhanced motivation and speaking skills (Schmitt, 2020; Kuncoro, 2017).

Students' dialogic abilities improved, characterized by effective two-way communication during role-plays and conversation simulations. This strategy created a communicative learning environment supporting sentence construction and immediate responses (Wahyuni, 2022; Spolsky & Bachman, 1991). Monologic skills also improved, with clearer and contextually appropriate sentences. Consistent practice without relying on notes helped students speak fluently and convey information effectively (Richards & Rodgers, 2021). The use of varied media aligned with learning styles supported the achievement of learning objectives (Wedayanti & Wiarta, 2022).

Increased student confidence was evident from their willingness to present without notes, which also fostered creativity through product creation (Fatimah & Putra, 2024). Reduced public speaking anxiety contributed to improved speaking skills (Puspitaningtyas, 2012; Yoioga & Rustam, 2024).

Overall, differentiated learning made students more active, creative, and quick thinkers by addressing individual needs. Auditory learners showed the best results due to their sensitivity to orally delivered material, supporting language pattern mastery and speaking skills (Hughes, 2019). Nonetheless, this approach remains important for all learning styles to ensure optimal development for every student.

Conclusion

The implementation of differentiated learning in class XI-10 at SMAN 1 Batu effectively improved students' German speaking skills. This approach facilitated active student engagement according to visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles through varied content, processes, and products. Diverse and directed learning activities encouraged students to practice speaking confidently and creatively. Learning outcomes showed significant improvement, with mastery reaching 89.28% in the second cycle. Therefore, differentiated learning is highly recommended as a responsive German language teaching method that addresses individual student needs and effectively enhances speaking skills.

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