

Conceptual Model of Differentiated Learning Management in Elementary School

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Abstract: This study examines the implementation of differentiated learning management at Al-Ilham Banjar Inspirational Elementary School, a dynamic instructional approach tailored to address the diverse needs of individual students. Differentiated learning aims to optimize each student's learning experience and outcomes by adapting teaching methods, yet it presents significant challenges for educators in terms of planning, resource allocation, and evaluation. Using a qualitative research methodology, including interviews, observations, and documentation, this study investigates the school's strategies in managing these challenges. The findings reveal a comprehensive, three-tiered approach: (1) assessing and identifying students' learning readiness and needs, (2) organizing and mobilizing resources, such as actively involving parents and employing specially designed teaching modules that align with differentiated instruction, and (3) implementing varied instructional strategies, allowing differentiation across content, learning processes, and final products to cater to diverse learning profiles. Additionally, the school employs formative and summative assessment methods to monitor and evaluate students' progress continuously, ensuring that differentiated learning outcomes are achieved effectively. This management strategy demonstrates a strong potential to maximize each student's abilities, providing a structured framework that could serve as a valuable reference for other educational institutions looking to enhance their differentiated learning practices. This study thus contributes valuable insights for schools and educators interested in implementing effective differentiated learning management.

Keywords: Differentiated learning; Learning management; Instructional strategies; Student readiness; Elementary school

INTRODUCTION

Education has a very important role in efforts to improve the human resources of a nation. In essence, humans need education (Hasanah, 2022). In order to grow and develop optimally, in accordance with their respective natural natures. However, the current education still does not show maximum results. Students are still faced with a paradoxical dichotomy between smart and not smart children, so that these conditions can weaken the position of students who have already been labelled not smart (Hasanah, Al Ghazy, Suyatno, Maryani, & Mohd Yusoff, 2023). In addition, education practices that only refer to ideal standards in general conditions can cause students with special needs to appear as if they are always behind other children. This is an injustice that

should not happen. Therefore, the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia issued the Merdeka learning policy in the Merdeka curriculum, one of which contains the implementation of differentiated learning (Pangestu & Rochmat, 2021).

Differentiated learning allows teachers to look at learning from different angles, starting with paying attention to the learning profile that encourages educators to always pay attention and take action to determine student needs, as well as analyse students' learning readiness, learning responses, and even interests, which may differ from one another (Hasanah, 2022). Basically, differentiated learning aims to create learning equality for all students who come from different backgrounds and bridge the gap of different potentials (Bouilheres, Le, McDonald, Nkhoma, & Jandug-Montera, 2020). Differentiated learning will be successful if teachers and students have confidence about why, what and how teachers plan and implement it in the classroom (Hasanah, Suyata, Ghazi, Fauzia, & Akbar, 2023). Especially for elementary school teachers, as the main guardian to instil positive character values early on to their students, so that they have academic abilities as well as develop their social competence.

Differentiated learning will be successful if teachers have an open perspective and understand differences (Wardat, Belbase, & Tairab, 2022). For this reason, teachers need to equip themselves with pedagogic competence in order to implement differentiated learning well. However, in the field, many teachers are found to have difficulties in implementing differentiated learning (Nuraini & Abidin, 2020). Until now, no differentiated learning management model has been found that can be adopted by teachers to overcome the difficulties faced in implementing differentiated learning.

The main research problem in this study is the need for an effective differentiated learning management model that can help teachers implement differentiated learning successfully in elementary schools. Although differentiated learning is recognized for its potential to support diverse student needs, teachers often face challenges in applying it effectively due to limited pedagogic competence and difficulties in adapting to various student readiness levels. Currently, no standardized model exists to guide teachers in managing differentiated learning.

The specific research question guiding this study is how can a differentiated learning model be designed to develop the potential of elementary school students? This study focuses on understanding and analyzing the practices at SD Inspiratif Al-Ilham Banjar, where differentiated learning is implemented through student grouping based on readiness levels (Grade I) and

abilities (Grades II to VI). This context highlights the need to explore a differentiated learning management model that other schools and educators could adopt to overcome similar challenges.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is a case study that focuses on examining the implementation of differentiated learning at a specific school, SD Inspiratif Al-Ilham Banjar. The case study approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the real-world challenges and practices associated with differentiated learning management. By using this design, the study aims to provide a detailed understanding of how differentiated learning is applied in the context of this particular school and the barriers faced in its implementation. Through the analysis of observation data, in-depth interviews, and documentation, the research seeks to provide practical insights that could be useful for other schools looking to adopt or improve differentiated learning practices.

Data Source

In this research, there are two types of data sources, namely primary sources and secondary sources. In general, determining the sample of research data using purposive sampling techniques where the researcher determines the specific identity that matches the research objectives. (Lenaini, 2021). Primary sources in the study include the results of interviews with principals, wakakurikulum teachers and students, as well as based on observations made when teachers and students implement differentiated learning and supervision by the head of Inspiratif Al Ilham Elementary School in Banjar City. While secondary sources of research are obtained from official documents, archives, mass media, electronic media, and other things related to the research including Curriculum, Syllabus, lesson plans, Annual Program, Semester Program, School Profile and photo archives of differentiated learning implementation starting from Non-Cognitive Diagnostic Assessment, Cognitive Diagnostic Assessment to the evaluation stage.

Research Procedures

The research implementation includes data collection techniques and guidelines, data validity and data analysis techniques. Data collection techniques and guidelines include in-depth interviews, observation and documentation studies. The validity of the research data uses the data source triangulation technique which includes the use of something else outside the data for the purpose of checking or comparing the data (Alfansyur & Mariyani, 2020). While the data analysis technique uses thematic techniques based on Miles and Huberman's theory including four steps, namely Collection, Data Reduction,

Data Display and Verification and Affirmation of Conclusions (Dull & Reinhardt, 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Differentiated Learning Management at Al-Ilham Banjar Inspirational Primary School is divided into four categories: planning, organising, implementing and evaluating. Planning, learning planning has a function in organising learning, designing learning programs to facilitate basic student needs and mapping learning outcome indicators and achievement strategies (Rush, 2023).

Theme 1. Planning

The differentiated learning planning conducted by Al-Ilham Inspirational Primary School is a comprehensive process that includes organizing the curriculum, designing tailored learning programs, and mapping out strategies to meet diverse student needs, as detailed in the following sections:

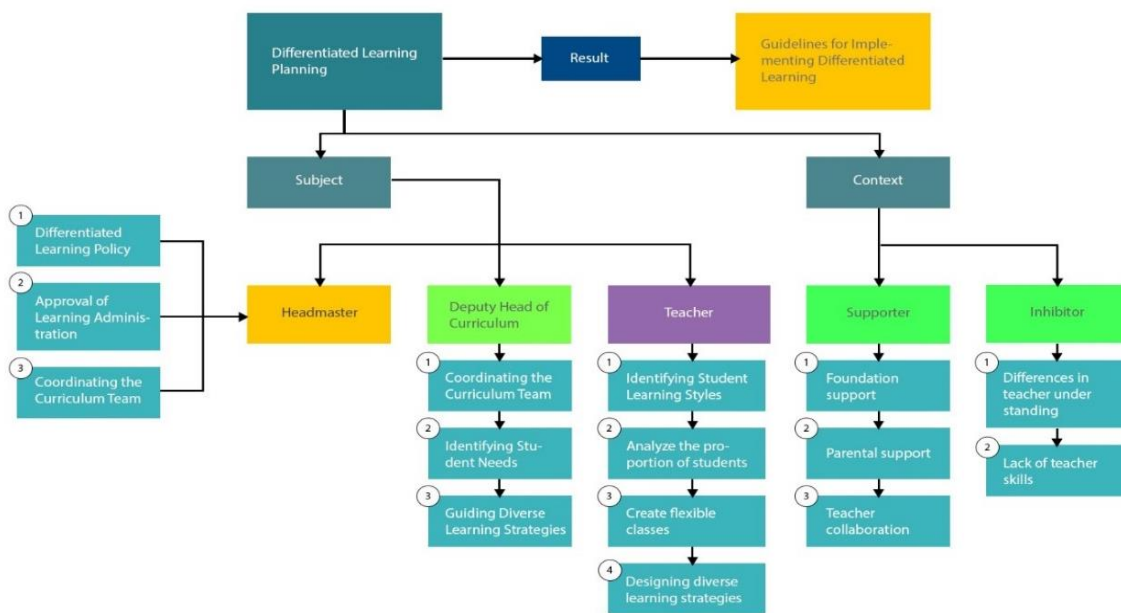


Figure 1: Differentiated Learning Planning at Inspirational Primary School Al-Ilham Banjar

From the figure 1, it is evident that the implementation of differentiated learning at Al-Ilham Inspirational Primary School involves a collaborative effort

from various stakeholders within the school structure, including the Principal, Vice Principal, and relevant teachers. The planning phase is significantly supported by the involvement of student guardians and the school foundation, which facilitates a conducive environment for differentiated learning. This aligns that the importance of a strong support system in executing differentiated instruction (Bi, Struyven, & Zhu, 2023). However, a key challenge identified in the planning process is the mismatch between some teachers' competencies and the specific needs of differentiated learning. The inadequate teacher preparation can hinder the effective implementation of differentiated strategies (Stollman, Meirink, Westenberg, & van Driel, 2021). To address this challenge, Al-Ilham has taken proactive measures by organizing workshops aimed at enhancing teachers' skills, ensuring they are better equipped to meet the demands of differentiated learning. It means, for continuous professional development as a means to bridge gaps in teacher competencies and improve instructional effectiveness (Susanti & Sa'ud, 2016). Through these efforts, the school demonstrates a commitment to overcoming obstacles and ensuring the success of differentiated learning for all students (Grant & Hill, 2020).

The headmaster at Al-Ilham Inspirational Primary School plays a pivotal role in ensuring the successful implementation of differentiated learning, primarily through the development and approval of learning administration and the coordination of the curriculum team. By adhering to the school's Differentiated Instruction (DI) policy, the headmaster ensures that the principles of differentiation are embedded within the school's educational practices. This includes overseeing the approval process for lesson plans (Mashuri & Hasanah, 2021) and instructional strategies (Ginja & Chen, 2020), ensuring they align with the DI policy. Furthermore, the headmaster coordinates the efforts of the curriculum team, guiding them in adapting the curriculum to meet the diverse needs of the student body. This leadership role is critical, as it sets the tone for the entire school, promoting a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement in teaching practices, which is essential for the effective implementation of differentiated learning (Hallinger, 2018). Through these efforts, the headmaster not only supports teachers in delivering differentiated instruction but also ensures that the school's overarching educational goals are met (Egido Gálvez, Fernández Cruz, & Fernández Díaz, 2016).

The curriculum coordinator at SD Al Islam plays a crucial role in shaping the educational experience of students. Their primary responsibilities include identifying the developmental needs of students, which involves understanding their academic, social, and emotional growth. Based on these needs, the coordinator designs a curriculum that is both challenging and

supportive, ensuring it meets the diverse learning styles and abilities of all students. Additionally, the coordinator creates differentiated learning guidelines for teachers, providing them with strategies and resources to tailor instruction to individual student needs, thereby promoting more effective and personalized learning across the school.

The role of teachers in differentiated learning at Al-Ilham Inspirational Primary School is multifaceted, with significant responsibilities in coordinating the curriculum, identifying student needs, and guiding diverse learning strategies. Teachers serve as key figures in aligning the curriculum with the varied learning profiles of students, ensuring that each student receives instruction that is tailored to their specific abilities and interests. This is consistent with the findings of Tomlinson (Tomlinson, 2001), who highlights the critical role of teachers in adapting the curriculum to meet diverse needs. Additionally, teachers at Al-Ilham actively engage in identifying students' strengths, challenges, and learning preferences through continuous assessments and observations, emphasizing the importance of knowing the learner for effective differentiation (Reis, McCoach, Little, Muller, & Kaniskan, 2011). By understanding individual student needs, teachers are able to implement a range of instructional strategies, such as flexible grouping and differentiated tasks, to support diverse learners. This proactive approach not only enhances student engagement but also fosters a more inclusive learning environment. Through these efforts, teachers at Al-Ilham play a crucial role in ensuring that all students are given the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their starting point.

Theme 2. Organizing

The process of organizing differentiated learning at Al-Ilham Inspirational Primary School is a structured effort that involves the formulation of policies by the principal, coordination with the curriculum section, and collaboration with teachers throughout the stages of planning, implementation, and evaluation. The principal's role is crucial in establishing a clear policy framework that guides the entire process of differentiated learning (Hasanah, Al Ghazy, et al., 2023). This policy serves as the foundation for the curriculum team's efforts to align instructional plans with the diverse needs of students (Grant & Hill, 2020). Teachers are actively involved in this organizational process, ensuring that differentiated learning strategies are effectively implemented and continuously evaluated for improvement. The organization of differentiated learning at Al-Ilham is depicted in the following scheme, which highlights the collaborative (Athirah Mohd Nasir & Abd. Aziz, 2020) and systematic approach taken by the school to ensure that all students receive the support they need to succeed (Zein, Iskandar, Moenada, & Thahir, 2023). The

organisation of differentiated learning conducted by Al-Ilham Inspirational Primary School is illustrated in the following scheme:

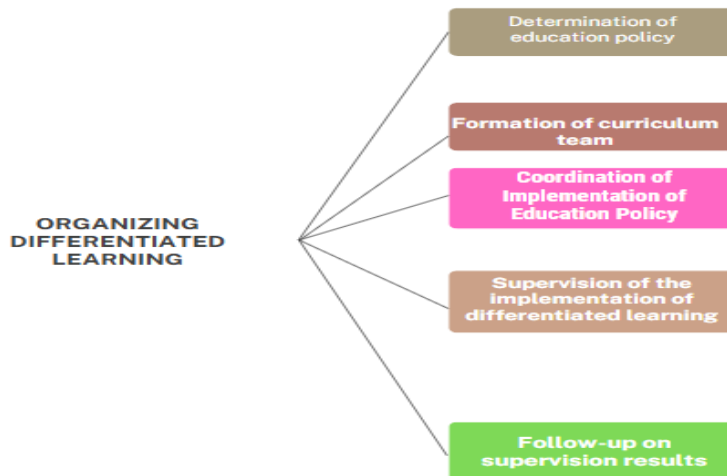


Figure 2: Organizing Process of Differentiated Learning

Theme 3. Implementation

Implementation is the practical phase where the plans and organizational structures for differentiated learning at Al-Ilham Inspirational Primary School are put into action. Following the groundwork laid in the planning and organizing stages, the school executes various strategic efforts to ensure the effectiveness of differentiated learning. These efforts include regular meetings with student guardians, which foster collaboration between teachers and families in supporting each student's unique learning journey. Additionally, the school emphasizes the importance of daily class reports or daily reports, which serve as tools for continuous monitoring and reflection on student progress. Furthermore, the implementation process involves meticulously mapping student needs by assessing aspects of readiness, interests, and learning profiles. This comprehensive approach ensures that each student receives personalized instruction tailored to their individual learning styles, which is a hallmark of successful differentiated learning. Through these strategic actions, Al-Ilham demonstrates its commitment to creating an inclusive and responsive learning environment that addresses the diverse needs of all its students.

The implementation of differentiated learning carried out by Al-Ilham Inspirational Primary School is illustrated in the following scheme:

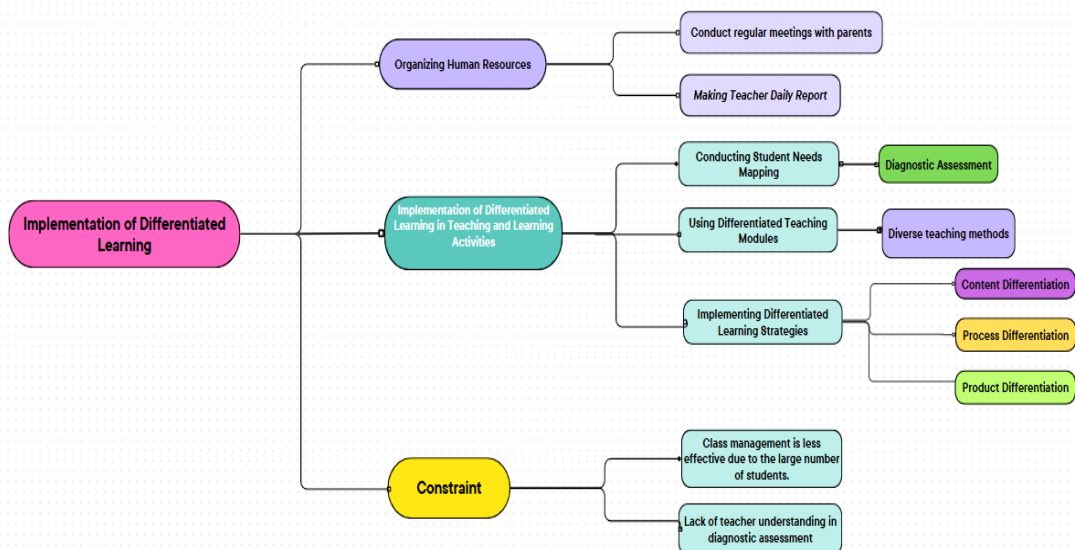


Figure 3: Implementation of Differentiated Learning at Al-Ilham Banjar Inspirational Primary School

The implementation of differentiated learning at Al-Ilham Inspirational Primary School is closely tied to the theoretical understanding of elementary school students' characteristics. At this developmental stage, students typically exhibit a wide range of cognitive, social, and emotional abilities, which necessitates tailored instructional approaches (Piaget, 1972). Differentiated learning, through strategies such as regular student guardian meetings, daily class reports, and the mapping of student needs based on readiness, interest, and learning profiles, directly addresses these developmental variances.

For instance, Piaget's theory of cognitive development suggests that elementary students are transitioning from concrete operational thinking to more abstract reasoning, meaning they require varied instructional methods that accommodate different levels of understanding. Similarly, Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) emphasizes the importance of providing tasks that are just beyond a student's current abilities, with the support of teachers or peers. The school's focus on mapping student readiness and interests aligns with this theory, as it allows teachers to provide instruction that is appropriately challenging and supportive.

Furthermore, the use of differentiated learning strategies such as individualized feedback and interest-based activities caters to the varying attention spans and motivational factors typical of elementary students. By aligning differentiated learning implementation with these theoretical insights,

Al-Ilham ensures that its approach not only meets academic needs but also supports the holistic development of each student, fostering a learning environment where all students can thrive.

Obstacles, in the effort to implement differentiated learning at Al-Ilham Banjar Inspirational Elementary School, there are several obstacles experienced by schools, namely the existence of teacher competencies that are not yet appropriate in efforts to design differentiated learning activities. There are two factors that make teacher obstacles in implementing differentiated learning, namely internal factors and external factors of teachers, one of which is the difficulty of teachers in understanding differentiated learning. From these problems, there are steps taken by Al-Ilham Banjar Inspirational Elementary School in overcoming obstacles to the implementation of differentiated learning, namely including teachers in workshops and technical guidance and implementing a mentoring program among teachers at school.

Theme 4. Evaluation

The final step in differentiated learning management in elementary schools is the evaluation stage. The role of evaluation in learning is very important as a form of accountability for education implementation (Yongmei Ni, Liz Hollingworth, Andrea Rorrer, 2016). Evaluation is carried out to collect data to determine values, criteria, judgments and make decisions about student learning outcomes, as well as the effectiveness of the teaching process carried out by teachers (Indahsari, 2021). Evaluation in differentiated learning is different from conventional learning evaluation, in differentiated learning evaluation is carried out through flexible assessments. There are two types of assessment applied to the evaluation of differentiated learning, namely formative assessment (Matthews, 2020) and summative assessment (Partami, 2019). The assessment is outlined in the form of a learning progress report, in the form of a learning outcome report, which is prepared based on the processing of assessment results that provide information about the highest achievement and the lowest achievement of learner learning outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study presents a novel approach to differentiated learning management at SD Inspiratif Al-Ilham Banjar, showcasing the successful implementation of a tailored learning strategy across planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating phases. The unique contribution of this research lies in its practical application of differentiated learning within a real-world elementary school context, specifically focusing on grouping students based on their readiness levels and abilities. This approach not only highlights the

importance of personalized learning pathways but also demonstrates the effectiveness of involving both teachers and parents in supporting student development. The findings offer valuable insights into the challenges educators face and provide a practical framework for other schools seeking to enhance their differentiated learning strategies, thereby advancing the field of educational management.

EXPRESSION OF GRATITUDE

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