

REVISITING DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION IN INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF TEACHER PRACTICES, CHALLENGES, AND INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORTS

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ABSTRAK

Penerapan pembelajaran berdiferensiasi di kelas inklusif masih menghadapi berbagai tantangan, seperti kesiapan guru, keragaman karakteristik siswa, keterbatasan waktu, dan dukungan pembelajaran yang belum optimal. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk meninjau praktik guru, tantangan, dan dukungan pembelajaran dalam penerapan pembelajaran yang dibedakan di sekolah inklusif melalui *systematic literature review* (SLR). Sumber literatur diperoleh dari Google Scholar yang mencakup periode tahun 2020–2025. Dari 195 artikel yang diidentifikasi, 15 di antaranya dipilih berdasarkan tema pembahasan. Hasil sintesis menunjukkan bahwa praktik guru melibatkan diferensiasi konten, proses, hasil, dan lingkungan belajar, didukung oleh penilaian diagnostik untuk memetakan kesiapan belajar, minat, dan profil belajar siswa. Tantangan utama meliputi kesiapan guru dalam memahami karakteristik siswa, keterbatasan waktu dan manajemen kelas, serta kurangnya dukungan dan pengawasan dari kepala sekolah. Dukungan yang diperlukan meliputi pelatihan dan lokakarya, pengawasan akademik, kolaborasi antar pendidik, dan keterlibatan orang tua. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa keberhasilan pembelajaran diferensiasi di sekolah inklusif sangat dipengaruhi oleh sinergi antara kompetensi guru dan dukungan dari pihak sekolah dan orang tua siswa.

Kata kunci : pembelajaran berdiferensiasi, kelas inklusif, *literature review*, praktik guru.

ABSTRACT

The implementation of differentiated instruction in inclusive classrooms still faces various challenges, such as teacher readiness, the diversity of student characteristics, time constraints, and suboptimal instructional support. This article aims to review teacher practices, challenges, and instructional support in the implementation of differentiated instruction in inclusive schools through a systematic literature review (SLR). Literature sources were obtained from Google Scholar covering the period 2020–2025. Of the 195 articles identified, 15 were selected based on the discussion themes. The synthesis results indicate that teacher practices involve differentiating content, processes, outcomes, and the learning environment, supported by diagnostic assessments to map students' learning readiness, interests,

and learning profiles. Key challenges include teachers' readiness to understand student characteristics, time constraints and classroom management, as well as a lack of support and supervision from school principals. The necessary support includes training and workshops, academic supervision, collaboration among educators, and parental involvement. These findings confirm that the success of differentiated instruction in inclusive schools is significantly influenced by the synergy between teacher competencies and support from the school and students' parents.

Keywords: *differentiated learning, inclusive classes, literature review, teacher practice.*

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is understood as an educational service system that promotes educational equality without discrimination, integrating children with special needs with other children so that they receive the same education. To implement inclusive education, schools are required to adapt their curriculum, facilities and infrastructure, as well as teaching methods, to meet the needs of each student (Direktorat PSLB, 2004). In practice, learning in inclusive classrooms is often supported by a special education teacher who assists students with special needs in meeting their learning needs while they are in school, with the expectation that they will receive support commensurate with the special education teacher's competencies (Khusus, A. B., & Learning, 2022).

To support inclusive education, teachers are required to design and provide instruction that is responsive to the needs of each student. One approach that can be used is differentiated instruction, a teaching strategy that allows teachers to adapt content, processes, and learning outcomes based on students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles (C. A. Tomlinson, 2021). As a student-centered approach, the goal of differentiated instruction is for teachers to develop the potential of all students by identifying their needs through the design of appropriate classroom educational experiences (Hall, 2002; Santangelo and Tomlinson, 2012). Differentiated instruction is designed to help teachers understand students' abilities, thereby making it easier to provide instruction tailored to each student's learning style or ability (C. A. Tomlinson, 2021). Previous studies have shown that differentiated instruction can improve the quality of learning and students' interest

in language learning, making instruction more effective, creative, and enjoyable (Ryan, J., & Bowman, 2022); however, its implementation still faces challenges related to teacher readiness, the complexity of student characteristics, limited learning resources, and suboptimal support from school leadership. Nevertheless, teachers continue to strive to implement various teaching practices to accommodate students' needs, even though the available support is not yet optimal.

Therefore, the author hopes this article can offer new insights into reviewing and analyzing differentiated instruction in inclusive classrooms, particularly regarding teacher practices, challenges, and learning support, thereby serving as a source of insights, knowledge, and a reference for further research. To achieve this objective, the study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) of articles published between 2020 and 2025, obtained through Google Scholar.

METHOD

The researchers used a systematic literature review (SLR) to examine the challenges, teacher practices, and support for differentiated instruction in inclusive classrooms. SLR is a literature review method that identifies, evaluates, and interprets all research findings relevant to a specific topic, thereby addressing the research questions posed (Nursalam et al., 2020). This study focuses on exploring teachers' practices, challenges, and learning support in the implementation of differentiated instruction. This process involves searching for various literature related to the topic (Mahanum, 2021).

The data collection method in this study involved gathering relevant articles from the Google Scholar and Scopus databases over the past six years (2020 to 2025). Reliable academic sources, including articles published in leading journals, served as the basis for literature selection to ensure that the collected data is valid and up-to-date (Ajani, 2023). The data consisted of 15 articles relevant to the implementation of differentiated instruction and inclusive classrooms, obtained by: (1) identifying search keywords such as “differentiated instruction,” “inclusive,” “teacher practices in differentiated instruction,” “challenges of differentiated instruction,” and “support for differentiated instruction”; (2) conducting a literature search through reputable databases such as Google Scholar and Scopus, resulting

in 195 articles related to the topic; (3) screening the articles for relevance and alignment with the research topic, during which the researcher identified 15 articles suitable for the discussion. As for the data analysis method, content analysis was used, with a process comprising: 1) data collection; 2) data reduction; 3) analysis; and 4) drawing conclusions. The research results were presented in narrative form.

DISCUSSION

How do teachers implement differentiated instruction in inclusive classrooms based on the findings of various studies?

The results of several articles examining differentiated instruction provide a comprehensive overview of teachers' practices in implementing differentiated instruction in inclusive classrooms. Teachers who use this approach are not only required to master the subject matter but must also fully understand each student's learning needs—from their level of readiness, interests, to their learning styles. Implementing differentiated instruction in inclusive classrooms requires teachers to make thoughtful decisions tailored to each student's needs. Teachers are expected to create flexible learning by adapting the content (subject matter), process (learning methods), and outcomes (learning products). These adaptations are made not to prioritize certain students, but to ensure all students have equal access to the learning process and its objectives (Ananda, 2025).

Teachers differentiate instructional content by varying the topics students study. Content, in this context, refers to the material taught by the teacher in class or the topics students will cover during the lesson. In differentiated instruction, there are two ways to create varied lesson content: by adapting the material taught by the teacher or studied by students to align with their abilities and interests; and by adjusting how the teacher delivers the material or how students access it based on each student's learning profile.

Process differentiation refers to the activities students engage in during class. These activities are those that benefit students as part of their learning experience in the classroom, not activities unrelated to the material being taught. These student activities are not graded numerically but are assessed qualitatively through

feedback notes regarding attitudes, knowledge, and skills that are still lacking and need improvement.

Differentiating products means that teachers assess the learning process to determine the extent to which students understand, master, and apply the subject matter after completing a semester's worth of lessons. These products are summative in nature and must be assessed. They take longer to complete and require a broader and deeper understanding from students. The teacher's role is to design products for students to complete based on the knowledge, understanding, and skills they must demonstrate. Teachers must establish assessment criteria within a rubric so students know what will be evaluated and the desired quality for each aspect they must achieve (Ibrahim, S., & Haerudin, 2024).

Differentiated instruction also emphasizes the importance of teachers responding to students' learning needs, where teachers do not force the learning process but instead focus on the learning needs of each student (Himmah & Nugraheni, 2023). By grouping students' needs, the learning process will be tailored to their learning profiles, readiness, and interests in an effort to improve student learning outcomes (Herwina, 2021). Learning readiness refers to students' level of understanding of the material or their preparedness to participate in an activity. Interest refers to a student's curiosity or fascination with a topic, which can serve as a key motivator to make students more active in learning. Learning profiles relate to learning styles, types of intelligence, and individual preferences of each student, such as a preference for learning through visuals, auditory cues, or movement, as well as other types of intelligence.

Analysis of the articles indicates several steps in implementing differentiated instruction. The first step is to plan the lesson. At this stage, the first action taken by the classroom teacher and the special education teacher is to set learning objectives. Learning objectives are the targets students aim to achieve. Afterward, the classroom teacher identifies students' learning needs through in-depth analysis via observation, diagnostic tests, and communication with the special education teacher. This assessment covers three aspects: readiness to learn, interests, and the students' learning profiles (Astiti et al, 2021). Diagnostic assessments help teachers understand each student's needs, enabling them to provide appropriate support and

resources during the learning process (Elviya, D. D., & Sukartiningsih, 2023). The results of diagnostic assessments, in addition to being used for mapping and creating learning contracts, also make a significant contribution to improving the quality of differentiated instruction. This step helps teachers better understand students' readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles. Teachers' understanding of concepts, their readiness to teach, and the availability of sufficient resources greatly influence the effectiveness of differentiated instruction (Dewi et al., 2025) and are also used to design differentiation in learning content, processes, and outcomes. In addition to administering diagnostic tests, teachers also conduct interviews to gain a clearer understanding of students' habits and characteristics.

Next, the classroom teacher and the special education teacher develop lesson plans (RPP) and individual learning programs (PPI) tailored to each student's abilities. The RPP and PPI are designed flexibly, offering several options for learning activities, as well as visual, audio, and kinesthetic aids. Based on these learning styles, teachers can group students according to their individual learning styles. The assessment results indicate that students already possess the knowledge and skills aligned with the material to be studied. Additionally, teachers develop instructional materials, in-class and out-of-class activities, daily assignments, and summative assessments tailored to students' abilities, interests, or preferences in learning, while employing teaching methods that align with their learning styles.

The second step is the implementation phase. During this phase, classroom teachers and special education teachers conduct instruction and use various formative assessment methods to monitor the learning progress of both regular students and those with special needs. According to this concept, students are regarded as the subjects of learning who have the right to choose the learning methods and approaches that best suit their needs (Heni Susanti et al., 2024) In this context, teachers need to understand the differences in each student's abilities and employ differentiated instruction strategies, such as preparing various types of worksheets and giving students choices regarding how they demonstrate their understanding—for example, through drawings, written work, or oral presentations (Salmia & A. Muhammad Yusri, 2021). By providing different worksheets, teachers give every student the opportunity to learn at a pace and level of ability

suited to their individual circumstances. This approach aligns with the concept of differentiated instruction, which focuses on adapting content and learning outcomes to meet the needs of each student. This approach has great potential to create a more inclusive learning environment, thereby addressing diverse student needs and helping to improve their learning outcomes.

The final step is the summative assessment phase, which involves evaluating students at the end of the learning process to determine the extent to which the learning objectives set at the beginning have been achieved. This summative assessment can serve as a baseline for subsequent learning. These findings indicate that diagnostic assessment serves as the primary foundation for implementing differentiated instruction in inclusive classrooms, as the quality of mapping students' learning readiness, interests, and learning profiles significantly determines the teacher's ability to accurately design differentiation in content, process, and products.

What are the challenges faced in implementing differentiated instruction in inclusive classrooms?

In inclusive education, a differentiated instruction approach is considered effective for creating a fair and responsive learning environment that addresses the diverse needs of students, including those with special needs (Pitaloka, H., n.d.). However, findings from several studies indicate that the implementation of differentiated instruction in inclusive classrooms still faces several challenges.

One of the main issues is teachers' readiness to understand students' characteristics and design varied and flexible activities (Ni Komang Arie Suwastini, 2021). Yet, educators' readiness to implement differentiated instruction is a crucial component to consider, as educators are the primary agents in carrying out differentiated instruction within the classroom (Zhang, 2022). Teachers need to possess pedagogical competencies, as well as creativity and flexibility in designing instruction that aligns with student diversity (Pertwi, 2021). In this regard, teachers must be able to accurately identify students' readiness levels, interests, learning styles, and learning profiles, and this makes instructional planning far from straightforward.

Another challenge faced by teachers is limited time and inadequate classroom management. Differentiated instruction requires teachers to manage various learning activities occurring simultaneously, as well as address the diverse needs and learning styles of students within the same classroom (Abdurrohman et al., 2025). Teachers must carefully manage the classroom environment, establish routines for the learning process, and prepare lesson plans tailored to each student's readiness level and needs—including setting rules, procedures, and providing alternative activities. This makes differentiated instruction more time-intensive, from planning to evaluating learning, and requires a variety of adequate learning media and resources.

Misconceptions regarding differentiated instruction also pose a challenge for teachers, such as the fear of attempting to implement differentiated instruction in the classroom, which leads to a lack of self-confidence (Tra, 2022). In fact, teachers' self-efficacy plays a significant role in differentiated instruction. Teachers with high self-efficacy are more responsive, proactive, and creative in finding solutions. They are more willing to try new approaches, provide positive feedback, and create an interactive learning environment. In contrast, teachers with low self-efficacy tend to be passive, less creative, and easily overwhelmed by job demands (Suwandono, 2024). This demonstrates that teachers require strong support from their peers and school principals.

Challenges at the school level also arise when the principal's leadership has not yet fully succeeded in fostering a culture of collaboration, academic supervision, and the provision of resources to support differentiated instruction. The principal plays a central role in implementing differentiated instruction in the classroom by providing various facilities—whether in the form of learning resources, opportunities for collaboration, or professional support (Puzio, K., Newcomer, S. N., & Goff, 2015). Furthermore, the principal's leadership should be directed toward fostering a school culture that supports differentiated instruction and student diversity.

What forms of instructional support are needed to optimize the implementation of differentiated instruction in inclusive classrooms?

Literature reviews indicate that optimizing differentiated instruction in inclusive classrooms requires both pedagogical and collaborative support. First, there is a need to enhance teachers' competencies in several areas, which may include training and workshops for teachers and school principals to improve their skills in designing and implementing differentiated instruction. Teachers are the primary agents in the success of differentiated instruction and also instill a philosophical awareness of the humanizing nature of education (Fath, M. S. A., & Putri, 2024). Therefore, continuous professional development should be directed toward enhancing pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) and diagnostic assessment skills. Training for teachers has proven to be more effective in improving their ability to design differentiated instruction (Yuli, 2025). In addition to training and workshops, support from fellow teachers and mentorship are also crucial for strengthening teachers' self-efficacy in implementing differentiation strategies. Communication among educators is known to have a positive impact on the implementation of differentiated instruction in the classroom (Moosa, V., & Shareefa, 2019). One of the positive benefits of communication and collaboration among educators is the mentorship or support provided by experienced educators or those who have undergone training in differentiated instruction. Mentoring activities are known to have many benefits; not only do they boost educators' confidence in implementing differentiated instruction in the classroom, but they also serve as a medium for sharing information and motivation among educators (Chipika, C. G., Musendekwa, M., & Mahanya, 2023).

Furthermore, support from the school principal and school policymakers in inclusive schools is also crucial to ensure that differentiated instruction is not merely implemented by a single teacher but becomes part of the school's culture. In this context, academic supervision should focus on supporting teachers in designing and evaluating differentiated instruction, rather than merely conducting administrative evaluations (Aprida, Y., et al., 2020). As a supervisor in the school, the principal should be able to enhance teachers' performance as educators to achieve educational goals and improve the quality of education by enhancing

teachers' professional competence. With proper supervision from the principal, it is expected that the challenges teachers face in conducting instructional activities will be reduced, thereby fostering effective and efficient learning and improving the quality of teachers' performance (Nawas, 2023).

Parental involvement is a key factor in the successful implementation of an inclusive, differentiation-based curriculum. Parents who support their children's education can help meet individual learning needs. According to (Armaida, 2022) schools and parents can collaborate to enhance students' motivation and academic achievement within an inclusive environment. Parental support is crucial because differentiated learning does not end in the classroom but requires parental motivation and monitoring of learning at home. It is important to remember that the implementation of differentiated learning must be carried out responsibly and carefully, especially when dealing with extreme differences in students' abilities. In this context, teachers can foster collaboration with students' parents and colleagues to help support the implementation of differentiated instruction.

Overall, the results of the literature review indicate that the success of differentiated instruction in inclusive classrooms is largely determined by support in the form of enhanced teacher competencies, a collaborative culture, principal supervision, and parental involvement.

CONCLUSION

The results of the systematic literature review (SLR) indicate that the success of differentiated instruction in inclusive classrooms depends on the synergy between teacher competencies and support from the school and students' parents. In practice, teachers are not only required to master the subject matter but must also fully understand each student's learning needs, ranging from their readiness level, interests, to their learning styles. Additionally, teachers are expected to create flexible instruction by adapting content (subject matter), process (learning methods), and outcomes (learning products). Furthermore, there are various challenges in implementing differentiated instruction in inclusive classrooms. Some of the challenges include: teachers' readiness to understand students' characteristics, time constraints and poor classroom management, misconceptions

regarding differentiated instruction, and school leadership that has not yet fully succeeded in fostering a culture of collaboration, academic supervision, and the provision of resources to support differentiated instruction. Support from school principals and policymakers in inclusive schools is also crucial for implementing differentiated instruction in inclusive classrooms. Additionally, enhancing teachers' competencies-through training and workshops for teachers and principals-as well as fostering parental involvement can serve as key factors in supporting the implementation of differentiated instruction.

The limitation of this study in the literature review lies in the lack of detailed explanations regarding operational procedures in some articles. This compels us to be cautious in interpreting teachers' practices, challenges, and existing support in the implementation of differentiated instruction to avoid bias in the analysis. The generalizability of this study's findings remains limited and does not fully represent how teachers teach, the challenges they face, and the support available in implementing differentiated instruction in inclusive classrooms.

Further research is recommended to develop mixed methods within the context of specific inclusive schools to test the effectiveness of differentiated learning support models, particularly regarding teacher collaboration, school leadership, and parental involvement. Additionally, future research could develop and test technology-based learning innovations that support the implementation of differentiated learning in inclusive classrooms.

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