

## EVALUATION OF DIFFERENTIATED LEARNING TO MEET THE LEARNING NEEDS OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Minsih <sup>1</sup>, Muhammad Fakhri Saifudin <sup>2</sup>, Mohd Hanafi Mohd Yasin <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, Indonesia <sup>3</sup>  
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Johor Bahru, Johor, Malaysia

\*Email: [fahrisyahhhh@gmail.com](mailto:fahrisyahhhh@gmail.com)<sup>2</sup>, [mohdhanafi.yasin@newinti.edu.my](mailto:mohdhanafi.yasin@newinti.edu.my)<sup>3</sup>

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| Keywords:                   |  | Abstract                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
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| Differentiated Instruction; |  | <p><i>This study explores the implementation of differentiated instruction to support students with special needs (Anak Berkebutuhan Khusus/ABK) in a non-inclusive elementary school setting. Conducted at SDIT Muhammadiyah Al-Kautsar in Sukoharjo, the research adopts a qualitative case study approach to investigate how teachers adapt their teaching strategies, media, and assessments to meet the diverse needs of students, particularly those with dyslexia and dyspraxia. Data were collected through observations, interviews, and documentation, involving key stakeholders such as classroom teachers and school administrators. The findings reveal that while differentiated instruction is applied through variations in content, process, and product, its implementation faces challenges due to limited resources and teacher preparedness. Teachers use modified learner worksheets (LKPD), individualized guidance, and varied media formats (visual, audio, and audiovisual) to support ABK students, although these adaptations are not always sufficient to fully meet their needs. Evaluations of learning strategies, materials, and outcomes indicate that differentiation has improved student engagement and achievement, yet ongoing constraints highlight the need for better support systems. This research contributes to bridging the gap in literature regarding differentiated instruction in non-inclusive schools and offers practical insights for educators seeking to create more inclusive and effective learning environments.</i></p> |
| Special Needs Education;    |  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Learning Evaluation;        |  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |

## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Study

In the context of contemporary education, the diversity of students' needs and potentials has become increasingly evident in the learning process. Each student possesses unique characteristics in terms of cognitive abilities, learning interests, learning profiles, and even special educational needs. As emphasized by Purnawanto (2024), meaningful learning requires that teachers understand and accommodate the individual characteristics of each learner. However, many classroom practices still adopt a one-size-fits-all approach, overlooking students' diversity (Purnawanto, 2023).



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Differentiated learning, as promoted in the **Merdeka Curriculum**, aims to address these challenges by tailoring content, processes, and learning products based on student profiles (Pitaloka & Arsanti, 2022). This approach aligns with Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy that teachers should empower and support students in developing their individual potentials (Mansyur, 2022). Effective differentiated instruction requires strategic planning by teachers (Kusumaningpuri, 2024) and supports active, creative, and student-centered learning environments (Hasriadi, 2022; Widyawati & Rachmadyanti, 2023).

Nevertheless, implementation remains inconsistent. Research by Jayawardana & Gita (2020) and Nurcahyono (2023) reveals that many teachers continue to hold outdated assumptions, treating all students as homogeneous and struggling to distinguish **Merdeka Curriculum's differentiated approach** from the former 2013 Curriculum.

This issue becomes even more complex when special needs students (ABK) are present in mainstream classrooms. A private elementary school in Kartasura, where the researcher conducted observations, revealed that although not officially an inclusive school, several students exhibited learning difficulties, including dyslexia and dyspraxia. This diversity calls for an effective differentiated learning strategy specifically tailored for students with special needs.

### Problem of The Study

Based on the background described, the main research problem in this study focuses on **how differentiated instruction is implemented to meet the learning needs of students with special needs (ABK) in an elementary school that is not formally designated as an inclusive school**. This issue is particularly significant given the presence of students with special needs, such as dyslexia and dyspraxia, in regular classrooms students who require specific learning approaches tailored to their unique characteristics and learning challenges.

To explore this main issue more deeply, the study will address several sub-problems. First, **what challenges do teachers face in implementing differentiated instruction for students with special needs**, considering the limitations in their understanding and preparedness to apply appropriate strategies. Second, **how are learning strategies and tools adapted to support students with dyslexia and dyspraxia**, particularly in terms of instructional materials, teaching methods, and assessments. Third, **to what extent has the implementation of differentiated instruction succeeded in meeting the learning needs of students with special needs in the observed context**, including their engagement, comprehension, and skill development. These research questions aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of both the effectiveness and the practical challenges of applying differentiated instruction in a non-inclusive elementary school setting.

### Research's State of the Art

Previous research has underscored the value of differentiated instruction in improving student engagement and academic performance. Farid (2022) emphasized that differentiation supports the development of students' unique learning characteristics and maximizes their potential. Similarly, Purnawanto (2023) demonstrated the effectiveness of differentiating content, process, and product in promoting active and meaningful student participation. Widyawati and Rachmadyanti (2023) highlighted the significance of student-centered strategies in ensuring effective classroom management, while Hasriadi (2022) stressed the teacher's role as a facilitator in selecting the most suitable instructional methods to support student learning. Although these studies offer useful insights and frameworks for applying differentiated instruction, they largely concentrate on general classroom contexts or diverse student populations, without specifically addressing its application for students with special needs in non-inclusive educational settings.

### Gap Study & Objective

Despite the increasing attention given to differentiated instruction in recent years, there remains a notable gap in the literature concerning its implementation in educational settings where students with special needs (Anak Berkebutuhan Khusus/ABK) are present, yet the schools are not officially designated as inclusive. Most existing studies tend to focus either on fully inclusive classrooms or on typical mainstream educational environments, thereby overlooking the unique, hybrid contexts that many schools currently face—where ABK students are enrolled without the institutional support or frameworks of an inclusive system. Addressing this gap, the present study aims to evaluate how differentiated instruction is implemented to meet the diverse learning needs of ABK students in non-inclusive elementary school settings. Specifically, the study seeks to identify the differentiation strategies employed by teachers in supporting ABK students, with particular attention to those with dyslexia and dyspraxia. It will also examine how educators adapt learning materials, instructional methods, and assessment practices to accommodate these needs. Furthermore, the study will explore the challenges teachers face, as well as the successes they achieve, in applying differentiation in such contexts. Ultimately, the research aims to provide practical recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of differentiated instruction for ABK students in similar educational settings, contributing valuable insights for both policy and practice..

## METHOD

### Type and Design

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a case study design. Qualitative research is used to explore and understand the meaning behind social phenomena experienced by research subjects, such as behaviors, perceptions, motivations, and actions, in a natural context using descriptive language (Moleong, 2016; Sutama, 2019). The phenomenon being investigated in this study is the strategy of differentiated instruction used to meet the learning needs of students with special needs in elementary school. By focusing on a specific case, this research aims to gain an in-depth understanding of how differentiation is practiced in a non-inclusive school environment.

### Data and Data Sources

This research was conducted at SDIT Muhammadiyah Al-Kautsar, an elementary school located in Sukoharjo Regency. The research site was purposefully selected due to the presence of students with special needs and the school's efforts to implement differentiated instruction. The study was carried out over a three-month period from April to June 2024, covering stages of planning, data collection, analysis, and reporting.

The primary data in this study were collected through direct interviews with classroom teachers of grades 1, 2, 3, and 5, all of whom have students with special needs in their classes. The main focus was on gathering detailed information regarding the implementation of differentiated teaching strategies. Secondary data, which serve to support the primary data, included relevant school documents such as teaching modules, school profiles, learning plans, and student mapping records from the school's guidance and counseling teacher. The key informants in this study were the school principal, the vice principal of curriculum, the guidance counselor, and the classroom teachers of grades 1, 2, 3, and 5.

### Data collection technique

Data were collected using three primary techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. **Observation** was carried out in classrooms that included students with learning difficulties, particularly those with dyslexia and dyspraxia. The purpose was to directly observe how teachers plan, implement, and evaluate differentiated instruction in real teaching situations. **Interviews** were conducted with classroom teachers to gain insight into their understanding, experiences, and challenges in applying differentiated teaching strategies for students with special needs. These interviews were recorded and documented for further analysis. **Documentation** involved collecting relevant materials such as teaching modules, student learning maps, school vision and mission statements, and other related administrative records. These documents provided additional context and validation for the findings gathered through observations and interviews.

### Data analysis

The analysis process in this study followed the framework proposed by Miles and Huberman (as cited in Sugiyono, 2015), which involves three key stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. **Data reduction** is the initial step, where the researcher summarizes and selects essential data by focusing on significant themes and patterns relevant to the research objectives. **Data display** follows, in which the reduced data are organized and presented in a structured format, such as descriptive text or visual diagrams, to facilitate interpretation and understanding. Finally, **conclusion drawing and verification** involve interpreting the displayed data to identify findings. Preliminary conclusions may be tentative and subject to change unless supported by strong and consistent evidence collected throughout the research process. The conclusions drawn in this study aim to provide new insights into the implementation of differentiated instruction in non-inclusive school settings, specifically for supporting students with special needs.

## RESULTS

In learning activities carried out by teachers in the classroom, of course, it is necessary to evaluate so that further learning can run well according to the teaching modules used by teachers in differentiated learning.

*"Yes, in learning activities carried out in class, of course, teachers need to evaluate learning, because the evaluation carried out has an impact on the future for students so that differentiated learning objectives can be achieved."* (Mrs. ANW, as the first grade teacher)

Another thing was explained by Mrs. KH, as the second grade teacher, namely:

*"I also conduct evaluation activities at the end of each lesson, where in this activity I ask all students in the class related to the material presented and also the media used and even the LKPD questions done by students. So that with this evaluation, I know the level of development of students in the classroom."*

Therefore, in this evaluation activity, I researchers conducted interviews with class teachers related to problems in learning evaluation, including;

### a. Evaluation of Learning Strategies

Learning activities cannot be separated from the learning strategies used by teachers, where teachers in this learning activity use strategies to make students understand.

*"Yes. In learning activities I always use differentiated learning strategies, namely process, content and product differentiation. With the application of this strategy aims to make it easier for students and not boring in learning so that learning objectives can be achieved well and maximally. However, this weakness is for children who have learning disabilities or children with special needs because they are unable to follow properly. So that for children with special needs this remains in the monitoring and guidance of the teacher. Therefore, children with special needs are given different questions or LKPDs related to the level of difficulty." (Mrs. KH, as a grade II teacher)*

Another thing was explained by Mrs. IR, as a grade V teacher, namely:

*"I use process and product differentiation learning strategies for children with dyspraxia in my class. It is not every meeting, because of time constraints and learning targets. Process differentiation is in the form of different explanations and special assistance, while for the product, there is a different lkpd between normal students and those with dyspraxia."*

It can be concluded that in teaching and learning activities, teachers use a variety of differentiated learning strategies such as process, content and product differentiation whose application is adjusted to students' learning conditions. The purpose of differentiated learning, especially for regular students and students with disabilities, is to improve understanding of teaching materials and the achievement of learning outcome targets (CP). For students with learning disabilities, such as slow learners, dyslexia and dyspraxia, teachers provide additional guidance and adjust questions or Learner Worksheets (LKPD) according to their level of learning difficulty. This strategy helps teachers overcome students with learning disabilities in achieving the target learning objectives.

#### **b. Evaluation of Learning Media**

Media as a tool in delivering learning, in schools today the media used are Smart TV, LCD projectors, Sound Systems and qualified media and teaching aids. However, the obstacles in this learning activity are children who experience learning disabilities or children with special needs.

*"If there is a lot of media at school because it is a school facility, but there is no special media for assisting children who experience special needs. So that the distribution is through LKPD based on audio, visual or audio visual, and also online interactive learning such as google form and wordwall." (Mrs. IR, as homeroom teacher V)*

Another thing was explained by Mrs. ANW as the first grade teacher, namely:

*"for media, I always use the existing media at school, I make good use of it, such as smart TV and picture card media. However, for dyslexic children, I rarely use TV but rather props of letter and number picture cards, and special sheets for neat writing. As for slow learners, I often use audio-visual TV, which is very helpful for understanding the material."*

At the school today, the learning media available include Smart TVs, LCD projectors, and sound systems, as well as other teaching aids. However, obstacles arise in supporting children with special needs, such as those with ADHD, dysphaxia or dyslexia. Although existing media facilities are optimally utilized, they are not fully effective for children with learning disabilities. Therefore, LKPD based on teacher creativity (wordwall google form), audio, visual, or audio-visual is used as a solution, although it does not fully meet their needs.

#### **c. Evaluation of Learning Implementation**

In the implementation of learning carried out at school there is an evaluation carried out by teachers in this differentiated learning. The evaluations carried out at school are;

##### **1) Evaluation of Learning Materials**

*"With the presence of abk children in the class it is not too difficult for me to prepare materials for them. The material is the same, it's just different in assisting understanding of the material, I give special or additional time to abk students. Even outside the lesson there is also assistance. This is well received by students with disabilities and parents are very grateful for this special assistance." (Mrs. KH, Grade II teacher)*

Also explained by Mrs. ANW, Grade 1 teacher, namely:

*"during the implementation of learning the material that I have prepared goes well, but it is necessary to manage time well so that the learning material for regular students and children with disabilities is not lame. But in Alkautsar, thank God, there is a package book for reference, so it goes well."*

##### **2) Learning Evaluation**

*"The learning that I apply in class refers to the lesson plan or teaching module for students, which is currently using differentiated learning. Where in this differentiated learning activity I have implemented according to the needs of students at the class level. When learning, children who experience obstacles in this learning activity still have difficulties, but I try to guide them well in working on questions and delivering learning materials." (Mrs. IR, grade V teacher)*

##### **3) Evaluation of LKPD**

*"different types of questions or lkpd between regular students and children with disabilities are quite effective in helping students with learning disabilities such as dyslexia, slow learners and dyspraxia to catch up. Before there was differentiation, teachers had difficulty taking the scores of these children because they kept reminding them, not according to the minimum target in the CP. Now after this differentiation abk students can follow the learning well. The grades are good and they are happy to be enthusiastic." (Mr. MH, as the head of curriculum)*

It can be concluded that in schools there is an evaluation of differentiated learning carried out with several approaches and strategies, namely teachers ensure that the material taught is in accordance with learning barriers and learning objectives. The material is delivered in a way that is easy to understand, accommodating for regular students and students with disabilities, following a lesson plan or teaching module. The learning that is implemented refers to the teaching module with a differentiation strategy, adjusting to the needs of students. Teachers try to guide students, including those with learning disabilities such as dyslexia, dyspraxia and slow learners.

## DISCUSSIONS

Differentiated learning activities in meeting the learning needs of students with special needs certainly have an evaluation in their learning. Through this evaluation activity can provide solutions or alternatives to improve differentiated learning that is more optimal and optimal.

Learning activities implemented at SDIT Muhammadiyah Al Kautsar related to content, process and product elements have learning evaluation through assessment and feedback applied by teachers to see the results in differentiated learning activities. This is reinforced by Amini et al., (2019) the results carried out in the application of differentiated learning are able to improve better and higher. So that with this differentiated learning is able to meet the needs of students in learning.

Of course, differentiated learning in SDIT Muhammadiyah Al Kautsar also applies related to varied strategies that have the aim of improving and developing learning to be more interesting. In addition, the differentiated learning activities implemented at SDIT Muhammadiyah Al Kautsar have the aim of achieving maximum results in meeting the needs of children with special needs who have difficulties in learning activities. In line with the opinion of Elviya & Sukartiningsih, (2023) explaining differentiated learning has a positive impact and increases the enthusiasm and enthusiasm of students in learning activities. Reinforced by Amini et al., (2019) that the selection of this learning strategy can focus and collaborate learning with this strategy so that students achieve the maximum level of results.

Differentiated learning at SDIT Muhammadiyah Al Kautsar uses media that can support student learning so that learning activities can help students understand the learning material delivered by the teacher. With this, teachers make good and optimal use of facilities so that students follow learning effectively. In line with the opinion of Rachmadyanti et al., (2024) through differentiated learning activities can improve maximum results for students by choosing learning strategies.

Differentiated learning evaluation activities not only focus on learning strategies but also media, methods and elements in differentiated learning, namely content, process and product. So that by paying attention to this, this differentiated learning can be applied properly in accordance with LKPD for children with special needs. This is in line with Dewi et al., (2023) children with special needs are enthusiastic in participating in learning using a differentiated approach. It is clarified by Prabandari et al., (2022) that the LKPD used in this learning activity is able to improve and facilitate differentiated learning activities for students.

It can be concluded that, evaluation activities in differentiated learning at SDIT Muhammadiyah Al Kautsar are very important to improve the effectiveness of learning for students with special needs. Evaluation is done through assessment and feedback, which helps teachers understand learning outcomes and learners' needs.

By applying varied strategies, learning becomes more interesting and able to increase student enthusiasm. The learning media used also supports the understanding of the material, so that students can follow the learning better. The research shows that the differentiated approach increases students' enthusiasm, and the use of appropriate LKPD plays an important role in facilitating this learning, so that learning outcomes can reach the maximum level according to the needs of each student.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study conducted at SDIT Muhammadiyah Al Kautsar, it can be concluded that the implementation of differentiated learning is supported by continuous evaluation activities that play a critical role in improving the quality and effectiveness of the learning process, especially for students with special needs. Teachers at this school carry out evaluations across various aspects, including learning strategies, media,

implementation, and assessment tools such as LKPD, to ensure that all students—both regular and those with learning disabilities like dyslexia, dyspraxia, and slow learning—receive appropriate support. Differentiated strategies in content, process, and product allow for flexible learning that adapts to individual student needs, while creative use of media and tools enhances student engagement and understanding. Teachers' commitment to guiding students with special needs through personalized assistance and modified materials shows a clear effort to meet the Competency Achievement (CP) goals effectively. The evaluations not only help identify challenges but also provide practical solutions for improving learning outcomes. Supported by relevant research, this study affirms that differentiated learning, when properly evaluated and applied, increases student motivation, participation, and achievement, ultimately leading to more inclusive and successful learning experiences for all.

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