

Differentiated Learning Management as a Catalyst for Positive School Culture Development in Kindergarten Settings

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Abstract

Contemporary educational paradigms increasingly emphasize addressing student diversity through pedagogically responsive approaches. This study investigates how differentiated learning management serves as a catalyst for positive school culture development in kindergarten settings, addressing the gap between individual accommodation strategies and collective community building. A qualitative multiple case study was conducted at two kindergarten institutions in Sukabumi City, Indonesia: TK Negeri Pembina Baros and TK Aisyiyah 2. Six participants including two principals and four teachers were selected through purposive sampling. Data collection employed semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and documentation analysis. Data analysis followed Creswell's framework using systematic coding procedures with NVivo software, incorporating methodological triangulation and member checking for validation. Four interconnected dimensions of differentiated learning management emerged: comprehensive planning that prioritizes student diversity recognition, robust organizational structures supporting implementation, diverse classroom strategies fostering inclusion, and systematic evaluation ensuring continuous improvement. Findings revealed that systematic adaptation of content, processes, and products creates inclusive environments where individual accommodation simultaneously contributes to positive culture development. Teachers demonstrated sophisticated professional competence in managing multiple differentiated activities while maintaining supportive learning atmospheres characterized by enhanced student engagement, respectful peer interactions, and collaborative behaviors. The results demonstrate a reciprocal relationship between differentiated learning and positive culture development, extending current theoretical frameworks. Findings align with culturally responsive classroom management principles and support the need for comprehensive institutional commitment rather than isolated teacher efforts. The study contributes empirical evidence for systematic approaches that honor student diversity while building strong learning communities, with implications for teacher preparation programs and educational policy development.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary educational paradigms increasingly recognize the imperative of addressing student diversity through pedagogically responsive approaches that accommodate varied learning needs, backgrounds, and abilities. The heterogeneity among students in primary classrooms presents both opportunities and challenges, as differences in cognitive abilities, cultural backgrounds, and learning preferences significantly shape the dynamics of teaching and learning processes (Dotzel et al., 2022; Ecton & Dougherty, 2023). When such diversity is inadequately accommodated, the consequences manifest as unequal learning opportunities, compromised educational equity, and the potential hindering of students' fundamental right to meaningful engagement in the learning process (Bennett, 2025). Furthermore, insufficient responsiveness to learner differences can diminish school engagement, reducing students' motivation and active participation in classroom activities (Martins et al., 2022).

The evolving landscape of education has witnessed a paradigmatic shift away from traditional "one-size-fits-all" instructional models toward more inclusive and individualized approaches. This transformation has been driven by advances in educational psychology, neuroscience research on learning, and growing recognition of the diverse ways students acquire, process, and demonstrate knowledge. Classroom management, as a fundamental component of effective teaching, encompasses far more than establishing behavioral controls; it involves creating environments that facilitate meaningful academic learning through effective instruction, caring relationships, and responsive pedagogical practices (Milner et al., 2019). Research consistently demonstrates that effective classroom management serves as a prerequisite for successful teaching, significantly impacting students' cognitive, behavioral, and emotional outcomes (Korpershoek et al., 2016).

Differentiated learning emerges as a particularly promising pedagogical framework that addresses these multifaceted challenges by tailoring instructional content, processes, and products to meet individual student needs, interests, and learning profiles. This approach recognizes that students enter classrooms with varying levels of readiness, diverse cultural backgrounds, different learning preferences, and unique combinations of strengths and challenges. Agusta et al. (2024) demonstrated that differentiated learning significantly enhances both student motivation and academic achievement in primary education contexts. Similarly, Lestari et al. (2023) found that implementing differentiated instruction substantially increased learning engagement among elementary students, while Lisnawati et al. (2023) highlighted the crucial role of teachers in fostering student interest through differentiated approaches in social studies education.

The relationship between differentiated instruction and positive school culture represents a critical yet underexplored dimension of educational research. Positive school culture, characterized by environments where all community members feel safe, valued, and supported in pursuing common goals, serves as a foundation for both academic excellence and social-emotional development. Yulaichah et al. (2024) provided compelling evidence that differentiated learning implementation contributes to building positive classroom cultures in multicultural educational settings. Their research demonstrated how adapting instruction to individual needs creates more inclusive and collaborative learning environments that honor diversity while maintaining high expectations for all students.

Recent empirical investigations have begun to illuminate the multifaceted benefits of differentiated instruction across various educational outcomes. Ramdhani et al. (2024) established significant positive effects of differentiated learning on student motivation within history education, while Sadriani and Muliana (2024) demonstrated enhanced student engagement in multicultural high school settings through differentiated approaches. These findings align with broader research indicating that differentiated instruction substantially elevates students' learning interest, motivation, and engagement by personalizing learning tasks according to individual abilities and preferences, thereby reducing frustration and academic disengagement.

However, substantial gaps remain in the literature regarding the specific mechanisms through which differentiated learning management influences positive school culture development, particularly in early childhood education settings. While existing research has explored differentiated instruction's impact on academic outcomes and student engagement separately, limited empirical investigation exists into how systematic implementation of differentiated learning management serves as a catalyst for creating positive cultural environments. This research gap is particularly significant given that interdisciplinary learning frameworks provide authentic contexts that promote experimentation and collaboration, nurturing creativity through knowledge integration across domains (Dousay, 2017). Moreover, evidence suggests that innovative instructional media and technology-enhanced learning resources enhance creative thinking development by balancing cognitive challenge with accessibility for diverse learners (Sutrianto et al., 2025; VanTassel-Baska et al., 2021).

The importance of addressing this research gap is underscored by early childhood education's unique characteristics, where foundational attitudes toward learning, social interaction patterns, and cultural values are established. Understanding how differentiated learning management can

strategically foster positive cultures in these formative settings has significant implications for long-term student success and social-emotional development, particularly considering the reciprocal relationship between creative thinking and learning interest that mutually reinforce educational growth (Tsai et al., 2020; Basri et al., 2024).

This study addresses these knowledge gaps by investigating the relationship between differentiated learning management and positive school culture enhancement in kindergarten settings. Through comprehensive analysis of differentiated learning planning, organization, implementation, and evaluation processes, this investigation seeks to understand mechanisms through which responsive pedagogy contributes to positive cultural transformation. The purpose of this study is to describe and analyze differentiated learning management strategies that enhance positive culture in kindergarten schools, providing both theoretical insights and practical guidance for educational practitioners seeking to create more responsive and inclusive learning environments for young learners.

METHODS

This investigation employed a qualitative research design utilizing a multiple case study approach to examine differentiated learning management practices and their impact on positive school culture development in kindergarten settings. The case study methodology was selected for its capacity to provide in-depth, contextual understanding of complex educational phenomena within their natural environments, enabling researchers to explore the intricate relationships between differentiated learning implementation and cultural transformation processes. This approach facilitates comprehensive examination of how differentiated learning management functions as a catalyst for positive culture enhancement through detailed analysis of planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating processes across multiple institutional contexts.

The study was conducted at two purposively selected kindergarten institutions in Sukabumi City, Indonesia: TK Negeri Pembina Baros (State Kindergarten) and TK Aisyiyah 2 (Private Islamic Kindergarten). These institutions were chosen based on their established implementation of differentiated learning practices, diverse student populations, and demonstrated commitment to positive culture development. The selection criteria ensured representation of both public and private educational sectors, providing comparative insights into differentiated learning management across varied institutional frameworks. Research participants comprised six key informants, including two school principals who served as primary decision-makers and educational leaders, and four classroom teachers directly responsible for implementing differentiated learning strategies. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in differentiated learning management and their role in shaping school culture.

Data collection employed multiple complementary methods to ensure comprehensive understanding and methodological triangulation. Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data collection instrument, utilizing an interview protocol developed through extensive literature review and expert validation. The interview guide addressed four key domains: differentiated learning planning processes, organizational structures supporting implementation, classroom-level implementation strategies, and evaluation mechanisms for assessing cultural impact. Interview sessions were conducted individually with each participant, lasting approximately 60-90 minutes, and were audio-recorded with participant consent for subsequent transcription and analysis. Classroom observations provided direct evidence of differentiated learning implementation and its manifestation in daily educational practices. Observation protocols focused on teacher-student interactions, instructional adaptation strategies, student engagement patterns, and cultural indicators within classroom environments. Each classroom was observed for multiple sessions across different activities to capture comprehensive implementation patterns. Documentation analysis complemented primary data collection through examination of lesson plans, assessment records, school policy documents,

professional development materials, and student work samples. This documentary evidence provided contextual background and supported triangulation of findings from interviews and observations.

Data validation was ensured through multiple strategies including methodological triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Interview transcripts were returned to participants for verification and clarification, while preliminary findings were discussed with education experts to enhance credibility and trustworthiness. The research protocol received ethical approval from the institutional review board, and all participants provided informed consent prior to data collection.

Data analysis followed Creswell's qualitative analysis framework, incorporating systematic procedures for managing and interpreting complex qualitative datasets. The analysis process began with data organization and preparation, including interview transcription, observation note compilation, and document cataloging. Initial data familiarization involved multiple readings of transcripts and field notes to develop overall impressions and identify preliminary patterns. Open coding procedures were employed to identify significant statements, phrases, and concepts related to differentiated learning management and positive culture development. Axial coding followed to establish relationships between initial codes and develop thematic categories. Selective coding integrated categories into overarching themes that addressed the research objectives. Data analysis was facilitated by NVivo software to manage large volumes of qualitative data and support systematic coding procedures. Constant comparative analysis ensured consistency in theme development across cases, while analytic memos documented researcher reflections and emerging insights throughout the analysis process. Final themes were validated through return to raw data and verification of supporting evidence, ensuring robust connections between findings and empirical data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The findings from this multiple case study reveal four distinct yet interconnected dimensions of differentiated learning management that contribute to positive school culture development in kindergarten settings. Data analysis across both institutions demonstrates systematic approaches to implementing differentiated instruction that foster inclusive, collaborative, and supportive learning environments.

Planning Phase of Differentiated Learning Management

Interview data from both school principals revealed comprehensive planning processes that prioritize student diversity recognition and cultural sensitivity. As Principal A from TK Negeri Pembina Baros explained:

"We begin each academic year by conducting thorough assessments of children's individual characteristics, including their learning styles, interests, cultural backgrounds, and developmental readiness. This information guides our collaborative planning sessions with teachers to design learning experiences that honor each child's uniqueness while building classroom community."

Table 1. Differentiated Learning Planning Components

Planning Component	TK Negeri Pembina Baros	TK Aisyiyah 2	Frequency of Implementation
Student Assessment	Individual learning profiles	Comprehensive diagnostic assessment	Weekly
Learning Objective Setting	Multi-level objectives	Tiered learning goals	Per lesson
Strategy Selection	Varied instructional methods	Multiple intelligence approaches	Daily
Parent Consultation	Structured meetings	Regular communication	Monthly
Teacher Collaboration	Team planning sessions	Professional learning communities	Bi-weekly

Observation data supported these interview findings, revealing structured planning meetings where teachers engaged in detailed discussions about individual student needs. Table 1 presents the key planning components identified across both institutions.

Documentation analysis of lesson plans revealed systematic differentiation across content, process, and product dimensions. Teachers demonstrated sophisticated understanding of how to adapt instructional materials while maintaining learning standards. This planning phase establishes the foundation for positive culture by ensuring all students feel valued and capable of success from the outset.

Organizational Structures Supporting Implementation

Both institutions demonstrated robust organizational frameworks that facilitate differentiated learning implementation. Principal B from TK Aisyiyah 2 described the organizational approach:

"We have restructured our school operations to support teacher flexibility and student-centered learning. This includes flexible scheduling, resource allocation systems, and collaborative team structures that enable teachers to respond dynamically to student needs."

Observational data revealed evidence of these organizational supports in action. Teachers had access to diverse learning materials, flexible classroom arrangements, and collaborative planning time. The organizational structure created conditions where differentiated learning could flourish while building positive cultural norms of respect, inclusion, and mutual support.

Figure 1 illustrates the organizational model observed across both institutions, showing interconnected support systems that enable effective differentiated learning management.

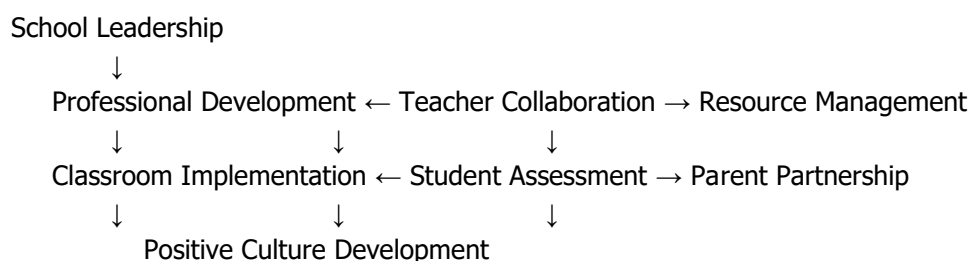


Figure 1. Organizational Structure for Differentiated Learning Management

This organizational structure ensures that differentiated learning becomes embedded in school culture rather than remaining an isolated teaching strategy. The interconnected nature of these supports creates conditions for sustained positive culture development.

Implementation Strategies in Daily Practice

Classroom observations revealed diverse implementation strategies that directly contribute to positive culture building. Teachers employed multiple approaches to accommodate student differences while fostering community and belonging. Teacher C from TK Negeri Pembina Baros shared:

"During our morning circle time, I provide different ways for children to participate - some share verbally, others draw pictures, and some use gestures. This ensures every child can contribute meaningfully to our classroom community."

Table 2 summarizes the implementation strategies observed across classrooms, demonstrating how differentiated approaches simultaneously address individual needs and build positive culture.

Observational data consistently showed high levels of student engagement, positive peer interactions, and inclusive classroom atmospheres across both institutions. Teachers demonstrated skill in managing multiple activities simultaneously while maintaining supportive learning environments.

Table 2. Differentiated Implementation Strategies and Cultural Impact

Strategy	Description	Cultural Impact Observed
Flexible Grouping	Students work in varied configurations based on interests, readiness, or learning style	Promotes collaboration and peer learning
Choice Boards	Students select from multiple activity options	Enhances autonomy and engagement
Tiered Activities	Tasks at different complexity levels with same learning objective	Builds confidence and reduces comparison
Multiple Modalities	Visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning options	Validates diverse learning preferences
Cultural Integration	Incorporation of students' cultural backgrounds into learning	Celebrates diversity and builds identity pride

Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

Both institutions employed comprehensive evaluation systems that assess both academic progress and cultural development. Principal A described their approach:

"We evaluate not just what children learn, but how they feel about learning and their relationships with peers and teachers. This holistic assessment helps us understand the full impact of our differentiated approaches."

Documentation analysis of assessment records revealed systematic tracking of both individual student progress and classroom culture indicators. Teachers maintained detailed observation notes, photo documentation, and reflection journals that captured the intersection of differentiated learning and positive culture development.

The evaluation data consistently demonstrated positive outcomes across multiple dimensions. Students showed increased engagement, improved social interactions, and enhanced learning motivation. Parents reported greater satisfaction with their children's school experiences, and teachers expressed increased confidence in meeting diverse student needs.

Discussion

This study's findings provide compelling evidence that systematic differentiated learning management serves as a powerful catalyst for positive school culture development in kindergarten settings. The results align with and extend existing theoretical frameworks while offering practical insights for educational practitioners.

The findings strongly support Tomlinson's (2017) differentiated instruction framework, demonstrating how systematic adaptation of content, process, and product creates inclusive learning environments. Our results extend this framework by explicitly connecting differentiated practices to positive culture development, showing how individual accommodation strategies contribute to collective community building. This connection addresses a gap in the literature identified in our review, where differentiated instruction research has typically focused on academic outcomes rather than cultural transformation.

The study's emphasis on organizational support systems aligns with Korpershoek et al.'s (2016) findings regarding the systemic nature of effective classroom management. Our results demonstrate that differentiated learning management requires comprehensive institutional support, confirming that individual teacher efforts alone are insufficient for sustained positive culture development. This finding supports the call for systemic approaches to educational innovation that Smets and Struyven (2020) advocated in their research on professional development for differentiated instruction.

The positive outcomes observed in this study are consistent with recent empirical investigations. Our findings align with Agusta et al. (2024), who demonstrated significant positive effects of differentiated learning on student motivation and achievement. The enhanced student engagement documented in our observations mirrors Lestari et al.'s (2023) findings regarding increased learning activity among elementary students through differentiated approaches. Similarly, the improved social

interactions and collaborative behaviors observed in both kindergartens support Sadriani and Muliana's (2024) research on student engagement in multicultural settings.

The study's emphasis on teacher professional development aligns with Lisnawati et al.'s (2023) findings regarding the crucial role of educator preparation in successful differentiated instruction implementation. Our results confirm that teachers require ongoing support and collaborative planning opportunities to effectively implement differentiated approaches that contribute to positive culture development.

This investigation makes several unique contributions to the existing knowledge base. The findings demonstrate the reciprocal relationship between differentiated learning and positive culture development, extending beyond the unidirectional impact typically examined in previous research. The data reveals how positive culture enhances the effectiveness of differentiated instruction while differentiated practices simultaneously strengthen cultural development. This bidirectional relationship supports the theoretical framework proposed by Tsai et al. (2020) regarding mutually reinforcing educational processes that create positive feedback loops sustaining long-term educational development.

The comprehensive organizational model identified through our research extends beyond classroom-level interventions to encompass institutional structures, resource allocation, and leadership practices. This systemic perspective addresses limitations in previous research that has focused primarily on individual teacher practices without examining institutional support systems. The framework demonstrates how Eysink & Schildkamp (2021) and Reis & Renzulli (2018) conceptualize differentiated learning as requiring integrated support systems that address content, process, product, and environment while accounting for socio-cultural diversity.

The study provides empirical evidence for how differentiated learning management can effectively address the discipline gap that Monroe (2005, 2006) identifies as problematic in contemporary education. By creating inclusive environments that honor cultural diversity while maintaining high expectations, the observed practices exemplify the culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies that Gay (2013, 2014) and Paris (2012) advocate for addressing systemic educational inequities.

The findings have significant implications for educational practice and policy development, particularly regarding teacher preparation for 21st-century classrooms. The comprehensive planning, implementation, and evaluation framework identified through this research provides a practical model for educators seeking to implement differentiated learning approaches that enhance positive school culture. The emphasis on organizational support systems suggests that successful implementation requires institutional commitment rather than relying solely on individual teacher initiative.

The observed teacher practices demonstrate the kind of culturally responsive classroom management preparation that Williams et al. (2022) argue is essential for contemporary educational contexts. The teachers' ability to recognize and respond to cultural diversity while building inclusive communities reflects the essential components of CRCM that Weinstein et al. (2003, 2004) identify: recognition of personal biases, knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds, understanding of broader social contexts, willingness to use culturally appropriate strategies, and commitment to building caring communities.

For teacher preparation programs, the findings highlight the importance of developing educators' capacity to simultaneously address individual learning needs and build positive classroom communities. The integration of differentiated instruction skills with cultural competency development emerges as a critical component of effective teacher preparation. This aligns with research emphasizing that teachers need the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to engage all students irrespective of cultural background, which constitutes the core of cultural competence (Danso, 2018).

The professional development approaches observed in both institutions reflect the kind of collaborative, ongoing support that research demonstrates enhances teachers' classroom management effectiveness. The emphasis on peer collaboration and reflective practice supports Berliner's (1988)

findings that teachers develop expertise by incorporating knowledge from their own experiences, observing colleagues, and learning from more knowledgeable others. This approach addresses the challenge that many beginning teachers face feeling inadequately prepared for classroom management realities (Hammerness, 2011; Humphrey & Wechsler, 2007).

While this study provides valuable insights, several limitations should be acknowledged. The focus on two kindergarten institutions in a specific geographic region may limit the generalizability of findings to other contexts. Future research should examine differentiated learning management across diverse educational settings, including different age groups, cultural contexts, and resource environments to validate and extend these findings.

Additionally, the study's qualitative design, while providing rich contextual understanding, would benefit from complementary quantitative investigations that could measure specific aspects of positive culture development more systematically. Longitudinal studies tracking the sustained impact of differentiated learning management on culture development would strengthen the evidence base and provide insights into long-term effectiveness.

The findings suggest directions for future research, particularly in examining how the differentiated learning management framework might be adapted across different educational levels and cultural contexts. Investigation of the specific feedback mechanisms that enhance professional development for differentiated instruction would address the gap that Prilop et al. (2021) and Weber et al. (2018) identify regarding feedback content effectiveness in teacher education.

Future studies might also explore how technology integration can support differentiated learning management while maintaining the cultural responsiveness observed in this investigation. This would address the growing need to understand how digital tools can enhance rather than compromise the caring relationships and cultural sensitivity that characterize effective differentiated instruction.

The findings suggest that differentiated learning management represents a promising approach for creating inclusive, supportive educational environments that honor student diversity while building strong learning communities. The systematic implementation framework identified through this research offers practical guidance for educators and administrators seeking to enhance both individual student outcomes and collective positive culture development in early childhood education settings.

CONCLUSION

This investigation demonstrates that systematic differentiated learning management functions as an effective catalyst for positive school culture development in kindergarten settings. The findings reveal four interconnected dimensions—planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating—that collectively create inclusive learning environments where individual accommodation strategies contribute to community building. The study establishes that when teachers systematically adapt content, processes, and products to meet diverse student needs while maintaining organizational support systems, positive cultural transformation occurs naturally through enhanced student engagement, respectful peer interactions, and collaborative learning atmospheres.

The research contributes to educational scholarship by bridging the gap between differentiated instruction theory and positive culture development, providing empirical evidence for their reciprocal relationship. Unlike previous studies that examined these constructs separately, this investigation demonstrates how differentiated learning management simultaneously addresses individual academic needs and builds collective community values. The comprehensive organizational framework identified extends current understanding beyond classroom-level interventions to encompass institutional structures, leadership practices, and professional development systems essential for sustained implementation.

Practical implications include the need for institutional commitment rather than isolated teacher efforts, systematic professional development that integrates differentiated instruction with cultural competency, and organizational structures that support teacher collaboration and resource flexibility. For teacher preparation programs, the findings emphasize developing educators' capacity to

simultaneously address individual learning differences and foster inclusive classroom communities through culturally responsive pedagogical approaches.

The study's limitations include geographic specificity and reliance on qualitative methodology, which may limit generalizability across diverse educational contexts. Future research should examine differentiated learning management effectiveness across varied age groups, cultural settings, and resource environments through mixed-methods approaches. Longitudinal investigations tracking sustained cultural impact and quantitative measures of specific culture development indicators would strengthen the evidence base. Additionally, research exploring technology integration within differentiated learning management frameworks and examining specific feedback mechanisms that enhance professional development effectiveness would address emerging educational challenges and extend these findings to contemporary digital learning environments.

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