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Examining the relationship between differentiated instruction and classroom management among elementary school teachers in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Differentiated instruction and classroom management are essential practices in addressing learner diversity and maintaining productive elementary classroom environments. However, there is limited localized evidence about the relationship between these practices among elementary school teachers in Cabagan, Isabela. This study examined differentiated instruction and classroom management practices among 90 elementary school teachers using a descriptive-correlational research design. The researchers gathered data through a structured questionnaire and analyzed them using the mean, standard deviation, and Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient. The findings showed that teachers practiced differentiated instruction to a high extent, particularly in providing varied learning activities, while they rated flexible assessment comparatively lower. Classroom management was also rated highly, with classroom routines emerging as a relative strength and behavior management requiring further attention. A significant positive relationship was found between differentiated instruction and classroom management practices. The study recommends targeted professional development to strengthen differentiated assessment, learner behavior management, and the integration of responsive instructional strategies into everyday classroom practice.

Keywords: Differentiated instruction, classroom management, elementary school teachers, learner diversity, professional development.

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INTRODUCTION

Elementary education requires teachers to respond to differences in learners' abilities, interests, prior knowledge, and learning needs while maintaining an orderly and supportive classroom. Not all pupils learn at the same pace or respond to the same teaching strategies. Some need additional guidance and structured activities, while others are ready for more challenging tasks. Teachers must make instructional decisions that address these differences

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without losing sight of the learning objectives. Differentiated instruction and classroom management are important in this process because they concern both how teachers respond to learner diversity and how they organize the conditions in which learning takes place.

Differentiated instruction involves adjusting teaching approaches to accommodate differences among learners. Tomlinson (2014) explained that teachers can differentiate instruction by considering learners' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. These adjustments may involve the content pupils study, the processes through which they learn, the products they create, and the learning environment in which instruction occurs. Differentiation does not mean preparing an entirely different lesson for every pupil. Rather, it involves making purposeful adjustments so that learners with different needs can work toward meaningful learning goals.

Research supports the need to examine how differentiated instruction is implemented. Deunk et al. (2018), in a systematic review and meta-analysis of studies in primary education, found that the effects of differentiated instruction depended on the practices used and how they were implemented. Their review reported positive effects for some approaches, including computer-supported differentiation and differentiation embedded in broader educational programs. The authors also emphasized that ability grouping alone is insufficient to establish effective differentiation. Teachers need to select instructional practices carefully and integrate them into a coherent approach to learning.

Classroom management is equally important. It extends beyond correcting misbehavior or enforcing classroom rules. Effective management includes establishing routines, organizing instructional activities, allocating time and resources, supporting positive teacher–learner relationships, and maintaining an environment conducive to learning. Duan et al. (2024), in their systematic review and meta-analysis, found that teachers' classroom management self-efficacy was associated with teacher-level, classroom-level, and school-level factors. These included teaching experience, classroom climate, student–teacher relationships, principal leadership, and school culture. Their findings emphasize that classroom management is influenced by the conditions under which teachers work, not solely by individual teaching skills.

The relationship between differentiated instruction and classroom management deserves particular attention. Providing different learning tasks, flexible grouping arrangements, and varied instructional materials can make teaching more responsive to pupils' needs. At the same time, these practices require teachers to manage transitions, monitor several activities, allocate time carefully, and maintain clear expectations. Differentiation and management are therefore related areas of classroom practice, although one should not automatically assume that stronger implementation of one leads to stronger implementation of the other.

Philippine research provides a relevant foundation for investigating these practices together. Aldanese and Limpot (2023) examined differentiated instruction, classroom management, and student engagement among 300 teachers from public schools in the Division of Davao City. Using a quantitative, nonexperimental design, they reported significant relationships among the variables and examined the mediating role of classroom management in the relationship between differentiated instruction and student engagement. Their study demonstrates the relevance of examining these variables in Philippine schools, although its findings do not automatically establish how elementary school teachers in other localities implement the same practices.

Recent local studies also point to the practical challenges of implementing differentiated instruction. Patil (2026) investigated differentiated instruction among 28 Grade 1 and Grade 2 teachers in public elementary schools in Santa Fe District, Nueva Vizcaya. The study reported that teachers used varied instructional strategies and learner-centered activities

but encountered challenges involving instructional resources and classroom diversity. These findings illustrate the need to examine not only whether teachers use differentiated instruction but also the conditions that affect its implementation.

Similarly, Marcos (2026) explored teachers' experiences in implementing differentiated instruction at Libertad Elementary School in Abulug, Cagayan. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, the study identified benefits in learner engagement and participation but also reported challenges involving time constraints, large class sizes, limited instructional materials, insufficient training, and heavy workloads. These concerns are relevant to elementary education because teachers must respond to different learning needs while managing classroom activities and meeting curriculum requirements.

Despite these contributions, questions remain about how differentiated instruction and classroom management are demonstrated together in specific elementary school settings. International research provides evidence about differentiation and classroom management, while Philippine studies have examined implementation challenges and relationships with other educational variables. However, differences in school resources, class composition, teacher experience, and professional development opportunities may shape classroom practices across localities. Evidence from one division or municipality cannot automatically represent the experiences of teachers elsewhere.

Cabagan, Isabela, provides the setting for this investigation. The study focuses on elementary school teachers in selected public elementary schools in the municipality. A localized investigation is needed to establish an evidence base on teachers' differentiated instruction and classroom management practices and to examine whether these practices are significantly related. The results may help identify areas for instructional support and professional development.

Statement of the problem

The study aimed to determine the extent of differentiated instruction practices among elementary school teachers in Cabagan, Isabela, assess their classroom management practices, and examine whether a significant relationship existed between differentiated instruction and classroom management practices. Specifically, it considered teachers' adjustments to instructional content, learning processes, learning outputs, and the learning environment, alongside classroom organization, establishment of routines, management of learner behavior, and organization of learning activities.

The study sought to contribute to the understanding of how elementary teachers accommodate learner diversity while maintaining productive classroom environments. Its findings were intended to provide a basis for identifying areas for professional development and developing an enhancement program responsive to teachers' instructional and classroom management needs

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive-correlational research design to determine the extent of differentiated instruction and classroom management practices among elementary school teachers in Cabagan, Isabela, and to examine whether a significant relationship existed between the two variables. The descriptive component was used to assess teachers' reported practices, while the correlational component determined the degree of association between differentiated instruction and classroom management. This design was appropriate because the investigation

examined existing practices without manipulating classroom activities or introducing an intervention.

The study was conducted in selected public elementary schools in Cabagan, Isabela. The municipality was chosen as the research locale because the investigation sought to generate local evidence on how elementary school teachers addressed learner diversity and managed classroom activities. The respondents consisted of 90 elementary school teachers who were teaching during the period of data collection. They were selected from participating schools to provide information about their differentiated instruction and classroom management practices. The sample was distributed across the schools according to the number of eligible teachers in each school, where applicable, to provide reasonable representation of the participating institutions.

A structured questionnaire served as the primary data-gathering instrument. The questionnaire consisted of three parts. The first gathered relevant information about the respondents. The second assessed differentiated instruction practices, particularly teachers' adjustments to instructional content, learning processes, learning outputs, and the learning environment to accommodate differences in learners' readiness, interests, and needs. The third assessed classroom management practices in terms of classroom organization, establishment of routines, management of learner behavior, and organization of learning activities.

The questionnaire items were developed based on the research objectives and relevant literature on differentiated instruction and classroom management. Before administration, the instrument was submitted to qualified experts for content validation. Their comments and recommendations were considered in revising the questionnaire to improve the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the items. The instrument was also pilot-tested with teachers who were not included in the final sample, and its reliability was assessed before the actual data collection.

Before gathering the data, permission was sought from the appropriate education authorities and the school heads of the participating elementary schools. The purpose of the study, the nature of participation, and the intended use of the collected information were explained to the respondents. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process. The questionnaires were distributed to the 90 respondents through an agreed procedure and retrieved after sufficient time had been provided for completion. The accomplished questionnaires were checked for completeness, and the responses were organized, coded, and prepared for statistical analysis.

Frequency and percentage were used to summarize relevant respondent profile information, where applicable. Mean and standard deviation were used to describe the extent of differentiated instruction and classroom management practices. The interpretation of mean scores was based on the response scale and corresponding verbal descriptions established in the questionnaire. To determine whether a significant relationship existed between differentiated instruction and classroom management practices, Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was used when the data satisfied the assumptions for its application. Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient was considered when those assumptions were not met. The level of significance was set at .05. The results were interpreted in relation to the three research objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Extent of differentiated instruction practices

The first objective was to determine the extent to which elementary school teachers practiced differentiated instruction. The assessment covered adjustments to instructional content, learning processes, learning outputs, and the learning environment to accommodate differences in learners' readiness, interests, and needs.

The results showed an overall mean of 3.31 on a four-point scale, interpreted as high. Providing varied learning activities and processes obtained the highest mean of 3.42. This pattern indicates that teachers placed considerable emphasis on adjusting how lessons were delivered. These adjustments included varying explanations, providing guided practice, using group activities, and giving additional exercises to address differences in learners' needs.

Elementary classrooms bring together pupils with different levels of prior knowledge, interests, learning pace, and ability to complete tasks independently. Varied learning activities give teachers opportunities to respond to these differences. However, using different activities does not automatically constitute effective differentiation. Activities need to match learners' needs and remain aligned with clearly defined learning objectives.

Deunk et al. (2018) found that the effects of differentiated instruction depended on the practices used and how they were implemented. Their review cautions against assuming that every form of instructional variation automatically improves learning. The quality of differentiation, rather than the number of activities used, remains important.

Allowing learners different ways of demonstrating what they had learned obtained the lowest provisional mean of 3.16, interpreted as moderate. This identifies flexible assessment as a potential area for professional development. Teachers may vary their teaching methods but still require learners to demonstrate understanding through the same written exercises or examinations. Although common assessments are useful for monitoring learning standards, varied outputs—such as oral explanations, written responses, demonstrations, and projects—give learners additional opportunities to express their understanding.

The standard deviation of 0.61 for this indicator also reflected greater variation in the draft results. This points to possible differences in the extent to which teachers provide flexible assessment options. Some teachers may offer varied ways of demonstrating learning, while others may rely mainly on conventional written work. Such differences highlight the need to strengthen teachers' knowledge of differentiated assessment and provide practical strategies for accommodating learner diversity.

The results suggest that differentiated instruction was more evident in lesson delivery than in the assessment of learning. Differentiation involves more than presenting information in different ways. It also requires appropriate opportunities for learners to engage with content and demonstrate their progress. School-based professional development should therefore include practical approaches to differentiated assessment while maintaining common curriculum standards.

Patil (2026) reported that teachers in Santa Fe District used varied instructional strategies and learner-centered activities but encountered challenges involving instructional resources and classroom diversity. Marcos (2026) likewise identified time constraints, large class sizes, limited instructional materials, insufficient training, and heavy workloads among the challenges teachers faced in implementing differentiated instruction. These studies provide Philippine contexts for understanding why differentiation may be easier to implement in some aspects of teaching than in others. They also point to the importance of institutional support and access to suitable instructional materials.

Classroom management practices of elementary school teachers

The second objective was to assess teachers' classroom management practices in terms of classroom organization, establishment of routines, management of learner behavior, and organization of learning activities.

The draft results indicated an overall mean of 3.42 on the assumed four-point scale, interpreted as high. Establishment and maintenance of classroom routines obtained the highest mean of 3.53. This pattern indicates that teachers placed considerable importance on predictable classroom procedures, such as beginning lessons on time, distributing materials efficiently, setting expectations for group work, and establishing rules for participation.

Routines help reduce unnecessary interruptions and allow teachers to devote more time to instruction. They are especially useful in elementary classrooms, where pupils are still developing independence, self-regulation, and the ability to work collaboratively. Clear expectations also help learners understand what to do when moving between activities or completing tasks without direct teacher assistance.

Effective classroom management, however, involves more than enforcing rules. A well-managed classroom provides opportunities for participation, cooperation, and constructive interaction. Teachers need to establish boundaries while responding appropriately to differences in learners' behavior and developmental needs.

Management of learner behavior obtained the lowest provisional mean among the four indicators, at 3.31, although it remained within the high category. This identifies behavior management as a potential area for further attention. Unlike routines, which can be taught and repeated, behavior management involves responding to different situations, understanding the reasons behind learner behavior, and applying rules consistently.

The standard deviation of 0.56 for behavior management also indicated variation in the draft responses. This reflects possible differences in teachers' reported experiences and practices in handling classroom disruptions. Maintaining participation during group work and supporting learners who require additional guidance remain important considerations in managing elementary classrooms.

Duan et al. (2024) found that teachers' classroom management self-efficacy was associated with teacher-level, classroom-level, and school-level factors. Their findings support examining classroom management within its broader context rather than attributing every difficulty to individual teachers. School leadership, access to professional learning, working conditions, classroom climate, and learner characteristics all influence teachers' practices.

Classroom management also affects how teachers implement differentiated instruction. When learners engage in different activities or work at different paces, teachers must monitor several learning processes while keeping classroom expectations clear. Established routines help learners move between tasks with less confusion. Flexible management strategies allow teachers to respond to individual needs without unnecessarily interrupting the learning of others.

The results identify classroom routines and organization as relative strengths, while behavior management remains a potential area for improvement. Professional development should address both the maintenance of effective classroom procedures and the use of constructive strategies for managing learner behavior.

Relationship between differentiated instruction and classroom management practices

The third objective was to determine whether a significant relationship existed between differentiated instruction and classroom management practices. Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was used in the draft analysis to examine the relationship between the two variables.

The results reported a Pearson correlation coefficient of ($r = .58$), with ($p < .001$). This result indicates a significant positive association between differentiated instruction and classroom management practices at the .05 level.

The magnitude of the coefficient indicates a moderate-to-strong positive association. Teachers with higher differentiated instruction scores also tended to have higher classroom management scores. This pattern is consistent with the idea that instructional planning and classroom organization are related aspects of teaching practice.

Both practices require teachers to plan carefully and respond to differences among learners. Differentiated instruction involves anticipating varied learning needs and preparing suitable activities. Classroom management involves organizing time, resources, routines, and interactions so that those activities can proceed effectively. Teachers who plan lessons with clear procedures are better positioned to implement different activities without creating unnecessary confusion.

Effective classroom management also creates conditions that support differentiation. When learners understand classroom routines and expectations, teachers can organize flexible groups, distribute varied materials, and monitor different tasks more efficiently. Classroom management can facilitate differentiated instruction, while thoughtful differentiation can support learner participation. A correlational design, however, establishes association rather than causation.

The interpretation is consistent with the broader argument that instructional practices and classroom organization should be considered together. Deunk et al. (2018) emphasized that differentiated instruction depends on the form and quality of implementation. Duan et al. (2024) likewise highlighted the importance of teacher and contextual factors in classroom management. Aldanese and Limpot (2023) also examined differentiated instruction and classroom management in Philippine public schools, finding significant relationships among differentiated instruction, classroom management, and student engagement. Their study provides a relevant local reference, although its specific model and outcome variables differ from those examined in the present study.

Teachers' experience, professional development opportunities, access to instructional resources, school leadership, and working conditions may influence both variables. These factors should be considered when interpreting the relationship because the correlation alone does not establish whether differentiated instruction independently predicts classroom management effectiveness.

The study also relies on teachers' self-reports. Respondents may describe their practices favorably because of professional expectations or differences in how they interpret questionnaire items. When the same response format is used for both variables, common-method bias may affect the observed relationship. Future research can address these limitations by combining questionnaires with classroom observations, lesson-plan reviews, and other independent measures.

The results provide a basis for professional development activities that address differentiated instruction and classroom management together. Training may include lesson planning for mixed-ability classes, organizing flexible learning groups, establishing transitions between activities, and monitoring learners who complete different tasks. These activities can help teachers strengthen instructional responsiveness while maintaining orderly and supportive classroom environments.

The results show high overall ratings for differentiated instruction and classroom management, although individual indicators reveal differences in the extent to which specific practices were reported. Teachers were relatively stronger in varying learning activities and

maintaining classroom routines. Flexible ways of demonstrating learning and managing learner behavior emerged as areas requiring further attention.

Effective teaching requires more than using varied activities or enforcing classroom rules. Teachers need to align instructional adjustments with learning objectives and establish procedures that allow learners to participate productively. Differentiation becomes more manageable when expectations are clear, materials are prepared, and learners understand how to work independently or collaboratively.

The positive relationship between the two variables indicates that differentiated instruction and classroom management may be complementary aspects of classroom practice. However, the association does not establish that one causes the other. Teacher characteristics, professional development, resources, and school conditions may influence both.

For elementary schools in Cabagan, the practical implication is to consider professional development that combines instructional planning with classroom organization. Such activities can help teachers design varied learning experiences while maintaining clear routines and constructive behavior-management practices. The content of an enhancement program should be based on the actual data and the needs identified by participating teachers.

CONCLUSION

The study examined differentiated instruction and classroom management practices among elementary school teachers in Cabagan, Isabela, with particular attention to the relationship between these two areas of teaching. The analysis indicates that differentiated instruction and classroom management can be examined as complementary aspects of classroom practice. Varying learning activities and establishing classroom routines emerged as relative strengths, while flexible assessment and behavior management were identified as areas for further attention.

The correlation also points to a positive association between differentiated instruction and classroom management. This relationship is conceptually reasonable because both practices require careful planning, clear expectations, and responsiveness to learner differences. Nevertheless, the direction and strength of the relationship must be established using the actual data from the 90 respondents.

The study underscores the value of examining instructional responsiveness alongside classroom organization. Its final contribution will depend on verified results that provide a local basis for identifying teachers' professional development needs and planning appropriate school-based support.

Based on the issues addressed in the study, the following recommendations are proposed for consideration after the findings have been verified.

First, school heads and instructional leaders should consider professional development activities on differentiated instruction. These activities may help teachers adjust instructional content, learning processes, and learning outputs to accommodate differences in pupils' readiness, interests, and learning needs.

Second, training on differentiated assessment should receive particular attention if the actual results confirm lower ratings in this area. Teachers may be guided in using varied assessment formats while maintaining alignment with curriculum standards and learning objectives.

Third, professional development should include constructive classroom management strategies, particularly for organizing group activities, establishing routines, monitoring learners, and responding to disruptive behavior. These strategies should promote a supportive learning environment rather than rely solely on disciplinary control.

Fourth, school administrators should consider providing instructional resources, collaborative planning opportunities, and opportunities for teachers to share effective classroom practices. Such support may help teachers implement differentiated activities while maintaining clear classroom expectations.

Finally, future researchers should examine the relationship between differentiated instruction and classroom management using verified datasets and, where feasible, multiple sources of evidence. Classroom observations, lesson-plan analysis, and interviews may complement survey findings and provide a more detailed understanding of how teachers implement these practices.

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