



# Teachers' Experiences of Implementing Differentiated Instruction in Elementary School

Asmi Khoirudin<sup>1\*</sup>, Ahmad Khor<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat, Universitas Islam Nusantara, Kota Bandung, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> Pendidikan Agama Islam, Universitas Islam Nusantara, Kota Bandung, Indonesia

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## ABSTRAK

Keberagaman kesiapan, minat, kepercayaan diri, dan cara belajar peserta didik menuntut guru menyesuaikan pembelajaran tanpa mengurangi tujuan belajar bersama. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengeksplorasi pengalaman guru kelas IV, V, dan VI dalam memahami, merencanakan, menerapkan, serta menanggapi manfaat, kendala, dan kebutuhan dukungan dalam pembelajaran berdiferensiasi. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif fenomenologis di SDN 202 Suryalaya, Kota Bandung, dengan tiga guru kelas yang dipilih secara purposif sebagai partisipan. Data utama diperoleh melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur, sedangkan observasi kelas dan dokumentasi terbatas digunakan sebagai data pendukung. Data dianalisis secara tematik melalui pembacaan berulang, pengodean, pengelompokan kategori, perbandingan lintas partisipan, pengembangan tema, dan interpretasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru memaknai pembelajaran berdiferensiasi sebagai penyesuaian yang adil, bukan pembelajaran terpisah bagi setiap peserta didik. Guru menggunakan asesmen awal dan pengetahuan tentang karakteristik peserta didik untuk menyesuaikan materi, pengelompokan, bantuan, aktivitas, dan produk belajar. Penyesuaian tersebut dipersepsikan mendukung partisipasi, kepercayaan diri, dan munculnya kemampuan yang kurang terlihat melalui tugas tertulis. Penerapannya terkendala waktu persiapan, ukuran kelas, keterbatasan sumber daya, tugas administratif, dan pembagian perhatian. Implementasi berkelanjutan memerlukan perencanaan kolaboratif, sumber belajar adaptif, pencatatan perkembangan yang ringkas, dan pengembangan profesional berbasis praktik kelas.

## ABSTRACT

Differences in students' readiness, interests, confidence, and ways of learning require teachers to adjust instruction without reducing shared learning goals. This study explored the experiences of Grade IV, V, and VI classroom teachers in understanding, planning, implementing, and responding to the perceived benefits, constraints, and support needs of differentiated instruction. A qualitative phenomenological design was employed at SDN 202 Suryalaya, Bandung, Indonesia, with three classroom teachers purposively selected as participants. Primary data were generated through semi-structured interviews, while classroom observations and limited document review provided supporting evidence. The data were analyzed thematically through repeated reading, initial coding, category development, cross-participant comparison, theme construction, and interpretation. The findings show that teachers understood differentiated instruction as equitable adjustment rather than separate teaching for every student. They used initial assessments and knowledge of students' characteristics to modify materials, grouping, scaffolding, activities, and learning products. Teachers perceived that these adjustments supported participation, confidence, and the visibility of abilities that were less apparent in written tasks. Implementation was constrained by preparation time, class size, limited resources, administrative demands, and difficulties in distributing attention. Sustainable implementation requires collaborative planning, adaptable learning resources, concise progress records, and classroom-based professional development.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Elementary classrooms are inherently heterogeneous. Students enter the same lesson with different levels of prior knowledge, learning pace, confidence, interests, language resources, family support, and willingness to participate. Responding to this variability does not require teachers to create a separate curriculum for every student. Rather, teachers need to preserve shared learning objectives while adjusting the routes, support, and opportunities through which students reach them. Differentiated instruction offers such an approach by linking instructional decisions to students' readiness, interests, and learning characteristics (Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2023). It is therefore better understood as planned responsiveness than as a collection of unrelated classroom activities.

\*Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [azmiijurnal@gmail.com](mailto:azmiijurnal@gmail.com)

In practice, differentiated instruction involves a recurring cycle of identifying needs, clarifying essential objectives, adapting instruction, checking students' responses, and revising subsequent teaching. Teachers may vary materials, task complexity, grouping, scaffolding, time, questions, products, or feedback. However, these variations become meaningful only when they respond to evidence about students' learning (Peters et al., 2022). Research involving primary teachers shows that diagnostic information and flexible instructional decisions are central to implementation, although teachers differ in how consistently they connect assessment findings with instructional follow-up (van Geel et al., 2022). This distinction matters because providing different worksheets or media may create visible variety without necessarily improving students' access to the intended concept.

Research generally reports potential benefits of differentiated instruction, but its findings should not be interpreted as uniformly positive. A systematic review and meta-analysis identified favorable overall patterns in learning outcomes while also showing considerable variation across educational settings, participants, subjects, and implementation designs (AM et al., 2023). Differentiated grouping has also been associated with performance, motivation, and self-regulation, although its value depends on how groups are formed, supported, and reviewed (Haelermans, 2022). These findings suggest that the quality of teachers' instructional judgment may be more important than the number of adaptations included in a lesson.

Teachers' experiences deserve particular attention because differentiated instruction is professionally demanding. Positive attitudes toward learner diversity do not always translate into confident or sustained classroom practice. Teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and self-efficacy influence how they interpret and enact differentiation (Porta et al., 2022). Among elementary teachers, self-efficacy and enthusiasm are also associated with the reported use of differentiated practices (Kalinowski et al., 2024). At the same time, teachers commonly experience limited preparation time, large classes, classroom-management pressures, insufficient materials, and uncertainty about supporting several groups simultaneously (Gibbs, 2023). Professional development may strengthen teachers' knowledge and practice, but its contribution depends on sustained opportunities to plan, practice, receive feedback, and connect learning with specific subjects and classroom problems (Kahmann et al., 2022).

In Indonesia, differentiated learning has received greater attention alongside the Merdeka Curriculum and its emphasis on responding to students' learning needs. Elementary teachers generally understand its basic purpose, but their interpretations remain uneven and may emphasize learning styles or task variation more than assessment-based instructional decisions (Witraguna et al., 2024). Studies in Indonesian elementary schools indicate that differentiated activities can support literacy participation and provide alternative ways for students to engage with learning tasks (Wijaya et al., 2024). Differentiated instruction has also been associated with students' mathematical critical and creative thinking, although these findings remain tied to particular subjects, research designs, and classroom conditions (Lestari et al., 2024). They should therefore be read as evidence of potential rather than proof that every differentiated lesson will produce similar outcomes.

Indonesian studies also identify persistent implementation difficulties. Teachers may struggle to translate broad curriculum principles into manageable procedures for assessment, grouping, material adaptation, classroom management, and evaluation. In Grade V language instruction, reported obstacles included identifying learner characteristics, preparing appropriate task variations, and managing their implementation within the available lesson time (Adnyana et al., 2024). Research in elementary schools further indicates that limited training and incomplete practical understanding can reduce the consistency of differentiated practices (Sari et al., 2023). Existing studies provide useful evidence about effectiveness, teacher understanding, and general implementation. However, detailed accounts of how experienced upper-grade classroom teachers interpret and negotiate differentiation across planning, teaching, assessment, perceived benefits, practical tensions, and support needs remain limited.

A phenomenological account can address this gap because implementation is shaped not only by formal procedures but also by the meaning's teachers attach to classroom events and instructional decisions. Teachers may accept the principle of responsiveness while experiencing tension between addressing different needs and maintaining shared objectives, manageable activities, classroom order, and students' sense of belonging. Examining these experiences may explain why certain adaptations develop into sustainable routines while others remain occasional or difficult to maintain.

This study therefore explores the lived experiences of Grade IV, V, and VI classroom teachers in implementing differentiated instruction at SDN 202 Suryalaya, Bandung. It examines how teachers understand and give meaning to differentiated instruction, how they plan and enact it, what benefits and student responses they perceive, and how they address constraints and identify needed support. By comparing teachers' accounts with classroom observations and limited documentation, the study seeks to

explain differentiated instruction as an iterative process of noticing learner differences, making manageable adjustments, checking students' responses, and revising subsequent instruction

## 2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to examine how upper-grade classroom teachers experienced and interpreted differentiated instruction in their daily practice. Phenomenology was selected because the inquiry focused on concrete teaching events and the meanings participants attached to them rather than on measuring the frequency or effectiveness of particular strategies (van Manen & van Manen, 2021). The study was conducted at SDN 202 Suryalaya, Bandung, Indonesia. Three classroom teachers were purposively selected because they taught Grades IV, V, and VI and had directly planned and implemented differentiated instruction. They were coded as G-IV, G-V, and G-VI to protect their identities. They had 11, 16, and 22 years of teaching experience and taught classes of 32, 34, and 33 students, respectively.

The primary data were generated through individual semi-structured interviews conducted in Indonesian. This format enabled the same areas to be discussed across participants while allowing follow-up questions about specific classroom events, decisions, and difficulties (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). The interview guide contained 20 main questions addressing teachers' understanding and meaning-making, identification of learning needs, instructional planning, classroom implementation, perceived benefits and student responses, constraints, coping strategies, and support needs. Each interview lasted approximately 60–75 minutes, was audio-recorded with the participant's consent, and was subsequently transcribed.

Supporting data were collected through one classroom observation for each participant and a limited document review. The observed lessons addressed force and motion in Grade IV, advertising texts in Grade V, and persuasive speeches in Grade VI. Field notes recorded initial assessment, variations in tasks and materials, grouping, teacher assistance, formative checks, student participation, classroom management, and adjustments made during the lesson. The documents examined included teaching modules, initial-assessment records, notes on students' learning needs, teaching materials, worksheets, student products, assessment instruments, progress notes, classroom photographs, and teacher-development records. These sources were used to compare teachers' reported experiences with observed practices and documented planning.

The data were examined using phenomenologically informed thematic analysis. Each transcript was read repeatedly alongside the corresponding observation notes and documents. Meaningful statements were assigned initial codes, related codes were grouped into participant-level categories, and a cross-participant matrix was prepared to identify shared and contrasting experiences. The categories were subsequently reviewed and developed into themes that addressed the four research questions. The interview areas guided data organization but did not predetermine the final themes. Theme development followed Braun and Clarke's (2021) emphasis on coherent patterns of meaning and continual review against the complete dataset, while Byrne's (2022) worked example informed the movement from initial codes to interpretive themes. Quotations selected for reporting were translated from Indonesian into English while preserving their intended meanings.

Trustworthiness was strengthened by comparing evidence across participants and across interviews, observations, and documents (Adler, 2022). Participants were also invited to confirm concise interpretive summaries. This procedure was used to clarify meanings and identify possible misinterpretations rather than to treat participant agreement as proof of accuracy (Erdmann & Potthoff, 2023). Contradictory evidence was retained and examined. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, names were replaced with codes, and student identities and individual scores were excluded from the dataset.

## 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis produced four interrelated themes corresponding to the research questions: teachers' understanding and meaning-making, experiences in planning and implementation, perceived benefits and student responses, and constraints, coping strategies, and needed support. Across these themes, differentiated instruction was experienced not as a finished model that could be transferred directly into the classroom, but as a continuing negotiation between responsiveness to learner diversity and the need to keep instruction fair, manageable, and focused on shared learning objectives.

### Understanding Differentiated Instruction as Equitable Responsiveness

All three teachers first encountered the formal term *differentiated instruction* through school activities related to the Merdeka Curriculum. Nevertheless, they recognized that some adaptive practices had long been present in their teaching. They had repeated explanations for students who struggled, used simpler examples, and provided additional work for students who completed tasks early. The important change was therefore not the appearance of adaptation itself, but a shift from spontaneous assistance after difficulties emerged to more deliberate adjustment based on information gathered before and during instruction.

The teachers initially interpreted differentiation as individualized instruction for every student. In classes of 32–34 students, this interpretation made the approach appear unrealistic. Their understanding changed through training, discussion with colleagues, independent learning, and classroom experimentation. G-V explained, “I used to think that teachers had to create different instruction for every child. Now I understand it as a reasonable adjustment based on groups of needs, not one plan for one student.” This shift reduced the perceived burden while preserving the central idea that students may require different routes toward the same objective.

The change also reflected a development in professional noticing. Teachers no longer focused only on visible achievement differences; they began to distinguish conceptual misunderstanding from carelessness, silence from lack of understanding, and weak written performance from weak conceptual knowledge. Gheyssens et al. (2021) found that teachers who were more capable of noticing and reasoning about inclusive classroom situations also reported stronger differentiated practices. In the present study, noticing became pedagogically meaningful when teachers translated small classroom signals—hesitation, repeated errors, dependence on examples, or reluctance to speak—into decisions about support, grouping, or task format.

Fairness was central to the teachers’ meaning-making. G-IV stated, “Fair does not mean that every child receives exactly the same treatment. Each child receives the help they need.” However, fairness was not interpreted identically across grade levels. G-IV emphasized participation without humiliation, G-V stressed opportunities to demonstrate different strengths, and G-VI connected support with growing independence before students entered secondary school. These differences indicate that fairness was not an abstract principle but a judgment shaped by students’ developmental demands and classroom histories.

Such judgments are morally significant because differentiation distributes teacher attention, task difficulty, time, and learning opportunities. Van Vijfeijken et al. (2023) showed that teachers’ beliefs and practices concerning fair differentiation may be organized around equality, need, or merit, and these orientations do not always align. The participants generally favored need-based support, but they also had to ensure that students who progressed more quickly received meaningful challenges rather than merely more work. Their accounts therefore suggest that equitable differentiation involves balancing additional support, intellectual challenge, and student dignity.

The teachers also recognized that differentiated tasks and grouping could produce unintended labels. They used neutral group names such as colors, animals, or numbers and explained that different support did not indicate fixed intelligence. Yet neutral labels could not fully prevent students from identifying which group received shorter texts or more teacher attention. Some students questioned why assignments differed, and some parents compared their children’s tasks with those of classmates. Godor (2021) argues that teachers’ differentiation choices are shaped by beliefs as well as practical limits; the present findings add that these choices also require social explanation. Grouping becomes more defensible when it is temporary, connected to a specific need, and changed across subjects. Otherwise, an adaptive decision may harden into a public hierarchy of perceived ability.

### Planning and Implementation as Assessment-Informed, Bounded Adaptation

Teachers identified learning needs through short initial assessments, previous assignments, daily observation, oral questions, conversations with students, and information from former teachers. Initial assessment was not limited to written testing. Depending on the lesson, it involved pictures, demonstrations, games, reading tasks, or three to five introductory questions. Teachers also considered how quickly students understood instructions, whether they worked independently, how confidently they communicated, and whether home circumstances affected learning routines.

The resulting information was commonly organized into three practical categories: students who had understood the basic concept, students who were beginning to understand, and students who still required assistance. These categories informed grouping, task complexity, media, and the intensity of support. They were described as temporary and subject-specific; a student needing assistance in one

subject could work independently in another. This flexibility was clear in the interviews, although the limited documents did not consistently record changes in group membership over time.

Planning began with a shared learning objective. Teachers then selected the instructional element most in need of adjustment rather than differentiating content, process, and product simultaneously. G-V generally limited a lesson to two or three variations because a larger number made classroom management difficult. Students needing support received shorter texts, keywords, images, concrete examples, or tasks divided into smaller steps. Students who demonstrated early understanding received application questions, independent challenges, or enrichment.

This selective practice can be described as bounded adaptation: variation was limited to what teachers considered necessary and operationally feasible. Godor (2021) notes that teachers cannot offer every form of differentiation to every learner at all times and must balance possible learning benefits against classroom efficiency. The current findings support this argument, but they also define an important boundary. Simplification remained pedagogically meaningful only when it could be traced to evidence of need. Merely changing media or arranging groups did not constitute differentiation if the adjustment lacked a diagnostic basis or follow-up assessment.

The observed lessons illustrated this bounded approach. In Grade IV, students learned about force and motion through toy-car experiments, visual observation, and short reading cases. They could demonstrate understanding through an observation table, sequential drawings, or oral explanation. The teacher spent more time with students who still confused pushing and pulling, while students who finished early compared how objects moved on different surfaces. In Grade V, printed advertisements, persuasive-word cards, worksheets, posters, and an audio example supported learning about advertising texts. Students could produce a poster, write a script, or perform a short advertisement. In Grade VI, students studied persuasive speeches through sample texts, keywords, written outlines, paired rehearsal, and oral delivery; less confident students could practice with a partner before presenting more publicly.

Across the classes, short whole-class explanations were followed by individual, paired, or group work. Instructions and time limits were displayed on the board, and roles such as leader, writer, reader, timekeeper, material manager, or presenter were assigned. These routines reduced repeated questions and limited domination by one student. Assistance was delivered individually or in temporary support groups through guiding questions and step-by-step scaffolding. Peer tutoring was used selectively, with the expectation that peers would explain rather than complete another student's task.

The importance of assessment lay in what teachers did with the evidence. Van der Steen et al. (2022) emphasize that formative information is useful when it is aligned with intended instructional decisions. The strongest practices in this study formed a sequence: eliciting evidence, interpreting difficulty, adjusting support, examining the response, and deciding the next step. Teachers therefore used individual questions, short written exercises, or reflection sheets after group activities because a collective product could conceal unequal understanding.

This caution is supported by intervention research. Peters et al. (2022) found that learning-progress assessment became more useful when teachers also received prepared materials for assessment-based differentiated reading instruction. Karst et al. (2022), however, reported no general main effect of data-based differentiation on reading comprehension, although it reduced the influence of initial performance on learning gains. Together, these studies challenge the assumption that assessment or differentiated materials automatically improve outcomes. Their value depends on the alignment between evidence, instructional response, and subsequent checking.

The documents confirmed shared objectives, initial assessments, varied materials, grouping, remedial work, enrichment, and product options. However, records of individual progress, written feedback, group changes, and product-specific rubrics were uneven. The teachers' knowledge of students was often richer than the formal records. This knowledge supported immediate decisions but was difficult to review or share. Grecu (2023) similarly found that prepared curricular resources can provide a useful roadmap, yet teachers still need to adapt them to the students present. A concise record of the difficulty identified, support provided, student response, and proposed next action would preserve instructional reasoning without turning differentiation into an additional paperwork burden.

### **Perceived Benefits and Student Responses: Increased Visibility, but Not Automatic Learning**

Teachers perceived the clearest benefits in participation, confidence, and the visibility of abilities that conventional written tasks had not revealed. In Grade IV, a student who was usually passive during reading and writing became highly involved in the toy-car experiment and explained why a stronger push produced longer movement. In Grade V, a student whose written work was usually unremarkable

delivered an oral advertisement confidently and used persuasive language appropriately. G-V concluded that this speaking ability might have remained unnoticed if all students had been required to produce the same written product.

These experiences changed how teachers interpreted student performance. An incomplete written response could reflect difficulty with writing, low confidence, or a narrow response format rather than a complete absence of conceptual understanding. Differentiated products therefore served not only as alternatives for completing an assignment but also as diagnostic windows into students' capabilities. They enabled teachers to reconsider earlier judgments and identify forms of competence expressed through oral explanation, drawing, practical work, or collaboration.

Observation supported the teachers' reports of active participation when lessons used concrete objects, visual materials, experiments, group roles, and limited product choices. However, student responses were not uniform. Some students preferred individual work, while others participated more comfortably in groups. Some chose a product quickly; others followed friends, sought the easiest option, or became uncertain when several alternatives were offered. Several students were initially uncomfortable when flexible grouping separated them from close friends.

These findings complicate the assumption that choice is inherently motivating. Haelermans (2022) found positive effects when students were grouped according to learning strategies, but the intervention involved structured grouping and tailored instruction rather than unrestricted choice. In the present study, choice was productive when options were limited, clearly explained, and tied to shared conceptual criteria. A poster, written script, and oral presentation could differ technically, but each had to demonstrate the same essential understanding. Without that common standard, product differentiation could allow students to avoid demanding knowledge or skills rather than access them through a suitable route.

The teachers also distinguished visible engagement from demonstrated learning. A lively class could indicate productive discussion, but it could also reflect confusion, social conversation, or weak time management. For this reason, teachers retained individual questions and written checks after group work. Geletu and Mihiretie (2024) found that professional development could improve teachers' differentiated practices without automatically ensuring strong alignment or student engagement. The present study shows the reverse caution as well: engagement can increase without providing sufficient evidence of understanding. Participation is therefore an important indicator of access, but it must be interpreted alongside conceptual accuracy, independence, and progress.

The teachers' emotional responses reflected this ambiguity. Successful lessons generated satisfaction because previously quiet students participated and demonstrated unexpected abilities. At the same time, teachers felt tired when several groups required attention simultaneously, and they questioned lessons that were attractive but noisy or unfinished. This response is important phenomenologically: differentiation was experienced as professionally meaningful precisely because it revealed students differently, yet it was also emotionally demanding because teachers remained responsible for determining whether increased activity represented genuine learning.

The findings should not be read as evidence that differentiated instruction caused higher achievement. Only one lesson per teacher was observed, and the study did not measure changes in achievement. The evidence supports a more limited claim: teachers perceived that manageable variations widened opportunities to participate and demonstrate understanding, while formative checking remained necessary to determine what students had actually learned.

### **Constraints, Coping Strategies, and the Need for Organizational Support**

The main constraints were limited preparation time, classes of 32–34 students, uneven reading abilities, limited digital devices and graded materials, administrative duties, restricted classroom space, and pressure to complete the curriculum. These factors were not experienced separately. A large class increased the number of learning needs to be noticed, groups to be managed, questions to be answered, products to be assessed, and students whose progress required follow-up. Limited time then reduced teachers' capacity to prepare materials and interpret the evidence collected.

The central problem was therefore scarcity of teacher attention. When a teacher remained with a support group, other students sometimes became noisy, requested repeated clarification, or felt overlooked. This explains why the participants did not experience differentiation simply as producing different worksheets. The more difficult task was allocating attention without allowing support for one group to reduce learning opportunities for another.

Teachers responded through adaptive simplification. They modified existing materials rather than designing everything from the beginning, restricted product choices, added keywords or worked examples to one version of a task, assigned group roles, displayed instructions, created temporary support

groups, and used supervised peer tutoring. When time became insufficient, they reduced the number of presentations, selected representatives, or continued the activity in another meeting. These strategies did not eliminate the constraints, but they made implementation more sustainable.

The decision to simplify should not be interpreted automatically as incomplete implementation. It represented professional judgment about the amount of variation that could be supported without losing the learning objective or classroom control. Nevertheless, simplification could become superficial if it was disconnected from assessment. The most defensible adaptations were those that addressed an identified difficulty and were followed by evidence of student response.

The participants requested practical support rather than further general explanations of content, process, and product differentiation. They needed examples of brief initial assessments, manageable lesson plans, leveled worksheets, product rubrics, graded reading materials, and demonstrations in large classes. Informal sharing of modules, worksheets, and media already reduced preparation demands, but document review did not identify a regular school program for observing, discussing, and evaluating differentiated lessons.

These findings place implementation beyond the competence of individual teachers. Dewanti et al. (2024) identified teacher perceptions, collaboration, leadership, administrative demands, training, and school readiness as interacting influences on differentiation in Indonesian inclusive elementary schools. Sannen et al. (2021) likewise found that primary-school teachers in denser collaboration networks reported more positive beliefs about inclusion and greater use of differentiated instruction. Collaboration matters not merely because teachers can exchange files, but because instructional decisions become open to collective examination.

Professional learning should consequently resemble the actual work of differentiation. Frerejean et al. (2021) conceptualized differentiation as a complex skill requiring connected learning tasks, supportive information, procedural guidance, and repeated practice. For the teachers in this study, a useful professional-learning cycle would involve examining student work, designing a short initial assessment, preparing limited forms of support, teaching the lesson, observing student responses, and revising the plan with colleagues. This is more responsive to their needs than isolated training that explains principles without addressing attention, time, and classroom management.

Prepared resources also need room for professional adaptation. Grecu (2023) showed that curriculum resources can promote access to rigorous content, but they still require thorough teacher planning for diverse learners. Similarly, the participants did not request fully individualized packages for every student. They requested reusable resources that could be adjusted efficiently. The implication is not that schools should prescribe identical differentiated lessons, but that they should reduce avoidable preparation work while preserving teachers' judgment.

Across the four themes, the shared experience of differentiation was a continuous negotiation between responsiveness and manageability. Teachers sought to recognize learner differences without fixing labels, provide choice without weakening common expectations, increase participation without mistaking activity for learning, and offer support without making the lesson impossible to manage. This negotiation explains why differentiation was valued but not implemented as an all-or-nothing model. It became sustainable when teachers made limited, evidence-informed adjustments and received enough organizational support to examine and refine those decisions.

These findings are bounded by three experienced teachers in one public elementary school, one observed lesson for each teacher, and limited documentation. They cannot establish effects on achievement or confirm that practices remained consistent throughout the school year. Nevertheless, convergence among interviews, classroom observations, and documents provides a grounded account of how upper-grade teachers understood, enacted, and negotiated differentiated instruction.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that Grade IV, V, and VI teachers understood differentiated instruction as equitable responsiveness rather than individualized teaching for every student. They planned and implemented it by using simple initial assessments, classroom observations, previous work, and knowledge of students' academic and non-academic characteristics to adjust materials, grouping, scaffolding, learning activities, and product options while maintaining shared learning objectives. Teachers perceived that these adjustments supported participation, confidence, and the visibility of abilities that were not always apparent in written tasks, although they also recognized that engagement did not necessarily indicate conceptual understanding. Implementation was constrained by limited preparation time, large classes, uneven reading abilities, restricted resources, administrative demands,

and difficulty distributing attention across groups. Teachers addressed these conditions by simplifying lesson designs, adapting existing materials, limiting choices, assigning group roles, forming temporary support groups, and using supervised peer assistance. The study contributes a grounded account of differentiated instruction as an iterative negotiation between responsiveness and manageability. Schools should therefore support implementation through collaborative planning, shared adaptable resources, classroom-based professional learning, concise progress records, and clear communication with parents about the purpose of differentiated support.

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