



Implementation of a Differentiated Christian Religious Education Learning Model Based on the Characteristics of Elementary School Students at SD S 101940 Bina Artha

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ABSTRACT

Christian Religious Education (PAK) learning at the elementary school level plays a strategic role in shaping students' character, faith, and spirituality. However, the diversity of student characteristics in terms of learning readiness, interests, and learning styles requires a more flexible and adaptive approach. This study aims to examine the implementation of a differentiated learning model in the Christian Religious Education subject at SD S 101940 Bina Artha. The research employed a qualitative approach with a case study method. The research subjects included the Christian Religious Education teacher, the school principal, and Grade IV and V students. Data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Data analysis was conducted thematically through the stages of reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that the Christian Religious Education teacher implemented differentiated learning in three main aspects: content, process, and product. These strategies were applied through the use of varied learning media, grouping based on learning styles, and offering options in the form of final assignments. The application of this model had a positive impact on students' motivation, participation, and understanding of Christian values. Students felt valued in the learning process and demonstrated improvement in both cognitive and affective domains. Nevertheless, challenges were encountered, such as limited time and the need for training in designing adaptive learning. The school responded to these challenges by organizing internal training sessions and promoting teacher collaboration. These findings indicate that differentiated learning can serve as an effective approach in religious education, particularly in contexts that require appreciation of student diversity. This study recommends strengthening institutional support and enhancing teacher competencies as prerequisites for the successful implementation of differentiated learning in Christian Religious Education at the elementary school level.

Keywords: Christian Religious Education, differentiated learning, student characteristics, inclusive learning, elementary school

INTRODUCTION

Christian Religious Education (PAK) plays a strategic role in shaping students' character, faith, and spirituality from an early age. Within the framework of primary education, PAK learning is not merely aimed at transferring theological knowledge but also at instilling Christian moral values that can guide students' behavior and attitudes in daily life. Therefore, the effectiveness of PAK learning is largely determined by the extent to which the learning process can address and engage the unique characteristics of each student. Elementary school students are individuals undergoing a dynamic stage of development. They demonstrate diversity in socio-cultural backgrounds, levels of learning readiness, learning styles, motivation, and interest in learning materials. In reality, no two students are truly identical. Each child brings different learning capital into the classroom. In such situations, the application of a uniform or one-size-fits-all approach becomes less relevant. Insensitivity to this diversity has the potential to create disparities in learning achievement and hinder the spiritual growth that should serve as the foundation of PAK learning.

To address this challenge, differentiated learning emerges as a strategic and relevant approach. This model provides teachers with the flexibility to adapt teaching strategies based on students' individual differences. According to Tomlinson (2014), differentiated learning encompasses three main aspects: content (learning materials), process (learning methods), and product (forms of learning outcomes). These adaptations are made according to three variables of student characteristics: learning readiness, interest, and learning profile. Thus, differentiated learning aims not only to enhance cognitive understanding but also to strengthen students' emotional and spiritual engagement in the learning process. In the context of PAK, applying a differentiated approach holds great potential for creating more inclusive, personalized, and transformative learning. PAK is not merely a subject that teaches doctrine or theological theory; it also demands the internalization of values and deep spiritual reflection. Therefore, teachers must understand who their students are, how they learn, and how they interpret the values being taught. This approach positions students as active subjects in the learning process rather than passive recipients of knowledge.

SD S 101940 Bina Artha is an elementary education institution with a highly diverse student population, in terms of academic abilities, family backgrounds, and personal characteristics. Recognizing this, the school began implementing a differentiated learning model in the PAK subject in the 2023/2024 academic year as an effort to enhance learning effectiveness and develop students' potential holistically. The implementation of this model is part of a pedagogical innovation expected to address the challenges of teaching in heterogeneous classrooms. However, the application of differentiated learning is not without challenges, including teacher competency, resource availability, and the complexity of classroom management. Therefore, it is essential to conduct an academic study on how differentiated PAK learning is implemented in practice, particularly at SD S 101940 Bina Artha. This study aims to: (1) identify teachers' strategies in implementing differentiated PAK learning, (2) evaluate the effectiveness of its implementation, and (3) uncover the challenges and solutions encountered during the process. It is expected that the results of this study will contribute to the development of more adaptive and

transformative pedagogical practices in Christian Religious Education at the elementary school level.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design as its primary framework. The qualitative approach was chosen because it provides the researcher with the flexibility to explore in depth the realities occurring in the field, particularly concerning the process of implementing a differentiated Christian Religious Education (PAK) learning model. A case study was selected since the research focuses on a specific location, namely SD S 101940 Bina Artha, which is currently applying a differentiated learning approach in the PAK subject. The selection of this school was based on the diversity of student characteristics and the school's commitment to developing innovative and adaptive teaching practices that address students' needs. The research subjects consisted of the PAK teacher, who served as the primary implementer of differentiated learning, the school principal, who acts as the educational policy maker at the institutional level, and Grade IV and V students, who were directly involved in the learning process. Grades IV and V were selected purposively, considering that students at this stage possess more mature cognitive abilities and are able to provide reflective responses to the learning process they experience. Furthermore, these classes were the initial target for the school's differentiated learning model implementation.

Data collection was carried out using three main techniques: observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Observations were conducted directly in the classroom, focusing on the differentiation strategies implemented by the teacher, teacher-student interactions, and students' responses to the methods used. In-depth interviews were conducted with the PAK teacher and the school principal to gather information on the planning, implementation, and evaluation of differentiated learning. Semi-structured interviews were employed to allow for broader exploration of the informants' experiences and perspectives. Meanwhile, document analysis included reviewing lesson plans (RPP), student worksheets, teacher reflection journals, and other relevant supporting documents. Data analysis was conducted thematically, following steps that included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was performed by selecting, simplifying, and organizing raw data into a more meaningful form. Data presentation was carried out in the form of descriptive narratives and thematic findings derived from observation and interview results. Conclusion drawing was conducted by examining the relationship between the data and the research objectives. To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the data, both source and method triangulation were applied. Source triangulation involved comparing information from various informants, while method triangulation entailed comparing the results of observations, interviews, and documentation to ensure consistency and credibility of the collected data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Strategies for Implementing Differentiated Learning

The findings indicate that Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SD S 101940 Bina Artha have implemented a differentiated learning model using systematic and contextual approaches. The implementation strategies focus on three main aspects, as developed by Tomlinson (2014), namely differentiation of content, process, and product. In practice, teachers demonstrated a high level of awareness regarding the importance of accommodating students' diverse learning needs, which was evident in various teaching practices observed and described during interviews. In terms of content differentiation, teachers deliver instructional materials using various media, such as illustrative videos, symbolic images, Bible stories contextualized to students' daily lives, and simplified reading materials adjusted to their levels of understanding. This strategy is applied to align the delivery of content with students' varying levels of readiness. Students are grouped based on the results of initial diagnostic assessments conducted at the beginning of the semester. High-achieving students are provided with challenging tasks, such as analytical questions on the moral messages of biblical narratives, while students with moderate or low readiness levels receive more concrete and visual explanations, as well as more intensive support. This approach allows each student to understand CRE materials in accordance with their cognitive capacity, without feeling left behind or pressured by uniform standards.

Process differentiation is implemented by grouping students according to their learning styles. Based on observations and interviews, teachers employ a simple questionnaire to identify students' learning preferences, which then informs the formation of learning groups. Visual learners are engaged in activities such as creating story diagrams or posters of biblical figures. Auditory learners listen to recorded Bible stories and participate in small-group discussions, while kinesthetic learners take part in role-play and simulations of biblical events. The learning activities are designed to be flexible and interactive, offering students opportunities to explore Christian values through approaches that best suit their learning styles. This makes the learning process more engaging, relevant, and meaningful for students. Regarding product differentiation, teachers give students the freedom to demonstrate their understanding in various forms. For example, after studying the theme of love in the teachings of Jesus, students may choose to write a reflective essay, compose a devotional poem, create a poster on love, or perform a short drama depicting the life of Jesus. This diversity in student outputs not only reflects respect for their creativity but also demonstrates a deep understanding of the essence of differentiated instruction—providing multiple pathways for students to express their learning outcomes. Teachers also design flexible yet structured assessment rubrics to evaluate these products fairly and objectively.

These strategies illustrate that CRE teachers at SD S 101940 Bina Artha have a sound understanding of, and have effectively applied, the principles of differentiated learning. This aligns with Tomlinson's (2014) view that differentiation is not merely about varying teaching methods but represents a pedagogical mindset that places the individual needs of students at the center of the learning process. Teachers in this context apply these strategies not only technically, but also with a genuine commitment to creating an inclusive, humanistic, and transformative learning environment.

Impact of Implementation on Learning Outcomes

The implementation of differentiated learning at SD S 101940 Bina Artha has yielded significant impacts on students' learning outcomes across cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions. Analysis of student performance records, along with interviews conducted with both students and teachers, revealed that the differentiated approach fosters greater student participation in the learning process and enhances comprehension of Christian Religious Education (CRE) materials. This is evident in the improved quality of group discussions, the depth of thought reflected in written reflections, and the expression of Christian values in students' daily behavior. For example, students with a visual learning preference demonstrated high enthusiasm in producing visual works such as posters and illustrated comics depicting biblical narratives. Kinesthetic learners were highly engaged in role-play activities, which not only deepened their understanding of biblical stories but also helped them internalize values such as love, forgiveness, and exemplary conduct. Meanwhile, auditory learners were more comfortable expressing their understanding through oral presentations and group discussions. This diversity of learning expressions indicates that differentiated instruction successfully creates a learning space that empowers each student to develop according to their strengths and preferences.

Furthermore, student interviews revealed that they felt more valued, motivated, and connected to the subject matter. Several students expressed that CRE lessons had become more lively and engaging because they could choose learning methods suited to their own preferences. One fifth-grade student, for instance, stated, "I understand Jesus' stories better when acting in a play because I can feel directly what He did." This statement illustrates the depth of learning experiences that extend beyond the cognitive domain to include affective and spiritual dimensions. From the teachers' perspective, differentiated learning provided opportunities to understand their students on a more personal level. Teachers noted that classroom interactions became closer and more meaningful, as the learning process encouraged dialogue, individualized mentoring, and the strengthening of pastoral relationships. This aspect is particularly vital in CRE, which focuses on holistic formation of character and faith. These findings are consistent with Hall's (2012) research, which emphasizes that differentiated instruction can enhance students' emotional engagement, thereby strengthening content retention and fostering spiritual growth.

Overall, the application of differentiated learning in the context of CRE at the elementary level has not only improved academic performance but also reinforced the formation of students' Christian faith identity. The learning process becomes more meaningful as it addresses the full spectrum of student development—cognitive, affective, and spiritual—aligning with the holistic principles of Christian education, which view learners as whole persons who must grow in their knowledge of God, others, and themselves.

Challenges and Solutions in Implementation

Despite the positive outcomes of differentiated learning implementation, teachers encountered several challenges during its application. The main challenges identified in this study include limited time for designing and preparing varied instructional materials, the need for more in-depth pedagogical training, and the complexity of managing classrooms engaged in multiple simultaneous activities. Time constraints emerged as a

primary obstacle, as differentiation requires teachers to prepare more than one form of material, activity, and assessment. This necessitates meticulous planning and longer working hours compared to conventional teaching. Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SD S 101940 Bina Artha reported that, within a single week, they were required to produce several variations of worksheets, presentation materials, and teaching aids tailored to students' needs. This challenge is further compounded by the need to balance these tasks with other administrative responsibilities.

Another challenge concerns the limitations in pedagogical competence required to systematically design differentiated instruction. While teachers possessed a general understanding of the importance of differentiation, they still required more comprehensive training on strategies for lesson design, alternative assessment rubrics, and methods to evaluate the effectiveness of the approaches used. Teachers also expressed the need for concrete examples and best practices from other educators to serve as references in developing adaptive instructional models. Additionally, classroom management presented its own set of challenges. When students engaged in diverse activities simultaneously, teachers had to monitor and guide all groups equitably. In certain situations, students became less focused due to the lively classroom environment. This required teachers to possess strong managerial and communication skills to maintain order and ensure instructional effectiveness.

To address these challenges, the school implemented several strategic solutions. First, periodic internal training sessions were conducted, facilitated by senior teachers and external trainers from Christian teacher development institutions. These sessions focused on enhancing teachers' skills in designing differentiated lesson plans, utilizing digital media, and implementing authentic assessment. Second, the school provided digital teaching resources—such as instructional videos, assignment templates, and adaptable assessment rubrics—that teachers could modify according to the characteristics of their classes. Third, a culture of teacher collaboration was cultivated through regular discussion forums and the internal curriculum development team. These forums served as spaces for teachers to share experiences, reflect on teaching practices, and co-develop instructional materials.

Teachers were also encouraged to engage in weekly reflections as part of continuous professional development. These reflections were documented in teaching journals that recorded classroom dynamics, student responses, and necessary adjustments for the following week. This approach provided teachers with a sustainable feedback mechanism to enhance instructional quality, reinforcing the principle that implementing differentiated learning is a dynamic process requiring ongoing adaptation.

Theoretical Analysis of Differentiated Learning Implementation

The implementation of differentiated learning by CRE teachers at SD S 101940 Bina Artha can be further examined through the theoretical framework of Carol Ann Tomlinson, a leading figure in the development of the concept. According to Tomlinson (2001), differentiated instruction seeks to accommodate diversity within the classroom, encompassing differences in readiness, interests, and learning profiles. In the context of this study, all three elements were evident in the observed instructional practices. Learning readiness emerged as a primary variable addressed by teachers through groupings and adjustments to the difficulty level of materials. Teachers recognized that

not all students learn at the same level, necessitating modifications in content delivery. For instance, students struggling with abstract concepts in New Testament narratives were provided with more concrete explanations using visual aids, while those with stronger comprehension skills were assigned tasks to analyze the moral and spiritual meanings of biblical texts. This illustrates the teachers' understanding of the essential principle of differentiating based on readiness.

The second aspect, interest, was also considered in the planning of instructional activities. Teachers sought to relate lesson topics to students' everyday lives, thereby increasing relevance. For example, when teaching about the love of Jesus, students were tasked with identifying acts of kindness in their homes or school environments. Such activities not only fostered affective engagement but also created opportunities for personal reflection, reinforcing the internalization of Christian values. Meanwhile, varied learning profiles were addressed through the adoption of multi-modality strategies. Visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles were catered to through activities tailored to each preference. This approach reflects teachers' awareness of diverse learning styles and the application of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, which advocate for multiple pathways to achieve learning objectives.

Moreover, the implementation of differentiated learning in CRE demonstrated an integration of modern pedagogical approaches with Christian theological values. Teachers not only acted as facilitators of learning but also as spiritual mentors, guiding students to interpret and internalize the Christian faith in practical life. In this regard, differentiated instruction became a means of deepening students' spirituality through personalized and holistic methods.

Differentiated Learning as an Expression of Pedagogical Competence

The study findings also indicate that differentiated learning implementation constitutes a concrete manifestation of teachers' mastery and application of pedagogical competence. As stated in the Indonesian Ministry of National Education Regulation No. 16 of 2007 on Academic Qualification Standards and Teacher Competencies, one indicator of pedagogical competence is the ability to recognize student characteristics and design instruction accordingly. In this context, CRE teachers at SD S 101940 Bina Artha applied a learner-centered approach, considering the potential, learning styles, and backgrounds of each student. This practice also reflects a shift from traditional teacher-centered instruction to student-centered learning. In conventional teaching, teachers tend to deliver uniform content without considering individual differences among students. Through differentiation, however, teachers assumed the role of designers of learning experiences, tailoring instructional strategies to specific student needs (Barasa, 2022). This shift represents progress toward a more inclusive and humanistic educational paradigm. Furthermore, teachers demonstrated the ability to conduct adaptive formative and summative assessments. In differentiated learning, assessment focuses not only on the final product but also on the learning process. Teachers at this school provided continuous feedback, reflected on learning outcomes, and used assessment results to design subsequent instruction. This strategy aligns with the principle of "assessment for learning," which positions assessment as an integral part of the instructional process rather than merely a tool for measuring achievement.

Differentiated learning is not merely a technical strategy but part of a pedagogical praxis that reflects professional teaching quality. Its implementation demonstrates that teachers understand the importance of tailoring instruction to students' characteristics and are capable of integrating Christian faith values into teaching and learning in relevant and holistic ways.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study on the implementation of a differentiated Christian Religious Education (PAK) learning model tailored to student characteristics at SD S 101940 Bina Artha, it can be concluded that this strategy has a significant impact on both the effectiveness of the learning process and its outcomes. Differentiated instruction has proven effective in addressing the diverse learning needs of students in terms of academic readiness, personal interests, and learning styles. PAK teachers at the school successfully applied the principles of differentiation in three key areas: content, process, and product. Through this approach, teachers were able to deliver PAK material in a more inclusive and relevant manner, while simultaneously fostering active participation and deepening students' engagement with Christian values. Content differentiation was realized through the presentation of material using a variety of media adapted to students' comprehension levels. Process differentiation was implemented by grouping students according to their learning styles and providing varied learning activities. In terms of product differentiation, students were given the freedom to express their understanding through assignments that suited their individual strengths and preferences. This approach not only stimulated cognitive engagement but also strengthened students' affective and spiritual dimensions in understanding and living out Christian teachings.

In addition to effective implementation strategies, the study revealed that differentiated learning had a positive impact on student motivation. Students felt valued as unique individuals, which in turn increased their enthusiasm for learning and improved the quality of their understanding of the material. Another notable implication was the improvement of teachers' skills in designing adaptive and reflective instruction. Teachers demonstrated high professionalism through regular self-reflection, inter-teacher collaboration, and innovation in developing differentiation-based lesson plans (RPP). Nonetheless, the implementation of differentiated instruction also faced challenges. Time constraints, the need for further training, and the complexity of classroom management were identified as key obstacles. These challenges were addressed through various solutions, such as internal training programs, the provision of digital learning resources, and policy support from the school principal. This underscores the importance of collaboration among stakeholders in creating a learning environment that supports differentiated instruction. Differentiated PAK instruction represents a relevant and effective model for enhancing the quality of student-centered learning. This model not only accommodates the diversity of student characteristics but also reinforces Christian educational values that emphasize love, respect for differences, and personal spiritual growth. Therefore, this approach is highly recommended for continued development and integration into PAK teaching practices in other Indonesian elementary schools.

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