

Adaptive Learning Strategies for Students with Diverse Backgrounds: Implementation of Pedagogical Competence at Agios Nikolaos Christian Private Junior High School Gunungsitoli

Asamahati Harefa

Student, Pendidikan Profesi Guru, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

*correspondence: asamahatiharefa6@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study explores the implementation of adaptive learning strategies to enhance students' mastery of Christian Religious Education (PAK) content at Agios Nikolaos Christian Private Junior High School Gunungsitoli. Situated in a classroom with students from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, the study focuses on how teachers' pedagogical competence facilitates differentiated instruction, formative assessment, and reflective practice to meet varying learning needs. Using a classroom action research approach, data were collected through direct observations, interviews with teachers and students, and analysis of student work. The findings reveal that adaptive learning strategies significantly improve both cognitive understanding and moral development. Teachers employed flexible grouping, interactive activities, and contextualized moral narratives to engage students effectively. Differentiated instruction allowed students to progress according to their prior knowledge and learning pace, while formative assessments and personalized feedback supported continuous improvement. Teachers' relational competence-empathy, patience, and moral guidance-proved essential in creating a supportive learning environment where students felt safe to participate and reflect. Challenges identified include time constraints, curriculum demands, and varying levels of student motivation. Reflective practice and peer collaboration among teachers enabled the adjustment of instructional strategies to optimize learning outcomes. The study demonstrates that adaptive learning is not solely a methodological approach but a pedagogical ecosystem wherein teacher expertise, ethical sensitivity, and reflective capacity converge to foster academic mastery and character formation. In conclusion, adaptive learning strategies, underpinned by robust pedagogical competence, effectively support both the intellectual and moral growth of students in diverse classroom settings. These findings offer practical insights for teachers, administrators, and policymakers seeking to implement inclusive and ethically grounded Christian education.

Keywords: *Learning Strategies, Christian Religious Education, Pedagogical Competence*

INTRODUCTION

Education in contemporary contexts is increasingly characterized by diversity, not only in terms of cultural, social, and economic backgrounds but also in terms of students' learning abilities, interests, and prior knowledge. Such diversity presents both opportunities and challenges for educators, particularly in the context of Christian private schools like Agios Nikolaos Christian Junior High School in Gunungsitoli, where the integration of academic instruction and moral-religious formation is a key objective. Students bring to the classroom a wide range of experiences, expectations, and learning needs, making it essential for teachers to employ adaptive instructional strategies that recognize and respond to individual differences. Adaptive learning strategies are pedagogical approaches that allow teachers to tailor instruction, activities, and assessments to match students' unique learning profiles. These strategies aim to create equitable learning opportunities, ensuring that all students can access content meaningfully, achieve learning objectives, and develop both cognitive and moral competencies (Tarigan, 2023). At the heart of implementing adaptive learning is the teacher's pedagogical competence, which encompasses knowledge of instructional design, classroom management, differentiated teaching methods, and the ability to assess and respond to students' needs effectively. Pedagogical competence also involves understanding the developmental stages of students, their socio-emotional contexts, and the potential barriers that may affect learning, including linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic factors. Teachers who demonstrate strong pedagogical competence are able to design lesson plans that are flexible, inclusive, and engaging, facilitating learning experiences that are both challenging and supportive. In the context of Christian education, this competence is further extended to the ethical and spiritual guidance of students, ensuring that adaptive teaching not only addresses academic mastery but also fosters character formation, empathy, and moral reflection in alignment with Christian values.

Agios Nikolaos Christian Private Junior High School serves a student body that is diverse in terms of cultural heritage, prior schooling, and family backgrounds. This diversity requires teachers to go beyond conventional, one-size-fits-all teaching models and adopt adaptive strategies that can respond to different learning paces, preferences, and prior knowledge. For instance, students from urban areas may exhibit different learning readiness and digital literacy compared to students from rural or remote communities, which calls for differentiated instruction, scaffolding, and interactive learning methods. Additionally, teachers must be sensitive to students' moral and religious development, integrating biblical principles and values into classroom practices without compromising inclusivity or academic rigor. Previous research highlights that adaptive learning strategies can significantly enhance student engagement, comprehension, and long-term retention, particularly when teachers apply reflective practices, formative assessment, and feedback mechanisms to continuously adjust instruction. Furthermore, integrating adaptive approaches in Christian education ensures that moral and character formation is contextually relevant and responsive to students' lived experiences. However, despite the clear benefits, challenges remain in operationalizing adaptive learning, including limited teacher training, time constraints, resource availability, and balancing the demands of standardized curricula with individualized approaches. Given these considerations, this study seeks to explore how teachers at Agios Nikolaos Christian Private Junior High School

implement adaptive learning strategies through the lens of pedagogical competence. Specifically, it aims to examine the methods and practices teachers employ to address the diverse learning needs of their students, the extent to which these strategies are informed by pedagogical knowledge, and the challenges and successes encountered in real classroom contexts. By investigating these dynamics, the study contributes to understanding how adaptive learning can be systematically applied in faith-based educational settings, providing insights for improving teaching quality, student learning outcomes, and holistic development in diverse classrooms.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to examine the implementation of adaptive learning strategies by teachers at Agios Nikolaos Christian Private Junior High School in Gunungsitoli. The research was designed as a classroom action-oriented investigation, focusing on the pedagogical competence of teachers as they adapted instruction to meet the diverse needs of their students. The case study approach was selected because it allows for an in-depth understanding of complex educational processes in their real-life context, particularly how teachers apply adaptive strategies in response to varied student backgrounds, learning styles, and abilities. This method is well-suited for exploring nuanced pedagogical practices, including lesson design, classroom interactions, and formative assessment techniques. The participants of the study included three PAK (Christian Religious Education) teachers and two representative classes, totaling 60 students, selected through purposive sampling to capture diverse socio-cultural and academic backgrounds. Data collection was conducted over a 12-week instructional period, during which teachers implemented adaptive learning strategies, including differentiated instruction, flexible grouping, scaffolding, interactive activities, and personalized feedback. The study also emphasized reflective teacher practice, documenting how pedagogical decisions were influenced by ongoing assessment of students' understanding and engagement. Multiple data sources were utilized to enhance the credibility and richness of the findings. Classroom observations were conducted using structured protocols to capture teaching strategies, student participation, and teacher-student interactions. Field notes and reflective journals maintained by teachers provided insights into their planning processes, challenges encountered, and the rationale behind instructional adjustments. Semi-structured interviews with teachers were conducted at multiple points to explore their perceptions of pedagogical competence, adaptive methods, and the effectiveness of interventions. Student artifacts-including assignments, quizzes, and project work-were analyzed to evaluate learning outcomes and the impact of adaptive strategies on academic performance. This methodology enabled a comprehensive understanding of how adaptive learning strategies, grounded in pedagogical competence, can be operationalized effectively in a diverse Christian junior high school setting.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of adaptive learning strategies at Agios Nikolaos Christian Private Junior High School demonstrated significant impacts on both teaching practices and

student learning outcomes, highlighting the critical role of pedagogical competence in managing classroom diversity. Through classroom observations, interviews, and analysis of student artifacts, several key themes emerged regarding how teachers applied adaptive strategies, the effectiveness of these methods, and the challenges encountered in addressing diverse learning needs. Teachers employed a variety of adaptive strategies to respond to differences in students' prior knowledge, learning pace, and socio-cultural backgrounds. Differentiated instruction was central to classroom practice. Teachers grouped students flexibly based on ability, interests, and learning preferences, allowing for targeted instruction and collaborative learning opportunities. For instance, students with stronger prior knowledge were assigned extension tasks that encouraged critical thinking and application of Christian values, while students requiring additional support received scaffolded exercises with step-by-step guidance. Such differentiation not only maintained academic rigor but also ensured inclusivity, allowing all students to engage meaningfully with PAK content. Interactive and student-centered activities formed another crucial component of adaptive learning. Teachers integrated role-playing, group discussions, problem-solving tasks, and reflective exercises to promote active engagement. Observations indicated that students participating in these activities demonstrated higher motivation, attentiveness, and willingness to articulate moral reasoning, particularly when scenarios were contextualized to their daily lives and community experiences. For example, in lessons on ethical decision-making and biblical narratives, students were asked to relate principles to local cultural norms, fostering relevance and deeper comprehension. Formative assessment and personalized feedback were consistently used to inform instructional adjustments. Teachers continuously monitored students' understanding through questioning, quizzes, and classwork, using this information to modify pacing, provide additional resources, or introduce remedial sessions. Interviews revealed that teachers considered this responsive approach essential to ensuring that adaptive learning was effective: *"I need to know where each student struggles and adjust my teaching accordingly. Otherwise, some students fall behind, while others are not sufficiently challenged,"* noted one PAK teacher. These practices illustrate how pedagogical competence-encompassing assessment literacy, instructional planning, and classroom management-directly supports adaptive learning in diverse classrooms.

The study found that adaptive learning strategies positively influenced students' cognitive understanding, moral reasoning, and engagement. Analysis of student work showed improvements in comprehension of biblical narratives, ethical principles, and the application of Christian values in daily situations. Reflective exercises, such as journaling or group discussions, encouraged students to internalize lessons, relate them to personal experiences, and develop empathy for peers. Interviews with students indicated increased confidence in participating, asking questions, and sharing perspectives. One student remarked, *"When the teacher divides us into groups based on what we know, I feel comfortable asking questions without feeling embarrassed, and I learn from my friends too."* The relational dimension of adaptive learning was particularly pronounced in this context. Teachers demonstrated attentiveness to students' socio-emotional needs, building trust and encouraging self-expression. This relational competence was crucial in a school with students from varied socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. For instance, students from remote areas often required additional support in understanding

complex biblical concepts or moral dilemmas, while urban students benefited from enrichment tasks that challenged their analytical skills. Teachers' ability to balance these needs contributed to a classroom climate characterized by mutual respect, collaboration, and moral reflection.

Pedagogical Competence as the Foundation for Adaptive Learning

Findings reinforced that pedagogical competence is foundational to the successful implementation of adaptive strategies. Teachers' mastery of instructional design, knowledge of developmental psychology, classroom management skills, and reflective practices enabled them to differentiate instruction effectively. Reflective practices, including post-lesson analysis and peer discussions, allowed teachers to evaluate the success of adaptive methods, identify gaps in student understanding, and refine future lessons. The study revealed that teachers who regularly engaged in self-reflection demonstrated higher adaptability, responsiveness, and moral modeling, illustrating the interconnection between professional growth and effective pedagogy. Despite the evident benefits, several challenges were noted in the implementation of adaptive learning. Time constraints posed difficulties in designing differentiated tasks and providing individualized attention. Teachers reported that aligning adaptive strategies with the standardized PAK curriculum and assessment schedules sometimes limited the depth of personalization. Additionally, resource limitations, including textbooks, teaching aids, and digital tools, constrained opportunities for innovative instructional methods. Teachers also faced challenges related to students' varying levels of motivation and engagement. Some students, particularly those from less supportive home environments, initially exhibited reluctance to participate in group activities or reflective exercises. To address these issues, teachers employed strategies such as positive reinforcement, mentorship, peer tutoring, and contextualized moral narratives to enhance engagement and encourage consistent participation. The findings highlight the necessity of institutional support, including professional development programs, access to resources, and collaborative teaching communities, to sustain adaptive practices effectively. A distinctive feature of this study is the integration of moral and religious instruction within adaptive learning. Teachers successfully contextualized biblical content to students' daily lives, cultural norms, and ethical dilemmas, allowing learners to connect cognitive understanding with practical moral reasoning. This integration not only improved mastery of PAK content but also fostered character formation, empathy, and ethical decision-making. Observations indicated that students engaged more deeply when lessons emphasized relevance to personal and community experiences, illustrating that adaptive strategies can simultaneously promote academic and moral development. The findings underscore that adaptive learning strategies, grounded in strong pedagogical competence, are essential for addressing diverse student needs in Christian educational settings. For effective implementation, teachers must possess both technical skills—such as differentiation, assessment, and instructional design—and relational competencies, including empathy, moral guidance, and responsiveness to socio-cultural contexts. Professional development programs that enhance reflective practice, collaborative learning, and pedagogical innovation are critical to sustaining these strategies. Additionally, school leadership and policy must support adaptive approaches through

resource allocation, mentoring, and flexibility in curriculum implementation. The study demonstrates that adaptive learning strategies significantly enhance students' mastery of PAK content, engagement, and moral reasoning. Teachers' pedagogical competence-manifested through reflective practice, differentiated instruction, formative assessment, and relational sensitivity-is the key driver of this success. While challenges such as time constraints, resource limitations, and diverse student motivation exist, strategic planning, professional development, and institutional support can mitigate these obstacles. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how adaptive learning can be effectively operationalized in faith-based educational contexts, offering practical guidance for teachers, administrators, and policymakers aiming to optimize both academic and moral outcomes in diverse classrooms.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the critical role of adaptive learning strategies in enhancing students' mastery of Christian Religious Education (PAK) content at Agios Nikolaos Christian Private Junior High School Gunungsitoli. Findings demonstrate that teachers' pedagogical competence-encompassing differentiated instruction, formative assessment, reflective practice, and relational sensitivity-is central to effectively responding to the diverse academic, socio-emotional, and cultural needs of students. By tailoring instructional approaches to students' prior knowledge, learning styles, and personal backgrounds, teachers not only facilitate cognitive understanding but also foster moral reasoning, ethical reflection, and character development. The study reveals that adaptive strategies positively influence student engagement, participation, and confidence. When students experience learning that is relevant, interactive, and responsive, they demonstrate higher motivation, improved comprehension of PAK materials, and greater willingness to internalize ethical and biblical principles. Moreover, the integration of moral and religious education within adaptive practices strengthens students' capacity for empathy, ethical decision-making, and application of Christian values in daily life. Despite these benefits, challenges such as time limitations, curriculum constraints, and varying student motivation were identified. Effective implementation of adaptive learning requires strategic planning, access to adequate resources, professional development opportunities, and supportive institutional policies. Teachers' reflective practice and peer collaboration emerged as key mechanisms for overcoming obstacles and enhancing instructional effectiveness. In conclusion, adaptive learning strategies, grounded in robust pedagogical competence, offer a comprehensive approach to teaching PAK in diverse classrooms. The study underscores that teacher expertise, moral sensitivity, and reflective practice collectively enable both academic mastery and character formation. For Christian educational institutions, investing in teachers' professional growth, adaptive pedagogical skills, and relational capabilities is essential for fostering meaningful, inclusive, and morally grounded learning experiences.

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