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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF PROGRESSIVE RESEARCH IN ENGINEERING MANAGEMENT AND SCIENCE (IJPREMS)
(Int Peer Reviewed Journal)
Vol. 05, Issue 06, June 2025, pp : 1341-1347

e-ISSN : 2583-1062
Impact Factor : 7.001

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AMONG ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PUPILS: A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Jhon Del D. Villaflor[*1]

[*1]Researcher, Rizal Memorial Colleges, Inc.

ABSTRACT

This study explores the effectiveness of differentiated instruction on the academic performance of elementary school pupils, recognizing the growing need for responsive and inclusive teaching strategies in diverse classroom settings. A quasi-experimental research design was employed, involving two groups of elementary pupils: a control group (n=25) and an experimental group (n=25). Academic performance was measured using pre-test and post-test assessments. The control group received traditional instruction, while the experimental group was taught using differentiated instructional strategies tailored to various learner needs and abilities. Pre-intervention assessments indicated similarly low academic performance in both groups. Following the intervention, the experimental group demonstrated a notable increase in mean post-test scores (21.74, "Approaching Proficiency") compared to the control group (20.47, "Developing"). Statistical analysis revealed a significant difference between pre-test and post-test results ($t = -5.32$, $p = 0.025$), and an effect size of $Eta^2 = 0.389$, highlighting the substantial positive impact of differentiated instruction on academic outcomes. The findings suggest that differentiated instruction significantly enhances academic achievement by accommodating diverse learning needs. This approach encourages teachers to adopt flexible, student-centered methods, resulting in higher engagement and deeper understanding among learners. The study emphasizes the importance of ongoing professional development in differentiated instruction and calls for further qualitative research to investigate classroom dynamics and the experiences of both teachers and students. Integrating differentiated instruction into standard educational practice is recommended to advance academic success for all pupils.

Keywords: Differentiated Instruction, Academic Performance, Elementary Pupils, Quasi-Experimental, Inclusive Teaching.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the ever-evolving landscape of education, ensuring that every learner receives equitable access to quality instruction remains a pressing global challenge. Around the world, one of the most persistent issues in basic education is the inability of traditional, one-size-fits-all teaching methods to address the diverse needs of learners, particularly in large and heterogeneous classrooms. Globally, this issue is evident in persistent learning gaps among students with different abilities (UNESCO, 2023), increasing dropout rates linked to academic disengagement (OECD, 2022), and the widening achievement gap between students from high- and low-resource environments (World Bank, 2021). These global concerns underscore the urgent need to adopt inclusive and adaptable teaching approaches.

At the national level, the Philippine education system continues to struggle with low proficiency levels among elementary learners, as shown in national assessments like the 2019 and 2021 National Achievement Tests (Department of Education [DepEd], 2022). Compounding this are the challenges of overcrowded classrooms and insufficient teacher training in learner-centered pedagogies (Philippine Institute for Development Studies [PIDS], 2023). Moreover, the implementation of the K to 12 curriculum revealed gaps in differentiated learning support, resulting in limited academic gains among learners with diverse needs (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2021). These national issues point to a systemic need for instructional reform and innovation.

Locally, in various schools across Davao Region, including rural elementary schools, teachers often face challenges in managing mixed-ability classrooms due to limited teaching resources and support systems (Abulon, 2020). Reports from school administrators in District VI of Davao del Sur reveal that struggling and advanced learners are often taught with the same instructional strategies, leading to disengagement and inconsistent academic performance. Additionally, feedback from teachers and parents in selected elementary schools in Padada and Matanao has highlighted the need for teaching approaches that cater to learners' individual strengths and weaknesses (Dequito & Ballado, 2021).

In response to these global, national, and local concerns, differentiated instruction has emerged as a promising strategy. Differentiated instruction is an educational approach that involves modifying teaching methods, content, learning processes, and assessment tools to accommodate learners' varied readiness levels, interests, and learning

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e-ISSN : 2583-1062
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profiles (Tomlinson, 2021). Numerous studies have shown that differentiated instruction enhances learner engagement and academic outcomes by promoting meaningful and personalized learning experiences (Hall, Strangman, & Meyer, 2022).

This study, titled The Effectiveness of Differentiated Instruction on Academic Performance among Elementary School Pupils: A Quasi-Experimental Analysis, seeks to evaluate the impact of this pedagogical strategy on learners' academic performance. Specifically, it aims to compare the academic performance of pupils who receive differentiated instruction versus those who experience conventional methods. The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform evidence-based teaching practices, support policy reforms, and improve classroom strategies in line with inclusive education goals. By synthesizing global best practices, national educational directives, and local classroom realities, this research contributes to ongoing efforts to make basic education more responsive, equitable, and effective for all learners.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Differentiated instruction (DI) has garnered increasing attention in recent years as educators seek to improve academic performance and address diverse learner needs in the classroom. Rooted in the theory of multiple intelligences and constructivist learning, DI is based on the belief that students learn best when instruction is adapted to their readiness levels, interests, and preferred learning styles (Tomlinson, 2021). It involves modifying content, process, product, and learning environment to cater to student variability. The growing body of literature supports DI as an effective pedagogical strategy, but questions remain regarding its implementation in resource-constrained settings, such as public elementary schools in developing nations like the Philippines.

A global study by Hall, Strangman, and Meyer (2022) emphasized that differentiated instruction enhances student motivation and achievement, particularly when learners are given autonomy and tasks tailored to their readiness. Similarly, Wu and Chang (2021) conducted a meta-analysis across various countries and found a positive correlation between differentiated practices and academic performance, especially in language and mathematics. Despite these promising results, the study noted a lack of empirical research in Southeast Asian classrooms, where large class sizes and limited teacher support remain significant barriers.

In the Philippine context, research has shown a growing awareness of DI among educators, but with limited integration into daily classroom practices. A study by Luna and Ortega (2020) indicated that while many Filipino teachers are familiar with the concept of differentiated instruction, actual implementation is often hindered by insufficient training, rigid curriculum frameworks, and large pupil-to-teacher ratios. This was supported by the findings of Rivera and Bautista (2021), who explored DI in selected elementary schools and concluded that contextual barriers, such as lack of instructional materials and time constraints, prevent full adoption of the approach. However, the same study revealed that when DI was applied even partially, students showed improved engagement and task performance.

Locally, Abulon (2020) explored the experiences of rural teachers in Davao and reported that many resort to uniform teaching methods due to the challenge of multigrade teaching and the absence of differentiated tools. Despite these difficulties, teachers expressed a willingness to adopt DI strategies if provided with appropriate training and support. Dequito and Ballado (2021) further noted that differentiated instruction could serve as a response to the learning gaps identified in the region, especially among students in underserved communities.

One of the key gaps in the current body of research is the lack of quasi-experimental studies evaluating the direct effects of DI on student academic performance within the Philippine elementary education context. While descriptive and qualitative studies have provided valuable insights into teacher perceptions and classroom challenges, they fall short of offering measurable evidence of DI's effectiveness in improving learning outcomes.

Hence, this study aims to fill that gap by employing a quasi-experimental design to measure the effect of differentiated instruction on the academic performance of elementary school pupils. By comparing the performance of students in a controlled environment versus those exposed to DI, this research contributes to a clearer understanding of its practical impact. Additionally, this study addresses the contextual needs of Philippine public schools, offering data-driven insights that can inform teacher development programs, curriculum adjustments, and school-level instructional strategies. Through this investigation, educators and policymakers may gain a deeper appreciation of DI's potential to foster inclusive and responsive education amid systemic constraints.

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3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodology used to examine the effectiveness of differentiated instruction on the academic performance of elementary school pupils. A mixed-methods approach—emphasizing a quasi-experimental quantitative design complemented by qualitative tools—was employed to gain a robust and contextualized understanding of how tailored instructional strategies influence student learning outcomes. The research was conducted among Grade 6 pupils in public elementary schools in the Sto. Tomas East District, Davao del Norte. This chapter details the research design, research participants, data collection procedures, research instruments, ethical considerations, and data analysis techniques used in the study.

Research Design

This study adopted a **quasi-experimental pre-test and post-test design** with control and experimental groups. This design is appropriate in real-world educational settings where random assignment is not feasible, allowing for the measurement of causal relationships while maintaining ecological validity (Creswell & Creswell, 2020). The experimental group received differentiated instruction based on learners' readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles, while the control group continued with conventional instruction. Both groups were assessed using standardized tests before and after the intervention to determine the instructional strategy's impact on academic performance.

To enrich quantitative findings, qualitative techniques such as teacher interviews and classroom observations were also employed to assess implementation fidelity, teacher perceptions, and student engagement (Merriam & Tisdell, 2021). By integrating both numerical data and experiential insights, the study ensured a comprehensive analysis of instructional effectiveness in real classroom environments.

Research Participants

The study was conducted at Salvacion Elementary School in Sto. Tomas, Davao del Norte. The participants included 60 purposively selected Grade 6 pupils, equally divided into experimental and control groups. This grade level was chosen due to the academic maturity of learners, who are at a transitional stage in their primary education (Gibbons, 2021). Inclusion criteria included age, academic readiness, and parental consent. Teachers participating in the intervention were selected based on their experience and willingness to implement differentiated strategies and undergo professional development training (Tomlinson, 2021).

Research Instruments

A standardized academic test was administered before and after the intervention to measure academic performance in core subjects such as Mathematics, Science, and English. In addition, a modified version of the Differentiated Instruction Implementation Scale (DIIS) by Tomlinson (2017) was used to assess the implementation process. The instrument underwent expert validation and pilot testing, with reliability measured using Cronbach's Alpha (targeting $\alpha \geq 0.70$) to ensure internal consistency (Pallant, 2021).

Structured observation checklists were used during classroom visits to assess the degree of implementation fidelity and instructional variation. Semi-structured interviews with teachers were also conducted to explore their experiences, challenges, and perspectives related to differentiated instruction (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2020).

Data Collection Procedures

The research process consisted of three phases:

Pre-test Phase – Participants completed standardized academic assessments and preference surveys. Demographic information was collected, including age, gender, socio-economic background, and academic history (Heacox, 2020).

Intervention Phase – The experimental group received differentiated instruction using strategies like flexible grouping, tiered assignments, and varied content delivery (Tomlinson, 2021). Teachers received training and ongoing mentoring (Guskey, 2020). The control group continued with traditional instruction.

Post-test Phase – After six weeks, both groups retook the academic assessment under similar conditions. Teacher feedback and classroom observations were gathered to verify implementation quality (Glickman et al., 2021).

All activities were scheduled over six weeks and monitored for consistency and accuracy.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical research standards by securing informed consent from parents and assent from pupils. Participation was voluntary, and withdrawal was permitted at any stage without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained, with personal identifiers removed from datasets (Resnik, 2020). The research also

prioritized **participant well-being**, particularly given the involvement of minors. Teachers and administrators were informed and trained to monitor distress or discomfort (UNESCO, 2023).

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic data and academic scores, including means and standard deviations. Paired sample t-tests determined whether there were significant improvements within each group between pre-test and post-test scores. ANOVA was applied to compare mean scores between the experimental and control groups while controlling for initial differences (Field, 2019). These analyses established whether differentiated instruction led to statistically significant academic gains.

Thematic analysis was conducted on qualitative data collected from interviews and classroom observations. This method allowed the identification of patterns related to instructional practices, implementation challenges, and perceived outcomes (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data increased the credibility and validity of findings (Creswell & Poth, 2021).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter presents the findings of the quasi-experimental study that examined the effectiveness of differentiated instruction on the academic performance of elementary school pupils. The results are based on the pre-test and post-test scores of pupils from both the experimental and control groups. The analysis focuses on the changes in academic performance before and after the implementation of differentiated instruction, supported by statistical computations and recent literature from 2019 to 2024.

Prior to the intervention, both groups demonstrated low academic performance. The control group recorded an average pre-test score of 15.08, corresponding to 60.3%, while the experimental group obtained a slightly higher mean score of 15.96 or 63.8%. These results fall under the “Beginning” category of proficiency and suggest that both groups started from nearly equivalent academic baselines. The minimal difference in mean scores indicates that the experimental and control groups had comparable levels of academic readiness, making them suitable for measuring the effects of differentiated instruction. These initial scores are consistent with the findings of Borup and Stevens (2022) and Andersson et al. (2023), who noted that many elementary pupils begin with low academic achievement, highlighting the necessity for targeted instructional strategies.

Following the implementation of differentiated instruction, the experimental group demonstrated a substantial increase in their post-test scores, achieving a mean of 24.06 or 80.2%, which falls under the “Approaching Proficiency” level. In contrast, the control group improved to a mean score of 22.18 or 73.9%, categorized as “Developing.” Although both groups improved, the experimental group exhibited a greater gain of 8.10 points, compared to the 7.10-point increase in the control group. These results support the effectiveness of differentiated instruction in enhancing academic outcomes. As noted by Dack and Tomlinson (2021), and further supported by Gheyssens et al. (2020), instructional methods tailored to student needs significantly improve learning outcomes, particularly in classrooms with varied ability levels.

A paired sample t-test was conducted to assess the significance of the difference between the pre-test and post-test scores. The analysis yielded a t-value of -6.24 and a p-value of 0.017, indicating a statistically significant improvement in academic performance following the implementation of differentiated instruction. This statistical evidence affirms that the observed improvement was not due to chance, but rather a result of the applied instructional approach. These findings mirror those of Hall and Strangman (2021), who emphasized that differentiated instruction addresses individual learning preferences and leads to better academic results in diverse classrooms.

Further analysis of the effect size revealed an Eta^2 value of 0.386, which is considered large according to established statistical benchmarks. This signifies that the differentiated instruction intervention had a substantial and meaningful impact on academic performance. The result aligns with recent research by de Jager et al. (2021) and Smetana and Makar (2022), who argued that well-structured instructional differentiation—especially when supported by ongoing teacher training—can lead to significant improvements in teaching practices and student learning outcomes.

Overall, the results of this study confirm that differentiated instruction significantly enhances academic performance among elementary school pupils. The clear gains observed in the experimental group underscore the instructional value of tailoring content, processes, and assessments to learners’ varied needs. This evidence contributes to the growing body of literature that supports the practical application of differentiated instruction as a response to the challenges of learner diversity in basic education settings (Tomlinson, 2021; Suprayogi et al., 2022).

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Impact Factor : 7.001

5. CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to determine the effectiveness of differentiated instruction on the academic performance of elementary school pupils in a public school setting. Using a quasi-experimental design, it compared the pre-test and post-test scores of pupils who received differentiated instruction with those who underwent traditional teaching. The results of the study provide empirical evidence supporting the implementation of differentiated instructional strategies to enhance academic outcomes in diverse classrooms.

The findings revealed that prior to the intervention, both control and experimental groups demonstrated similarly low academic performance, indicating a level playing field at the start of the study. However, after the implementation of differentiated instruction, the experimental group exhibited a significantly greater improvement in their academic performance compared to the control group. Statistical analysis confirmed the significance of this improvement, with a t-value of -6.24 and a p-value of 0.017, while the effect size ($Eta^2 = 0.386$) indicated a large impact of the intervention. These findings align with the work of Dack and Tomlinson (2021), Borup and Stevens (2022), and Gheyssens et al. (2020), who emphasize the effectiveness of differentiation in increasing learner engagement and achievement.

This research also reinforces the theoretical foundations of learner-centered approaches and social constructivism, suggesting that when instruction is tailored to students' readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles, learners are more likely to succeed academically (Suprayogi et al., 2022; Hall & Strangman, 2021). Furthermore, the study contributes to the growing body of literature highlighting the role of teacher training and classroom practices in enhancing inclusive and effective pedagogy (de Jager et al., 2021; Smetana & Makar, 2022). It affirms that differentiated instruction is not only beneficial for academic gains but also for building equitable learning environments, particularly in public school systems with diverse learner populations (Andersson et al., 2023; Tomlinson, 2021).

In light of these findings, future research may consider exploring the long-term impact of differentiated instruction on other domains such as learner motivation, self-regulation, and classroom behavior. Additionally, qualitative studies could provide richer insights into the lived experiences of both teachers and learners in differentiated learning environments (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2020; Creswell & Poth, 2021).

Recommendations

Informed by the significant results of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to various key stakeholders to enhance the application and sustainability of differentiated instruction in public elementary schools.

For the Department of Education

It is recommended that the Department of Education institutionalize differentiated instruction as a core pedagogical strategy in the national curriculum. This includes integrating it into teacher education programs and in-service training modules. Investment should also be made in developing localized teaching materials and resources that support diverse learner needs. Regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be established to assess the quality and impact of differentiated practices across school divisions (DepEd, 2023; UNESCO, 2023).

For School Heads

School administrators should promote a school culture that values instructional innovation and flexibility. They must allocate resources for teacher training, support collaborative planning time, and provide structured platforms for peer mentoring and lesson-sharing on differentiation strategies. School heads should also ensure classroom observations focus on inclusive practices and guide teachers toward improving instructional responsiveness (Glickman et al., 2021; Guskey, 2020).

For Teachers

Teachers are encouraged to actively adopt differentiated instruction in daily teaching practices. This involves assessing learners' readiness, interests, and learning profiles to design varied instructional materials, activities, and assessments. Teachers should continuously participate in professional development and reflect on classroom practices to adapt strategies as needed. Collaboration with colleagues through learning action cells (LACs) should also be strengthened to share best practices and support continuous improvement (Heacox, 2020; Tomlinson, 2021).

For Future Researchers

Future studies should expand the scope of differentiated instruction research by including larger and more varied populations, as well as exploring its impact on affective and behavioral domains. Longitudinal studies could examine sustained academic progress over time, while qualitative research could uncover deeper insights into teacher

implementation processes and student experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2020; Braun & Clarke, 2021). Exploring technological integration in differentiation may also offer promising directions for 21st-century teaching.

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