



The Impact of Differentiated Instruction on Learners' Social Interaction in Primary Schools

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of differentiated instruction on learners' social interaction in primary schools. This research applied the literature review method and analysed the data with a simplified approach to simplify the problem-solving process. The results show that the implementation of the differentiated instruction approach has a positive impact on learners' social interaction. This approach fosters cooperation in groups, through discussion, learners also develop their communication skills. Differentiated instruction not only plays a role in improving academic achievement, but also in shaping learners' character in socialising and empathising. The implementation of differentiated instruction shows effectiveness in increasing learning participation, so teachers should consider this approach in planning and implementing teaching. The results also support the view that flexible, learner-centred learning can create a learning environment that is inclusive, adaptive and supports the development of social and cognitive skills. This research can also serve as a reference to encourage teacher training to effectively implement the differentiated instruction approach.

Abstrak: Tujuan penelitian ini untuk mengkaji dampak penerapan pendekatan differentiated instruction terhadap interaksi sosial peserta didik di sekolah dasar. Penelitian ini menerapkan metode literatur review dan menganalisis data dengan pendekatan simplified approach untuk menyederhanakan proses pemecahan masalah. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penerapan pendekatan differentiated instruction memberikan dampak positif terhadap interaksi sosial peserta didik. Pendekatan ini menumbuhkan kerja sama dalam kelompok, melalui diskusi peserta didik juga mengembangkan keterampilan komunikasinya. Differentiated instruction tidak hanya berperan dalam meningkatkan pencapaian akademik, tetapi juga membentuk karakter peserta didik dalam bersosialisasi, dan berempati. Penerapan differentiated instruction menunjukkan efektivitas dalam meningkatkan partisipasi belajar, sehingga guru harus mempertimbangkan pendekatan ini dalam merencanakan dan melaksanakan pengajaran. Hasil penelitian ini juga mendukung pandangan bahwa pembelajaran yang fleksibel dan berfokus pada peserta didik dapat menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang inklusif, adaptif, dan mendukung perkembangan keterampilan sosial serta kognitif. Penelitian ini juga bisa menjadi acuan untuk mendorong pelatihan guru dalam menerapkan pendekatan differentiated instruction secara efektif.

A. Introduction

Learning at school is an important forum for the formation of social interactions; learners can exchange knowledge, information, and experiences with other school members, which ultimately supports the academic development and social skills of learners. This is in line with the Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Number 20 Tahun 2003 concerning the National Education System, article 1 paragraph 20, which states that learning is a process of interaction between learners, educators, and learning resources in a learning environment. Social interaction is part of an important development for learners because it reflects the ability to adjust to norms, traditions, and moral values (Herawati, 2018). In reality, social interaction is a very complex process because it is influenced by various factors, including the presence of other people in the surrounding environment who have different behaviours (Yunita, 2019). This diversity of factors arises because everyone has different backgrounds, experiences, and mindsets, which have an impact on the way they interact with each other.

Teachers play an important role in facilitating the improvement of students' social interaction skills through the learning and guidance process carried out every day at school. Not a few teachers still pay less attention to the importance of learners' social interaction skills, as a result, learners feel less confident, reluctant to express opinions, and have difficulty in getting along in the school environment (Nuraida et al., 2017). This shows that the learning process should not only be oriented towards cognitive aspects, but also needs to emphasise the development of learners' social skills. If learners' social interaction is less than optimal, it can have an impact on their motivation, which has the potential to reduce their enthusiasm for learning and make them feel bored with participating in learning.

Based on the results of interviews with teachers on 5 February 2025, problems were found in the social interaction of students in primary schools. The teacher said, *"The children only hang out with the same friends; they don't want to hang out with other friends, so they don't want to interact with others"*. Observations show that learners prefer to hang out with friends they already know and tend to be reluctant to interact with others. This can be seen from their habits when resting, choosing to play and cooperate with friends who are already familiar, and more comfortable chatting with people they consider to be the same. The factor that influences this is the learning method, which is still dominated by teacher-centred learning. As a result, social interaction between learners is limited, which can hinder the development of learners' social skills, especially in communicating and working together in groups.

Thus, teachers need to design learning that can support learners' social interaction. An approach that can be used in this application is by implementing differentiated instruction. Tomlinson (2001), in his book *How to Differentiate Instruction in Mixed Ability Classroom*, explains that differentiated instruction is a strategy used by teachers to adjust the teaching-learning process in the classroom to accommodate the learning needs of individual learners. Differentiated instruction learning comes as an approach that aims to meet the learning needs of individual learners by adjusting the content, process, product, and learning environment (Pozas et al., 2021). A teacher must pay attention to learner readiness

as an important component in differentiated instruction, so that learners can actively interact socially with knowledgeable adults or peers who have more abilities (Ginja & Chen, 2020). Through learning by considering differences in abilities, interests and learning styles, learners can learn optimally according to their needs. Differentiated instruction is effective in supporting learners' social and emotional development through the implementation of learning activities that are tailored to their needs (Alfina et al., 2023). The differentiated instruction approach provides opportunities for learners to learn according to their abilities, so that learners feel valued, gain more confidence, help form a more inclusive classroom atmosphere, and support good social interactions between learners.

Differentiated instruction can help reduce the frustration and boredom that often arise when learning materials are too difficult or too easy (Jumrawarsi, 2024). The implementation of differentiated instruction in schools is very diverse, one of which is by dividing learners into groups based on their learning styles, interests and abilities. Classes that implement the differentiated instruction approach by grouping learners are done flexibly, so that learners who excel in a field can work together with other friends in diverse groups (Alhafiz, 2022). Learning with a differentiated instruction approach in groups aims to fulfil the learning needs of each learner, so that they can develop according to their individual potential. Through this grouping, learners can collaborate, which refers to aspects of communication, group formation, collaboration, problem solving, and managing diversity in teams (Tamama et al., 2023). Learning with this grouping can make more capable learners become peer tutors for friends who are having difficulty, thus strengthening communication skills and empathy.

Relevant research on the impact of learning with a differentiated instruction approach has been conducted. Research conducted by Fahrani & Karkono (2024) analysed the impact of differentiated instruction learning in improving letter writing skills at the junior high school level, while Sadriani & GH (2024) emphasised learner engagement in a multicultural classroom context at the high school level. However, the main concern of these studies is still focused on improving academic achievement or individual participation without delving deeper into how the implementation of this strategy affects social interaction among learners, especially at the primary school level. In the age range of 6 to 12 years or the primary school period, children experience typical social and emotional development through a continuous process of interaction with the environment and others, which plays a role in shaping communication skills, empathy, and understanding of differences (Chasanah et al., 2024). Therefore, further studies are needed that specifically evaluate the effect of differentiated learning on learners' social interaction in primary schools.

In response to these issues, this study aims to examine the impact of differentiated instruction on learners' social interaction in primary schools. Specifically, this research will analyse the extent to which differentiated instruction can influence learners' social skills. By using the literature review method, the researcher can examine various findings and theories that have been developed previously regarding differentiated instruction learning

and its effect on learners' social relationships, which can provide a comprehensive picture of how learning strategies tailored to individual needs can shape social dynamics in the classroom. Therefore, the results of this study are expected to provide understanding for educators in developing learning strategies that encourage positive social interactions in diverse classrooms.

B. Method

This research applies the *literature review* method. *Literature review* is a concise description of the literature relevant to a topic (Yusuf & Khasanah, 2019). The *simplified approach* was used as a method in analysing the data. The *simplified approach* is a method designed to simplify the process of problem solving or analysis (Syafawani & Prasetyo, 2024). The search process was conducted using the keywords “*Differentiated Instruction*” and “*Social Interaction of Learners in Elementary School*”. The results of the search for journal articles published in the last 10 years, namely the range of 2015-2025, related to the application of differentiated instruction in the context of social interaction of students at the elementary school level, found around 1,400 journal articles. All of the articles found were considered, and only six were considered in accordance with the relevance criteria set by the researcher.

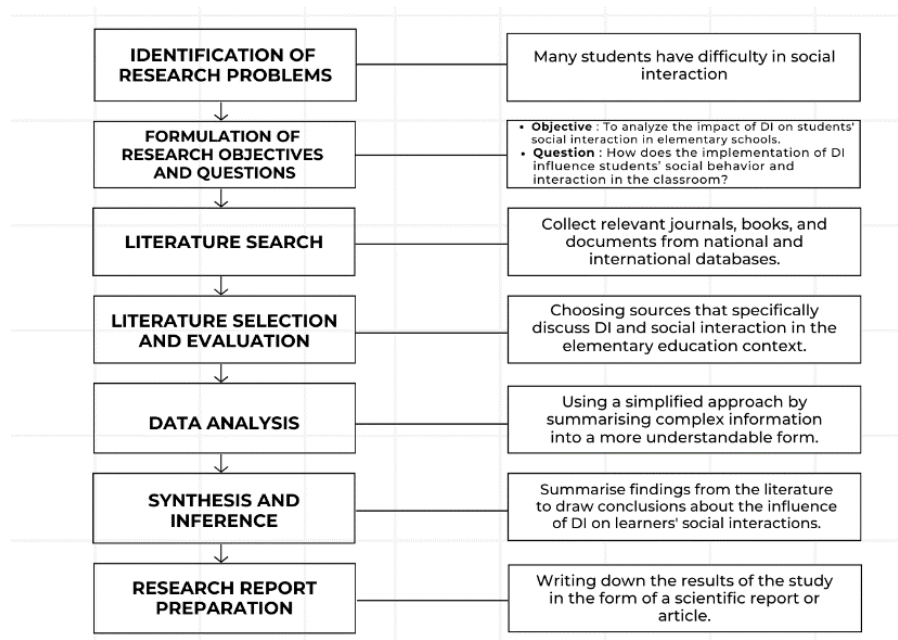


Figure 1. Research Flow

C. Result

1. Data Analysis

The simplified approach was used as the method in analysing the data. The results of the article search related to the application of differentiated instruction in the context of learners' social interaction at the primary school level found around 1,400 journal articles.

The search process was conducted using the keywords 'Differentiated Instruction' and 'Social Interaction of Learners in Elementary School', which were combined using the Boolean operator 'AND'. The use of this operator aims to combine two different concepts so that the search results become more specific and focused (Sumartiningsih & Prasetyo, 2019). Of all the articles found, only six were assessed according to the relevance criteria set by the researcher. Details of the discussion of each article are presented in *Table 1*.

2. Critical Appraisal

The researcher used the literature review method with a simplified approach, which aims to simplify the analysis process while remaining systematic. This article reviews six primary sources relevant to the theme of differentiated learning and learners' social interaction, especially at the elementary school level. Methodologically, this article has met the standard of literature review by screening articles based on keywords, publication year (2015-2025), and context of primary education. The strength of this article lies in the synthesis of the results of a well-structured study and the relevance of the elementary school context, which often escapes the research spotlight.

3. Matrix of Literature Data Analysis

After searching for scientific articles through the Google Scholar platform, articles relevant to the application of differentiated instruction to students' social interactions in primary schools published in the last 10 years, between 2015 and 2025, were obtained, as follows:

Table 1. Literature Review Analysis Matrix

No	Author, Year	Research Title	Research Results
1.	Siska Lestari, Yasir Arafat, Murjainah. 2023	Efektivitas Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi Dalam Meningkatkan Keterampilan Sosial Peserta Didik Kelas IV Pada Mata Pelajaran Ipas	Differentiated learning is effective in improving the social skills of grade IV students at SDN 19 Kelapa, with a hypothesis test value of Sig. (2-tailed) of 0.00 <0.05.
2.	Abdul Mukromin, Widya Kusumaningsih, Suherni. 2024	Analisis Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi Terhadap Kemampuan Kolaboratif Peserta Didik Sekolah Dasar	The implementation of differentiated learning contributes to the improvement of collaborative skills of grade 2 students at SDN Sendangmulyo 02, especially in the aspects of cooperation and communication.
3.	Danny Lutvi Hidayat, Khusnul Fajriyah, Bernadeta Warsiti, Agnita Siska P. 2024	Pengembangan Keterampilan Kolaboratif Peserta Didik Melalui Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi Di Kelas 6 SD Bukit Aksara	The implementation of differentiated learning significantly contributed to the improvement of collaborative skills and science literacy of grade 6 students at SD Bukit Aksara.

No	Author, Year	Research Title	Research Results
4.	Ratih Shintia Devi, Effy Mulyasari, Gunawan Anggia R. 2024	Peningkatan Keterampilan Kolaborasi Peserta Didik Melalui Penerapan Model Kooperatif Tipe Group Investigation Berbasis Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi Pada Mata Pelajaran Ipa Di Sekolah Dasar	The application of the Group Investigation type cooperative model in differentiated learning can improve learners' collaboration skills. The results of observation analysis showed this improvement, with learners' collaboration skills increasing by 80.6% in cycle one and increasing by 15% in cycle 2, reaching 95.6%.
5.	Maya Alfina, Sholeh Hidayat2, M. Taufik. 2023	Analisis Penerapan Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi Untuk Meningkatkan Kompetensi Sosial Dan Emosional	Learning by using the differentiation approach can improve the social and emotional development of learners.
6.	Sadiq Abdulwahed Ahmed Ismail, Khayal Al Allaq. (2019).	The Nature Of Cooperative Learning And Differentiated Instruction Practices In English Classes	The implementation of Cooperative Learning with a structured differentiated instruction approach can effectively play a role in increasing learning engagement, social awareness, cultural responsiveness, and meeting the overall learning needs of learners.

4. Literature Review Results

Based on Table 1, the results of several studies on learning using the differentiated instruction approach can be obtained. Research conducted by [Lestari & Arafat \(2023\)](#) shows that IPAS learning with a differentiated instruction approach is effective in improving the social skills of grade IV students. This study uses a pre-experimental design, where learners undergo a pretest on the first meeting to determine their initial abilities. In the second and third meetings, learners conducted learning with a differentiated instruction approach tailored to their needs. The research was conducted with rubric instruments, and the results of hypothesis testing showed that cooperation, tolerance, social sensitivity, self-control, and expression improved significantly.

Research conducted by [Mukromin et al \(2024\)](#) showed that the application of differentiated instruction learning contributed to the improvement of collaborative abilities of grade II students, especially in the aspects of cooperation and communication. This research was collected through interviews with grade II teachers based on their experience in implementing differentiated instruction learning. Based on the results of her research, differentiated instruction affects learners' collaborative skills because this approach encourages learners to work in groups and solve problems together. Her research also mentioned that this approach helps learners in practising the skills of respecting friends' opinions and expressing their views to classmates.

Based on research conducted by [Hidayat et al](#) (2024), the application of differentiated instruction has a positive impact on improving the collaborative skills of grade VI students in IPAS subjects. This research uses a qualitative approach with direct observation and focuses on the interaction between learners, learners' reactions to the subject matter, and the learning approach used by the teacher. Questionnaires were used in this study, which included five components of communication skills, ability to cooperate, respect for others' opinions, task sharing, and conflict resolution. The questionnaire results showed that the implementation of differentiated instruction in the IPAS subject in grade VI successfully improved learners' collaborative skills compared to before the implementation, where the majority of learners tended to be passive in working together.

Research related to differentiated instruction has also been conducted by [Devi et al](#) (2023), which shows that this approach can improve the collaboration skills of students in science subjects in grade V through the application of cooperative learning models of Group Investigation type conducted by the PTK method and implemented in two cycles. Before the research was conducted, researchers assessed the learners and then grouped them based on their interests. Learners' collaboration skills in the first cycle were not optimal because they were still adapting to new group members. However, in the second cycle, there was an increase in collaboration skills from 80.6% to 95.6%. This increase shows that using a group-type cooperative investigation model in the application of differentiated instruction is effective in improving learners' collaborative skills in working together effectively, respecting friends' opinions, sharing ideas, and being responsible for their group tasks.

Research conducted by [Alfina et al](#) (2023) revealed that the differentiated instruction learning approach can improve the social and emotional competence of fourth-grade students. Qualitative descriptive methods were used in this study and relied on documentation in activities and lesson planning. The research was conducted with an initial diagnostic assessment to understand learners' learning needs before dividing them into four groups according to their diverse learning styles. The results show that the implementation of differentiated instruction contributes to the improvement of learners' social interaction, caring, sense of responsibility, ability to respect others, and management of emotions.

Finally, research related to differentiated instruction was also conducted by [Ismail & Al Allaq](#) (2019), who examined teachers' views on cooperative learning with a differentiated instruction approach in teaching English classes. According to the research, this approach is effective in improving social interaction because it creates a learning environment that supports differentiation while building collaboration, confidence, and a sense of community. The study used a mixed method with quantitative and qualitative approaches involving 200 English teachers from various private schools in one of the major cities in the UAE, reflecting a multicultural and multilingual context. The research findings revealed that teachers perceived cooperative learning as a valuable instructional strategy in enhancing learner engagement, social interaction in the classroom, cultural appreciation, as well as differentiated teaching effectiveness.

Referring to the various studies discussed earlier, it can be concluded that learning using a differentiated instruction approach has a positive impact on learners' social interaction. This approach fosters cooperation in groups, which results in increased tolerance, responsibility and caring. Differentiated instruction ensures that every learner gets equal opportunities to be actively involved because learners are encouraged to collaborate with each other. In line with research conducted by [Ismail & Al Allaq \(2019\)](#), a collaborative learning environment creates easier interactions for learners in a pleasant and supportive atmosphere, so as to increase their sense of comfort and build a learning environment that is safe and free from anxiety. Through discussion, learners also develop their communication skills, such as respecting their friends' opinions, sharing ideas, and joint problem solving, which ultimately strengthens social relationships. This active engagement builds closer social relationships between learners, which will be beneficial in future social and professional life [Sadriani & GH \(2024\)](#).

According to Cooper and Tomlinson (in [Wan, 2016](#)), an effective classroom for academically diverse learners views 'equity' as an attempt to give each individual what they need to succeed, rather than simply treating everyone the same. In the differentiated instruction approach, learners are grouped flexibly based on their needs, interests or readiness levels, so that each individual gets the appropriate support to achieve learning success and can encourage more active interaction and strengthen cooperation between them. Grouping in learning allows learners to collaborate more easily because each member in the group has a similar way of understanding information. This is in accordance with the natural tendency of humans to feel more comfortable and happy when in an environment with individuals who have something in common with them [Fauzi et al \(2023\)](#). Teachers need to pay attention to this grouping, because this approach is not just giving different treatment to each learner or differentiating between high and low ability learners [Mahfudz \(2023\)](#). Through grouped differentiated instruction, social interaction between learners will be formed and developed because learners are required to develop communication skills, work together in teams, exchange ideas, and make decisions when facing problems in groups. All these components work together to create an inclusive and collaborative learning environment where every learner has an equal opportunity to develop academically and socially. Differentiated instruction helps learners learn more about how to adapt better to their peers and appreciate differences.

Differentiated instruction can also increase learners' empathy as it emphasises the diversity of learners' needs and learning styles. Empathy acts as an important element in encouraging social interaction to help establish good relationships with others, interact with peers, and become proficient in socialising in the community [Arhami et al \(2023\)](#). Learners get the opportunity to engage in group work during the differentiated instruction learning process, so that learners will get used to listening, understanding other people's perspectives, and showing concern for friends who are experiencing difficulties. The taxonomy of differentiated instruction practice proposed by Pozas and Schneider explains the tutor system in learning groups, where high-ability learners act as teacher assistants as

well as tutors for lower-ability learners Pozas et al (2020). Learners act as peer tutors for friends who have difficulties so that they can learn in a more relaxed and interactive way. This happens because learners tend to feel more comfortable when learning with peers than receiving direct instructions from the teacher, which in turn increases their confidence to appreciate each other in group activities and helps them overcome anxiety and stress. Being used to working in groups teaches learners to understand differences, appreciate each member's contribution, and help friends who need support.

D. Discussion

Implementation of differentiated instruction can improve learners' social interaction by conducting an initial diagnostic evaluation to identify learners' needs, learning styles, interests, and learning readiness, followed by flexible grouping, in line with the theory put forward by Tomlinson (2001) which explains that learning adjusts content, processes, products, and learning environments based on the readiness, interests, and learning profiles of learners. Learners can explore the material independently with a sense of comfort because the learning method is tailored to their needs and abilities.

Learning using the differentiated instruction approach is learner-centred learning where teachers only need to plan, facilitate and motivate learners. The differentiated instruction approach opens opportunities for each learner to be actively involved and work together in the learning process without ignoring individual differences. Research results Lestari & Arafat (2023), Mukromin et al (2024), and Hidayat et al (2024) show that through flexible grouping and adaptive learning, learners are more active in working together, communicating, and respecting differences between individuals.

Learning takes place optimally through social interaction Vygotsky & Cole (1978), where learners develop understanding in a social environment by working in teams, discussing, and collaborating. The application of differentiated instruction that involves group work according to learners' interests and abilities helps in the development of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which provides opportunities for learners to learn more effectively with support from peers and teachers. The differentiated instruction approach not only enhances positive social interactions but also encourages increased confidence and feelings of security in the learning process.

In line with the opinion of Cooper and Tomlinson (in Wan, 2016), fairness in education does not mean treating the same for all, but rather providing the right support so that each learner can achieve success. Educators need to conduct early diagnostic assessments and regular learning reflections to adjust their approach. The differentiated instruction approach has been proven in research conducted by Devi et al (2023) and Alfina et al (2023) to produce an inclusive learning environment that focuses on learners' social-emotional development.

Thus, the differentiated instruction approach not only provides learning experiences that suit the individual needs of each learner, but also helps in developing social skills such as collaboration, tolerance and empathy. Through flexible grouping and learner-focused

learning, the classroom environment becomes more inclusive and supports the development of interpersonal relationships. This approach is also in line with the principles of Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasises the importance of character-oriented education and diversity.

E. Implication

The results of this study show that the application of the differentiated instruction approach can encourage a more flexible, adaptive, and learner-centred learning process. By taking into account the different needs, learning styles and readiness of each individual, this approach helps to increase learners' involvement in learning activities and social interactions in the classroom. Teachers can manage learning more effectively through diagnostic assessments, flexible grouping and collaborative activities that encourage communication, cooperation and empathy. The learning environment becomes more inclusive so that learners feel valued, confident and comfortable in their interactions. This contributes to positive character building and strengthens relationships between learners, which is beneficial in everyday life and in the future.

F. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

This research has limitations in the approach used, namely literature review, so that the data obtained is secondary and depends heavily on the quality and scope of the available literature. There is also no direct observation in the field, so the validity of the results still needs to be tested through a more in-depth empirical study. Therefore, it is recommended that future research expand the scope of the study, not limited to one particular grade level or subject, but also include more varied learning contexts and learner characteristics. In addition, longitudinal research is important to assess the long-term impact of differentiated instruction on learners' social interactions and character development.

G. Conclusion

The implementation of the differentiated instruction approach has been shown to contribute positively to improving learners' social interaction in primary schools. This approach encourages meaningful collaboration between learners through flexible grouping based on interests, learning styles and learning readiness. A review of the literature shows that learners who engage in differentiated learning show improvements in communication skills, teamwork, empathy, tolerance and responsibility. Thus, Differentiated Instruction not only supports individual learning needs but also strengthens social dynamics in the classroom. This answers the research objective that adaptive and learner-centred learning strategies are effective in shaping essential social skills in the context of primary education.

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