

Implementation of Differentiated Instructional Strategies Used by Teachers and It's Relation to Indigenous Learners' Academic Performance

Joemarie C. Amalla¹, Danny F. Javelina², Andy Ryan M. Amandoron³, Kenneth C. Valiao⁴, Criezyl Mae V. Clarin⁵, Wesley Neil H. Florentino⁶

¹Teacher VI, Calat-an Elementary School, Sipalay, Negros Occidental, Philippines

²Teacher VI, Gil M. Montilla Elementary School, Sipalay, Negros Occidental, Philippines

³Teacher III, Genaro P. Alvarez Elementary School, Sipalay, Negros Occidental, Philippines

⁴Teacher III, Nabulao Elementary School, Sipalay, Negros Occidental, Philippines

⁵Teacher I, Genaro P. Alvarez Elementary School, Sipalay, Negros Occidental, Philippines

⁶Teacher I, Nabulao Elementary School, Sipalay, Negros Occidental, Philippines

Email of Corresponding Author: joemariecanonigoamalla@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study examined the extent of implementation of differentiated instructional strategies and their relationship with Indigenous learners' academic performance in two public elementary school districts in Negros Occidental, Philippines, during School Year 2026–2027. Anchored in the concept of differentiated instruction, the study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design involving 76 Indigenous learners selected through total enumeration sampling. Data were collected using a validated and reliable 24-item researcher-developed questionnaire covering four instructional dimensions, while academic performance was determined from official school report cards (Form 138). Descriptive statistics and Spearman's rank-order correlation were used for data analysis. Findings revealed very high implementation levels in assessing learners' readiness and needs ($M = 4.33$), planning differentiated instruction ($M = 4.21$), organizing flexible learning experiences ($M = 4.224$), and monitoring and adjusting instruction ($M = 4.247$). Indigenous learners demonstrated satisfactory academic performance ($M = 84.55$). Significant positive relationships were identified between academic performance and assessing learners' readiness and needs ($r = .241, p = .037$) and planning differentiated instruction ($r = .252, p = .029$). Conversely, organizing flexible learning experiences ($r = .197, p = .197$) and monitoring and adjusting instruction ($r = .151, p = .197$) showed positive but statistically non-significant relationships. The study concluded that readiness assessment and differentiated instructional planning were significantly associated with academic performance, highlighting the importance of responsive teaching practices. Strengthening teacher professional development, instructional support, resource allocation, and collaboration with Indigenous communities is recommended. The study supports Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by addressing inclusive educational opportunities for Indigenous learners. Its sustainability implications include strengthening culturally responsive teaching, institutional instructional practices, and community participation to support equitable educational development.

Keywords: Academic Performance; Culturally Responsive Instruction; Differentiated Instruction; Indigenous Learners; Instructional Planning; Learners' Readiness; Sustainable Education

1. Introduction

Equitable and inclusive education requires instructional approaches that respond to learners' diverse academic abilities, cultural backgrounds, experiences, and learning needs. Differentiated instruction provides a responsive pedagogical approach by adapting teaching content, processes, learning activities, and assessment practices to accommodate individual differences (Canilang et al., 2026; Özüdoğru, 2022; Tacorda, 2026). This approach is particularly relevant to Indigenous learners, whose educational experiences may be influenced by linguistic diversity, socio-economic barriers, and curricula that do not adequately reflect their cultural identities (Dakingking, 2026). Accordingly, this study examines the implementation of differentiated instructional strategies in assessing learners' readiness and needs, planning differentiated instruction, organizing flexible learning experiences, and monitoring and adjusting instruction, and determines their relationship with Indigenous learners' academic performance in two school districts in Negros Occidental.

Differentiated instruction recognizes that learners possess varying levels of readiness, interests, prior knowledge, and learning preferences. Rather than applying uniform teaching methods, educators adjust instructional content, processes, products, and learning environments to address individual differences (Özüdoğru, 2022; Tacorda, 2026). Such practices are essential in heterogeneous classrooms where linguistic, cultural, and cognitive differences influence learning experiences (Canilang et al., 2026). For Indigenous learners, differentiated instruction also provides opportunities to integrate culturally relevant learning experiences and recognize community knowledge (Claypool & Johnston, 2021; Miranda, 2026). However, socio-economic disadvantages, limited educational resources, and culturally misaligned curricula continue to affect Indigenous learners' participation and academic development (Dakingking, 2026). These conditions emphasize the importance of examining how teachers implement differentiated instructional strategies and how these practices relate to Indigenous learners' academic performance.

Existing literature emphasizes the potential of differentiated instruction to improve academic achievement by accommodating differences in learners' abilities and educational experiences (Vacalares et al., 2024). Studies involving elementary education have identified differentiated instructional practices as relevant to improving classroom learning and academic outcomes (Canilang et al., 2026; Özüdoğru, 2022; Rivera, 2025). Four instructional dimensions are particularly relevant to the present investigation (Estaiteyeh & DeCoito, 2023; Gheyssens et al., 2023). Assessing learners' readiness and needs involves identifying prior knowledge, learning difficulties, and individual strengths. Planning differentiated instruction requires developing appropriate teaching activities and learning materials based on these differences. Organizing flexible learning experiences provides varied opportunities for individual and collaborative learning, while monitoring and adjusting instruction involves evaluating learner progress and modifying teaching approaches when necessary (El Galad et al (Hopfenbeck et al., 2023; Pramesti, 2024)., 2024; Singh et al., 2024).

Globally, differentiated instruction is recognized as an approach to addressing educational disparities among culturally and academically diverse learners (Özüdoğru, 2022). In the Philippines, inclusive education and Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) initiatives promote equitable learning opportunities. However, implementation challenges remain, particularly in geographically isolated and disadvantaged communities where teachers experience limited instructional resources, inadequate specialized training, and administrative demands (Dakingking, 2026; Nuñez, 2026). National reports also indicate gaps between educational policies and classroom implementation, particularly in teachers' proficiency in differentiated instruction (Philippine Institute for Development Studies, 2026). These challenges may encourage standardized instructional approaches that inadequately address Indigenous learners' cultural backgrounds and individual learning needs (Canilang et al., 2026). Within Negros Occidental, examining differentiated instructional practices across two school districts provides a localized perspective on the relationship between instructional responsiveness and Indigenous learners' academic performance.

The study is conceptually anchored in differentiated instruction, which emphasizes modifying teaching approaches according to learners' readiness, interests, and learning profiles (Özüdoğru, 2022; Tacorda, 2026). This perspective recognizes that effective instruction requires continuous attention to learner differences rather than uniform educational delivery. The conceptual relationship examined in this study involves four dimensions of differentiated instructional implementation: assessing learners' readiness and needs, planning differentiated instruction, organizing flexible learning experiences, and monitoring and adjusting instruction. These dimensions constitute the instructional variables, while Indigenous learners' academic performance represents the outcome variable. Examining their relationships provides a basis for understanding which instructional practices are associated with academic achievement among Indigenous pupils.

Although previous studies have established the relevance of differentiated instruction to academic achievement, much of the existing literature examines its overall effectiveness in general educational settings (Canilang et al., 2026; Özüdoğru, 2022; Rivera, 2025). Limited attention has been given to the individual relationships between specific differentiated instructional strategies and Indigenous learners' academic performance, particularly within Philippine public elementary schools. This gap is significant because differentiated instruction encompasses several practices that may have different relationships with learning outcomes. Accordingly, the present study investigates the extent of implementation of four differentiated instructional dimensions and determines their relationships with Indigenous learners' academic performance in two school districts in Negros Occidental. The findings are intended to inform instructional planning, teacher professional development, and culturally responsive educational practices.

The study aligns primarily with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), particularly its emphasis on inclusive and equitable educational opportunities. By examining differentiated instructional practices and Indigenous learners' academic performance, the research addresses the importance of adapting classroom instruction to learners' diverse abilities, educational experiences, and cultural backgrounds. The study also relates to SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) through its focus on educational disparities affecting Indigenous learners. Identifying instructional practices associated with academic performance may provide evidence to support more equitable teaching approaches and strengthen educational opportunities for culturally diverse learners.

The study contributes to educational sustainability by examining instructional practices that support inclusive, responsive, and equitable learning environments. Its focus on readiness assessment, differentiated planning, flexible learning experiences, and instructional monitoring provides a basis for strengthening teaching practices that accommodate Indigenous learners' academic and cultural needs. From a cultural and community sustainability perspective, differentiated instruction recognizes the importance of integrating learners' experiences, community knowledge, and cultural identities into educational activities. The study also has implications for institutional sustainability by providing evidence that may guide teacher professional development, instructional supervision, curriculum implementation, and educational resource allocation. Through these contributions, the research supports efforts to sustain inclusive educational practices and improve learning opportunities for Indigenous pupils.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design to examine the extent of implementation of differentiated instructional strategies and their relationship with Indigenous learners' academic performance during School Year 2026–2027. The descriptive component assessed four instructional dimensions: assessing learners' readiness and needs, planning differentiated instruction, organizing flexible learning experiences, and monitoring and adjusting instruction. It also determined the level of Indigenous learners' academic performance based on grades recorded in their official school report cards (Form 138). The correlational component examined the statistical relationships between these instructional dimensions and learners' academic performance without manipulating the study variables.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in public elementary schools within two school districts in Negros Occidental, Philippines. These schools served as the research setting for examining teachers' implementation of differentiated instructional strategies as assessed by Indigenous learners. The selected districts provided the educational context for determining how instructional practices were associated with Indigenous learners' academic performance during School Year 2026–2027.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The study identified 76 Indigenous learners from public elementary schools in two districts of Negros Occidental as respondents. District I comprised 35 learners, while District II comprised 41 learners. The respondents evaluated their teachers' implementation of differentiated instructional strategies using a structured questionnaire. Their academic performance was determined through secondary data obtained from official school report cards (Form 138).

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The researchers employed total enumeration sampling to include all 76 identified Indigenous learners from the participating schools (Sarker & AL-Muaalemi, 2022). This sampling procedure was selected to obtain information from the entire identified population rather than selecting a subset of respondents. Accordingly, the study covered 35 learners from District I and 41 learners from District II, allowing the researchers to examine differentiated instructional practices and academic performance across the two participating districts.

2.5 Research Instrument

The study utilized a researcher-developed questionnaire consisting of 24 items distributed equally across four dimensions of differentiated instructional strategies. These included assessing learners' readiness and needs, planning differentiated instruction, organizing flexible learning experiences, and monitoring and adjusting instruction, with six indicators for each dimension. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 5 (Always) to 1 (Never), corresponding to implementation levels from Very High to Very Low. Classroom advisers assisted respondents in understanding the questionnaire by translating its contents into Hiligaynon. Content validity was evaluated by five expert validators using the Good and Scates validity tool and the Item-Level Content Validity Index (I-CVI). The instrument obtained an overall validity rating of 0.917, interpreted as very valid. Reliability testing was conducted in schools excluded from the actual study using Cronbach's alpha. The resulting coefficients were 0.915 for assessing learners' readiness and needs, 0.970 for planning differentiated instruction, 0.946 for organizing flexible learning experiences, and 0.977 for monitoring and adjusting instruction. All dimensions were interpreted as very reliable, indicating high internal consistency.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers secured the necessary approvals from the concerned educational authorities, district supervisors, and school administrators before conducting the study. Following authorization, the validated questionnaires were reproduced and personally administered to the identified Indigenous learners, with one questionnaire distributed to each respondent. Classroom advisers assisted in explaining and translating the questionnaire into Hiligaynon to facilitate comprehension. The researchers supervised the administration and retrieval of the instruments, while academic performance data were obtained from official school report cards (Form 138). The collected responses and academic records were subsequently encoded, organized, and tabulated for statistical analysis.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Frequency and percentage distributions were employed to summarize relevant data, while the mean and standard deviation were used to determine the extent of implementation of differentiated instructional strategies and the level of Indigenous learners' academic performance. Instructional implementation was interpreted using the following mean-score ranges: 4.21–5.00 (Very High), 3.41–4.20 (High), 2.61–3.40 (Neutral), 1.81–2.60 (Low), and 1.00–1.80 (Very Low). Academic performance was classified according to the grading scale of 90–100 (Outstanding), 85–89 (Very Satisfactory), 80–84 (Satisfactory), 75–79 (Fairly Satisfactory), and below 75 (Did Not Meet Expectations). Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient was employed to determine the strength, direction, and statistical significance of the relationships between the four dimensions of differentiated instructional strategies and Indigenous learners' academic performance. The correlation results served as the basis for evaluating the study's null hypotheses.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

The researchers observed ethical safeguards throughout the study by obtaining the necessary institutional permissions and informing respondents about the voluntary nature of their participation, including their right to withdraw without penalty. No monetary compensation was provided, and respondents were assigned identification codes to protect their anonymity and confidentiality. The researchers also checked the accuracy of responses and evaluated the research instrument through content validation procedures. All collected information was designated exclusively for research purposes, with provisions for destroying the data three months after completion of the study.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Extent of Implementation of Differentiated Instructional Strategies

3.1.1 Assessing Indigenous Learners' Readiness and Needs

The implementation of strategies for assessing learners' readiness and needs obtained a mean of 4.33 and a standard deviation of 0.773, interpreted as Very High. This result indicated that Indigenous learners generally perceived their teachers as consistently assessing their prior knowledge, learning abilities, participation, and individual educational needs before or during instruction. The findings suggest that teachers demonstrated considerable attention to identifying differences in learners' academic readiness and providing appropriate instructional support. This aligns with Han (2022), who emphasized that integrative teaching and community-linked instructional strategies supported student engagement and teachers' professional self-concept. The result highlights the relevance of identifying learners' needs in implementing responsive instruction within Indigenous educational settings.

3.1.2 Planning Differentiated Instruction for Indigenous Learners

Planning differentiated instruction recorded a mean of 4.21 and a standard deviation of 0.888, interpreted as Very High. This indicated that teachers frequently incorporated varied instructional approaches, learning materials, and activities intended to accommodate Indigenous learners' abilities, interests, experiences, and cultural

backgrounds. The findings reflect teachers' efforts to develop learning experiences responsive to individual differences. Although the implementation level was very high, the variation in responses suggests that instructional planning practices were not uniformly experienced by all learners. These results are consistent with the broader observation of Han (2022) that integrative teaching strategies may be implemented differently depending on instructional purposes and learning contexts.

3.1.3 Organizing Flexible Learning Experiences

Organizing flexible learning experiences obtained a mean of 4.224 and a standard deviation of 0.895, interpreted as Very High. The findings indicated that teachers frequently provided varied learning arrangements, including individual activities, collaborative tasks, and opportunities for learners to engage with instructional content through different approaches. The result suggests that flexible learning structures were widely practiced to accommodate Indigenous learners' diverse learning needs and preferences. However, differences in respondents' assessments indicate some variation in the implementation of these strategies. Han (2022) similarly identified the relevance of integrative teaching practices and community connections in supporting engaged learning, emphasizing the importance of instructional approaches responsive to learners' educational contexts.

3.1.4 Monitoring and Adjusting Instruction

Monitoring and adjusting instruction recorded a mean of 4.247 and a standard deviation of 0.976, interpreted as Very High. This indicated that teachers regularly monitored learners' academic progress, provided feedback, and modified instructional approaches according to identified learning difficulties and educational needs. The findings suggest that teachers demonstrated responsiveness to learners' progress through instructional monitoring and adjustments. However, the comparatively higher standard deviation indicated greater variation in learners' assessments of this dimension. This supports the relevance of adaptive teaching practices discussed by Han (2022), particularly the need to align instructional approaches with learners' engagement and educational experiences.

3.2 Level of Indigenous Learners' Academic Performance

The academic performance of Indigenous learners obtained a mean score of 84.55 and a standard deviation of 3.508, interpreted as Satisfactory. This indicated that the respondents generally achieved an acceptable level of academic performance, although individual differences in achievement were observed. The findings suggest that Indigenous learners demonstrated satisfactory academic outcomes but continued to exhibit varying levels of educational achievement. These differences emphasize the importance of identifying individual learning strengths and difficulties to provide appropriate instructional support. Iim et al. (2026) similarly reported that identifying learners' educational needs and aligning instructional processes with those needs contributed to improved student competencies and academic performance in inclusive learning environments.

3.3 Relationship Between Differentiated Instructional Strategies and Indigenous Learners' Performance

3.3.1 Relationship Between Assessing Learners' Readiness and Academic Performance

Assessing learners' readiness and needs demonstrated a positive and statistically significant relationship with Indigenous learners' academic performance, with a correlation coefficient of $r = .241^{**}$ and a p-value of .037. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating a significant positive association between readiness assessment and academic performance. The findings suggest that teachers' consistent identification of learners' prior knowledge, strengths, and learning difficulties was associated with better academic performance. This emphasizes the importance of understanding individual learning needs when developing responsive instructional approaches. Saeed (2022) similarly highlighted the importance of aligning teaching practices with Indigenous learners' educational needs rather than focusing primarily on assessment preparation, particularly in supporting meaningful understanding and academic engagement.

3.3.2 Relationship Between Planning Differentiated Instruction and Academic Performance

Planning differentiated instruction demonstrated a positive and statistically significant relationship with Indigenous learners' academic performance, with a correlation coefficient of $r = .252^{**}$ and a p-value of .029. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected, indicating that higher implementation of differentiated instructional planning was associated with better academic performance. The findings suggest that deliberate instructional planning responsive to learners' abilities, interests, and educational backgrounds was positively associated with academic achievement. This relationship highlights the relevance of designing appropriate learning activities and instructional materials that address individual differences. Saeed (2022) emphasized that instructional approaches should support meaningful subject understanding and respond to Indigenous learners' educational needs, reinforcing the importance of purposeful teaching practices.

3.3.3 Relationship Between Flexible Learning Experiences and Academic Performance

Organizing flexible learning experiences demonstrated a positive but statistically non-significant relationship with Indigenous learners' academic performance, with a correlation coefficient of $r = .197$ and a p-value of .197. Accordingly, the null hypothesis was not rejected, indicating insufficient statistical evidence of a significant

relationship between flexible learning arrangements and academic performance. Although flexible instructional arrangements were implemented to a very high extent, their relationship with academic performance was not statistically significant. This suggests that the presence of varied learning activities alone did not establish an association with higher academic achievement in the present study. Saeed (2022) observed that instructional practices and school policies did not necessarily address Indigenous learners' educational needs, emphasizing that meaningful learning requires approaches that support conceptual understanding rather than relying solely on instructional structures or assessment-oriented activities.

3.3.4 Relationship Between Monitoring and Adjusting Instruction and Academic Performance

Monitoring and adjusting instruction demonstrated a positive but statistically non-significant relationship with Indigenous learners' academic performance, with a correlation coefficient of $r = .151$ and a p-value of .197. Consequently, the null hypothesis was not rejected, indicating insufficient evidence of a significant relationship between instructional monitoring and academic performance. The findings indicate that although teachers frequently monitored learning progress and adjusted instructional approaches, these practices were not significantly associated with academic performance in the present analysis. This suggests that the relationship between instructional adjustments and academic outcomes requires further examination. Saeed (2022) similarly emphasized the importance of ensuring that instructional practices address Indigenous learners' actual learning needs and promote meaningful understanding rather than concentrating primarily on assessment outcomes.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concluded that teachers implemented differentiated instructional strategies to a very high extent, while Indigenous learners demonstrated satisfactory academic performance. Assessing learners' readiness and needs and planning differentiated instruction showed statistically significant positive relationships with academic performance, emphasizing the importance of identifying individual learning needs and designing responsive instructional activities. Conversely, organizing flexible learning experiences and monitoring and adjusting instruction demonstrated positive but statistically non-significant relationships with academic performance. These findings highlight the relevance of culturally responsive differentiated instruction while recognizing that its relationship with academic achievement may vary according to instructional practices, cultural relevance, and available educational resources.

It is recommended that educational administrators strengthen professional development programs and allocate appropriate resources to support culturally responsive differentiated instruction. Education program supervisors should provide instructional guidance, coaching, and monitoring focused on assessing learners' readiness and planning differentiated lessons, while school heads should promote collaboration among teachers, families, and Indigenous communities. Teachers should consistently identify learners' strengths and needs, develop responsive instructional activities, and improve monitoring and instructional adjustments. Indigenous learners should be encouraged to communicate their learning needs and interests, while Indigenous communities should participate in developing culturally relevant educational experiences to support sustained academic improvement.

The study was limited to 76 Indigenous learners from public elementary schools in two districts within one division in Negros Occidental during School Year 2026–2027, restricting the generalizability of the findings to other educational settings and Indigenous populations. The descriptive-correlational design examined statistical relationships without establishing causal effects between differentiated instructional strategies and academic performance. Furthermore, instructional implementation was assessed through learners' questionnaire responses, while academic performance was measured using grades obtained from official school report cards. Consequently, the findings reflect the reported instructional experiences and academic outcomes of the participating learners within the specific study setting.

5. Compliance with ethical standards

The authors acknowledge the participation of 76 Indigenous learners from two public elementary school districts in Negros Occidental, Philippines, and the institutional cooperation of the concerned educational authorities, district supervisors, and school administrators. Data were collected through non-invasive questionnaires and review of official academic records following authorization from the appropriate educational offices. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and confidentiality was maintained through coded identifiers to protect respondents' identities.

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