

Classroom Management Using Tiered Activities and Flexible Grouping to Support Gender-Based Differentiated Instruction in Elementary Schools

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ABSTRACT

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 01-04-2026
 Accepted: 04-04-2026
 Published Online: 04-05-2026

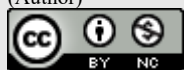
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Available online at:
<https://ejournal.yayasanumamahaminahalibdhamaal.org/g/index.php/>

Keywords

1. Differentiated Instruction
2. Tiered Activities
3. Flexible Grouping
4. Gender
5. Classroom Management

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Background: Elementary school classrooms are increasingly characterized by diverse student needs, including differences in gender, learning styles, and academic abilities. Conventional classroom management that applies a one-size-fits-all approach often fails to address this diversity, leading to low student engagement and suboptimal learning outcomes. Therefore, effective classroom management strategies that support differentiated instruction are essential, particularly those that consider gender-based differences among students.

Objectives: This study aims to analyze: (1) the implementation of classroom management through tiered activities and flexible grouping; (2) how these strategies support gender-based differentiated instruction; and (3) the challenges faced in their implementation in elementary school settings.

Methods: This study employs a mixed-methods design combining a literature review and a small-scale field study. The research subjects were a teacher and students of Grade 5-A at UPT SDN 064866 Medan. Data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. The data were analyzed using qualitative descriptive techniques supported by simple quantitative analysis, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

Results: The findings indicate that tiered activities and flexible grouping significantly support differentiated instruction by accommodating diverse student characteristics, including gender differences. Female students tend to demonstrate higher levels of focus and academic achievement, while male students are generally more physically active and exploratory. Flexible grouping enhances student collaboration and participation, while tiered activities support learning according to students' readiness levels. However, the implementation of these strategies is still not systematic and tends to be carried out intuitively by teachers.

Conclusions: Classroom management strategies based on tiered activities and flexible grouping are effective in supporting gender-based differentiated instruction. However, strengthening teachers' conceptual understanding and developing structured differentiation-based learning tools are necessary. This study highlights the importance of integrating a gender perspective into differentiated instruction and ensuring its systematic implementation in elementary classroom practices.

INTRODUCTION

Elementary school education today faces the challenge of increasingly complex student diversity, in terms of academic ability, learning interests, learning styles, and social aspects such as gender. In practice, classroom management that remains uniform (one-size-fits-all) often fails to

accommodate the learning needs of a heterogeneous student body. This results in suboptimal student engagement and disparities in learning outcomes. Therefore, an adaptive and responsive learning approach is needed to address individual student differences, one of which is through Differentiated

Instruction (Tomlinson, 2018; Smale-Jacobse et al., 2019).

Differentiated Instruction is an approach that emphasizes the adaptation of learning processes, content, and products based on students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles (Tomlinson, 2018). In its implementation, strategies such as tiered activities and flexible grouping are important components in supporting the success of differentiated instruction. Tiered activities allow teachers to provide tasks of varying difficulty levels, while flexible grouping gives students the opportunity to learn in dynamic groups according to their learning needs. According to research on flexible grouping, this strategy serves as "a means for classroom management in a heterogeneous classroom," enabling classroom management to be more adaptive to student differences (Borich, 2018). However, in the context of elementary school classrooms, the implementation of this strategy remains suboptimal, particularly in accommodating gender-based differences.

Several recent studies indicate that Differentiated Instruction has a positive impact on student learning outcomes and motivation. A study by Smale-Jacobse et al. (2019) shows that the implementation of differentiated instruction significantly enhances student engagement and academic achievement in heterogeneous classrooms. Furthermore, recent research also reveals that the use of flexible grouping can enhance student collaboration and active participation in the learning process (Siam & Al-Natour, 2018). In the book **The Flexibly Grouped Classroom**, it is stated that "flexible grouping is at the heart of differentiated instruction" because it allows teachers to dynamically organize instruction according to students' needs (Tomlinson, 2018).

On the other hand, studies on tiered activities indicate that assigning tiered tasks can help students learn at their own readiness levels, thereby reducing achievement gaps in the classroom. Research shows that this strategy is effective in improving students' conceptual understanding and independent learning (Subban, 2020). Meanwhile, the gender aspect in learning is beginning to receive attention, with several studies indicating differences in learning styles, motivation, and social interaction between male and female students (Gurian & Stevens, 2019). This highlights the importance of considering a gender perspective in the implementation of differentiated instruction.

Although various studies have examined Differentiated Instruction, tiered activities, and flexible grouping, there remain limitations in integrating these three aspects, particularly within the context of gender-based elementary school

classroom management. Most research still focuses on the general effectiveness of these strategies without specifically linking them to gender dynamics in the classroom. Furthermore, studies combining a literature review with empirical field data in local contexts remain relatively scarce (Smale-Jacobse et al., 2019; Subban, 2020). Thus, research is needed to comprehensively examine how classroom management through tiered activities and flexible grouping can support gender-based Differentiated Instruction.

Based on this gap, this study aims to analyze classroom management through the implementation of tiered activities and flexible grouping to support gender-based differentiated instruction in elementary schools. The research questions posed are: (1) how are tiered activities and flexible grouping implemented in classroom management; (2) how do these strategies support gender-based differentiated instruction; and (3) what are the challenges and implications of their implementation in the field. The novelty of this study lies in the integration of learning differentiation strategies with a gender perspective within the context of elementary school classroom management, as well as the use of a mixed-methods approach that combines literature review and a small-scale field study to yield a more comprehensive understanding.

METHOD

This study employs a mixed-methods design that combines a literature review and a mini-field study to address issues related to classroom management through tiered activities and flexible grouping in support of gender-based differentiated instruction in elementary schools. This approach was chosen because it provides a comprehensive understanding, both theoretically and empirically. The literature review was conducted by examining various relevant journal articles and scientific books, while the mini field research was conducted to obtain a realistic picture of the classroom management practices implemented by teachers in classroom learning.

The research subjects in the mini field study were the teacher and students of Class 5-A at UPT SDN 064866 Medan. Subject selection was conducted using purposive sampling, taking into account the teacher's involvement in the learning process as well as the diversity of student characteristics within the class. Data were collected through observation and interviews. Direct observations were conducted to observe the learning process, including how the teacher began and concluded lessons, arranged seating, managed the classroom, and interacted with students. Semi-

structured interviews were conducted with the fifth-grade A class teacher at UPT SDN 064866 Medan to gather more in-depth information regarding classroom management strategies, the teaching methods used, and the challenges faced in dealing with student diversity.

The data collected were analyzed using qualitative descriptive techniques and supported by simple quantitative analysis. Data from the literature review were analyzed through content analysis to identify relevant concepts and findings, while data from observations and interviews were analyzed through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Additionally, the observation results were also presented in the form of indicator tables to systematically reinforce the findings. The analysis procedures were conducted sequentially and in a structured manner so that the data obtained could provide a clear picture of classroom management practices and allow this study to be replicated in similar contexts.

RESULTS

Literature Review on Gender-Differentiated

Learning

The literature analysis shows that Differentiated Instruction (DI) is a learning approach that emphasizes adapting the learning process, content, and products based on student characteristics. This approach is considered effective in accommodating student diversity, both in terms of abilities, interests, and learning styles (Tomlinson, 2018; Smale-Jacobse et al., 2019). Various studies have shown that implementing DI can increase student engagement, learning motivation, and learning outcomes in heterogeneous classrooms. Furthermore, DI also contributes to creating an inclusive and adaptive learning environment that addresses individual student needs (Frontiers in Psychology, 2019; PMC, 2019). In terms of gender, there are differences in characteristics between male and female students. Female students tend to excel in academics and concentration, while male students are more physically active and exploratory (Voyer & Voyer, 2018; Stoet & Geary, 2018). Therefore, the application of DI becomes relevant to accommodate these difference

Researcher & Year	Title	Research Results	Link
Smale-Jacobse et al. (2019)	Differentiated Instruction in Education	This study shows that the implementation of differentiated instruction significantly increases student engagement in the learning process and has a positive impact on learning outcomes. Students who receive instruction tailored to their individual needs demonstrate higher levels of motivation compared to those in conventional instruction.	https://nasenjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1471-3802.12481
Frontiers in Psychology (2019)	Differentiated Instruction Review	This study found that DI is effective in supporting inclusive learning by accommodating student diversity, including differences in learning styles and abilities. This approach also enhances student interaction and creates a more adaptive learning environment.	https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02366/full
Suprayogi et al. (2023)	Implementasi Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi di SD	The results of the study indicate that teachers who implement DI are able to adapt their teaching strategies to students' needs, leading to improved conceptual understanding and student participation in the learning process.	https://ejournal.upi.edu/index.php/eduhumaniora/article/download/69344/pdf
Fadilla et al. (2023)	Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi	This study found that differentiated instruction has a positive impact on student learning outcomes, particularly in enhancing student engagement and independence in learning.	https://ejournal.unhasy.ac.id/index.php/ijpsc/article/view/8463
PMC	Differentiated	This study shows that DI is effective in	https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/a

(2019)	Instruction and Diversity	addressing student diversity in the classroom by adapting the content and learning processes, thereby minimizing learning achievement gaps.	articles/PMC6883934/
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Table 1. Research Analysis of Differentiated Instruction

Literature Review Results on Flexible Grouping

The literature review results indicate that flexible grouping is an important strategy in Differentiated Instruction, enabling dynamic grouping of students based on learning needs, interests, and specific characteristics (Tomlinson, 2018). Research indicates that flexible grouping can enhance social interaction, collaboration, and active student participation in learning. Students have the

opportunity to learn in various group configurations, making the learning process more varied and less monotonous (Siam & Al-Natour, 2018). Furthermore, flexible grouping also plays a role in managing heterogeneous classes. With flexible grouping, teachers can create a more conducive learning environment that is responsive to student needs (Borich, 2018).

Researcher & Year	Title	Research Results	Link
Siam & Al-Natour (2018)	Flexible Grouping Strategy	This study shows that flexible grouping can enhance social interaction among students and strengthen collaboration in the learning process. Students become more active because they have the opportunity to work in various different groups.	https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0742051X16303894
Borich (2018)	Flexible Grouping for Classroom Management	Research findings indicate that flexible grouping is effective in managing heterogeneous classes because it allows teachers to adjust student groupings according to learning needs, thereby creating a more conducive classroom environment.	https://www.researchgate.net/publication/270025865_Flexible_Grouping_as_a_Means_for_Classroom_Management_in_a_Heterogeneous_Classroom
Tomlinson (2018)	The Flexibly Grouped Classroom	This study confirms that flexible grouping is at the heart of differentiated instruction because it allows teachers to manage learning dynamically based on students' abilities and characteristics.	https://files.ascd.org/pdfs/publications/books/The-Flexibly-Grouped-Classroom-sample-chapters.pdf
Ford (2016/akses 2024)	Flexible Grouping during Literacy Centers	The results of the study indicate that flexible grouping increases student participation and helps students understand the material through varied group interactions.	https://www.researchgate.net/publication/289924683_Flexible_grouping_during_literacy_centers_A_model_for_differentiating_instruction
ZMS Adra Journal (2023)	Flexible Grouping Implementation	This study shows that flexible grouping can improve student learning outcomes and foster social skills and cooperation within groups.	https://journal.zmsadra.or.id/index.php/fej/article/view/79/97

Table 2. Analysis of the Flexible Grouping Study

Literature Study Results on Tiered Activities

The literature study results indicate that tiered activities are a strategy in Differentiated Instruction that provides tiered tasks according to

students' ability levels. This strategy aims to ensure that each student can learn at their own pace (Subban, 2020). Various studies have shown that providing varied assignments can improve

conceptual understanding, learning motivation, and student independence. Students do not feel overwhelmed because the assignments are tailored to their abilities (Springer, 2025; MDPI, 2025). Furthermore, in the elementary school context,

tiered activities have proven effective in helping students achieve learning objectives optimally, especially in classes with diverse ability levels (Tandfonline, 2025).

Researcher & Year	Title	Research Results	Link
Subban (2020)	Differentiated Instruction Review	This study shows that tiered activities help students learn at their own pace, thereby increasing motivation and reducing achievement gaps in the classroom.	https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02188791.2020.1859989
Springer (2025)	Differentiated Instruction Study	This study found that assigning tiered tasks enhances learning effectiveness and helps students gain a deeper understanding of the material in accordance with their individual abilities.	https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12564-025-10065-y
MDPI (2025)	Differentiated Instruction Learning	The results of the study indicate that varying tasks within tiered activities can improve student learning outcomes and encourage active engagement in learning.	https://www.mdpi.com/2673-8392/5/2/71
Tandfonline (2025)	DI in Primary School	This study shows that the use of tiered tasks with elementary school students significantly improves conceptual understanding and academic achievement.	https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/2331186X.2025.2516378
ERIC (2024)	Tiered Instruction Study	This study found that tiered activities can enhance students' independent learning and help them achieve competencies appropriate to their individual abilities.	https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1484958.pdf

Table 3. Analysis of Tiered Activities

Results of the Gender-Based

Mini-Field Research Observations and interviews conducted in class V-A of UPT SDN 064866 Medan indicate that teachers have implemented several classroom management strategies aligned with the principles of Differentiated Instruction, particularly in student grouping and classroom organization. Teachers arrange seating by mixing male and female students and placing active students at the front of the class.

This strategy aims to create a conducive classroom atmosphere and minimize disruptions during learning.

Interview excerpt: "I usually mix the seating between boys and girls to make the class more conducive." "If a male student is often noisy, I place him at the front and next to the female student." In addition, teachers also implement group discussions and question-and-answer sessions. Teachers

actively engage in individualized approaches by walking around the class to assist students experiencing learning difficulties. Interview results revealed differences in characteristics between male and female students:

female students tend to be more focused and have higher academic achievement, male students tend to be more physically active and more easily distracted.

These findings align with various studies showing that female students perform better academically than male students (Voyer & Voyer, 2018), as well as reports showing similar global trends (Voice of America Indonesia, 2014). Based on the results of this mini-research, it can be concluded that classroom management practices implemented by teachers have led to gender-differentiated learning, although they have not yet been systematically implemented.

DISCUSSION

Implementation of Tiered Activities and Flexible Grouping in Classroom Management The results of this study indicate that the implementation of tiered activities and flexible grouping in classroom management in elementary schools has begun, although it is not yet fully structured. This finding is evident in teachers' practices in arranging seating, combining male and female students, and implementing group discussions and individual approaches. Theoretically, flexible grouping is an important strategy in Differentiated Instruction, allowing for dynamic grouping of students based on learning needs, interests, and characteristics (Tomlinson, 2018). Other research also shows that flexible grouping is effective in increasing student social interaction and collaboration in learning (Siam & Al-Natour, 2018). In fact, this strategy is considered a solution for managing heterogeneous classes because it provides teachers with flexibility in managing classroom dynamics (Borich, 2018). The study's findings are also supported by research by Ford (2016), which shows that flexible grouping in learning can increase student participation and help them understand the material through varied group interactions. Furthermore, research in national journals also shows that the implementation of flexible grouping has a positive impact on student learning outcomes and collaboration skills (ZMS Adra Journal, 2023). Meanwhile, tiered activities have not been fully implemented explicitly, but have been seen in the form of varied assignments. This aligns with research by Subban (2020), which states that tiered activities allow students to learn according to their level of readiness. Other research

also shows that varying tasks in differentiated learning can improve conceptual understanding and active student engagement (Springer, 2025; MDPI, 2025). Thus, it can be concluded that teachers have implemented the principles of Differentiated Instruction in practice, although this is not yet supported by systematic, theory-based planning.

The Role of Tiered Activities and Flexible Grouping in Supporting Gender-Based Differentiated Instruction

Research results show that tiered activities and flexible grouping significantly contribute to supporting gender-based differentiated learning. Both strategies provide teachers with the opportunity to accommodate the differing characteristics of male and female students. Numerous studies indicate differences in academic achievement between male and female students. Female students tend to have higher academic results and are more consistent in their learning, while male students are more physically active and exploratory (Voyer & Voyer, 2018; Stoet & Geary, 2018). This finding is also supported by reports showing that globally, female students tend to perform better academically than male students (Voice of America Indonesia, 2014). In this context, flexible grouping allows teachers to combine male and female students in study groups. This strategy creates a balance in group dynamics, where female students can help maintain focus and accuracy, while male students can increase activeness and exploration in discussions. This aligns with research showing that flexible grouping can increase social interaction and student participation (Siam & Al-Natour, 2018). Furthermore, tiered activities allow teachers to provide a variety of tasks tailored to student characteristics. Research shows that task differentiation can improve student motivation and learning outcomes because they learn according to their individual abilities and learning styles (Subban, 2020; Tandfonline, 2025). Furthermore, recent studies confirm that differentiated learning can create an inclusive and adaptive learning environment for student diversity, including gender differences (Frontiers in Psychology, 2019; PMC, 2019). Therefore, the integration of tiered activities and flexible grouping is an effective strategy in supporting gender-based differentiated instruction.

Challenges and Implications of Implementation in the Field

Despite its significant potential, the implementation of tiered activities and flexible grouping in gender-based classroom management still faces various challenges. First, teachers' limited understanding of the concept of Differentiated

Instruction is a major obstacle. Research shows that many teachers have intuitively implemented differentiated learning, but do not yet fully understand the concept (Suprayogi et al., 2023; Fadilla et al., 2023). Second, time constraints and administrative burdens also hinder the optimal design of differentiated learning. Implementing tiered activities requires careful planning in varying assignments (Subban, 2020). Third, the large number of students in a single class presents a challenge in managing flexible grouping. Teachers must be able to manage the dynamics of multiple groups simultaneously, which requires advanced classroom management skills (Borich, 2018). However, research also shows that implementing Differentiated Instruction has a positive impact on student engagement and learning outcomes (Smale-Jacobse et al., 2019). Therefore, there are several important implications, namely: (1) the need for teacher training related to Differentiated Instruction, (2) development of differentiation-based learning tools, and (3) integration of gender perspectives in learning practices.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the implementation of tiered activities and flexible grouping in classroom management plays a crucial role in supporting gender-based differentiated instruction in elementary schools. These two strategies enable teachers to accommodate differences in student characteristics, both in terms of ability and gender.

The research findings also indicate that although teachers have applied the principles of differentiation in practice, their implementation has not yet been carried out in a systematic and structured manner. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen teachers' understanding and provide relevant instructional resources.

Furthermore, the differences in characteristics between male and female students are important factors that need to be considered in the learning process. By integrating a gender perspective into Differentiated Instruction, learning can become more effective, inclusive, and responsive to students' needs.

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