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Examining Differentiated Instruction Practices in Special Education: Basis for Intervention Program

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ABSTRACT

Republic Act No. 11650 mandates inclusive education in all Philippine public schools, yet little is known about how differentiated instruction (DI) is practiced in special education (SPED) classrooms in provincial divisions. This study examined the implementation of DI in SPED in the 4th, 5th, and 6th Districts of the Schools Division of Pangasinan II as a basis for an intervention program. A mixed-methods design was used. Fifty purposively selected respondents, 44 SPED teachers and 6 school heads or head teachers from six public schools offering SPED programs, answered a validated researcher-made questionnaire-checklist and structured interview questions. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean, and analysis of variance, and qualitative data were analyzed thematically. Respondents rated DI implementation as Outstanding in all four domains: curriculum adaptation and content differentiation (M = 4.48), instructional process and teaching strategies (M = 4.63), assessment and learning outcomes (M = 4.54), and professional development and teacher development (M = 4.69). Implementation differed significantly by age in instructional process and teaching strategies (p = .033) and professional development (p = .011), and by highest educational attainment in instructional process and teaching strategies (p = .044), whereas sex and length of service showed no significant differences. Interviews showed that teachers relied on individualized, multisensory, and IEP-guided strategies but faced diverse learner needs, limited time, scarce materials and assistive technology, and uneven parental and community support, and that they sought practical, SPED-specific training and administrative support. These findings informed a proposed intervention program to build teachers' competence in inclusive practice, including Filipino Sign Language, through school-based upskilling, collaboration, and monitoring. Sustained professional development, adequate SPED resources, and stronger school–home–community partnerships are needed to consolidate DI in SPED.

Keywords: *differentiated instruction, special education, inclusive education, intervention program, Pangasinan Division II*

INTRODUCTION

Special education has long been a critical yet underserved dimension of educational systems worldwide. Despite growing international commitments to inclusive and equitable quality education, learners with special needs continue to face significant barriers in accessing appropriate instruction and support. Globally, there has been a paradigm shift toward inclusive education, in which learners with special needs are educated in regular rather than segregated settings, bringing more diverse learners into the classroom. A single teaching approach that ignores these differences threatens classroom inclusiveness and places learners with special needs at risk of lagging behind, losing motivation, and failing to reach their potential.

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Differentiated instruction (DI) responds to this diversity. It is the practice of modifying and adapting instruction, materials, content, student products, and assessment to match the learning needs of individual students (Onyishi & Sefotho, 2020). At its core, DI involves the teacher's adaptation of content, process, product, and learning environment in response to learners' readiness, interests, and learning profiles (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010). Implementation is demanding, however. Challenges arise from students, the school environment, and teachers themselves, and teachers need professional development on what DI is and how to implement it, as well as time and organizational support (Aldossari, 2018).

In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) has affirmed special education as a priority program (Malipot, 2018), and Republic Act No. 11650 (2022) institutionalized inclusive education and the establishment of Inclusive Learning Resource Centers for learners with disabilities across school divisions. Despite these policy commitments, SPED implementation continues to face systemic challenges, including a shortage of trained teachers, insufficient learning resources, and societal attitudes toward disability (Muega, 2016). Without adequate training and incentives, teachers may struggle to implement differentiated strategies that meet the diverse needs of learners with disabilities.

Most studies on DI in SPED have been conducted in Western or developed-country settings, and local studies on SPED tend to examine general program challenges rather than the specific instructional practices and enabling conditions that support differentiated teaching at the classroom level. No study has examined DI implementation in the 4th, 5th, and 6th Districts of the Schools Division of Pangasinan II or proposed a locally contextualized intervention program. This study therefore examined DI practices in SPED in this division. Specifically, it sought to describe the respondents' profile in terms of age, sex, highest educational attainment, and length of service; to determine the level of DI implementation in terms of curriculum adaptation and content differentiation, instructional process and teaching strategies, assessment and learning outcomes, and professional development and teacher development; to test whether implementation differed significantly when respondents were grouped according to profile; to describe participants' experiences in using DI and the themes that emerged from them; and to propose an intervention program based on the findings. The results are expected to inform SPED teachers, school heads, DepEd, parents, and future researchers in strengthening inclusive instruction for learners with special needs.

Literature Review

Differentiated Instruction: Concept and Components

DI is a philosophy and practice of teaching and learning rooted in the acknowledgment of student differences and aimed at tailoring instruction to support each student's growth (Deunk et al., 2018). In the research literature, DI initially focused on gifted students, then evolved into a set of practices for special education inclusion classrooms, and later developed into a mainstream approach for meeting the needs of all learners (Graham et al., 2021). This wide adoption has produced a proliferation of concepts and strategies, so the concept is characterized by some ambiguity and lacks a single clear-cut definition (Graham et al., 2021).

Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) argued that the core of DI is the teacher's adaptation of content, process, product, and affect in response to perceived differences in learners' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. This involves recognizing students' learning needs and adjusting learning objectives, curriculum content, instructional methods, learning tasks, and ongoing assessment (Van Geel et al., 2019). Alrashidi (2026) similarly described DI as a set of strategies used to modify content, process, product, and the learning environment in line with learners' needs, readiness, interests, and learning styles, and identified flexible grouping, respectful tasks, and the adaptation of these four instructional elements as its core components.

Effective DI depends primarily on teachers' actions, specifically how deliberately, proactively, and effectively they adapt instruction, for example by adapting materials for diverse learners and using appropriate instructional strategies (Van Geel et al., 2019). Onyishi and Sefotho (2020) added that teachers who differentiate

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observe and understand individual differences among students and use this information to plan instruction, offering learners multiple options for taking in information, making sense of ideas, and expressing what they have learned.

Differentiated Instruction for Learners with Special Needs

DI holds particular significance for students with disabilities. It has become a central concept in educating these students in both inclusive and special education settings, because the wide range of individual differences among them, spanning cognitive, neurological, sensory, physical, and developmental domains, requires instruction tailored to diverse learning profiles (Alrashidi, 2026). Because general education curricula are typically standardized, teachers must adapt content to accommodate learners' needs, and successful implementation depends on pre-assessment of learners' differences, clear learning objectives, an adapted physical environment, varied tasks, and assessment of learning products.

Evidence also shows that differentiating how students demonstrate learning is effective. Özüdoğru (2022) found that differentiated instruction improved academic achievement and self-directed learning readiness and that offering varied products with support throughout product development was among the most frequently used strategies. Nevertheless, the major challenges to DI include those related to students, the school environment, the strategy itself, and teachers, and teachers need professional development, preparation time, and organizational support before DI can be fully implemented (Aldossari, 2018).

Special Education and Inclusive Education in the Philippines

Special education in the Philippines plays a vital role in the pursuit of inclusive education, which upholds the right of every learner to access quality instruction regardless of physical, intellectual, emotional, or social differences. DepEd mandated the institutionalization of SPED programs through DECS Order No. 26, s. 1997, which required at least one SPED center per school division, and later issuances extended SPED programs to secondary schools and provided guidelines for SPED program support funds. Republic Act No. 11650 (2022) further institutionalized inclusive education and the establishment of Inclusive Learning Resource Centers that serve as hubs for resources, training, and specialized services for learners with disabilities.

Policy commitments, however, have not been fully matched by practice. Muega (2016) found that teachers, administrators, and parents generally supported the principles of inclusion but cited insufficient teacher preparation as one of the greatest barriers, and that inclusive education was implemented more effectively in schools where administrators and teachers proactively cultivated empathy, acceptance, and sensitivity toward learners with special needs. Despite DepEd's commitment to prioritize SPED (Malipot, 2018), progress has been constrained by budget limitations, uneven resource allocation, and a shortage of qualified SPED professionals.

Educational, Societal, Financial, and Personal Factors in DI Implementation

Educational and personal factors center on teacher preparation and competence. DI can be understood as a teacher competency, an integrated set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and practical classroom experience is among the most helpful factors in developing DI skills (Van Geel et al., 2019). Aghajari and Heydari (2024) identified the professional development needs of special education teachers as spanning teaching strategies, emotional and social support, professional knowledge, and collaboration and advocacy, underscoring the need for training programs tailored to specific instructional, emotional, and collaborative demands.

Societal factors include the attitudes of teachers, parents, school leaders, and peers. Teachers' beliefs about the capabilities of students with disabilities significantly influence their instructional strategies and willingness to adapt, and teachers who view inclusion as burdensome may lower their expectations for these students (Kiely et al., 2015). In low-resource communities, stigma toward disability can further isolate families and reduce their willingness to advocate for inclusion.

Financial factors concern resources and infrastructure. Overcrowded classrooms, outdated or insufficient materials, and the limited availability of assistive technology hinder the delivery of inclusive instruction. Baglama et al. (2017) showed that technology can enhance the teaching of mathematics to students with special needs, yet

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equitable access to such tools requires infrastructure, training, and curriculum alignment that are still emerging in many Philippine schools.

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on Carol Ann Tomlinson's theory of differentiated instruction, a proactive framework in which teachers adjust the curriculum, teaching methods, and learning environment to match diverse student needs (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010). Teachers can differentiate three elements of a lesson: content, or what students learn; process, or how students make sense of ideas; and product, or how students demonstrate what they have learned. These adaptations are made according to three learner traits: readiness, interest, and learning profile. The theory also emphasizes two operational practices, ongoing assessment and flexible grouping, and requires teachers to set high expectations for all students while providing varied levels of support. This framework informed the domains used to assess DI implementation in this study.

Research Gap and Research Paradigm

The reviewed literature affirms the effectiveness of DI in meeting diverse learner needs but leaves gaps in the Philippine context. Existing studies on DI in SPED largely come from developed countries, and local studies tend to examine general SPED program challenges rather than classroom-level differentiated teaching (Muega, 2016). There is also limited empirical documentation of how the mandates of Republic Act No. 11650 translate into practice in provincial divisions such as Pangasinan Division II. This study addressed these gaps by providing quantitative and qualitative evidence on DI implementation in the division and by proposing a locally contextualized intervention program.

Figure 1 presents the research paradigm. The quantitative strand gathered data through a questionnaire-checklist, while the qualitative strand gathered data through structured interview questions. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS, qualitative data were analyzed through coded responses, and both were interpreted together. The integrated findings served as the basis for a qualified intervention plan for differentiated instruction in special education.

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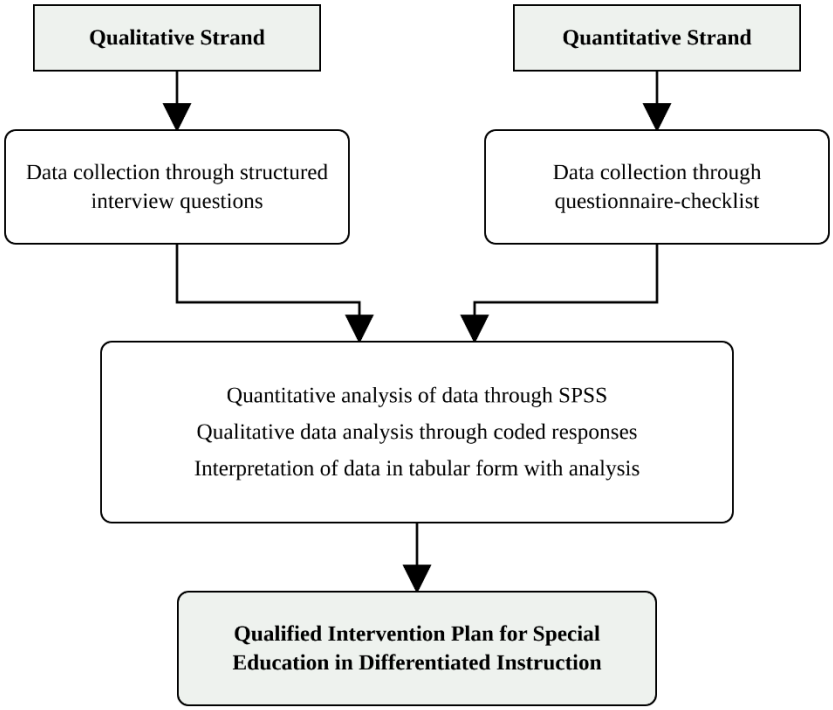


Figure 1. *Research Paradigm of the Study*

METHODS

Research Design

The study used a mixed-methods research design (Creswell, 2009). The quantitative strand followed a descriptive-comparative approach to determine the respondents' profile, the level of DI implementation, and differences in implementation when respondents were grouped according to profile. The qualitative strand used structured interview questions to explain and expand on the quantitative results by describing participants' experiences in implementing DI. Findings from both strands were integrated to identify connections between the two datasets and to form the basis of the proposed intervention program.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in the 4th, 5th, and 6th Districts of the Schools Division of Pangasinan II, Philippines. The division encompasses urban and rural municipalities serving learners from varied socioeconomic backgrounds, and several of its public schools maintain SPED programs in accordance with DECS Order No. 26, s. 1997, and subsequent DepEd orders. The three districts were selected because they represent a cross-section of the division's geographic and demographic diversity, including town-center schools with comparatively greater resources and rural schools with more limited support infrastructure.

Participants and Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was used to select respondents who met predetermined inclusion criteria and had the experience necessary to provide credible information about DI in SPED. The respondents were 50 personnel from six public schools offering SPED programs: 44 SPED teachers and 6 school heads or head teachers, one

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representing each school. The SPED teachers and the school heads or head teachers also provided written responses to the structured interview questions.

Research Instrument

A researcher-made questionnaire-checklist served as the primary data collection instrument. Part I gathered the respondents' demographic profile, namely age, sex, highest educational attainment, and length of service in special education. Part II assessed the level of DI implementation in four domains, each with five items: curriculum adaptation and content differentiation, instructional process and teaching strategies, assessment and learning outcomes, and professional development and teacher development. Items were rated on a 5-point scale interpreted as 4.21–5.00, Outstanding; 3.41–4.20, Very Satisfactory; 2.61–3.40, Satisfactory; 1.81–2.60, Fair; and 1.00–1.80, Poor. A separate set of structured interview questions explored teachers' daily SPED instruction, their ways of differentiating content, process, product, and environment, effective strategies, use of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), challenges, the influence of educational, societal, financial, and personal factors, sources of support, and training needs. School heads and head teachers answered parallel questions on their schools SPED programs, parent engagement, community attitudes, and recommended improvements.

Content validity was established by a panel of five subject matter experts in special education and educational research, who rated each item for relevance, clarity, and alignment with the research questions using a content validation matrix. Face validity was checked by SPED practitioners not included in the main sample. The instrument was pilot-tested with SPED personnel outside the study sample, and internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with 0.70 as the threshold for retaining items (Hair et al., 2019).

Data Gathering Procedure

A letter requesting approval to conduct the study was submitted to the Schools Division Superintendent of Pangasinan II. Upon approval, an endorsement letter was obtained from the Division Office, and letters requesting permission were sent to the school heads and head teachers of the identified SPED schools. The researcher coordinated with school administrators on the schedule of data collection. Each participant received an informed consent form describing the purpose of the study, the procedures, the expected duration, and the potential benefits and minimal risks. Participants who gave written consent completed the questionnaire in about 20 to 30 minutes and answered the structured interview questions.

Data Analysis

Frequency counts and percentages were used to describe the respondents' profile. Means were used to determine the level of DI implementation in each domain. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine significant differences in DI implementation when respondents were grouped according to age, sex, highest educational attainment, and length of service, at the .05 level of significance. Quantitative data were processed using SPSS. Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis, in which responses were coded and grouped into themes that were then cross-referenced with the quantitative findings for triangulation.

Ethical Consideration

Written permission was obtained from the Schools Division Superintendent of Pangasinan II, and school principals were notified through endorsement letters. Ethical clearance was secured in accordance with the requirements of the University of Perpetual Help System DALTA Graduate School. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were informed of the voluntary nature of their participation and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Responses were coded to protect anonymity, access to raw data was limited to the researcher and authorized personnel, and data were handled in compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173, 2012). The researcher disclosed the use of artificial intelligence tools for language editing and document organization.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the Respondents

Table 1 presents the profile of the 50 respondents. The largest age group was 30–39 years old (38%), followed by 50 years old and above (32%), while the smallest was 20–29 years old (6%). Most respondents were female (82%). In terms of highest educational attainment, 44% held a master's degree, 22% held a doctoral degree, and 16% had earned doctoral units, while only 6% held a bachelor's degree. The largest group had served in special education for 1–5 years (32%), followed by 6–10 years (22%), whereas 12% had served for more than 20 years. The profile shows a predominantly female, highly qualified SPED workforce with a mix of early-career and experienced personnel.

Table 1. *Profile of the Respondents (n = 50)*

Profile	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
20–29 years old	3	6
30–39 years old	19	38
40–49 years old	12	24
50 years old and above	16	32
Sex		
Male	9	18
Female	41	82
Highest educational attainment		
Bachelor's degree	3	6
With master's units	6	12
Master's degree (MA/MS/MEd)	22	44
With doctoral units	8	16
Doctoral degree (PhD/EdD)	11	22
Length of service in special education		
Less than 1 year	2	4
1–5 years	16	32
6–10 years	11	22
11–15 years	8	16
16–20 years	7	14
21–25 years	3	6
More than 25 years	3	6

Level of Implementation of Differentiated Instruction

Table 2 shows that respondents rated DI implementation as Outstanding in all four domains. Professional development and teacher development obtained the highest overall mean (M = 4.69), followed by instructional process and teaching strategies (M = 4.63), assessment and learning outcomes (M = 4.54), and curriculum adaptation and content differentiation (M = 4.48). All 20 items were rated Outstanding, with means ranging from 4.42 to 4.82.

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Table 2. *Level of Implementation of Differentiated Instruction*

Domain and indicator	Mean	Interpretation
Curriculum adaptation and content differentiation		
Curriculum content is modified to match learners' readiness, learning styles, and abilities	4.44	Outstanding
Tiered assignments target the same objective at different levels of complexity	4.50	Outstanding
IEPs provide accommodations for access to the general education curriculum	4.58	Outstanding
Supplementary materials offer varied examples and representations	4.46	Outstanding
Content is accessible through alternative formats (video, audio, interactive)	4.44	Outstanding
Overall	4.48	Outstanding
Instructional process and teaching strategies		
Flexible grouping is applied based on goals and student needs	4.54	Outstanding
Scaffolding techniques support learners who need additional guidance	4.60	Outstanding
Multisensory strategies enhance learning and retention	4.68	Outstanding
Collaboration with related service providers and families	4.66	Outstanding
Positive reinforcement encourages desired academic and behavioral outcomes	4.66	Outstanding
Overall	4.63	Outstanding
Assessment and learning outcomes		
Completes academic tasks with increasing independence	4.56	Outstanding
Maintains attention and focus during instructional activities	4.42	Outstanding
Demonstrates cooperation during group activities	4.50	Outstanding
Builds and maintains positive relationships with classmates	4.58	Outstanding
Uses appropriate verbal or alternative communication methods	4.64	Outstanding
Overall	4.54	Outstanding
Professional development and teacher development		
The classroom is arranged to accommodate students with disabilities	4.68	Outstanding
Positive relationships between students and teachers are evident	4.82	Outstanding
The classroom promotes equity, participation, and inclusion for all students	4.72	Outstanding
Students receive necessary accommodations and support services	4.66	Outstanding
Appropriate learning materials and assistive technologies are available	4.56	Outstanding
Overall	4.69	Outstanding

Note. 4.21–5.00 = Outstanding; 3.41–4.20 = Very Satisfactory; 2.61–3.40 = Satisfactory; 1.81–2.60 = Fair; 1.00–1.80 = Poor.

In curriculum adaptation and content differentiation, the highest-rated item was the use of IEPs to provide accommodations that enable students to access the general education curriculum (M = 4.58), while the modification of curriculum content to match learners' readiness, learning styles, and abilities and access to content through alternative formats were rated lowest (M = 4.44 each). These results suggest that curriculum adaptation is strongly addressed in the respondents SPED schools in compliance with institutional SPED policies. They are consistent with Tomlinson and Imbeau's (2010) view that the core of DI lies in adapting content to learners' readiness, interests, and learning profiles, and with evidence that DI requires a shift from program-based to learner-based pedagogy (Onyishi & Sefotho, 2020).

In instructional process and teaching strategies, the use of multisensory strategies to enhance learning and retention received the highest rating (M = 4.68), followed by collaboration with related service providers and families and the use of positive reinforcement (M = 4.66 each), while flexible grouping was rated lowest (M = 4.54). This indicates that appropriate grouping, scaffolding, targeted instruction, collaboration, and positive reinforcement are integral to SPED teaching in the division, in line with the emphasis on flexible grouping and scaffolding in DI frameworks (Alrashidi, 2026; Van Geel et al., 2019).

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In assessment and learning outcomes, learners' use of appropriate verbal or alternative communication methods received the highest rating (M = 4.64), followed by building positive relationships with classmates (M = 4.58) and completing academic tasks with increasing independence (M = 4.56). Maintaining attention and focus during instructional activities was rated lowest (M = 4.42), although it remained Outstanding. This suggests that communication supports pave the way for learners' understanding of classroom activities, while sustaining attention remains comparatively more challenging.

The professional development and teacher development domain obtained the highest overall rating. Its items describe the classroom conditions that teachers create, with positive relationships between students and teachers rated highest (M = 4.82), followed by a classroom that promotes equity, participation, and inclusion (M = 4.72). The availability of appropriate learning materials and assistive technologies was rated lowest (M = 4.56). The comparatively lower rating for materials and assistive technology is consistent with reports that resource limitations remain a barrier to inclusive instruction (Baglama et al., 2017; Muega, 2016) and with the multifaceted professional development needs of SPED teachers, which include instructional, emotional, social, and collaborative competencies (Aghajari & Heydari, 2024).

Differences in Implementation When Grouped According to Profile

Table 3 summarizes the ANOVA results. When respondents were grouped by age, significant differences were found in instructional process and teaching strategies, F (3, 46) = 3.17, p = .033, and in professional development and teacher development, F (3, 46) = 4.13, p = .011, indicating that teaching approaches and perceptions of professional development varied across age groups. No significant age differences were found in curriculum adaptation (p = .477) or assessment and learning outcomes (p = .259). When grouped by sex, no significant differences were found in any domain (p = .385 to .908), indicating that male and female respondents implemented DI similarly.

Table 3. *Differences in the Implementation of Differentiated Instruction by Profile (ANOVA)*

Domain	Age F(3, 46)	*p*	Sex F(1, 48)	*p*	Education F(4, 45)	*p*	Service F(6, 43)	*p*
Curriculum adaptation	0.84	.477	0.77	.385	0.24	.913	1.02	.425
Instructional process	3.17	.033	0.01	.908	2.67	.044	0.34	.912
Assessment and outcomes	1.39	.259	0.13	.717	1.50	.218	1.03	.417
Professional development	4.13	.011	0.03	.865	2.57	.050	0.34	.911

Note. Education = highest educational attainment; Service = length of service in special education. Bold values are significant at $p < .05$.

When grouped by highest educational attainment, a significant difference was found in instructional process and teaching strategies, F(4, 45) = 2.67, p = .044, suggesting that the level of education completed influences how teachers approach and implement instruction. The difference in professional development and teacher development reached exactly the .05 threshold, F(4, 45) = 2.57, p = .050, and is best regarded as marginal, while no significant differences were found in curriculum adaptation (p = .913) or assessment and learning outcomes (p = .218). When grouped by length of service in special education, no significant differences were found in any domain (p = .417 to .912), indicating that newer and more experienced SPED personnel implemented DI in similar ways.

The pattern of results suggests that DI implementation in the division is largely uniform across respondents' characteristics, with differences concentrated in the instructional process and professional development domains. This is consistent with Cabantug (2025), who found that the lack of significant differences in DI implementation across demographic factors implies that effective DI depends less on personal characteristics than on institutional and structural support. At the same time, the differences by age and educational attainment align with the view that DI is a teacher competency developed through knowledge, skills, and classroom

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experience (Van Geel et al., 2019), and with the finding that teachers' educational preparation shapes their capacity to implement DI (Aldossari, 2018).

Participants' Experiences in Implementing Differentiated Instruction

The analysis of interview responses yielded five themes, summarized in Table 4. The first theme, individualized, multisensory, and IEP-guided instruction, describes how teachers differentiated content, process, product, and environment. Teachers described days built around routines, literacy, numeracy, and life-skills activities, using leveled texts, visual aids, real objects, hands-on activities, modeling, task cards, choice boards, and quiet structured spaces. One teacher explained, "the other one can do writing and the other one is still in tracing," so content was adjusted accordingly. Teachers used learners' IEPs to review present levels of performance, strengths, needs, and goals and to select objectives, strategies, materials, and assessments. They reported that visual aids, flexible grouping, step-by-step instruction, repetition, and positive reinforcement improved participation, task completion, and progress toward IEP goals.

Table 4. *Themes from Participants' Experiences in Implementing Differentiated Instruction*

Theme	Description
Individualized, multisensory, and IEP-guided instruction	Routines, leveled texts, visual aids, real objects, hands-on and multisensory activities, task cards, flexible grouping, and IEP goals guide differentiation of content, process, product, and environment.
Diverse needs, limited time, and scarce resources	Diverse needs within one class, limited instructional time, heavy workload, strict curriculum pacing, and insufficient materials and assistive technology constrain DI.
Family and community support as facilitator and barrier	Parental support and accepting peers and communities facilitate DI; low involvement, limited awareness, and misconceptions about disability hinder it.
Motivation and resilience sustaining DI	Motivation, confidence, patience, empathy, reflection, and collaboration sustain DI despite emotional demands and burnout.
Demand for practical training and systemic support	Hands-on, school-based training; more SPED teachers; manageable class sizes; resources, funding, and time for IEP preparation and collaborative planning.

The second theme, diverse needs, limited time, and scarce resources, captures the most persistent challenges. Teachers cited the diversity of learner needs within one classroom, limited instructional time, heavy workloads, and insufficient specialized materials and assistive technology. Educational factors such as strict curriculum pacing and limited access to SPED-specific training constrained flexibility, while financial limitations meant that teachers often created low-cost materials themselves. These accounts echo the challenges of DI reported by Aldossari (2018) and the resource constraints described by Muega (2016), and they help explain the comparatively lower quantitative ratings for materials and assistive technology.

The third theme, family and community support as facilitator and barrier, reflects the role of societal factors. Teachers and school heads reported that parental support, accepting classmates, and positive community attitudes facilitated DI, whereas limited parental involvement, lack of awareness of inclusive education, and misconceptions that learners with disabilities have limited potential made it more difficult. School heads described initial "resistance," doubt, and questioning from the community, which they treated as motivation to demonstrate the value of the SPED program, consistent with evidence that stakeholder beliefs shape inclusive practice (Kiely et al., 2015).

The fourth theme, motivation and resilience sustaining DI, highlights personal factors. Teachers identified motivation, professional confidence, patience, empathy, and emotional resilience as the factors that most influenced the consistency of their DI practice, while acknowledging that high emotional demands and burnout sometimes affected the quality of their work. They sustained DI through careful planning, continuous reflection, and collaboration with colleagues, school heads, parents, and related service providers. The fifth theme, demand

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for practical training and systemic support, reflects participants' calls for hands-on, school-based training on DI, behavior management, functional assessment, and assistive technology, as well as more SPED teachers, manageable class sizes, adequate learning resources, time for IEP preparation and collaborative planning, and dedicated funding. These needs mirror the professional development priorities identified by Aghajari and Heydari (2024).

Integration of Findings and Proposed Intervention Program

Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative findings show that DI practices were rated highly and were consistent across most respondent characteristics, yet teachers continued to work under constraints of time, materials, assistive technology, training, and community support. The high self-ratings therefore reflect strong commitment to DI, while the interviews identify the conditions needed to sustain it. Based on these findings, the study proposed an intervention program titled "Enabling Potential of Teacher-Advisers: Fostering Special Needs Education and Inclusivity." The six-month program aims to increase teachers' participation in special needs and inclusive education, build support for inclusion through learning Filipino Sign Language, and enhance teachers' competencies in SPED teaching strategies. Its milestones include identifying core teachers, developing training materials, conducting upskilling sessions, monitoring teachers' progress, and documenting outputs, with success indicators covering teacher participation, the frequency of dissemination activities, and improvements in learner achievement.

CONCLUSION

The SPED personnel of the 4th, 5th, and 6th Districts of the Schools Division of Pangasinan II were predominantly female and highly qualified, with most holding graduate degrees. They implemented differentiated instruction at an Outstanding level in curriculum adaptation and content differentiation, instructional process and teaching strategies, assessment and learning outcomes, and professional development and teacher development, with positive student–teacher relationships and inclusive classroom climates as particular strengths. Implementation was largely consistent across sex and length of service but differed by age and highest educational attainment in instructional process and, for age, in professional development.

Teachers relied on individualized, multisensory, and IEP-guided strategies, positive reinforcement, and collaboration with families and colleagues, and they were sustained by personal motivation and resilience. However, diverse learner needs, limited time, insufficient materials and assistive technology, limited SPED-specific training, and uneven parental and community support continued to constrain their practice. Good assessment strategies, well-prepared instructional tools, a caring learning environment, and diligent teachers supported by school administrators and stakeholders are central to effective SPED programs, and the proposed intervention program offers a school-based means of strengthening teachers' competence in inclusive practice.

Recommendation

SPED policymakers and implementers may ensure that every school has a SPED room and that SPED programs are properly implemented so that learners with special needs are not left behind. Proper identification and tagging of learners with special needs should be carried out so that their needs can be addressed appropriately. SPED focal persons and teachers should receive continuous, practical training on differentiated instruction, behavior management, assessment, and assistive technology, and SPED teaching materials, learning kits, modules, and assistive devices should be prioritized in resource allocation.

Schools may hold a dedicated SPED program day to showcase the abilities and talents of learners with special needs, and school administrators, parents, local government units, and other stakeholders should provide concrete support for school SPED programs. School heads may adopt the proposed intervention program to build teachers' competence in inclusive practice, including Filipino Sign Language. Future researchers may extend this

study to other divisions, include parents and learners as respondents, compare the perspectives of teachers and school heads, and examine the effects of the intervention program on teacher practice and learner outcomes.

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