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Student Governance in Differentiated Learning at State Junior High School 1 Bulawa

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Abstract

The implementation of differentiated learning still faces substantial challenges, particularly in adapting content, processes, and learning products to meet the needs of diverse learners. This study aims to describe student governance in differentiated learning at SMP Negeri 1 Bulawa by examining: (1) planning; (2) organization; (3) implementation; and (4) assessment. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, the study was conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Bulawa with data collected through observation, interviews, and documentation analysis, and analyzed using an interaction model of data analysis. The findings show that: (1) student governance planning is oriented toward the application of student-centered learning principles; (2) student organization is carried out collaboratively and flexibly; (3) the implementation of differentiated learning proceeds through adjustments to students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles; and (4) assessment practices are comprehensive, continuous, and reflective. Overall, the implementation of differentiated learning at SMP Negeri 1 Bulawa has been successful and reflects the school's concrete efforts to realize inclusive, adaptive, and student-centered learning, thereby strengthening governance practices that support differentiated instruction.

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Keywords: Student Governance; Differentiated Learning; Inclusive Education; Middle School; Qualitative Research

INTRODUCTION

Differentiated learning helps teachers be more responsive to differences in students' abilities, interests, and learning styles, thus creating an inclusive learning environment and supporting the achievement of students' maximum potential. One school that implements this concept is SMP Negeri 1 Bulawa, this school has been designated as a Driving School since 2023 and has implemented differentiated learning in several subjects. Some unique phenomena at SMP Negeri 1 Bulawa include the diversity of student characteristics, both in terms of academic abilities, learning styles, social backgrounds and special needs. Limited internet access due to the school's location quite far from urban areas. The school culture is adaptive to change, where teachers are encouraged to experiment with new learning methods such as Project Based Learning and differentiated approaches. This school also has diverse student characteristics, including the presence of two students with special needs, namely 1 student with hearing and speech impairments and 1 student with slow learning (slow learner). This situation presents challenges for teachers in accommodating unique learning needs and ensuring that each student reaches their full potential. SMP Negeri 1 Bulawa is also one of the pioneering schools that has effectively implemented differentiated learning in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum policy. The diverse characteristics of students at this school provide an ideal context for examining student governance in meeting their learning needs. The school is committed to continuous innovation and adaptation to change.

Student governance is the process of planning, implementing, supervising, and evaluating various activities related to students during their time at an educational institution. This governance aims to provide structured, systematic, and targeted services to each student, so they can develop optimally according to their individual potential (Kamali & Nawawi, 2023). This management encompasses administrative aspects such as the new student admission process, student data collection, recording academic and non-academic progress, and managing student transfers. All of these aspects must be managed with high

transparency and accountability to positively impact the quality of education (Hasnadi, 2022).

The primary function of student governance is to regulate the direction and operational policies in the implementation of education in schools. Through a good governance system, schools can design appropriate strategies to support students' academic and character development (Irawati et al., 2022). Differentiated learning is an approach that gives teachers the flexibility to adapt the learning process based on students' needs, interests, and learning profiles. This concept emphasizes that each student has a different learning style and requires appropriate strategies to optimally achieve learning objectives. In the Independent Curriculum, differentiated learning is at the heart of student-centered learning practices (Fitra, 2022). Schools that support learning prioritize differentiated learning because it can increase active student participation. When students perceive that the learning process is tailored to their needs and potential, they become more motivated to learn (Handiyani & Muhtar, 2022).

The researcher presents a review of previous research and scientific studies related to the Implementation of Differentiated Learning in this Driving School, a study conducted by Mahfudz, (2023), entitled "Differentiated Learning and Its Application" The results of this study indicate that differentiated learning provides various ways to understand new information for all students in their diverse classroom communities, including ways to: obtain content; process, build, or reason ideas; and develop learning products and assessment measures so that all students in a classroom with diverse ability backgrounds can learn effectively. The difference is that in Mahfudz's research, (2023) discusses the general concept and application of differentiated learning. More theoretical-conceptual, highlighting the principles, working methods, and mechanisms of differentiation (content, process, product). While this study focuses on student governance in differentiated learning at SMP Negeri 1 Bulawa, as a real case study at the Driving School. As well as discussing aspects of planning, organizing, implementing and assessing in schools. Therefore, this research is expected to provide empirical and conceptual contributions to understanding student governance in differentiated learning in schools, as well as providing a basis for strengthening the implementation of differentiated learning at the junior high school level.

Research conducted by Mas et al., (2024) on "Training for Optimizing Differentiated Learning in the Era of the Independent Curriculum Towards Effective Schools" which shows: 1) The results of the Pre-Test and Post-Test of the Ability to compile Initial Assessments, the average score obtained by teachers in the Pre-Test was 67.24%, while the average score obtained by teachers in the Post-Test was 70.12%. 2) The results of the Pre-Test and Post-Test of the Ability to compile Formative and Summative Assessments of Learning showed a comparison of 50.6% compared to 61.22%. This shows that teacher understanding has decreased in compiling Formative and Summative Assessments as evidenced by the comparison of teacher understanding in compiling Initial Assessments. 3) The results of the Pre-Test and Post-Test of the Ability to design HOTS-based Assessments (higher order thinking skills) in learning showed a decrease in the understanding of teachers who participated in the workshop, the results of the Pre-Test were 59.6% and the Post-Test were 36.32%. This indicates that teachers' ability to conduct HOTS (higher order thinking skills)-based assessments has decreased significantly compared to the initial assessment diagram and formative and summative assessments. Research conducted by Mas, S. R., Arwildayanto, Arifin, & Sulkifly is relevant to this research because they both focus on the implementation of differentiated learning. The research shows that teachers still need to improve their competence in understanding and implementing differentiated learning, especially regarding initial assessments, mapping student learning needs, and designing learning that is responsive to student diversity. This finding aligns with the author's research focus on student governance, which essentially requires teachers' ability to map students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles as a basis for implementing differentiated learning.

Furthermore, research conducted by Mahmud et al., (2023) on "Improving Learning Innovation Through Strengthening a Culture of Technological Literacy at SDN 65 Kota Timur" is relevant to this research because both are oriented towards improving the quality of learning in schools. Strengthening technological literacy discussed in this research can support the implementation of differentiated learning, especially in providing a variety of content and learning activities according to student needs. In addition, both studies emphasize the importance of the role of adaptive and innovative teachers in facing the demands of the Independent Curriculum. Thus, this technological literacy research provides a foundation that innovation and strengthening teacher competencies are important supporting factors in student governance in differentiated learning. Research on

strengthening a culture of technological literacy shows that the use of technology can increase learning innovation, but this research has not discussed how this technological innovation is used to support student governance, especially in the context of differentiated learning. Furthermore, no research has specifically examined the relationship between these two aspects in the context of SMPN 1 Bulawa, which has its own unique student characteristics and school culture. Therefore, this study is crucial to fill this gap by examining student governance in differentiated learning while considering the potential for supporting technological literacy innovations in classroom practice.

METHODS

This research was conducted at SMPN 1 Bulawa, located on Jl. Simpang Tiga, Mopuya Village, Bulawa District, Bone Bolango Regency, Gorontalo Province. This research took place at SMPN 1 Bulawa, one of the schools designated as a "Moving School." The research period was from March to June 2025. The research used a qualitative descriptive approach, aiming to understand the process of managing differentiated learning at SMPN 1 Bulawa in depth. The researcher sought to uncover phenomena based on empirical evidence, allowing them to explore how teachers implement differentiated learning, its challenges, and its impact on student learning.

During their fieldwork, the researcher directly observed the school's conditions, particularly the implementation of differentiated learning in the classroom. These observations helped the researcher understand interaction patterns, the learning strategies used by teachers, and student responses to the implementation of differentiated learning. Therefore, the researcher's presence at the research site significantly contributed to ensuring the accuracy and depth of the data obtained.

The data collected in this study include: 1) Observational data, which is data obtained from direct observation of how teachers implement differentiated learning strategies, including differentiation of content, process, and product in the classroom; 2) Interview data, which includes the opinions and experiences of the principal and teachers regarding the implementation of differentiated learning. Through interviews, researchers obtained information regarding the planning, organization, implementation, and assessment of student governance in differentiated learning at SMPN 1 Bulawa; 3)

Documentation data, obtained from various school documents such as the curriculum, syllabus, lesson plans (RPP), assessment records, policies, and other supporting documents.

The data sources in this study consisted of: 1) The principal, as the policymaker who provided insights regarding the vision, implementation of the School Mover program, and support for differentiated learning. Information from the principal strengthened the researcher's understanding of the direction of school policy; 2) Teachers, as the primary implementers of differentiated learning in the classroom. Teachers provided insight into the methods used, challenges faced, and the support needed to implement differentiated learning effectively; 3) Students, as the direct beneficiaries of differentiated learning. Data from students provides perspective on their learning experiences, their perceptions of tailored learning, and the perceived impact on the learning process.

Data collection for this study was conducted in stages over approximately 12 weeks (3 months). The data collection process was carried out through three main stages: 1) orientation, where the researcher prepared and established the research focus, determined data collection techniques, and gathered various initial information related to the problem to be studied. During this stage, the researcher also studied the school context and prepared research instruments; 2) exploration, where the researcher secured research permits and conducted initial coordination with SMPN 1 Bulawa to convey the purpose and scope of the study. The researcher then conducted initial observations, compiled a list of informants, and prepared research instruments in the form of interview and observation guides. After selecting informants, the researcher agreed on a timeframe for the observations and interviews. During this stage, the researcher intensively collected field data, including in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and documents such as photographs, letters, regulations, policies, and other supporting documents; 3) member checking, where the data obtained was reviewed with informants to ensure the truthfulness, accuracy, and consistency of the information. This process was carried out to ensure the reliability and validity of the data used in the analysis. The data analysis technique used in this study is the interaction model data analysis, which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and verification and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, the researcher recorded all informant responses during the interview process and collected data from observations and documentation. The data obtained was diverse, showing both similarities and differences between informants. Therefore, the researcher conducted a data reduction process by summarizing, sorting, and selecting relevant

information according to the research focus. This stage was carried out by referring to the indicators contained in the interview guide related to differentiated learning governance. Data reduction helped the researcher sharpen the analytical focus on the main points of interest.

After the data was reduced, the researcher presented the data in narrative form, containing the facts and information discovered during the study. This data presentation provided a clear picture of the phenomena in the field and facilitated the researcher's interpretation of the findings. The data, compiled in narrative form, was then organized into tables or matrices as needed to demonstrate patterns and relationships between the findings. This data presentation provides researchers with a comprehensive understanding of the governance of differentiated learning at SMPN 1 Bulawa and serves as a basis for determining subsequent analytical steps.

The verification phase was conducted continuously throughout the research process. From entering the field until all data was collected, researchers continuously checked the accuracy and consistency of the information provided by informants. This verification was conducted to ensure that the data obtained was truly valid and accountable. Researchers then analyzed patterns, themes, and relationships among the data, resulting in a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study. After the data was presented and verified, researchers drew conclusions based on the meaning of the information found in the field. These conclusions were formulated according to the research focus and reflected the main findings obtained. These findings served as the final results, demonstrating how the governance of differentiated learning at SMPN 1 Bulawa was implemented and organized.

RESULTS

This study uncovered several key findings related to planning in student governance in differentiated learning, organization in student governance in differentiated learning, implementation in student governance in differentiated learning, and assessment in student governance in differentiated learning. These findings are summarized in Table 1, which outlines each aspect of student governance in differentiated learning along with key findings and supporting evidence, thus facilitating interpretation of how each aspect contributes to the overall student governance process.

Table 1. Main Findings and Supporting Evidence of Student Governance in Differentiated Learning at SMP Negeri 1 Bulawa

Student Governance Aspects	Key Findings	Supporting Evidence
Planning	Differentiated learning planning is carried out systematically based on diagnostic assessments and student profiles.	• Schools conduct early-year diagnostic assessments (questionnaires, observations, and communication with parents). • Student profiles are compiled, including learning readiness, interests, learning styles, and talents. • Teachers develop teaching modules based on the mapping results. • Homeroom teachers are actively involved in monitoring student motivation and development. • Learning plans align with the principles of the Independent Curriculum (student-centered learning).
Organizing	The organization of students is collaborative and flexible through flexible grouping and cross-role collaboration.	• Grouping students based on abilities and interests (diagnostic assessment results). • There are no dedicated guidance counselors; homeroom teachers perform guidance counseling functions, assisted by teachers and the principal. • Establishment of Teacher Learning Communities (Kombel) for weekly discussions and problem-solving. • Utilization of the Merdeka Mengajar (PMM) Platform in organizing learning. • Parents and committee members are involved in developing the curriculum for each educational unit. • Study groups are dynamic, tailored to learning needs and teacher reflection.

Student Governance Aspects	Key Findings	Supporting Evidence
Implementation	The implementation of differentiated learning is adaptive according to student needs, although it still faces time management constraints.	• Teachers use worksheets with varying levels of difficulty. • A variety of methods: discussions, projects, experiments, independent learning. • Peer tutoring strategies are implemented to assist students who need guidance. • Teachers provide special services for students with hearing impairments, speech impairments, and slow learners using visual media and video text. • Teachers actively monitor groups and provide individual guidance. • Time management challenges arise due to differences in student readiness and the number of students per class. • Teachers implement solutions such as dynamic grouping and peer tutoring.
Assessment	Assessment is comprehensive, continuous, and uses formative-summative assessment as a basis for improving learning.	• Formative assessment is conducted through observation, reflection, and individual assignments. • Summative assessment is conducted at the end of a unit or semester. • Assessment results are used for remedial, enrichment, and improvement of learning strategies. • Analysis of learning outcomes is conducted at the end of each semester through school evaluation meetings. • Assessment also includes student character development. • Parents are provided with information on their child's progress through direct communication or WhatsApp groups. • Assessment serves a diagnostic and reflective function, not merely administrative.

Planning in Student Governance in Differentiated Learning at SMP Negeri 1 Bulawa

Research findings indicate that the differentiated learning planning process at SMP Negeri 1 Bulawa has been carried out systematically and structured. The school conducts a diagnostic assessment at the beginning of the school year to map students' learning

readiness, learning styles, interests, and talents. This process involves questionnaires, direct observation, and communication with parents. The collected data is then compiled into a student profile, which teachers use as a basis for developing teaching modules and differentiated learning tools.

These findings demonstrate that student governance planning has led to the implementation of student-centered learning principles. Furthermore, homeroom teachers play an active role in collecting data and monitoring student learning motivation. Subject teachers follow up on the mapping results by adjusting learning models, methods, media, and activity designs relevant to each student's learning needs. This planning demonstrates the school's commitment to implementing the Independent Curriculum, where each student is facilitated to learn according to their potential.

Student Organization in Differentiated Learning at SMP Negeri 1 Bulawa

Research findings indicate that student organization at SMP Negeri 1 Bulawa is carried out collaboratively and flexibly. Teachers and homeroom teachers form study groups based on diagnostic assessment results, taking into account students' abilities and interests. Because the school does not yet have a dedicated guidance and counseling teacher, the guidance and counseling function is carried out by homeroom teachers with the support of subject teachers and the principal. To maintain the sustainability of the organization process, the school established a Teacher Learning Community (Kombel) which meets regularly weekly. This forum serves as a forum for teachers to share experiences, discuss learning challenges, and find solutions together, including through the Merdeka Mengajar (PMM) Platform.

In addition, the school involves parents and committee members in developing the curriculum for each educational unit, even though they are not directly involved in the learning process. Observations indicate that student grouping is dynamic (flexible grouping), with groups changing according to learning needs and teacher reflections. Overall, the organization at SMP Negeri 1 Bulawa reflects collaborative practices that support the creation of an adaptive and inclusive learning environment.

Implementation of Student Governance in Differentiated Learning at SMP Negeri 1 Bulawa

Research findings indicate that the implementation of differentiated learning at SMP Negeri 1 Bulawa is carried out with adjustments to students' readiness, interests, and

learning profiles. Teachers prepare worksheets with varying levels of difficulty, adjust learning activities, and use a variety of methods such as group discussions, projects, experiments, and independent learning. Teachers also implement a peer tutoring strategy, where students with high abilities help students who still need guidance.

In an inclusive context, teachers provide special guidance to students with hearing and speech impairments, as well as slow learners. Teachers use visual media, videos with captions, and provide additional time for understanding the material. Observations show that teachers actively circulate to monitor groups, provide individual guidance, and maintain a conducive and participatory classroom atmosphere. However, teachers still face time management challenges, primarily due to differences in student readiness levels and the large number of students per class. Nevertheless, teachers demonstrate adaptability by implementing creative solutions such as the use of peer tutors and dynamic grouping.

Assessment in Student Governance in Differentiated Learning at SMP Negeri 1 Bulawa

Research findings indicate that the assessment system at SMP Negeri 1 Bulawa is comprehensive, ongoing, and reflective. Teachers use a combination of formative and summative assessments to assess both the learning process and outcomes. Formative assessments are conducted through observation, reflection, and individual assignments, while summative assessments are conducted at the end of a learning unit or semester. Assessment results are used not only to determine report card grades but also to evaluate and improve learning strategies. The principal explained that at the end of each semester, a learning outcome analysis and evaluation meeting is held, which discusses the effectiveness of differentiated learning, student character development, and recommendations for follow-up programs such as enrichment and remedial programs. Furthermore, parents are involved through direct communication or WhatsApp groups to monitor their children's progress at school. Assessment at SMP Negeri 1 Bulawa reflects a diagnostic and reflective function, not just an administrative one, making it a crucial part of sustainable student management.

DISCUSSION

This discussion will interpret and explain the significance of the findings in relation to what is already known about the research problem, contextualize the results within the broader academic discourse and identify their implications for policy, practice and future research.

Synthesis of Key Findings

Research by Smale-Jacobse et al., (2019) and Gheyssens et al., (2022) confirms that differentiated learning is not merely a teaching strategy but a pedagogical model that requires a comprehensive understanding of student differences. This approach is oriented towards equal learning opportunities through adaptation of content, processes, and learning products. This is in line with the results of research on planning at SMPN 1 Bulawa, which began with a diagnostic assessment and learning style mapping, reflecting the basic principles of this theory. The results show that the process of planning differentiated learning at SMP Negeri 1 Bulawa is implemented in a structured and participatory manner, through a diagnostic assessment at the beginning of the school year to map student readiness, interests, and learning styles. This step aligns with (Pozas's theory., (2021), which emphasizes that the main basis for differentiated learning is the teacher's understanding of student learning profiles. Teachers need to recognize readiness, interests, and learning styles in order to adapt the content (material), process (learning methods), and products (learning outcomes). Planning at SMPN 1 Bulawa also reflects the principles of student-centered learning, as explained by Johnson (2016), who stated that planning that places students at the center of learning will result in meaningful and relevant learning activities for each individual. The involvement of homeroom teachers and subject teachers in the mapping process demonstrates the implementation of collaborative student management, in accordance with Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 22 of 2016 concerning Educational Process Standards, which emphasizes the importance of learning planning based on student characteristics (Indonesia, 2017).

The student organization phase at SMP Negeri 1 Bulawa is implemented based on the principles of collaboration and flexibility. Teachers and homeroom teachers group students based on diagnostic assessment results, and group assignments are dynamic, adapting to learning needs. This finding aligns with research by Ginja & Chen (2020), which shows that flexible grouping strategies are a key component of Differentiated Instruction (DI), but its success is highly dependent on collaboration between teachers and

support from school management. The practice of forming dynamic groups and Teacher Learning Communities (Kombel) at SMPN 1 Bulawa reflects the implementation of the Professional Learning Community (PLC) as recommended in recent research. Tomlinson & Strickland, (2005) state that flexible grouping is an important strategy in differentiated learning to ensure that each student learns according to their individual readiness and pace. Furthermore, the school established a Teacher Learning Community (Kombel) that serves as a forum for reflection and regular discussion among teachers. This illustrates the implementation of the Professional Learning Community (PLC) as explained by Huijboom et al., (2021) that collaboration between teachers within a professional community can improve the quality of teaching and support differentiated practices in schools. Although the school does not yet have a formal guidance counselor, the school is able to overcome limitations by forming a small collaborative team that carries out the functions of observing and guiding students. This strategy demonstrates good adaptation to school conditions and is in line with the school-based management (SBM) approach that emphasizes the empowerment of internal resources independently and efficiently.

In practice, teachers employ differentiated learning strategies by adapting learning activities to students' readiness and learning styles. This differentiation is evident through the creation of student worksheets with varying levels of difficulty, the use of visual media for deaf/mute students, and the use of peer tutoring for slow learners. This demonstrates that teachers have implemented adaptive and inclusive learning. This implementation aligns with the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) concept proposed by Rao et al., (2023), Teachers need to provide various ways for students to access materials, engage in the learning process, and present learning outcomes according to their abilities. Furthermore, the implementation of differentiation at SMPN 1 Bulawa also supports the principle of learner-centered learning (the "Kurikulum Merdeka" or "Learner-Centered Approach") in the Independent Curriculum, which encourages teachers' freedom and creativity in adapting teaching strategies. Despite challenges in time management and the large number of students, teachers demonstrated a reflective and adaptive attitude. This is in line with the findings Tomlinson, (2017) that differentiated learning according to teachers is reflective, flexible, and able to adapt strategies to the diverse needs of the class.

Assessment at SMP Negeri 1 Bulawa is conducted using an authentic and reflective approach, encompassing formative and summative assessments. This practice aligns with Onasanya & Ajamu, (2024) emphasizes the importance of formative assessment to support

learning progression. Recent meta-analysis review by Xuan et al., (2022) expands this concept by emphasizing differentiation-based reflective assessment that encourages students to understand their own learning progress. Onasanya & Ajamu, (2024) states that formative assessment functions to provide continuous feedback to teachers and students, so that the learning process can be dynamically improved. In addition, assessment results are used as material for teacher reflection in monthly evaluation forums and as a basis for determining enrichment and remedial programs. SMPN 1 Bulawa has implemented reflective assessment and continuous assessment in line with the modern assessment-as-learning paradigm. Assessment that focuses on individual processes and development demonstrates the application of assessment as learning, where students are actively involved in understanding their learning progress. This approach is in accordance with the principles of evaluation in Permendikbud No. 21 Tahun 2016, which emphasizes the importance of assessment as part of efforts to improve the quality of learning, not just measuring learning outcomes (Mendikbud, 2016).

Comparison with Literature

Research findings indicate that SMPN 1 Bulawa has systematically implemented differentiated learning through diagnostic assessment, flexible grouping, adaptive learning, and authentic and reflective assessment. These practices reinforce core theories related to learning differentiation. First, the process of mapping students' readiness, interests, and learning styles aligns with the Pozas's theory., (2021) which emphasizes that differentiation is based on the teacher's understanding of the student's learning profile. This approach is also in accordance with the principles of student-centered learning according to Johnson, (2016). Second, the flexible grouping strategy implemented by the school is in line with research Ginja & Chen, (2020) also Tomlinson & Strickland, (2005), which emphasizes the importance of teacher collaboration and group dynamics in supporting differentiation. The formation of the Teacher Learning Community (Kombel) emphasizes the implementation of Professional Learning Community (PLC) practices as outlined by (Huijboom et al., 2021).

Third, the implementation of adaptive learning through variations of LKPD, visual media, and peer tutors shows the application of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as explained by Rao et al., (2023). Fourth, authentic, formative, and reflective assessments carried out by teachers are in line with the principles of formative assessment Onasanya &

Ajamu, (2024) and meta-analysis Xuan et al., (2022) regarding assessment as learning and reflection on student learning progress. Overall, the findings of this study strengthen existing theory and indicate that differentiated learning practices at SMPN 1 Bulawa are aligned with current literature, although they still face technical challenges such as time management and large student numbers.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings indicate that differentiated learning planning at SMP Negeri 1 Bulawa has been carried out systematically through diagnostic assessments that map student readiness, interests, and learning styles. This confirms that the school has implemented the conceptual basis of differentiated learning as outlined by Pozas et al., (2021), which emphasizes the importance of knowing the learner as the foundation for differentiating learning content, processes, and products. This finding is also in line with research Smale-Jacobse et al., (2019) and Gheyssens et al., (2022) about the importance of differentiation as a comprehensive pedagogical approach, where mapping student characteristics is a prerequisite for ensuring equal access to learning. Planning involving homeroom teachers and subject teachers demonstrates the existence of collaborative practices that are consistent with Permendikbud No. 22 Tahun 2016 regarding Process Standards, which require planning based on student characteristics (Indonesia, 2017). Thus, the planning implemented at SMPN 1 Bulawa not only meets national standards but also adopts international best practices in differentiated instruction. This is a significant achievement for the pioneering school in its efforts to realize student-centered learning.

The organization of learning at SMPN 1 Bulawa demonstrates the application of the flexible grouping principle, where students are grouped based on diagnostic assessment results and groups can change according to learning needs. This finding confirms the Tomlinson & Strickland's theory, (2005) and research by Ginja & Chen, (2020) which places flexible grouping at the core of the differentiation strategy. The existence of the Teacher Learning Community (Kombel) which actively collaborates reflects the implementation of Professional Learning Communities (PLC), in accordance with the concept (Huijboom et al., 2021). PLC's enable teacher capacity building through reflective dialogue and collaborative problem-solving. Although the school does not have a guidance counselor, adaptations through the division of roles between homeroom teachers and subject teachers demonstrate the implementation of School-Based Management (SBM) that

maximizes internal resources. This finding is significant because it demonstrates that despite resource constraints, schools can build collaborative ecosystems that support the effective implementation of differentiation.

The implementation of differentiated learning at SMPN 1 Bulawa is adaptive, as evidenced by the use of student worksheets with varying levels of difficulty, visual media for students with special needs, and peer tutoring strategies. This is consistent with the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) concept Rao et al., (2023), which emphasizes multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression. These findings also support the principles of the Independent Curriculum, which encourages teacher creativity in adapting learning to students' needs. Teachers' willingness to change strategies when faced with constraints, such as time management or class heterogeneity, demonstrates adherence to the principle of flexibility emphasized by the Tomlinson, (2017). The significance of the findings lies in the teachers' ability to implement differentiation not only for regular students but also for deaf/mute students and slow learners. This demonstrates inclusive practices relevant to the discourse of inclusive education in Indonesia.

Assessment at SMPN 1 Bulawa is conducted comprehensively through formative and summative assessments, and is used for reflection and improvement of learning strategies. This reinforces the Onasanya & Ajamu's theory, (2024) about the role of formative assessment in supporting learning progression. The approach that positions assessment as a reflective process is in line with the study by Xuan et al., (2022), which emphasizes that differentiated assessment helps students understand their learning progress on a personal level, a key feature of assessment as learning. Parental involvement in the evaluation process also demonstrates participatory student management practices that are aligned with the school's curriculum Permendikbud No. 21 Tahun 2016. Its significance lies in the fact that assessment serves not only an administrative function, but also an instructional and character development one, a modern assessment paradigm that supports continuous learning.

Limitations

This study has several limitations, including: a) its focus on a single school, making the findings difficult to generalize; and b) limited classroom observations, which did not capture the full range of learning dynamics across the semester. Nevertheless, this study

still makes an important contribution to understanding how student governance can support differentiated learning in schools.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that student governance in differentiated learning at SMP Negeri 1 Bulawa is implemented systematically through four interrelated stages. In the planning stage, diagnostic assessments conducted at the beginning of the academic year are used to map students' readiness, interests, learning styles, and talents, and these data become the basis for preparing differentiated teaching tools. Organizationally, governance is strengthened through collaboratively formed flexible learning groups and the establishment of a Teacher Learning Community (*Kombel*) as a forum for reflection and sharing of good practices. In the implementation stage, teachers adapt learning activities to students' readiness and characteristics by using visual media, peer-tutoring strategies, and inclusive approaches for students with special needs—such as deaf and mute students and slow learners. Assessment is carried out comprehensively through formative and summative evaluations that measure both processes and outcomes and are explicitly used as a basis for reflection and continuous improvement of learning.

Theoretically, these findings contribute to a clearer understanding of how student governance can operationalise differentiated learning at the school level through an integrated cycle of planning, organization, implementation, and assessment. The model illustrates how diagnostic assessment, flexible group structures, professional learning communities, and inclusive instructional strategies can be aligned to respond to diverse learner profiles. Practically, the governance approach at SMP Negeri 1 Bulawa offers a structured and replicable reference for schools seeking to implement differentiated learning, particularly in contexts where student diversity in readiness, interests, and special needs must be addressed within mainstream classrooms.

Future research is recommended to examine the impact of this governance model on students' academic outcomes, engagement, and socio-emotional development using more varied designs and data sources. Comparative studies across different schools, regions, and levels of education would also be valuable to test the transferability and robustness of the four-stage governance framework. In addition, further investigations into teachers' and students' perceptions of each governance stage could deepen understanding

of the conditions that support or hinder the effective implementation of differentiated learning.

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