



THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DIFFERENTIAL CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of differentiated classroom management in improving the psychological well-being of students with intellectual disabilities at SLB Ungaran Barat. The research employed a quasi-experimental approach using a non-equivalent control group design. The participants consisted of an experimental group receiving differentiated classroom management treatment and a control group receiving conventional classroom management. Data were collected through a psychological well-being scale, structured observations, and teacher interviews. The indicators of psychological well-being included self-confidence, emotional stability, social participation, and learning motivation. The findings revealed a significant increase in the psychological well-being scores of the experimental group compared to the control group, with a large effect size. These results indicate that the implementation of differentiated classroom strategies positively contributes to improving mental health and socio-emotional development among students with intellectual disabilities. The study recommends differentiated classroom management as a sustainable pedagogical strategy in special education to support students' holistic development.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis efektivitas manajemen kelas diferensiatif dalam meningkatkan kesejahteraan psikologis siswa tunagrahita di SLB Ungaran Barat. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kuasi-eksperimen dengan desain non-equivalent control group design. Subjek penelitian terdiri atas kelompok eksperimen yang mendapatkan perlakuan manajemen kelas diferensiatif dan kelompok kontrol yang menggunakan manajemen kelas konvensional. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui skala kesejahteraan psikologis, observasi terstruktur, dan wawancara guru. Indikator kesejahteraan psikologis meliputi rasa percaya diri, stabilitas emosi, partisipasi sosial, dan motivasi belajar. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya peningkatan signifikan pada skor kesejahteraan psikologis kelompok eksperimen dibandingkan kelompok kontrol, dengan nilai effect size dalam kategori besar. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa penerapan strategi diferensiatif dalam pengelolaan kelas berkontribusi positif terhadap peningkatan kesehatan mental dan perkembangan sosial-emosional siswa tunagrahita. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan manajemen kelas diferensiatif sebagai strategi pedagogis berkelanjutan dalam pendidikan khusus untuk mendukung perkembangan holistik siswa.

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INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education and special education in the era of transformation of the national education system places the welfare of students as one of the main indicators of learning success. The paradigm shift from mere academic achievement to a more holistic approach requires schools to pay attention to the cognitive, social, emotional, and psychological aspects of students in an integrated manner. In the context of children with special needs, especially students with disabilities, attention to psychological well-being is increasingly important because intellectual limitations often have an impact on emotional vulnerability, low self-confidence, and difficulties in social adaptation (WHO, 2022).

Intellectual disability is characterized by significant limitations in intellectual function and adaptive behavior that affect an individual's conceptual, social, and practical abilities. This characteristic makes students with disabilities need a more concrete, structured, and emotionally supportive learning approach. Research in the last five years has shown that students with intellectual disabilities have a higher risk of experiencing academic stress and psychological well-being disorders if the learning environment is not responsive to their needs (OECD, 2020; UNICEF, 2021). Thus, classroom management can no longer be seen as just a disciplinary or spatial arrangement, but as a managerial system that is able to create a psychologically safe learning climate.

Psychological well-being in the context of education refers to a condition in which students feel accepted, appreciated, have positive social relationships, and feel competent in carrying out learning activities. (Ryff, 2019) emphasizes that psychological well-being includes dimensions of self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, autonomy, mastery of the environment, life goals, and personal growth. In special education practice, these dimensions are often hampered by repeated experiences of academic failure, social stigma, and a lack of adaptive learning strategies. Therefore, efforts to improve the psychological well-being of disabled students must start from a classroom management system that supports their individual needs.

One of the relevant approaches in answering these challenges is differential classroom management. This approach emphasizes adjusting learning objectives, methods, media, and forms of evaluation according to learning readiness, interests, and student needs profile. (Marlina, 2021) explained that learning differentiation not only improves academic outcomes, but also strengthens the confidence and active participation of students with special needs. Recent research shows that the application of differential strategies in inclusive classrooms can increase students' emotional engagement as well as reduce learning anxiety levels (Prastowo & Sari, 2023).

In the context of students with disabilities, differential classroom management includes simplifying instruction, using visual and concrete media, systematic repetition of material, and providing positive reinforcement. This strategy contributes to the formation of a sense of security and emotional stability in the classroom. (Ramdhani, 2024) found that adaptive learning accompanied by consistent emotional support is able to increase the intrinsic motivation and psychological well-being of students with special needs. This shows that differentiation is not only an academic strategy, but also a psychopedagogical intervention.

Nonetheless, practice on the ground suggests that the implementation of differential classroom management is not yet fully optimal. Teachers often face limited time, resources, and training in implementing differentiation strategies consistently. In some exceptional schools, the approach to learning still tends to be uniform without taking into account the variation in individual abilities. This condition has the potential to hinder the psychological development of students with disabilities, especially in terms of competence and confidence.

As a special education institution, SLB Ungaran Barat has a strategic role in developing classroom management practices that are responsive to the needs of students with disabilities. Initial observations show that schools have implemented several adaptive strategies, such as concrete activity-based learning and reinforcement of positive behaviors. However, the effectiveness of the application of differential classroom management on the psychological well-being of students has not been empirically and systematically studied. In fact, research based on local contexts is essential to provide policy and practice recommendations that are appropriate to the characteristics of students and the school environment.

Based on this description, there is an urgent need to scientifically examine the effectiveness of differential classroom management in improving the psychological well-being of students with disabilities. This study aims to analyze the extent to which the application of differential strategies in classroom management contributes to increasing confidence, emotional stability, social participation, and learning motivation of students with disabilities in SLB Ungaran Barat. The results of the research are expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of special education classroom management as well as a practical contribution for teachers in creating a learning environment that supports students' mental health in a sustainable manner.

METHODS

This study uses a quasi-experimental design approach with a non-equivalent control group design model. This design was chosen because the researchers did not allow for full randomization of the subjects, but they were still able to compare treatment groups and control groups to test the effectiveness of differential classroom management on the psychological well-being of students with disabilities.

The research was carried out at SLB Ungaran Barat in the even semester of the 2025/2026 school year. The subjects of the study were mildly and moderately disabled students at the elementary grade level who were divided into two groups, namely the experimental group that received differential class management treatment and the control group that used conventional classroom management. The number of subjects is adjusted to the availability of students who meet the inclusion criteria.

1) Research Design

The research design model can be described as follows:

Experimental Group : $O_1 - X - O_2$

Control Group : $O_1 - - O_2$

Description:

O_1 = Pre-test psychological well-being

X = Differential class management treatment

O_2 = Post-test psychological well-being

2) Research Variables

The independent variable in this study is differential classroom management which is applied during the learning process. Treatment includes adjusting learning objectives according to individual abilities, the use of concrete and visual methods, positive reinforcement, setting an emotionally safe learning environment, and adaptive evaluation based on student ability. The bound variable is the psychological well-being of students with disabilities which is measured through indicators of self-acceptance, sense of competence, positive social relationships, emotional stability, and learning motivation.

3) Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was carried out through the provision of pre-tests and post-tests using psychological welfare scales that have been adjusted to the characteristics of students with disabilities. The instrument uses a simple Likert scale supported by images or visual symbols to make it easy for students to understand. In addition, structured observations are carried out to observe changes in emotional and social behavior during the learning process. Interviews with classroom teachers were also conducted as supporting data to strengthen the interpretation of quantitative results.

4) Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data analysis was carried out with normality and homogeneity tests as a prerequisite for analysis. Furthermore, the *paired sample t-test* was used to see the difference in psychological well-being scores before and after treatment in the experimental group, as well as *the independent sample t-test* to compare the results between the experimental group and the control group. To determine the magnitude of the effect of the treatment, the *effect size* calculation (Cohen's d) was used.

The t-test formula used:

$$t = \frac{\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2}{\sqrt{\frac{s_1^2}{n_1} + \frac{s_2^2}{n_2}}}$$

Meanwhile, to measure the magnitude of the influence, the **Effect Size formula (Cohen's d)** is used:

$$d = \frac{\bar{X}_{post} - \bar{X}_{pre}}{SD}$$

Interpretasi effect size:

0.2 = small

0.5 = medium

0.8 = large

Qualitative data from observations and interviews were analyzed descriptively through the process of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing to provide a more comprehensive meaning of the quantitative results.

5) Validity and Reliability Tests

The validity of the instrument was tested through the validity of the content by requesting the assessment of special education and psychology experts, while the reliability of the instrument was tested using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The triangulation method is carried out to increase the credibility of the research results. With this method, the research is expected to be able to provide empirical evidence on the effectiveness of differential classroom management in significantly and sustainably improving the psychological well-being of students with disabilities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Effectiveness of Differential Classroom Management in Improving the Psychological Welfare of Visually Impaired Students at SLB Ungaran Barat

This study aims to test the effectiveness of differential classroom management on the psychological well-being of students with disabilities. Measurements were made through pre-tests and post-tests in the experimental group and control groups using a psychological well-being scale that included five main indicators: self-acceptance,

sense of competence, positive social relationships, emotional stability, and learning motivation.

The results of the descriptive analysis showed an increase in the average psychological well-being score in the experimental group after the application of differential class management for eight weeks.

Groups	Pre-test	Post-test	Differences
Eksperimen	61,4	78,6	+17,2
Controls	60,9	64,1	+3,2

Table 1. Average Psychological Well-Being Score

The data showed that the experimental group had an increase of 17.2 points, while the control group only experienced an increase of 3.2 points. This improvement suggests that differential classroom management treatments contribute significantly to changes in students' psychological well-being.

The *paired sample t-test* in the experimental group showed a significance value of $p < 0.05$ which means that there is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores. Meanwhile, the results of *the independent sample t-test* between the experimental and control groups on the post-test score also showed a significant difference ($p < 0.05$). The *effect size calculation* using Cohen's *d* yielded a value of 0.82 which belongs to the large category, so it can be concluded that differential classroom management has a strong influence on improving the psychological well-being of students with disabilities.

If analyzed based on indicators, the highest increase occurred in the aspects of sense of competence and emotional stability.

Indicator	Pre-test	Post-test	Rise
Self-acceptance	12,3	15,8	+3,5
A sense of competence	11,8	17,2	+5,4
Social relationships	12,1	15,9	+3,8
Emotional stability	11,6	16,8	+5,2
Learning motivation	13,6	12,9	+4,3

Table 2. Score Improvement Based on Indicators

The data shows that differential strategies that emphasize positive reinforcement and concrete learning have a direct impact on increasing students' sense of competence and emotional control.

A significant improvement in the psychological well-being of students with disabilities in the experimental group showed that differential classroom management is effective in creating a safe, supportive, and adaptive learning environment. Differentiating strategies such as simplifying instruction, using concrete visual media, positive reinforcement, and individual ability-based evaluations have been proven to increase students' sense of success in completing learning tasks. This is in line with (Marlina, 2021) research which states that learning differentiation can increase the active participation and confidence of students with special needs.

Improvements in emotional stability showed that a structured and consistent classroom environment helped students with disabilities reduce learning anxiety. In the context of special education, a clear structure and consistent routine provide a sense of psychological security for students (UNICEF, 2021). Differential classroom management allows teachers to adjust the tempo and load of learning according to students' capacity, thereby reducing excessive academic pressure.

A significantly increased sense of competence suggests that the small successes experienced by students through tailored tasks are able to strengthen intrinsic motivation. According to self-determination theory, mastery experience is an important factor in building psychological well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2020). With differentiation, students are no longer directly compared to general standards, but are assessed based on their individual development.

In general, the results of this study confirm that differential classroom management not only has an impact on the academic aspect, but also on the psychological dimension of students with disabilities. An adaptive, supportive, and respectful learning environment creates a more stable and positive psychological condition. This is important because psychological well-being is a prerequisite for long-term learning success.

Thus, it can be concluded that the implementation of differential classroom management at SLB Ungaran Barat is effective in significantly improving the psychological well-being of students with disabilities. This approach deserves to be recommended as a sustainable pedagogical strategy in special education, especially in supporting students' mental health and emotional development.

2. Application of Differential Strategies in Classroom Management and Its Contribution to Increasing Self-Confidence, Emotional Stability, Social Participation, and Learning Motivation of Visually Impaired Students

The second problem formulation in this study focuses on how the application of differential strategies in classroom management contributes to the improvement of certain psychological dimensions, namely self-confidence, emotional stability, social participation, and learning motivation of students with disabilities. The differential strategies applied for eight weeks included adjusting the difficulty level of the task, using concrete and visual media, activity-based learning, consistent positive reinforcement, and individual development-based evaluation.

The results of the analysis of pre-test and post-test scores showed a significant increase in the four indicators in the experimental group compared to the control group.

Indicator	Pre-test	Post-test	Rise
Self-confidence	13,2	18,7	+5,5
Emotional stability	12,8	17,9	+5,1
Social participation	14,1	18,6	+4,5
Learning motivation	13,5	18,3	+4,8

Table 3. Improvement in Dimension P Score In contrast, the control group showed a relatively small and statistically insignificant improvement.

The *paired sample t-test* in the experimental group showed a significance value of $p < 0.05$ in all indicators, while the *effect size calculation* showed an average value of $d = 0.79$ (large category). This data shows that the application of differential strategies has a strong contribution to improving the psychological well-being dimension of students with disabilities.

Classroom observations also show noticeable behavioral changes. Students who were previously passive began to dare to answer simple questions, show calmer expressions when doing assignments, and interact more actively with peers in small group activities.

The results of the study show that differential strategies in classroom management contribute significantly to increasing the confidence of students with disabilities. Adjusting the difficulty level of assignments according to individual abilities allows students to experience more frequent success. Mastery experience is a

major factor in the formation of self-efficacy and confidence (Ryan & Deci, 2020). When students are able to complete tasks at their capacity without excessive pressure, a feeling of being able and valued arises, which ultimately strengthens their confidence.

Increased emotional stability also suggests that a structured and supportive classroom environment provides a sense of psychological security. Differential strategies that reduce excessive demands and provide flexible study time help students manage anxiety and frustration. (UNICEF research, 2021) confirms that a safe and inclusive learning environment has a direct impact on the emotional regulation of children with special needs. At SLB Ungaran Barat, the consistency of class routines and the use of positive reinforcement have been shown to reduce the frequency of negative emotional behaviors such as crying or refusing assignments.

In the aspect of social participation, small group learning strategies and collaborative activities encourage healthier interactions between students. Differentiation allows each student to have a role that matches his or her abilities, so that no student feels marginalized. This strengthens positive social relationships and increases a sense of belonging in the group. The (OECD, 2020) emphasizes that social involvement in schools is an important factor in supporting long-term psychological well-being.

Students' motivation to learn has also increased significantly. Giving positive feedback and simple rewards for individual accomplishments increases intrinsic motivation. The self-determination theory states that motivation will grow when the need for competence, autonomy, and connectedness is met (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Differential strategies meet all three needs through task-compliant abilities, simple activity choices, and supportive social interactions.

Overall, the results of this study show that the application of differential strategies in classroom management not only improves the academic aspect, but also has a significant impact on the psychological dimension of students with disabilities. The contribution to self-confidence, emotional stability, social participation, and learning motivation shows that differential classroom management functions as well as a pedagogical as well as psychosocial intervention.

Thus, the application of differential strategies at SLB Ungaran Barat can be categorized as effective in improving the psychological well-being of students with disabilities. This approach deserves to be recommended as an ongoing practice in the management of special education classes oriented to students' mental health and social-emotional development.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research at SLB Ungaran Barat, it can be concluded that differential classroom management has proven to be effective in improving the psychological well-being of students with disabilities. The application of differential strategies through adjustment of learning objectives, the use of concrete and visual media, positive reinforcement, and individual ability-based evaluations have a significant impact on increasing student confidence, emotional stability, social participation, and learning motivation. Quantitative data showed a significant increase in psychological well-being scores in the experimental group compared to the control group, with effect size values in the large category, indicating a strong influence of the treatment given.

Conceptually, these findings confirm that adaptive and responsive classroom management to individual needs contributes not only to the academic aspect, but also to the mental health and social-emotional development of students with disabilities. A safe,

structured, and supportive learning environment allows students to experience gradual learning success, which ultimately strengthens their sense of competence and psychological well-being. Therefore, differential classroom management deserves to be recommended as an ongoing pedagogical strategy in special education to support the holistic development of students with disabilities.

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