

Bridging the Curriculum-to-Classroom Translation Gap: Differentiated Instruction Under Revised KSSR in Malaysian Primary Schools

Mastura Athira Marin, Khairul Azhar Jamaludin

Faculty of Education, National University of Malaysia (UKM), Selangor, Malaysia

Email: p158232@siswa.ukm.edu.my

DOI Link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v15-i4/29285>

Published Online: 28 October 2026

Abstract

Differentiated instruction is increasingly promoted as a response to learner diversity in Malaysian primary schools and is broadly compatible with the student-centred orientation of the Revised Primary School Standard Curriculum (KSSR Semakan), which integrates curriculum standards, classroom-based assessment (Pentaksiran Bilik Darjah, PBD), higher-order thinking skills and 21st-century learning. However, curriculum expectations do not automatically translate into differentiated classroom practice. Malaysian studies report moderate to high levels of teachers' curriculum understanding, whereas differentiated practice remains at a moderate level in some contexts. Drawing on a narrative review of Malaysian and international literature, this issue paper examines the curriculum-to-classroom translation gap across four dimensions: teacher capacity and professional readiness, classroom feasibility, assessment and curriculum demands, and school-level implementation conditions. The review suggests that differentiated practice depends not only on teacher knowledge but on the interaction of pedagogical skill, assessment literacy, classroom conditions, resources, workload and organisational support. Five directions are proposed: aligning curriculum, pedagogy and assessment; providing sustained practice-based professional learning; improving classroom and school conditions; strengthening the use of PBD for instructional decisions; and establishing continuous feedback mechanisms for curriculum implementation. The experience of KSSR Semakan offers timely lessons for the 2027 School Curriculum.

Keywords: Differentiated Instruction, Revised KSSR, Curriculum Implementation, Classroom-Based Assessment, Primary Education

Introduction

Primary school classrooms are characterised by considerable diversity in pupils' prior knowledge, readiness, interests, learning profiles and pace of learning. This diversity creates a central educational challenge which are teachers must maintain common curriculum expectations while providing appropriate opportunities for all pupils to access and demonstrate learning. Differentiated instruction responds to this challenge by adapting content, process, product and the learning environment to pupils' readiness, interests and learning profiles while maintaining meaningful learning goals (Tomlinson, 2014).

In Malaysia, this challenge is directly relevant to the Revised Primary School Standard Curriculum (Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah Semakan, KSSR Semakan). Implemented in stages from 2017, KSSR Semakan emphasises student-centred and flexible learning, classroom-based assessment (Pentaksiran Bilik Darjah, PBD), higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) and 21st-century learning (Ministry of Education Malaysia [MOE], 2013, 2017). These expectations require teachers to interpret curriculum standards and make pedagogical decisions that respond to pupils' needs. Curriculum implementation therefore involves interpretation and enactment rather than document compliance alone: teachers make sense of educational change through their understanding of its purposes and through their existing knowledge, beliefs and experiences (Fullan, 2016; Spillane et al., 2002).

Against these curriculum expectations, Malaysian studies provide a mixed picture of implementation. Teachers have reported moderately high perceptions of KSSR Semakan and DSKP implementation in a large national survey (Narinasamy et al., 2020), high levels of DSKP understanding among primary Visual Arts Education teachers (Shahudin & Jamaludin, 2024), and a strong relationship between KSSR Semakan knowledge and general teaching implementation (Mansor & Jamaludin, 2024). However, differentiated practice remains moderate in some contexts (Mustaffa et al., 2021), while time, class size, differences in pupils' mastery and inadequate resources have been identified as barriers (Omar & Jamaludin, 2024; Radi & Amran, 2023). Because these studies involve different samples and measures, their findings do not establish a knowledge practice gap within the same group of teachers. Nevertheless, considered together, they raise an important issue which is favourable curriculum understanding does not necessarily ensure responsive, differentiated classroom practice.

The specific problem addressed in this paper is therefore how curriculum intentions are translated into instructional decisions under actual classroom and school conditions. Teachers must identify pupil differences, interpret assessment evidence, select suitable responses, prepare materials and monitor learning, often within constraints on time and resources. This paper uses the term curriculum-to-classroom translation gap to describe the difference between curriculum intentions and the extent to which they can be enacted as responsive, differentiated practice. The term serves as an organising concept rather than an established theoretical construct. The analytical focus is on the interaction between teacher capacity, assessment practices, classroom feasibility and school-level support, rather than on teacher knowledge alone.

Examining this implementation issue is particularly timely in view of Malaysia's transition towards the 2027 School Curriculum (Kurikulum Persekolahan 2027) and the priorities set out in the Malaysia Education Plan 2026-2035 (MOE, 2023, 2026). The experience of KSSR Semakan provides a context for considering the professional and organisational conditions needed to translate curriculum aspirations into classroom practice. Lessons from its implementation can therefore inform discussion of how teachers and schools may be supported during curriculum change.

Accordingly, this issue paper draws on a narrative review of Malaysian and international literature to examine how KSSR Semakan curriculum intentions relate to differentiated classroom practice. It analyses the curriculum-to-classroom translation gap across four

interconnected dimensions: teacher capacity and professional readiness, classroom feasibility, assessment and curriculum demands, and school-level implementation conditions. On this basis, it proposes practical directions for strengthening curriculum implementation in Malaysian primary schools.

The novelty of this paper lies in bringing curriculum understanding, the instructional use of PBD evidence, classroom feasibility and school-level support into a single implementation-focused synthesis of differentiated instruction under KSSR Semakan. Its contribution to the social sciences, particularly education and policy implementation, is to explain why teacher knowledge alone may be insufficient for responsive practice and to identify interconnected priorities for professional learning and organisational support. This is a conceptual and practical contribution, not a claim to a new validated theory or new empirical findings.

Methodology

This issue paper adopts a narrative review approach, drawing on Malaysian and international empirical studies, theoretical literature and official Ministry of Education documents relevant to curriculum implementation and differentiated instruction. The discussion focuses on how curriculum understanding, assessment practices and implementation conditions relate to differentiated practice in Malaysian primary schools. International literature is used to inform interpretation of the Malaysian context rather than to assume that findings transfer directly across education systems.

The literature discussed in the paper is organised across four thematic dimensions, teacher capacity and professional readiness, classroom feasibility, assessment and curriculum demands and school-level support. The synthesis is interpretive rather than an exhaustive systematic review or meta-analysis. It identifies converging issues, differences in study contexts and limitations in the evidence, and uses these observations to develop practical recommendations and directions for future research.

KSSR Semakan and the Expectation of Responsive Classroom Practice

KSSR Semakan was introduced as part of Malaysia's national curriculum reform and is aligned with the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025, which emphasises holistic and balanced pupil development (MOE, 2013). It seeks to develop knowledge, skills and values through student-centred learning, HOTS, classroom-based assessment and 21st-century learning (MOE, 2017), and is operationalised through the Dokumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran (DSKP), which specifies Content Standards (Standard Kandungan, SK), Learning Standards (Standard Pembelajaran, SP) and Performance Standards (Standard Prestasi, SPi).

These standards provide a structure for planning, teaching and assessment, but they do not prescribe how every classroom activity should be organised. Teachers must interpret them and decide how pupils will access the intended learning. This is where curriculum implementation connects with differentiated instruction. Two pupils may work towards the same Learning Standard yet require different levels of scaffolding, forms of practice or ways of demonstrating learning. In this context, the curriculum defines the expectation, while the teacher determines how it is made accessible to pupils with different levels of readiness.

PBD reinforces this responsibility. Assessment is integrated into teaching and learning to provide information on pupils' progress and mastery (MOE, 2019), and curriculum, teaching and assessment are intended to function as an integrated whole (Arumugham, 2020). In principle, curriculum standards provide the basis for gathering assessment evidence, which informs instructional decisions and, in turn, differentiated practice. When this process functions effectively, assessment information helps teachers identify what pupils have learned and what support or extension is appropriate.

The existence of this framework, however, does not guarantee that the process operates consistently. Teachers may understand the DSKP but struggle to use PBD evidence to redesign instruction, they may understand differentiated instruction but lack the time or resources to prepare different learning pathways, and they may recognise pupil differences but find flexible grouping difficult in large classes. The curriculum-to-classroom translation gap therefore emerges from the interaction between what teachers are expected to do and what they can realistically implement.

Teachers' Understanding of KSSR Semakan: From Knowledge to Application

Teachers' understanding is an important foundation for curriculum implementation. In this paper, curriculum understanding refers to teachers' knowledge, curriculum literacy and clarity regarding the purposes and requirements of KSSR Semakan, including the relationships among SK, SP and SPi, PBD and student-centred learning. Teachers actively interpret policy rather than simply receive it (Spillane et al., 2002), and meaningful educational change requires changes in both teachers' understanding and their practice (Fullan, 2016).

Malaysian evidence indicates that teachers generally report moderate to high levels of curriculum understanding. In a national online survey of 61,642 primary and secondary teachers, Narinasamy et al. (2020) reported moderately high perceptions of KSSR Semakan and DSKP implementation. Shahudin and Jamaludin (2024) found high levels of DSKP understanding ($M = 4.33$) and teaching implementation ($M = 4.31$) among 246 primary Visual Arts Education teachers in Selangor, while Mansor and Jamaludin (2024) reported high levels of knowledge and implementation of KSSR Semakan among 140 primary teachers in Rompin, Pahang, with a strong correlation between the two ($r = 0.75$). Implementation difficulties therefore cannot be attributed solely to inadequate curriculum knowledge.

The distinction between knowledge and application becomes clearer when assessment and pedagogical skills are examined. Ng et al. (2023) found that teachers' PBD knowledge was high ($M = 4.17$), whereas their PBD skills ($M = 3.98$) and readiness ($M = 3.95$) were only moderately high. Md. Yatim et al. (2020) similarly reported moderately high pedagogical content knowledge among primary Malay language teachers ($M = 3.83$) and highlighted the need for continued strengthening. Teachers may thus know what the curriculum requires without always possessing the practical skills and readiness needed to decide how those requirements should be translated into specific classroom decisions.

This distinction matters for differentiated instruction because differentiation is inherently decision-intensive. Teachers must judge which pupils need additional support and which are ready for greater challenge, which aspects of a task to modify, how much scaffolding to provide, how to group pupils, what evidence to collect and how to adjust subsequent

instruction. Curriculum understanding should therefore be regarded as a necessary foundation but not a sufficient condition for differentiated practice.

Differentiated Instruction in Malaysian Primary Classrooms

Differentiated instruction recognises that pupils vary in readiness, interests and learning profiles and that teaching may need to respond to those differences (Tomlinson, 2014). Four elements are commonly differentiated. Content concerns how pupils access the knowledge and skills specified by the curriculum, for example through different materials, representations or levels of scaffolding. Process refers to how pupils engage with learning, such as through flexible grouping, cooperative learning, learning stations and tiered activities (Pozas et al., 2020). Product concerns how pupils demonstrate learning, which, depending on the objective, may take the form of written responses, presentations, projects or diagrams. The learning environment refers to the physical and psychological conditions that support pupils' engagement and participation (Tomlinson, 2014).

These dimensions make differentiated instruction relevant to heterogeneous Malaysian classrooms, yet the literature suggests that it remains difficult to implement consistently. Mustaffa et al. (2021) reported moderate levels of differentiated pedagogy practice among 361 Islamic Education teachers in the Southern Zone of Malaysia, and Omar and Jamaludin (2024) identified challenges related to knowledge, time and resources among Malay language teachers. A recent systematic review of differentiated approaches in language teaching similarly found that, although teachers generally view differentiated instruction positively, classroom implementation remains limited, constrained by insufficient time, overcrowded classrooms, limited professional training and conceptual misunderstandings of its principles (John & Mohamad Nasri, 2025). Ramli and Mohd Yusoff (2020) found a significant positive relationship between teacher self-efficacy and differentiated instruction among 428 teachers in the East Coast Zone, suggesting that confidence, as well as knowledge, may influence practice.

International literature further highlights the complexity of the practice. Definitions and frameworks of differentiation vary considerably, making comparisons across studies difficult (Bondie et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2021), and differentiation involves a continuous cycle of identifying learning needs, planning, monitoring and adapting instruction (van Geel et al., 2019). Evidence on achievement also requires cautious interpretation: reported effects are positive but generally small to moderate, and are stronger when differentiation is embedded within broader, well-organised teaching rather than achieved through grouping alone (Deunk et al., 2018; Smale-Jacobse et al., 2019).

Differentiated instruction should therefore not be treated as a simple classroom technique. It requires teachers to coordinate curriculum knowledge, knowledge of pupils, pedagogy and assessment. Difficulties in coordinating these elements contribute to the curriculum-to-classroom translation gap.

Issues and Challenges in Translating Curriculum Intent into Practice

Teacher Capacity and Professional Readiness

The first issue concerns teachers' capacity to translate curriculum knowledge into classroom decisions. Curriculum understanding provides a foundation, but differentiated instruction

requires teachers to apply it flexibly, understanding not only what pupils are expected to learn but also how different pupils can achieve the intended learning outcomes. This draws on knowledge of curriculum standards, pupil readiness, differentiated strategies, assessment, scaffolding, flexible grouping and instructional adaptation. Malaysian evidence suggests that teachers' knowledge may be stronger than some aspects of their practical skills, as illustrated by the contrast between PBD knowledge and PBD skills reported by Ng et al. (2023).

Self-efficacy is a further factor. Teacher efficacy has been positively associated with differentiated instruction in several studies (Dixon et al., 2014; Ramli & Mohd Yusoff, 2020; Suprayogi et al., 2017), and teachers' attitudes towards differentiation have also been identified as an important predictor of practice (Letzel et al., 2020). A recent large-scale study of 1,954 primary and secondary teachers in China further found that self-efficacy was associated with differentiated practice both directly and indirectly through peer collaboration and teachers' attitudes towards differentiation (Bi et al., 2026). Teaching experience has been associated with differences in teachers' sense of efficacy for differentiation, although not with their knowledge or implementation of it (Moosa & Shareefa, 2019). Teachers who lack confidence in managing diverse learners may therefore be less willing to experiment with differentiated approaches, particularly under demanding conditions. The issue is not simply whether teachers know about differentiation, but whether they have the professional readiness and practical confidence to enact it.

Classroom Conditions and Practical Feasibility

The second issue concerns the feasibility of differentiation in everyday classrooms. Differentiation can require additional planning, varied materials, flexible grouping, monitoring of different activities, continuous assessment and ongoing adjustment. These demands become more difficult to manage with large classes, limited lesson time and wide differences in pupil mastery. Primary teachers have reported that the more demanding differentiation strategies are particularly difficult to implement (Gaitas & Alves Martins, 2017), and national data from Germany indicate that teachers implement differentiation practices only occasionally (Pozas et al., 2020). Gibbs (2023) identified time pressure and mixed-ability classrooms as significant challenges, and Maphumulo and Biccard (2024) described interconnected constraints involving time, resources and class size. In Malaysia, teachers in Muar identified time as the most significant barrier, followed by large classes, differences in pupils' mastery and inadequate teaching materials (Radi & Amran, 2023), and Omar and Jamaludin (2024) reported similar time and resource constraints.

These findings highlight the difference between pedagogical and practical feasibility: a strategy may be educationally appropriate yet difficult to sustain under particular classroom conditions. Moderate levels of differentiated practice should therefore not automatically be interpreted as evidence of weak teacher commitment, since the conditions of implementation matter.

Assessment and Curriculum Demands

The third issue concerns the relationship between PBD, curriculum expectations and differentiated instruction. PBD is intended to provide ongoing information on pupils' progress and mastery (MOE, 2019), and formative assessment has long been recognised as a means by which teachers identify learning gaps and adapt instruction (Black & Wiliam, 1998). In

principle, PBD evidence can help teachers identify pupils who require additional scaffolding, need further practice, have achieved the expected level or are ready for extension.

Assessment evidence, however, is useful only when teachers can interpret it and act upon it. Teachers' PBD knowledge has been found to exceed their PBD skills and readiness (Ng et al., 2023), readiness for PBD depends on both knowledge and skill (Hajmi & Jamaludin, 2022), and teachers continue to need guidance in implementing PBD as intended (Arumugham, 2020). The critical question is what a teacher does differently in response to the assessment evidence. If PBD becomes primarily a recording or reporting exercise, its contribution to differentiation is reduced; for differentiation to occur, teachers must connect performance evidence, interpretation and instructional response. PBD literacy may therefore function as a link between curriculum understanding and differentiation decisions, but the evidence discussed here does not establish this relationship in the KSSR Semakan context; it is therefore treated as an open research question rather than an established causal mechanism.

School-Level Support and Implementation Conditions

The fourth issue concerns the school environment. Teachers implement curriculum within organisational settings shaped by leadership, resources, professional learning, collaboration and workload, and educational change requires time, support and continuous capacity development (Fullan, 2016). Positive beliefs about differentiation do not necessarily translate into consistent practice when contextual support is limited (Whitley et al., 2019). In a review of 29 studies, Langelan et al. (2024) found that effective professional learning programmes for differentiation tended to involve active learning, collaboration and reflection, were often sustained over time, and were strongly influenced by school-level facilitators and barriers. Sustained professional development has also been associated with greater teacher efficacy for differentiation (Dixon et al., 2014), and teachers' beliefs may change after they observe improvements in pupil learning following the implementation of new teaching practices (Guskey, 2002).

Together, these perspectives suggest that teachers need opportunities to try, observe, reflect on and refine new approaches. School-based professional learning communities offer one context for doing so. Differentiated instruction should therefore not be framed solely as an individual teacher responsibility, since school conditions shape teachers' opportunities to develop and sustain the practice.

Evidence and Measurement Limitations

A further issue concerns the evidence base itself. Although differentiated instruction is widely discussed, reported effects on achievement are positive but relatively small to moderate, with considerable variation across study designs (Deunk et al., 2018; Smale-Jacobse et al., 2019), while definitions and measures of differentiation vary widely (Bondie et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2021). This has implications for interpreting Malaysian evidence, much of which relies on teachers' self-reported data collected through questionnaires. Such measures capture teachers' perceptions but may not fully reflect classroom practice; teachers may report high curriculum understanding while classroom observations reveal different patterns of implementation. In addition, studies examining curriculum understanding typically use general teaching implementation as the outcome (Mansor & Jamaludin, 2024; Shahudin & Jamaludin, 2024), rather than measuring specific differentiated practices across content,

process, product and the learning environment. Future research should therefore combine self-report with classroom observation, lesson plans, teaching materials, pupil work, assessment records, teacher interviews and, where appropriate, pupil perspectives.

The Interaction Among the Challenges

These challenges do not operate independently. A teacher may have strong curriculum knowledge but limited time; another may understand differentiation but lack suitable materials; a third may understand PBD but struggle to use assessment evidence because of workload. Self-efficacy may influence whether teachers attempt differentiation, while successful or unsuccessful classroom experiences may in turn shape their confidence (Guskey, 2002). The translation gap therefore cannot be reduced to a single variable; it reflects the combined influence of teacher capacity, assessment literacy, classroom conditions, resources and school support. In this paper, the notion of implementation capacity is used to describe this broader implementation environment, as an interpretive concept rather than a new formal construct requiring validation.

Bridging the Curriculum-to-Classroom Translation Gap

Strengthen Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment Alignment

The first direction is to strengthen alignment between curriculum expectations, differentiated pedagogy and assessment. Rather than being treated as separate responsibilities, KSSR Semakan, PBD and differentiated instruction can be viewed as interconnected: the curriculum identifies what pupils are expected to learn, assessment provides evidence of what they have learned, and differentiated pedagogy offers flexible pathways towards the intended learning. For example, a teacher working with a single Learning Standard may use previous PBD evidence to identify different levels of readiness, so that one group works with concrete materials and worked examples, another with guided practice, and a third with tasks involving application, explanation or problem-solving. The Learning Standard remains common while the learning pathway is adjusted. This matters because differentiation should not mean lowering expectations; its purpose is to provide appropriate support and challenge while maintaining meaningful curriculum goals (Tomlinson, 2014). Exemplar lesson plans showing how a single Learning Standard can be differentiated on the basis of PBD evidence would offer teachers practical support.

Develop Sustained, Practice-Based Professional Learning

The second direction concerns professional learning. One-off workshops may introduce the concept of differentiation, but teachers need repeated opportunities to apply and refine it through collaborative lesson planning, analysis of pupil work, peer observation, lesson study, classroom-based reflection, joint development of resources, discussion of PBD evidence and peer feedback. Effective professional learning for differentiation has been associated with active learning, collaboration, reflection and sustained duration (Langelaan et al., 2024), while sustained professional development has been associated with greater teacher efficacy for differentiation (Dixon et al., 2014). Recent Malaysian evidence points in the same direction: among 169 primary school History teachers, readiness to implement PBD was strongly associated with professional training (Chandran & Ahmad, 2026). This approach is consistent with Fullan's (2016) emphasis on continuous professional learning, and school-based professional learning communities (PLCs) offer a practical platform for it.

Create Enabling Classroom and School Conditions

The third direction addresses structural and organisational conditions. Given that time, class size and resources are among the most frequently reported barriers (Gibbs, 2023; Maphumulo & Biccard, 2024; Radi & Amran, 2023), teachers who are expected to differentiate need reasonable opportunities to plan and prepare. Schools and education authorities should therefore consider protected planning time, manageable workloads, flexible class organisation, access to teaching resources, collaborative planning and supportive leadership. Shared banks of differentiated materials aligned with the DSKP may be particularly useful, as they could reduce duplication and allow teachers to devote more time to interpreting pupil evidence and making instructional decisions. The aim is not to reduce teacher autonomy but to ensure that teachers have sufficient organisational support to exercise professional judgement.

Strengthen the Use of PBD for Instructional Decision-Making

The fourth direction is to strengthen the practical use of PBD. Professional learning should help teachers move from asking “What is the pupil’s mastery level?” to asking “What should I do next based on this evidence?”, consistent with the view that assessment is formative only when its evidence is used to adapt teaching (Black & Wiliam, 1998). This involves showing teachers how assessment evidence can inform flexible grouping, scaffolding, task difficulty, questioning, additional practice, feedback and extension activities. This direction responds directly to the gap between PBD knowledge and PBD skills identified in Malaysian research (Ng et al., 2023) and also represents an important area for future empirical study.

Establish Continuous Implementation Feedback

Implementation should be understood as an ongoing cycle in which teachers plan, implement, assess, reflect and adapt. Curriculum expectations inform planning and differentiation; classroom implementation generates PBD evidence; reflection and feedback lead to instructional adjustment; and the cycle begins again. Differentiated instruction cannot be perfected through a single professional development intervention, since teachers need repeated opportunities to test strategies, observe pupils’ responses and adjust their practice. Observing improvements in pupil learning can itself strengthen teachers’ commitment to new practices (Guskey, 2002). At the school level, PLCs can support this cycle; at the system level, implementation feedback can help education authorities judge whether curriculum expectations are realistic under different classroom conditions.

Directions for Future Research

The issues identified in this paper suggest several priorities for future research. First, studies should examine whether teachers’ curriculum understanding is specifically associated with differentiated instructional practice, measured across content, process, product and the learning environment, rather than relying on general measures of teaching implementation (Mansor & Jamaludin, 2024; Shahudin & Jamaludin, 2024).

Second, research should investigate whether teachers’ ability to interpret and use PBD evidence is associated with their differentiation decisions. A guiding question might be: “To what extent does PBD literacy contribute to teachers’ ability to translate curriculum expectations into differentiated instructional decisions?” This relationship remains a proposition for empirical investigation rather than an established mechanism.

Third, future studies could examine whether classroom conditions, including class size, time, resources and workload, moderate the relationship between teacher capacity and differentiated practice, and whether school-level factors such as leadership, PLC participation, professional development, collaborative planning and resource availability contribute to sustained implementation (Langelaan et al., 2024). Fourth, as Malaysia transitions to the 2027 School Curriculum, studies that follow teachers across the transition could examine whether implementation capacity developed under KSSR Semakan carries over to the new curriculum.

Finally, given the reliance of the current evidence base on teacher self-report (Graham et al., 2021), future studies should adopt mixed-methods designs that combine quantitative self-report measures with classroom observation, lesson artefacts, pupil work and teacher interviews. Such designs would provide a more complete picture of how curriculum intentions are translated into classroom practice.

Conclusion

Differentiated instruction offers a useful approach for responding to learner diversity in Malaysian primary schools, and its principles are broadly consistent with the student-centred and responsive orientation of KSSR Semakan. Curriculum expectations, however, do not automatically translate into classroom practice. The evidence reviewed in this paper indicates that Malaysian teachers generally report moderate to high levels of curriculum understanding, while differentiated practice remains challenging in some contexts. This gap may be shaped by differences between knowledge and practical skills, assessment literacy, self-efficacy, class size, time, resources, workload and school-level support.

The central issue is therefore not simply whether teachers understand the curriculum, but whether they are able to translate curriculum intentions into appropriate instructional decisions under real classroom conditions. The concept of a curriculum-to-classroom translation gap draws attention to the challenges involved in this process, particularly how curriculum expectations are interpreted, connected with assessment evidence, translated into pedagogical decisions and enacted within particular classroom and school contexts.

Addressing the gap requires more than increasing teachers' knowledge of differentiated instruction. Five directions are particularly relevant: strengthening curriculum, pedagogy and assessment alignment; providing sustained practice-based professional learning; creating enabling classroom and school conditions; strengthening the use of PBD for instructional decision-making; and establishing continuous implementation feedback. PBD deserves particular attention, as its potential extends beyond recording mastery levels to informing what teachers do next, although this relationship requires further empirical investigation.

These lessons are timely as Malaysia moves towards the 2027 School Curriculum. The success of any new curriculum will depend not only on its aspirations for student-centred learning, but also on whether teachers have the knowledge, skills, assessment information, time, resources and organisational support to enact those aspirations. The curriculum-to-classroom translation gap should therefore be understood not as evidence of teacher failure, but as an implementation issue requiring attention at the teacher, classroom, school and curriculum levels.

References

- Arumugham, K. S. (2020). Kurikulum, pengajaran dan pentaksiran dari perspektif pelaksanaan pentaksiran bilik darjah. *Asian People Journal*, 3(1), 152–161.
- Bi, M., Liu, X., Cai, J., & Zhu, C. (2026). From teachers' self-efficacy belief to their differentiated practice: The mediating roles of collaboration and attitude. *Social Psychology of Education*, 29, 18. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-026-10186-1>
- Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (1998). Assessment and classroom learning. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 5(1), 7–74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0969595980050102>
- Bondie, R. S., Dahnke, C., & Zusho, A. (2019). How does changing “one-size-fits-all” to differentiated instruction affect teaching? *Review of Research in Education*, 43(1), 336–362. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X18821130>
- Chandran, A., & Ahmad, A. (2026). Tahap kesediaan guru sejarah sekolah rendah dalam melaksanakan Pentaksiran Bilik Darjah. *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH)*, 11(2), e3796. <https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v11i2.3796>
- Deunk, M. I., Smale-Jacobse, A. E., de Boer, H., Doolaard, S., & Bosker, R. J. (2018). Effective differentiation practices: A systematic review and meta-analysis of studies on the cognitive effects of differentiation practices in primary education. *Educational Research Review*, 24, 31–54. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2018.02.002>
- Dixon, F. A., Yssel, N., McConnell, J. M., & Hardin, T. (2014). Differentiated instruction, professional development, and teacher efficacy. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 37(2), 111–127. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0162353214529042>
- Fullan, M. (2016). *The new meaning of educational change* (5th ed.). Teachers College Press.
- Gaitas, S., & Alves Martins, M. (2017). Teacher perceived difficulty in implementing differentiated instructional strategies in primary school. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 21(5), 544–556. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2016.1223180>
- Gibbs, K. (2023). Voices in practice: Challenges to implementing differentiated instruction by teachers and school leaders in an Australian mainstream secondary school. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 50(4), 1217–1232. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-022-00551-2>
- Graham, L. J., de Bruin, K., Lassig, C., & Spandagou, I. (2021). A scoping review of 20 years of research on differentiation: Investigating conceptualisation, characteristics, and methods used. *Review of Education*, 9(1), 161–198. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3238>
- Guskey, T. R. (2002). Professional development and teacher change. *Teachers and Teaching*, 8(3), 381–391. <https://doi.org/10.1080/135406002100000512>
- Langelaan, B. N., Gaikhorst, L., Smets, W., & Oostdam, R. J. (2024). Differentiating instruction: Understanding the key elements for successful teacher preparation and development. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 140, Article 104464. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2023.104464>
- Letzel, V., Pozas, M., & Schneider, C. (2020). ‘It’s all about the attitudes!’ – Introducing a scale to assess teachers’ attitudes towards the practice of differentiated instruction. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2020.1862402>
- Mansor, A., & Jamaludin, K. A. (2024). Hubungan antara pengetahuan dan pelaksanaan Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah Semakan 2017 dari perspektif guru. *Jurnal Dunia Pendidikan*, 6(1), 68–81. <https://doi.org/10.55057/jdpd.2024.6.1.6>
- Maphumulo, T. & Biccadd, P. (2024). Teachers Identified Challenges to Implement Differentiated Instruction in Mainstream Primary School Mathematic Classrooms.

- Unnes Journal of Mathematics Education*, 13(1), 55-65.
<https://doi.org/10.15294/ccwb1a43>
- Md. Yatim, N. A., Chew, F. P., & Abdullah, Z. (2020). Tahap pengetahuan pedagogi kandungan guru Bahasa Melayu sekolah rendah. *Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Melayu*, 10(2), 43–53.
- Ministry of Education Malaysia. (2013). *Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025 (Preschool to post-secondary education)*. Ministry of Education Malaysia.
- Ministry of Education Malaysia. (2017). Dokumen Standard Kurikulum Sekolah. Curriculum Development Division.
- Ministry of Education Malaysia. (2019). *Panduan pelaksanaan pentaksiran bilik darjah* (2nd ed.). Curriculum Development Division.
- Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia. (2023). *Kurikulum Persekolahan 2027*. Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum. <https://www.moe.gov.my/kurikulum-persekolahan-2027>
- Ministry of Education Malaysia. (2026). *Rancangan Pendidikan Malaysia 2026–2035*. Ministry of Education Malaysia.
- Moosa, V., & Shareefa, M. (2019). The impact of teachers' experience and qualification on efficacy, knowledge and implementation of differentiated instruction. *International Journal of Instruction*, 12(2), 587–604. <https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2019.12237a>
- Mustaffa, Z., Hussin, Z., & Sulaiman, A. M. (2021). Tahap pengetahuan kurikulum dan amalan pedagogi terbeza guru-guru Pendidikan Islam Zon Selatan Malaysia. *Tinta Artikulasi Membina Ummah*, 7(2), 1–11.
- Narinasamy, I., Arumugam, L., Siew, S. K., & Musa, S. (2020). Teachers' perceptions on the implementation of KSSR (Revised 2017) and KSSM: An online survey. *Jurnal Kurikulum*, 5, 153–163.
- Ng, P. J., Rahman, S., & Surat, S. (2023). Tahap pengetahuan, kemahiran dan kesediaan guru terhadap pelaksanaan pentaksiran bilik darjah (PBD). *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 8(5), Article e002339. <https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v8i5.2339>
- Omar, Y., & Jamaludin, K. A. (2024). Use of differentiated pedagogical approaches by Malay language teachers: Issues and challenges. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 13(3), 1968–1980.
- Pozas, M., Letzel, V., & Schneider, C. (2020). Teachers and differentiated instruction: Exploring differentiation practices to address student diversity. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 20(3), 217–230. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12481>
- Radi, N. H., & Amran, S. (2023). Strategi dan cabaran pelaksanaan pendekatan pembelajaran terbeza dalam kalangan guru di sekolah rendah. *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 8(5), Article e002336. <https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v8i5.2336>
- Ramli, R., & Mohd Yusoff, N. (2020). Self-efficacy and differentiated instruction: A study among Malaysian school teachers. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 8(4), 1252–1260. <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2020.080416>
- Shahudin, M. S., & Jamaludin, K. A. (2024). The implementation of DSKP KSSR (Revision 2017) for Visual Arts Education among primary school teachers. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 13(1), 1082–1100.
- Smale-Jacobse, A. E., Meijer, A., Helms-Lorenz, M., & Maulana, R. (2019). Differentiated instruction in secondary education: A systematic review of research evidence. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, Article 2366. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02366>

- Spillane, J. P., Reiser, B. J., & Reimer, T. (2002). Policy implementation and cognition: Reframing and refocusing implementation research. *Review of Educational Research*, 72(3), 387–431. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543072003387>
- Suprayogi, M. N., Valcke, M., & Godwin, R. (2017). Teachers and their implementation of differentiated instruction in the classroom. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 67, 291–301. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.06.020>
- Tomlinson, C. A. (2014). *The differentiated classroom: Responding to the needs of all learners* (2nd ed.). ASCD.
- Van Geel, M., Keuning, T., Frèrejean, J., Dolmans, D., van Merriënboer, J., & Visscher, A. J. (2019). Capturing the complexity of differentiated instruction. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 30(1), 51–67. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2018.1539013>
- Whitley, J., Gooderham, S., Duquette, C., Orders, S., & Cousins, J. B. (2019). Implementing differentiated instruction: A mixed-methods exploration of teacher beliefs and practices. *Teachers and Teaching*, 25(8), 1043–1061. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2019.1699782>