

Optimization Strategies for Teaching Management in the Implementation of Differentiated Instruction

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Abstract: Differentiated instruction, as an important form of teaching organization that responds to individual differences among secondary school students, depends largely on whether supporting teaching management mechanisms can be simultaneously optimized. In current secondary school implementation of differentiated instruction, management challenges such as single-dimensional classification standards, improper allocation of teaching staff, lack of mobility mechanisms, and rigid evaluation systems are seriously undermining its educational effectiveness. From the perspective of coordinated development between differentiated instruction and teaching management, this paper analyzes the practical significance of optimizing teaching management, examines the main management challenges, and proposes optimization strategies across four dimensions: improving dynamic grouping, optimizing staff allocation, strengthening mobility systems, and constructing differentiated evaluation, in order to provide reference for secondary school differentiated instruction management.

Keywords: Secondary school; Differentiated instruction; Teaching management; Optimization strategies

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Introduction

Advancing individualized education is an intrinsic requirement of secondary education in addressing differences in student learning, and differentiated instruction is precisely the institutional response to this concept at the classroom level. In recent years, as secondary education reform has deepened, differentiated instruction has been gradually rolled out across different regions and schools, but the problem of uneven implementation outcomes has also emerged. The root cause lies in the obvious gap between the overall design of teaching management and the actual needs of differentiated instruction. The promotion of differentiated instruction cannot remain at the formal level of classroom grouping — if it lacks the support of corresponding management mechanisms, differentiated instruction may actually solidify academic gaps and exacerbate educational inequality. Therefore, systematically examining the problems and solutions in the implementation of differentiated instruction from the perspective of optimizing teaching management holds important practical significance for improving the overall quality of secondary school differentiated instruction.

1.The Practical Significance of Optimizing Teaching Management in the Implementation of Differentiated Instruction

1.1 Accommodating Individual Differences to Escape the Dilemma of Homogeneous Teaching

The fact that secondary school students show significant individual differences in cognitive development, knowledge foundation, and learning ability tendencies is not a coincidental phenomenon — it is determined by objective laws. Traditional class-based instruction places students with different starting points in the same teaching pace, calibrating the depth and speed of content to the "average student." The result is that students with a weak foundation cannot keep up, while students with greater capacity are not sufficiently challenged; homogeneous teaching effectively causes a misallocation of resources. The logical starting point of differentiated instruction is a direct response to this dilemma — it acknowledges differences and uses differentiated teaching designs to place students at appropriate challenge levels, thereby enabling effective learning. However, for differentiated instruction to truly escape the dilemma of homogeneous teaching, it cannot rely solely on adjustments within the classroom. Teaching management must also provide institutional support across classification standards, grouping methods, and the alignment of teaching content. If management does not guarantee the scientific validity of the grouping process, differentiated instruction will become merely superficial or produce negative effects. Therefore, optimizing teaching

management is a prerequisite for the effective implementation of differentiated instruction, and an important pathway for transforming individual differences into educational resources. Its practical significance lies in laying an operable foundation for differentiated education in secondary schools at the institutional level.

1.2 Reconstructing Teacher-Student Relationships to Activate Bilateral Teaching Motivation

The deeper influence of differentiated instruction on secondary school classrooms is not simply a reorganization of teaching content — it also brings new opportunities for reshaping the teacher-student relationship. In homogeneous classrooms, single teaching objectives and unified evaluation standards make it difficult for students to receive feedback from teachers that matches their own learning pace. Over time, students fall into a state of passive reception or learned helplessness, while teachers facing varied learning responses easily develop teaching fatigue from being unable to attend to both ends of the spectrum. The introduction of differentiated instruction allows teachers to concentrate their limited energy on students within the same learning tier, making teaching goals more precise and feedback more targeted, thereby creating structural conditions for better teaching interaction between teachers and students. However, the role of teaching management cannot be overlooked — it determines whether teachers receive sufficient professional support to meet the increased demands of differentiated instruction, and whether students are able to feel the fairness of the grouping rather than being labeled under institutional guarantees. Only when optimized teaching management is aligned with differentiated instructional design can the bilateral momentum of secondary school teaching be truly activated, making teachers willing to invest and students willing to participate, and allowing differentiated instruction to fulfill its true educational purpose through the positive reconstruction of teacher-student relationships.

1.3 Enhancing School Governance to Consolidate the Foundation of Differentiated Education

The promotion of differentiated instruction is not merely a classroom-level teaching reform — it places higher demands on the overall governance capacity of the school. The stable operation of differentiated instruction at the secondary school level involves many management areas, including curriculum resource allocation, faculty development, student development evaluation, and home-school communication coordination. Any management deficiency in any one of these links will cause deviations in the overall implementation of differentiated instruction. The improvement of teaching management is actually a valuable opportunity to drive the shift in school governance from experience-driven to institution-driven. It requires school administrators to re-examine existing management logic through the lens of differentiated education, and to make systematic changes in resource allocation, institutional arrangements, and faculty development. Only when the top-level design of teaching management aligns with the operational logic of differentiated instruction will differentiated instruction have sustained institutional guarantees for development, rather than remaining at the level of localized experiments or short-term attempts.

2. Main Management Challenges in the Current Implementation of Differentiated Instruction

2.1 Single Classification Standards Obscure Students' Multi-Dimensional Abilities

At present, when many secondary schools implement differentiated instruction, classification standards mostly rely on academic performance — particularly end-of-term total scores or single-subject scores — to determine tier placement, without considering students' overall competencies, interests, or other dimensions. While performance-based grouping is easy to execute operationally, it has obvious logical shortcomings. Academic scores can reflect a student's mastery of existing knowledge over a given period, but they cannot fully capture a student's learning potential, thinking style, autonomous learning ability, and non-cognitive traits. Within a classification system that uses scores as the sole standard, students who lag slightly in academic performance but possess strong comprehension or communication abilities are routinely placed in the lower tier, their multi-dimensional talents hidden from view and their developmental opportunities consequently constrained.

2.2 Improper Staff Allocation Makes Professional Support Difficult to Deliver

Differentiated instruction places higher demands on teachers' professional competence. Since students in different tiers differ considerably in cognitive starting points, learning needs, and motivational states, corresponding instructional strategies, classroom management approaches, and emotional support must all be implemented according to student tier. However, in the management practice of secondary school teaching, faculty allocation generally does not align with the professional standards required by differentiated instruction. Some schools, when arranging staffing for differentiated teaching, still follow an administrative course-load distribution logic, treating workload balance as the primary consideration without adequately accounting for whether a teacher's professional strengths match the needs of the students in the assigned tier. This creates a structural contradiction: differentiated instruction has formally completed the division of student tiers, but the professional competence and instructional strategies of the assigned teachers have not been correspondingly adjusted or prepared. Students in the foundational tier, who should receive more patient and targeted instructional guidance, in practice find themselves taught by teachers who lack experience in low-starting-point instruction.

2.3 Lack of Mobility Mechanisms Solidifies Grouping and Intensifies Anxiety

The legitimacy of differentiated instruction depends to a great extent on the dynamism of the grouping — students' tier assignments must be adjusted in accordance with changes in their learning status, and cannot be fixed at the beginning of the school year and left unchanged thereafter. However, most secondary schools currently implementing differentiated instruction have not established mobility cycles or evaluation criteria, or the opportunities for mobility are rarely activated. Once the mobility mechanism disappears, the initial grouping results gradually become a stable "tier hierarchy," with the psychological distance between tiers growing ever wider over time and becoming increasingly difficult to eliminate. For secondary school students placed in the lower tier, the inability to see a pathway to a higher tier creates an obvious erosion of intrinsic learning motivation. For students in the higher tier, over-reliance on their tier position forms, internalizing the tier label as part of their self-concept. Both of these psychological effects are detrimental to the formation of healthy learning attitudes among secondary school students.

2.4 Uniform Evaluation Standards Make Differentiated Progress Difficult to Recognize

Evaluation is both a means of testing teaching outcomes and an invisible force that guides the direction of student learning. If, after differentiated instruction has been implemented, the evaluation system still uses uniform standards and test papers — measuring students from all tiers with the same "ruler" — then the differentiated efforts of differentiated instruction are erased in the evaluation process. The misalignment between evaluation standards and instructional tiers produces two-sided consequences. For foundational-tier students, facing the same evaluation standards as higher-tier students makes it difficult to feel their own progress and growth within their tier, with no clear correspondence between effort and results. For secondary school teachers, the fact that the effects of differentiated teaching cannot be authentically reflected through unified evaluation diminishes their motivation to continue investing in differentiated instructional design.

3. Optimization Strategies for Teaching Management in the Implementation of Differentiated Instruction

3.1 Improving Dynamic Grouping: Data-Driven Scientific Classification

The fundamental way to address the problem of single classification standards is to reconstruct the information foundation of grouping using multi-dimensional data, enabling grouping outcomes to better reflect secondary students' actual learning status and developmental potential. In terms of data collection, teaching management needs to establish a comprehensive evaluation system encompassing academic outcomes, learning processes, ability tendencies, and psychological status, incorporating phased test scores, classroom engagement, autonomous learning behaviors, and subject interest inclinations into the grouping criteria, thereby preventing tier placement from being

based solely on a single examination result. The advantage of data-driven grouping is not only in improving the scientific validity of the classification, but more importantly in giving grouping decisions a traceable basis, reducing the occurrence of subjective arbitrariness in teaching management. In terms of dynamic adjustment, a semester-based tier review system should be established, conducting comprehensive reviews and necessary adjustments to students' tier assignments in connection with phased comprehensive evaluation results, ensuring that grouping reflects students' current actual learning situation rather than initial labels. The management logic of dynamic grouping treats the grouping as a continuously functioning tool for differentiated education rather than a one-time administrative act — which requires school management to establish institutional norms across the entire chain of data collection, analysis, decision-making, and feedback.

3.2 Optimizing Staff Allocation: Professional Matching to Improve Effectiveness

Improving staff allocation should take the learning needs of students at each tier as the starting point, rather than treating balanced workload distribution as the primary consideration. In the management practice of secondary school differentiated instruction, this means that teaching administrators need to conduct comprehensive evaluations of teachers' professional strengths, teaching styles, and existing experience, and on that basis make more targeted staffing decisions. Teachers assigned to foundational-tier instruction need strong diagnostic teaching ability — the capacity to identify cognitive weaknesses in students and formulate effective intervention measures. Teachers assigned to advanced-tier instruction need higher subject-extension ability and open-ended instructional design capability. Given the tiered nature of professional needs, personnel management and teaching management must form deep linkages rather than operating independently. Schools should, in accordance with the specific needs of differentiated instruction, provide differentiated pedagogical strategy training, low-starting-point instructional design training, and higher-order thinking cultivation training for teachers at different tiers, thereby strengthening teachers' professional competence in differentiated instruction. Schools should provide greater teaching-research support for teachers responsible for foundational-tier instruction, since the teaching challenges of the foundational tier are generally more demanding than working with students at average cognitive levels. Running the principle of professional matching throughout the entire process of staff allocation is an important management measure for improving the overall effectiveness of secondary school differentiated instruction, and an institutional guarantee for allowing teachers' professional value to be fully realized within differentiated instruction.

3.3 Strengthening Mobility Systems: Flexible Pathways to Break Solidification

The development of mobility mechanisms must address the two key questions of "when to move" and "how to move" at the level of institutional design. In terms of trigger conditions, the circumstances that initiate a tier adjustment evaluation should be specified — namely, routine reviews based on phased comprehensive evaluation results, and special evaluations triggered by significant changes in a student's learning status — so that tier adjustments have both an institutional basis and a degree of flexibility. In terms of adjustment procedures, a multi-stakeholder mechanism involving teacher recommendations, student self-evaluation, data assessment, and administrative review should be established, preventing tier adjustments from becoming unilateral administrative decisions, ensuring a degree of transparency in the adjustment process for students and parents, and reducing anxiety caused by information asymmetry. School administrators should deliberately guide teachers and students toward positive perceptions of tier mobility — treating upward movement as positive reinforcement for effort, and downward movement as access to more appropriate instructional support rather than punishment — thereby fundamentally eliminating the stigmatizing effects of tier labels. Since secondary school students have considerable plasticity, flexible mobility mechanisms are of particular importance at this stage. They can continuously stimulate student learning motivation, maintain a sense of fairness in differentiated instruction, and allow the grouping to become a dynamic platform for the shared development of students at all levels, rather than a static barrier that reinforces gaps.

3.4 Constructing Differentiated Evaluation: Multi-Dimensional Standards to Reflect Growth

Establishing a differentiated evaluation system requires teaching management to make systematic adjustments across evaluation objectives, content, standards, and subjects, forming logical consistency with the differentiated instructional design of differentiated teaching. Evaluation objectives should shift from horizontal comparison to longitudinal growth, measuring students by the amplitude of progress and quality of learning within their own tier using their personal growth trajectory, rather than ranking students across tiers on a unified scale. In terms of evaluation content, in addition to knowledge mastery evaluation, learning process evaluation, competency development evaluation, and learning attitude evaluation should be incorporated, enabling evaluation to more comprehensively reflect the growth process of students within the differentiated instruction framework. In terms of evaluation standards, corresponding attainment standards should be determined according to different instructional objectives, maintaining internal consistency between evaluation standards and instructional expectations, and avoiding the sense of failure caused by gaps between evaluation standards and pedagogical anticipations. In terms of evaluation subjects, a diversified evaluation approach combining student self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and teacher evaluation should be adopted, improving students' self-awareness while providing teachers with instructional feedback from the student perspective. Differentiated evaluation is not only a reasonable way to test the effectiveness of differentiated instruction — it is also an effective means of conveying to students the educational philosophy that "growth at every level deserves to be seen," providing value support at the management level for the sustained development of differentiated instruction.

4. Conclusion

The effective promotion of differentiated instruction in secondary schools is premised on the simultaneous development of teaching management. The four major challenges analyzed in this paper — single classification standards, improper staff allocation, lack of mobility mechanisms, and uniform evaluation standards — do not exist in isolation, but are interconnected and mutually reinforcing systemic problems. Improvement in any one link will benefit overall management effectiveness. The implementation of optimization strategies relies on school administrators adopting systematic thinking, advancing the management reform of differentiated instruction as part of the broader improvement of the school's overall governance capacity, rather than patching individual links in isolation. With scientific management mechanisms as the guarantee and differentiated education as the value orientation, differentiated instruction can truly realize its educational potential, creating more appropriately supportive spaces for the growth of secondary school students at all levels.

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