

Teacher's Ability To Implement Thematic Learning Variations In Grade IV At MI Islamiyah Pabuaran Cirebon

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Article Info *Received Date: 07-04-2026 Revised Date: 12-05-2025 Accepted Date: 12-06- 2026*

Abstract The ability of teachers to implement variations in learning is an alternative solution to overcome challenges in the teaching and learning process. This research describe the teacher's ability in implementing variations in thematic learning on the topic of various energy sources for Grade IV students (identify students' responses and analyze the obstacles faced by teachers in applying learning variations). This research employed a descriptive qualitative method. The research subjects included the school principal, classroom teacher, and Grade IV students. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis techniques included data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The study indicate that: (1) the teacher's ability to implement variations in thematic learning is categorized as good, as evidenced by indicators such as voice variation, teaching style, and improved teacher-student interaction, which positively affect students' learning motivation and evaluation outcomes; (2) students showed enthusiastic and active responses during the learning process, where they were not only passive recipients but also actively expressed opinions and engaged in learning based on their interests and abilities, resulting in a more dynamic classroom atmosphere; and (3) the obstacles faced by teachers include the diverse characteristics of students, which make classroom management challenging, as well as the extensive amount of material integrated into thematic learning, limiting the implementation of varied teaching strategies. Teachers' ability to apply learning variations plays a significant role in enhancing student engagement and learning effectiveness, although it still faces several practical challenges in its implementation.

Keyword: *Teacher ability, learning variations, thematic models*

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<https://doi.org/110.47766/jga.v7i1.7546>



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Abstrak

Kemampuan guru dalam menerapkan variasi pembelajaran merupakan solusi alternatif untuk mengatasi tantangan dalam proses belajar-mengajar. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan kemampuan guru dalam menerapkan variasi pembelajaran tematik pada topik berbagai sumber energi bagi siswa kelas IV, mengidentifikasi respons siswa selama proses pembelajaran tematik; serta menganalisis hambatan yang dihadapi guru dalam menerapkan variasi pembelajaran. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif. Subjek penelitian meliputi kepala sekolah, guru kelas, dan siswa kelas IV. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Teknik analisis data meliputi pengumpulan data, reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa: (1) kemampuan guru dalam menerapkan variasi pembelajaran tematik dikategorikan baik, sebagaimana dibuktikan oleh indikator seperti variasi suara, gaya mengajar, dan peningkatan interaksi guru-siswa, yang berdampak positif terhadap motivasi belajar dan hasil evaluasi siswa; (2) siswa menunjukkan respons yang antusias dan aktif selama proses pembelajaran, di mana mereka tidak hanya menjadi penerima pasif tetapi juga secara aktif mengemukakan pendapat dan terlibat dalam pembelajaran berdasarkan minat dan kemampuan mereka, sehingga menghasilkan suasana kelas yang lebih dinamis; dan (3) hambatan yang dihadapi guru meliputi karakteristik siswa yang beragam, yang membuat pengelolaan kelas menjadi menantang.

Kata Kunci: Kemampuan guru, variasi pembelajaran, model tematik

A. INTRODUCTION

In order to achieve the function and objectives of national education, the educational process must be systematically designed and provide opportunities for students to actively participate in learning. Education should create space for learners to develop their potential through meaningful engagement and interaction. (Mukti, Ramdon, and Nelly 2022) In this context, learning activities should not merely focus on knowledge transfer but also foster students' curiosity, interest, and discovery skills. As emphasized by Sumaatmadja (in Aunurrahman), the learning process should encourage the development of sense of interest, sense of curiosity, sense of reality, and sense of discovery in students (Aunurrahman 2009).

However, repetitive learning activities often lead to boredom and decreased student motivation. Students who experience boredom tend to lose focus and may disrupt the learning process. (Diansah, Andi, and Alirmansyah 2023) Learning variation is therefore essential to maintain students' attention and motivation, ensuring that classroom activities remain dynamic and engaging. Teaching variation can be defined as the teacher's ability to modify instructional styles, methods, and strategies to reduce students' boredom and increase active participation (Mulyasa 2018). Empirical studies indicate that varied instructional approaches significantly enhance student engagement and learning outcomes (Fitri, Maya, and Eka 2025).

Therefore, the application of teaching variation becomes essential in maintaining students' attention and motivation. Teaching variation refers to the teacher's ability to modify instructional strategies, teaching styles, and learning media to create a more dynamic and engaging classroom environment (Septi, Puji, and Sri 2024). Empirical studies confirm that varied instructional approaches significantly improve student engagement, participation, and learning outcomes. (Anik 2020)

At the elementary education level, especially within the framework of thematic learning as mandated by the Indonesian curriculum, teachers are expected to integrate multiple subjects into cohesive learning experiences. Thematic learning requires creativity and flexibility in teaching practices, including the use of diverse media, interactive methods, and student-centered approaches (Andi 2019). However, research findings show that many teachers still rely heavily on conventional teaching methods, such as lectures, with limited variation in instructional delivery (Karina,

Otang, and Astuti 2023). This condition reduces students' enthusiasm and participation, ultimately affecting the effectiveness of the learning process.

In addition, national education quality improvement requires not only equal access but also enhanced relevance and efficiency in educational management. (Sari, E.T., and Nismawati 2025) According to Government Regulation No. 19 of 2005 concerning National Education Standards, teachers must possess four core competencies: pedagogical, personal, professional, and social competencies. (Sinta and Ulhaq 2022) Among these, pedagogical competence—particularly in managing engaging and varied learning processes—plays a crucial role in achieving educational goals (S. A 2020). Teachers who lack variation in teaching often create monotonous classroom environments, which can negatively impact students' cognitive and emotional engagement (F. A and I 2021).

Preliminary observations conducted at MI Islamiyah, Pabuaran District, Cirebon Regency, reveal that thematic learning has been implemented in Grade IV. However, several challenges persist. Teachers tend to use limited learning resources and rely predominantly on lecture-based methods without accommodating diverse student learning styles, such as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities. The use of instructional media, discussions, experiments, demonstrations, and practical activities remains minimal. Furthermore, teachers often demonstrate low innovation in selecting and applying varied learning models, indicating a tendency to remain within their comfort zones. As a result, students frequently experience boredom, low engagement, and limited participation during classroom activities.

These conditions highlight a gap between the expected implementation of thematic learning and its actual practice in classrooms. Therefore, the identification of problems in this study includes: (1) the teacher's ability to implement variations in thematic learning; (2) students' responses to the learning process; and (3) the obstacles faced by teachers in applying varied instructional strategies.

Based on these issues, this study aims to: (1) analyze the teacher's ability to implement variations in thematic learning, particularly on the topic of various energy sources; (2) examine students' responses during the learning process; and (3) identify the challenges encountered by teachers in implementing learning variations.

The novelty of this research lies in its specific focus on the practical implementation of teaching variation skills within thematic learning in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, particularly in a rural or semi-urban context. While previous studies have discussed thematic learning broadly, this study emphasizes the micro-level analysis of teaching variation, including teaching style, instructional media, and interaction patterns, and their direct impact on student engagement.

This research is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it enriches the literature on pedagogical competence and instructional variation in elementary education. Practically, it provides insights for teachers to improve their teaching practices, for school leaders to design professional development programs, and for policymakers to enhance the quality of thematic learning implementation in primary education.

B. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research focuses on understanding social and natural phenomena by exploring meanings, perspectives, and experiences expressed in words rather than numerical data. It aims to generate in-depth insights and potentially develop new theoretical understandings based on empirical findings. In this context, qualitative data are derived from observations and interpretations of participants' experiences to construct meaningful conclusions. (Afrizal 2019)

Qualitative research is grounded in the post-positivist paradigm, which emphasizes the study of natural settings where the researcher acts as the primary instrument of data collection. Data are collected through multiple techniques, commonly referred to as triangulation, and analyzed inductively to identify patterns, themes, and meanings rather than to test hypotheses (Sugiyono 2020). This inductive process allows findings to emerge from field data and be constructed into conceptual interpretations or theoretical insights.

The purpose of this study is to describe the ability of teachers at MI Islamiyah to implement variations in thematic learning in Grade IV. Therefore, a descriptive qualitative method was employed to capture and portray the phenomena as they naturally occur. The researcher focused on observing and describing the teacher's ability to apply variations in teaching, including teaching style, instructional media, and interaction

patterns in thematic learning. In qualitative research, the research problems and theoretical frameworks are often flexible and may evolve as the researcher engages more deeply with the field context.

This research was conducted at MI Islamiyah, located in Pabuaran District, Cirebon Regency. The study focused on Grade IV students in thematic learning subjects. The research was carried out during the second semester of the 2019/2020 academic year, from March to May.

The data used in this study consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained directly from participants, including the school principal, classroom teacher, and Grade IV students. Secondary data were collected from relevant documents, such as lesson plans, teaching materials, and school records.

The research subjects included 35 Grade IV students, consisting of 22 male students and 13 female students, along with the classroom teacher and the school principal. These participants were selected to provide comprehensive information regarding the implementation of learning variations and students' responses.

Data collection was conducted in a natural setting using multiple techniques, including observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was used to directly examine classroom activities and teaching practices. Interviews were conducted with the teacher and school principal to gain deeper insights into teaching strategies and challenges. Documentation was used to support and validate findings through written records and learning materials (Sugiyono 2020).

The research instrument outline was developed based on the research variable, namely teachers' ability to implement variations in thematic learning. The instrument consists of five main indicators with a total of 24 statements/questions used to measure the implementation of variations in thematic learning in the fourth grade at MI Islamiyah Pabuaran, Cirebon.

Table 1. Research Instrument Outline

Variable	Indicator	Number of Items
Teachers' Ability to Implement Variations Thematic Learning	Variations in Teaching Styles	6
	Variations in the Use of Media and Tools	3
	Variations in Student Interaction Patterns and Activities	4
	Lesson Plan (RPP)	4
	Diverse Evaluation and Assessment	3
Total Number of Items		20

To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the data, this study employed triangulation techniques. Triangulation refers to the use of multiple data sources, methods, or perspectives to cross-check and verify the consistency and accuracy of findings (Flick, 2018). It does not merely involve three sources but may include various sources and methods to strengthen the credibility of the data. In this study, triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation, as well as from different informants such as the school principal and classroom teacher. This process was carried out continuously until the researcher was confident in the validity and completeness of the data.

Furthermore, data analysis in this study followed an inductive approach, involving several stages: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Through this process, the researcher systematically organized and interpreted the data to produce meaningful findings regarding the teacher's ability to implement variations in thematic learning.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Teachers' Ability in Implementing Variations in Thematic Learning

Based on the results of observations, interviews, and documentation, it was found that thematic learning at MI Islamiyah has been implemented only in Grade II and Grade IV, while other classes have not yet adopted this approach due to teachers' limited ability to integrate multiple subjects into a unified theme. This indicates that the successful implementation of thematic learning requires adequate pedagogical competence, particularly in designing integrated instruction.

The findings reveal that the Grade IV teacher demonstrated a generally good ability in implementing variations in thematic learning. Teaching variation is an essential component of professional teaching competence, as it integrates various teaching skills to create meaningful and engaging learning experiences. The teacher applied several forms of variation, including teaching style, instructional media, and interaction patterns.

First, in terms of the principles of variation, the teacher had prepared lesson plans (RPP) that included various instructional strategies. However, in practice, not all planned variations were implemented consistently. Some variations occurred spontaneously, depending on classroom conditions and students' needs. This flexibility reflects adaptive teaching, although consistency remains a challenge.

Second, regarding teaching style variation, the teacher effectively used voice modulation, pauses, movement, and eye contact to maintain students' attention. The teacher did not remain in a fixed position but actively moved around the classroom to monitor and engage students. This approach helped create a more interactive and controlled learning environment.

Third, in terms of sensory variation, the teacher attempted to involve multiple senses, such as visual and auditory elements (e.g., singing activities). However, this aspect was not fully optimized, as some students were still less responsive to the activities.

Fourth, regarding interaction patterns, the learning process was predominantly conducted in a classical (whole-class) format. Although some variations such as individual, paired, and small group activities were introduced, group-based learning was still limited. Nevertheless, teacher-student interaction and question-and-answer activities were evident and contributed to a more dynamic classroom atmosphere.

Fifth, the continuity of variation in the learning process was observed across several meetings. The teacher incorporated activities such as learning through games, singing, and competitions to enhance student motivation. These variations were implemented naturally and did not disrupt the flow of learning.

Sixth, in terms of instructional media, the teacher utilized simple but effective tools such as cardboard, origami paper, pictures, and videos. Students were also engaged in practical activities, such as creating windmills and waterwheels. Although the media were relatively simple, they were able to support students' understanding of the material.

Overall, the findings indicate that the teacher's ability to implement variations in thematic learning is categorized as good. Variations in teaching style, interaction, and media contributed positively to students' engagement and facilitated the learning process.

Students' Responses to Learning Variations

Students' responses to the implementation of learning variations were generally positive, as evidenced by several observed behaviors. First, students were able to prepare themselves for learning activities. Most students came to class with the necessary materials and were physically ready to participate in learning. Although some students occasionally changed seats and required teacher intervention, overall classroom readiness was well established. Second, students showed attention to the teacher's explanations, particularly during question-and-answer sessions. However, not all students actively participated; some remained passive and required further guidance from the teacher.

Third, students demonstrated a fairly good ability to observe learning objects, although their focus sometimes fluctuated. Observational activities were often followed by interactive discussions, indicating an emerging pattern of active learning. Fourth, students appeared to enjoy the learning process, as reflected in their enthusiasm and active participation. The use of varied teaching strategies created a lively classroom atmosphere, which facilitated the achievement of learning objectives. Interaction between teacher and students also encouraged students to ask questions and express their opinions more confidently. Fifth, students were able to utilize instructional media and teaching aids effectively. They showed greater enthusiasm when learning involved concrete objects and hands-on activities, such as watching videos or creating simple projects. These activities helped students better understand abstract concepts.

In addition, the use of rewards, such as snacks and verbal praise, further motivated students to participate actively in the learning process. Overall, students were not only passive recipients but also active participants who engaged in discussions and collaborative activities.

Challenges Faced by Teachers in Implementing Learning Variations

Despite the generally positive findings, several challenges were identified in the implementation of learning variations. One major challenge is the diverse characteristics of students, including differences in interests, talents, learning abilities, and discipline

levels. Some students were passive, while others were overly active, making classroom management more difficult.

Another challenge is the limited availability of instructional media and resources. Teachers primarily relied on basic classroom facilities such as whiteboards, markers, and laptops. Although videos were used, the absence of a projector limited students' ability to clearly view visual materials, reducing the effectiveness of media use.

Additionally, teachers faced difficulties in addressing students' varying levels of comprehension. Some students required more time and support to understand the material, which made it challenging to implement varied instructional strategies effectively within limited time constraints.

To address these challenges, several solutions can be proposed. Teachers need to better understand students' characteristics in order to design appropriate strategies. They should also adopt more creative and flexible teaching approaches, such as using games, songs, and interactive methods to engage passive students. Furthermore, schools should support teachers by providing adequate learning facilities, such as projectors and diverse teaching materials.

Discussion

Thematic learning is an educational approach that integrates various competencies from different subjects into various themes. In the context of the 2013 curriculum implemented in elementary schools and madrasah ibtidaiyah, thematic learning serves as the primary foundation of the teaching and learning process, particularly in grades 1 through 6. According to Hasibuan (2022), thematic learning allows for the holistic development of various types of intelligence, where the thematic model not only emphasizes the cognitive domain but also encompasses the affective, psychomotor, and social domains. This indicates that teachers are required to be able to manage a learning process rich in variety so that all aspects of student development can be optimally facilitated.

The skill of introducing variety is one of the fundamental teaching skills that every professional teacher must master. Variety in learning refers to changes in activities aimed at enhancing student motivation while reducing boredom and monotony in the teaching-learning process. Handayani, Widiada, & Nisa (2022) define the skill of variation in

learning as a situation created by the teacher to prevent boredom in the learning process, which takes the form of teaching styles, the use of media and learning tools, interaction patterns, and student activities. Without adequate variation, students' attention will wane and learning objectives will not be effectively achieved.

Variation in teaching style is the first and most fundamental component of the skill of creating variety. Teaching style includes variations in voice (loud-soft, fast-slow), focus of attention, use of silence (pauses), eye contact with students, variations in body movements and facial expressions, as well as changes in the teacher's position within the classroom. Fikri, Adinda, Putri, & Ayu (2023) found that teachers' mastery of teaching variation significantly influences student learning outcomes. Teachers who consistently vary their teaching styles are able to maintain students' attention and concentration throughout the learning process.

Furthermore, Rachmadian, Setyaningrum, Azifah, Nurhijjah, Pratama, & Soekamto (2023) revealed that there is a significant influence of teachers' age and educational background on their ability to vary teaching methods. Teachers with a strong background in teacher education and sufficient teaching experience tend to be more skilled at varying their teaching styles compared to teachers who lack adequate pedagogical training. This implies the importance of continuous professional development for teachers in mastering the skill of teaching variation.

In the context of elementary madrasahs such as MI Islamiyah Pabuaran Cirebon, variation in teaching styles becomes increasingly crucial given that fourth-grade students are at the concrete operational stage, which requires diverse stimulation to build understanding. Teachers.

The second component of the skill of creating variety is the use of a variety of media and learning tools. The use of varied media includes visual, audio, and audiovisual media, concrete teaching aids, and the use of information and communication technology in learning. Fatmaryanti, Amananda, & Anjarini (2025), in their study analyzing teachers' skills in varying science learning media in elementary schools, found that the use of varied media significantly increases students' interest and attention in learning. Diverse media help students with various learning styles absorb information more effectively.

In thematic learning, the integration of various types of media becomes more complex because teachers must ensure that the media used can support connections between subjects integrated within a single theme. Safitri et al. (2024) emphasize that the implementation of thematic learning in elementary schools requires the creation of an effective learning atmosphere, one aspect of which is realized through the use of varied and contextual learning media. Teachers who are able to select and use media appropriately will create a richer and more meaningful learning experience for students.

Meanwhile, Mustofa, Fatmawati, & Suriyana (2024), in their analysis of teaching variation skills among fourth-grade teachers at SDN in Sungai Ambawang, found that the variation in the use of media is the indicator that appears most frequently in teaching practice; however, it is also the aspect that most requires improvement in terms of the quality and creativity of its use. Teachers tend to rely on static visual media and fail to fully utilize audio-visual media and digital technology, which are actually very easily accessible.

The third component of instructional variation is variation in patterns of student interaction and activities. Patterns of interaction include traditional classroom instruction, small-group work, individual work, discussions, and project-based work. Variation in interaction patterns is important to ensure that every student has an equal opportunity to actively engage in learning. Kusuma & Andriani (2023), in a study on teachers' skills in implementing learning variations to foster interest in learning science in third-grade elementary school classes, found that variation in interaction patterns—particularly the transition from traditional classroom instruction to small-group learning—proved effective in increasing student participation and interest in learning.

Furthermore, in the context of thematic learning, varied interaction patterns serve as a vital tool for developing students' collaboration and communication skills, which are integral to 21st-century competencies. Hermayani, Winarti, & Legowo (2024), in an analysis of fifth-grade teachers' skills in implementing variations in thematic learning at SDN, found that teachers who consistently shifted interaction patterns from traditional to group to individual settings successfully created a more lively and responsive classroom

dynamic. Planned changes in interaction patterns were also shown to reduce the dominance of certain students and encourage participation from more passive students.

The research findings also indicate that varied teacher-student interactions are positively correlated with students' confidence in expressing their opinions. Teachers who consistently employ varied interactions create a more inclusive learning environment, where every student feels they have the opportunity to contribute to the ongoing thematic learning process.

CONCLUSION

Teachers' ability to implement learning variations is an essential teaching skill that must be mastered by every teacher. These variations include voice modulation, focusing students' attention, the use of pauses, eye contact, body movements and facial expressions, changes in teaching position, variations in instructional media or materials, and interaction patterns. The use of teaching variations can increase students' interest in learning and motivate them to actively participate in question-and-answer activities. In addition, learning variations help improve students' attention, enhance motivation, foster positive attitudes toward teachers and school through enthusiastic teaching styles, and encourage the improvement of teaching facilities.

Students' responses to the implementation of learning variations were highly enthusiastic and active. Effective learning requires student engagement, where students are not only passive recipients but also active contributors in the classroom. Through active participation, students develop independence, gain their own learning experiences, and enhance all aspects of their personal development. Learning activities also promote harmonious cooperation among students, encourage them to work according to their interests and abilities, foster natural classroom discipline, and create a democratic learning environment. Furthermore, active learning strengthens relationships between school and community, as well as between teachers and parents. The use of concrete learning experiences supports the development of critical thinking skills and prevents purely verbal learning, making classroom learning more dynamic and meaningful.

The challenges faced by teachers in implementing learning variations include several factors. Many teachers still focus primarily on transferring knowledge without effectively designing engaging learning experiences, resulting in low student motivation.

The diverse characteristics of students make classroom management more difficult. In addition, the large amount of material integrated into thematic learning limits teachers' ability to apply a wide range of variations. As a result, the variations implemented are often limited to basic attention-focusing techniques rather than more diverse and innovative instructional strategies.

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