
Implementation of Differentiated Learning in Islamic Religious Education at Darut Taqwa High School

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the implementation of differentiated learning in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) subjects at Darut Taqwa High School as part of the Mover School program. A descriptive qualitative approach was used with data collection techniques through semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and documentation review. The research subjects included PAI teachers, students of class X-A, and the principal of SMA Darut Taqwa. The results showed that teachers have implemented differentiation strategies by adjusting learning objectives, processes, and products based on students' interests, abilities, and learning styles. Students are given choices in the form of assignments, such as videos, essays, or infographics, which encourage active participation and learning motivation. Classroom observations show an inclusive, collaborative and adaptive atmosphere, with teachers acting as facilitators. And lesson plans include initial assessments, flexible modules and assessment rubrics that support differentiation. Despite challenges such as time constraints and difficulties in developing fair rubrics, support from the school through training and supervision strengthened implementation. In conclusion, differentiated learning at SMA Darut Taqwa runs systemically and has a positive impact on students' academic and non-academic development.

Keywords: differentiated learning, Islamic Religious Education, Merdeka Curriculum, driving school, learning strategy.

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Introduction

The transformation of national education launched through the Merdeka Curriculum policy is a strategic response to the global dynamics of the 21st century which requires students to have critical thinking, creative, communicative, and collaborative skills (Neliwati et al., 2023; Wati et al., 2023). The Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, has established the Mover School program as a driving force for change in the transformation of education in Indonesia (Irawaty et al., 2023; Ristiana et al., 2017). The program is geared towards creating a student-centric learning ecosystem, emphasizing flexibility, independence, and alignment with the unique potential of each learner.

One of the main strategies used in Sekolah Penggerak program is the implementation of differentiated learning method. Differentiated learning is an approach that adapts the learning process to the needs, interests, readiness, and learning styles of different students (Anwar et al., 2023; Suwandi et al., 2023). Through this approach, teachers can provide a more personalized and effective learning experience, so that each student has the opportunity to develop according to their potential (Dian Fitriani et al., 2023). Differentiation is not only a method that adapts learning materials, but also an approach that covers various aspects, such as classroom organization.

SMA Darut Taqwa, as one of the designated schools in the Mover School program, is committed to implementing the learning differentiation method as part of the strategy to improve the quality of education in the school. The implementation of this method is expected to have a positive

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impact on students' learning outcomes, especially in improving their engagement, motivation and academic achievement. Thus, students at SMA Darut Taqwa not only receive knowledge, but also teach them to develop critical, creative and adaptive skills that are needed in the future.

However, the implementation of the differentiation method in the driving school is not without challenges. Various factors such as teacher readiness, resource availability, and support from the school environment are important aspects that must be considered so that this method can run effectively (Dian Fitriani et al., 2023). Teachers as the main facilitators of learning must have the ability and skills to develop and implement learning plans that are varied and in accordance with the needs of diverse students (Anatasia, 2023; Andini et al., 2023; Huda et al., 2023). In addition, support from all elements of the school, including school leaders and parents, is needed in creating a learning climate that supports the implementation of differentiated learning.

In line with this urgency, a number of previous studies have discussed the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum and differentiated learning in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) subjects at various levels of education. Research (Baktiar Nasution et al., 2023) at MTs Diniyah Puteri Pekanbaru shows that differentiated learning is able to accommodate student diversity, although there are still obstacles in teacher readiness and facilities. Meanwhile, (Susilowati, 2022) highlights the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in PAI subjects at the elementary school level, with the main findings being the teachers' low understanding of the concept of independent learning and difficulties in preparing modules and assessments. Another study by (Saniah et al., 2024) at SD Penggerak Bandung City confirms that learning differentiation has been implemented by paying attention to student needs through initial assessment, but is still constrained by teachers' pedagogical competence. At the madrasah ibtidaiyah level, (Anwar et al., 2023) found that the implementation of differentiation was carried out through the stages of mapping, planning, and evaluation, but teachers' understanding of the concept was still minimal. Meanwhile, research (Shafira Azkiya (2023) at SMA Negeri 29 Jakarta highlighted the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in PAI and Budi Pekerti, with the main problem being the lack of teacher training and not maximizing differentiated learning.

Departing from these findings, SMA Darut Taqwa as a Mover School seeks to answer the challenges of 21st century education through the implementation of differentiated learning in Islamic Religious Education subjects. By implementing this method, it is expected to create an inclusive and collaborative learning atmosphere, where each student is valued according to their abilities and interests. Ultimately, the program is not just about improving academic results, but also about shaping the character and personality of students who are ready to face future challenges.

This research aims to examine the implementation of differentiated learning methods in Islamic Religious Education subjects at Darut Taqwa High School as part of the Movers School program. In addition, this research also analyzes the challenges faced, the benefits felt, and the impact on the development of students both from academic and non-academic aspects. The results of this study are expected to make a real contribution to improving learning practices at Darut Taqwa High School, as well as a reference for other schools that want to adapt differentiated learning strategies in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Method

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach, which aims to gain an in-depth understanding of differentiated learning practices, through direct observation of the learning process, interviews with various related parties, and review of documentation. This approach was chosen because it is suitable for describing phenomena naturally and contextually without intervening in the ongoing process.

The research was conducted at Darut Taqwa High School, over a period of three months (January - March), including the preparation stage, field data collection, and analysis of findings. The

location selection was carried out purposively based on the criteria that the school is actively implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and has experience in implementing differentiated learning. The subjects in this study consisted of Islamic Religious Education teachers who implemented a differentiated approach in the teaching and learning process, class X-A students as direct beneficiaries of the strategy, and the principal as the policy holder and director of curriculum implementation at the school level. While the object of research focused on the implementation process of differentiated learning, including strategies used by teachers, student responses to the method, and institutional support provided by the school.

The sample selection technique used purposive sampling, which is the deliberate selection of subjects based on consideration of their relevance and competence to the object of research. Teachers were selected because they have experience implementing differentiation strategies in the classroom, while students were selected from classes directly involved in the learning model. The school principal was included as a key informant to obtain policy views and managerial support for the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum and adaptive learning strategies.

Data collection techniques are carried out through three main methods, namely semistructured interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with teachers, students, and principals to obtain in-depth information verbally. Observation was used to observe differentiated learning practices directly in the classroom, while documentation was used to collect supporting data in the form of lesson plans, teaching modules, and student evaluation records.

The data analysis was conducted using the model (Miles & Hubberman, 2019) which consists of three stages, namely: data reduction (sorting and simplifying the information obtained), data presentation (compiling data in narrative and thematic form), and conclusion drawing and verification. Data validity was strengthened through triangulation of sources and methods, namely by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation to ensure the validity and consistency of the data obtained.

Results and Discussion

To obtain a comprehensive picture of the implementation of differentiated learning in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) subjects at Darut Taqwa High School, researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with three categories of informants, namely PAI teachers, students, and school principals. The interviews aimed to explore the understanding, practices, constraints, and impacts of the differentiation strategy applied in the teaching and learning process. The following is a summary of the interview results obtained from each informant which can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Interview Results Related to the Implementation of Differentiated Learning at Darut Taqwa High School

No	Interviewer	Question	Answer Summary
1	PAI teacher	How do you implement differentiated learning in PAI?	The teacher divides assignments based on students' interests and abilities; for example: video simulations, essays, infographics. Students are grouped based on the results of the initial assessment to adjust the approach.
		What are the challenges in implementing differentiated learning?	Limited time, large number of students, difficulty in creating a fair and varied assessment rubric.
2	Class X-A student	Does learning PAI now feel different?	Yes, it is more fun and flexible. Students can choose tasks according to their learning style
		Does this way of learning help	Yes, because students feel cared for, and

that is becoming more "flexible", "personalized", and "student-centered", aligned with the principles of differentiated instruction.

Then observation was conducted directly in the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) classroom to observe how the implementation of differentiated learning takes place in practice. Observations focused on teacher-student interactions, learning strategies, and classroom dynamics that reflect the implementation of differentiation principles in the seven main aspects. The following Table 2 summarizes the results of the participatory observation conducted in two sessions of class X-A at SMA Darut Taqwa

Table 2. Results of Participatory Observation of Differentiated Learning Implementation

Aspects Observed	Observation Findings
Learning strategy	The teacher provides three learning activity options, namely (1) group discussion, (2) making a proselytizing poster, or (3) short video.
Student grouping	Students are grouped based on initial diagnostic assessment results and learning interests.
Student activity	Students are active in choosing activities. Some students choose individual work, others in groups.
Teacher's role	The teacher acts as a facilitator, moving from one group to another to provide direction and clarification.
Variation of learning media	The teacher uses videos, PowerPoint shows and theme-based digital modules tailored to the topic.
Class atmosphere	The classroom atmosphere tends to be active, collaborative and conducive. Students are enthusiastic and not passive.
Learning assessment	The teacher provides different rubrics according to the type of assignment: presentation, visual work, or written reflection.

The observation shows that the teacher does not just deliver the material in a one-way manner, but develops learning scenarios that allow students to choose their own learning path. In the PAI lesson on Praiseworthy Morals in Daily Life, the teacher gives students the freedom to express their understanding through various products, such as infographics, reflective essays, or moral campaign videos. Grouping students by interest and ability helped create a more balanced collaboration. The teacher is alert in guiding the process but does not dominate. She encourages students to think critically and gives space for each group to present their work creatively.

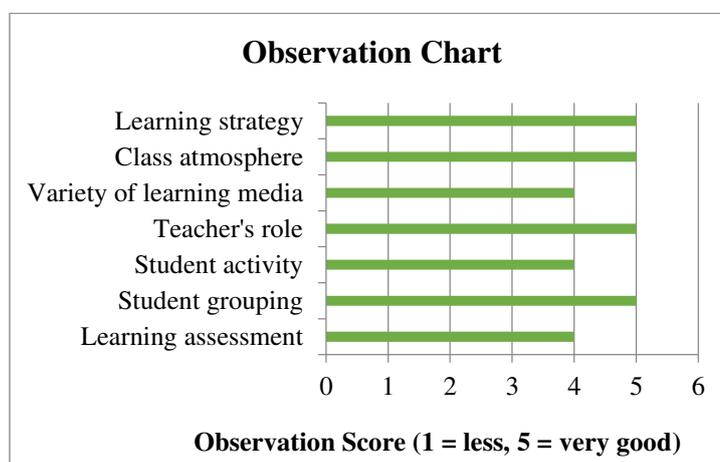


Figure 1. Graph of Differentiated Learning Observation Results

The graph in Figure 1 reinforces the observation findings by displaying the achievement level scores on the seven main aspects of differentiated learning implementation. Aspects such as learning strategy, student grouping, teacher's role and classroom atmosphere obtained the highest score (5), reflecting the excellent quality of implementation. This indicates that teachers have successfully created learning experiences that are flexible, collaborative and oriented to learners' needs. Meanwhile, aspects such as student activity, variety of learning media, and learning assessment received similarly high scores (4), but still leave room for improvement. This score illustrates that although students are already active and learning media are varied, there is potential to further improve the quality of engagement and differentiation of assessment to make it more optimal. Overall, this graph shows that the implementation of differentiated learning at Darut Taqwa High School has been running well and consistently in various aspects of the classroom.

This research is followed by documentation which includes analysis of lesson planning and administration documents, such as lesson plans, teaching modules, and student evaluation records. Each document was examined to find out the extent to which the principle of differentiation is accommodated in the teaching and learning process of PAI.

Table 3. Summary of Documentation Review Results

Type of Document		Main Findings
RPP Implementation Plan	(Learning)	There is an initial diagnostic assessment component as the basis for the division of learning groups. Learning objectives are adjusted to the three levels of student competence (basic, intermediate, high).
Islamic Teaching Module	Education	Provides alternative learning activities per subtopic, such as independent exploration, discussion, or creative work. The module also includes a flexible assignment selection sheet and grading rubric.
Student Evaluation Notes		There are variations in assessment forms: oral, written, visual products, and group presentations. Evaluation is accompanied by notes of reinforcement or follow-up based on individual performance.

From the document review, it is known that teachers' planning has taken into account the principle of differentiation in terms of learning objectives, process approach, and final product. The lesson plans analyzed included an initial mapping of students' abilities and the design of customized learning activities. The teaching module used in PAI classes presents high flexibility, by providing several activity paths that can be chosen by students according to their learning styles or interests. The module also includes task instructions and assessment rubrics that are open to multi-products. In addition, the student evaluation records show that the teacher has conducted process-based assessment, and not just end results. Evaluation is formative, with follow-up recommendations for students who have not achieved the learning targets.

From this, it is known that SMA Darut Taqwa has shown readiness both structurally and pedagogically in implementing differentiated learning in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) subjects. Teachers have developed lesson plans that pay attention to the principle of differentiation, both in terms of objectives, processes, and products, as reflected in the lesson plans and teaching modules analyzed. The teaching modules provide high flexibility by providing various activity paths that can be adapted to students' learning styles and interests. In addition, teachers have also implemented process-based formative assessment and provided follow-up for students who have not achieved competencies. Policy support from the school, such as providing teaching modules and empowering teachers through training, further strengthens the implementation of differentiated learning. Thus, the implementation of this strategy is not only an individual teacher initiative, but has become part of a more comprehensive and adaptive learning system in the school environment.

Discussion

Based on the results of interviews, observations, and document reviews conducted at Darut Taqwa High School, it can be concluded that the implementation of differentiated learning in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) subjects has been running quite well, although not yet fully ideal. There are several important things that need to be discussed in depth in three main aspects, namely the challenges of implementation, the benefits felt, and the impact on student development, both academic and non-academic.

1. Implementation Challenges

One of the main challenges teachers face in implementing differentiated learning is time management. When students are given choices in the form and manner of learning, more time is needed to strategize, facilitate students, and evaluate diverse learning outcomes. In addition, the large number of students in one class is also an obstacle, because teachers must really understand the learning needs of each individual to make differentiation effective. Teachers also said that preparing assessment rubrics is not an easy task. When students produce different forms of assignments such as videos, posters or essays, the assessment criteria must also be adjusted, while remaining fair and objective. Another challenge that arises is the readiness of the teachers themselves, who need further training to better understand the principles and practices of differentiated learning as a whole.

2. Perceived Benefits

Despite various obstacles, most teachers and students feel that the implementation of differentiated learning has a real positive impact on the learning process. Teachers feel more helpful in designing learning that is not only uniform, but more contextual and relevant to the character of each student. From the students' side, they claim to be more comfortable and motivated when given choices in completing tasks. Some students who are usually passive in conventional learning models, began to show interest and activeness when given the freedom to choose a way of learning that suits their interests. This shows that differentiated learning not only improves the quality of classroom interaction, but also builds students' confidence and ownership of their learning process.

3. Impact on Academic and Non-Academic Development

In terms of academics, the implementation of differentiated learning is proven to be able to improve students' understanding of PAI materials. This can be seen from the various forms of assignments collected by students, both individually and in groups, which show understanding not only in the aspect of memorization, but also analysis and reflection of religious values in everyday life. Meanwhile, in terms of non-academics, students also experienced development in terms of learning independence, creativity, and social skills. When they work together in groups or put together creative works such as da'wah videos or moral posters, they are trained to think critically, convey ideas in interesting ways, and learn to respect other people's opinions. In addition, flexible learning that respects diversity also helps shape inclusive and empathetic characters among students.

Conclusion

The implementation of differentiated learning in Islamic Religious Education subjects at Darut Taqwa High School shows positive results. Teachers not only adjust teaching materials to the needs of students, but also provide variations in the process and form of tasks that allow students to learn according to their individual styles and abilities. This approach makes the learning atmosphere more lively, students are more involved, and understanding of the material becomes deeper.

However, practice in the field is not free from challenges. Time constraints, large numbers of students, and difficulties in preparing fair assessments are still major obstacles. However, support from the school through teacher training and strengthened supervision helped smooth the implementation.

Overall, this strategy has a good impact, not only on academic achievement, but also in shaping students' character and learning attitudes that are more independent and adaptive.

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