

# THE APPLICATION OF DIFFERENTIATED LEARNING IN AN EFFORT TO OVERCOME LEARNING DIFFICULTIES IN ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

**Asep Supyandi**

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia  
[asyand4@gmail.com](mailto:asyand4@gmail.com)

**Aldi Ripaldi**

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia  
[aldiripaldi289@gmail.com](mailto:aldiripaldi289@gmail.com)

**Aan Diana**

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia  
[aandiana2021@gmail.com](mailto:aandiana2021@gmail.com)

**Ahmad Fajri Asshdiqi**

Northen University of Malaysia, Kedah, Malaysia  
[asshdiquef@gmail.com](mailto:asshdiquef@gmail.com)

## ABSTRACT

*The application of differentiated learning is one of the efforts made by Islamic Religious Education teachers in improving student learning outcomes caused by learning difficulties in Islamic Religious Education subjects that occur in class 4 SDN Cibadak in the 2022-2023 school year semester 1 material 3.13. This research procedure uses Classroom Action Research (PTK), namely planning, research implementation (Application of differentiated learning), evaluation and reflection. Data were obtained from evaluation and observation sheets, then the data were analyzed using quantitative descriptive analysis. The results of the research on 30 students showed that classical completeness in cycle 1 was 70% or 21 students scored above the KKM of 70 and 9 students below the KKM or 30%. In cycle 2, the data obtained was 90% or 27 students who reached the KKM and only 10% or 3 students who had not reached the KKM. Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that the application of differentiated learning is strongly believed to be able to overcome student learning difficulties in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) subjects in grade 4 SDN Cibadak.*

**Keywords:** Differentiated Learning, Islamic Religious Education, Learning Difficulties

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## INTRODUCTION

Education is a necessity for individuals to carry out their duties as servants and caliphs on this earth. In the context of teaching and learning at school, education is a way to develop the knowledge, attitudes and skills of students at school in facing the changes and challenges in this current life. In the context of learning, a student must engage in lessons, and be enthusiastic and actively involved so that learning objectives will be easily achieved. However, it is frequently found that students do not focus during learning activities either because the material presented does not attract their attention, or students' learning style is not facilitated, and/or there are other issues both internal and external that interfere with students' learning so that students have difficulty to

engage in learning which causes the learning outcomes do not reach the minimum completeness value (KKM). The issue is required to become the concern of teachers to find the best strategy for students to engage during the lesson without facing significant obstacles.

Learning, referred to in the Indonesian dictionary, is a verb that means knowing something; and trying to gain knowledge (intelligence, skills). Learning is any stage of behavior that is relatively stable as a result of experience and interaction with the environment (Asiri et al., 2024). In the teaching and learning process at school, a teacher will try to facilitate students to achieve optimal results by applying various strategies, methods, models or learning approaches. It is based on the belief that every human being has different characteristics due to innate and environmental factors (Magdalena et al., 2020). According to Wina Sanjaya (Darimi, 2016), although students share the same physical characteristics, they must each have distinct qualities such as interest, talent, ability and even learning style. Learning difficulties are conditions that will interfere with a person in the learning process (Utami, 2019). The truth is that learning outcomes are easily controlled or determined, and whether learning challenges are there or not is a matter of opinion (Nusroh & Ahsani, 2020).

From the statements above, it could be concluded that students' inability to achieve the expected learning outcomes may be related to the learning difficulties experienced. This shows the need for a more differentiated approach to learning to meet students' individual needs. Continuous evaluation of learning outcomes might assist in identifying inhibiting factors and efforts to improve student academic achievement in the future.

This research is based on the findings of students whose learning outcomes did not reach the Minimum Completeness Criteria (KKM) in grade 4 SDN Cibadak, in Islamic Religious Education and Cultivation lessons of the 2022/2023 academic year. Based on the results of evaluation and reflection carried out by teachers and students during the learning process, it was found that the cause of the related issue was that students had difficulty learning since the interests, profiles, and learning styles were not facilitated. Regarding this issue, the Islamic Religious Education Teacher tried to apply differentiated learning during teaching and learning activities to facilitate students' needs so that it is expected to overcome students' learning difficulties. This research differs from previous studies in that it focuses on ways to help students overcome their learning challenges rather than on enhancing learning results.

In the realm of Islamic education, where student diversity in behavior, aptitude, and learning styles is prominent, the implementation of differentiated teaching strategies is crucial (Gärtner et al., 2023). Addressing individual differences through differentiated instruction not only caters to the varied needs of students but also aligns with contemporary teaching practice aimed at optimizing learning outcomes (Cawdron, 2024). By exploring the effectiveness of differentiated instruction in tackling learning difficulties within Islamic education, researchers can enhance the development of more comprehensive educational strategies in religion studies (Gärtner et al., 2023). However, the study's limitations, stemming from methodological issues that fail to fully capture the nuances of individual student differences, highlight the need for further

refinement in research methodologies to better address the diverse learning needs present in this educational context (Gärtner et al., 2023).

The results of the implementation of differentiated learning were also designed into a research report to know the effectiveness of differentiated learning as an effort to overcome learning difficulties experienced by grade 4 students of SDN Cibadak. Although the application of differentiated learning has been proven effective in various subjects such as mathematics (Aprima & Sari, 2022) and Indonesian language (Jatmiko & Putra, 2022), specific research on the effectiveness of differentiated learning in the subject of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is still very limited. Previous research shows that differentiated learning increases students' understanding and interest, and makes them more relaxed in participating in learning. However, there is no in-depth study that examines how differentiated learning can overcome learning difficulties faced by students in Islamic Education. Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap by focusing on the effectiveness of differentiated learning in overcoming learning difficulties in PAI subjects in grade 4 of SDN Cibadak. Thus, this study is expected to give a new contribution to the field of education, especially in learning strategies for PAI subjects, which is expected to be a reference for improving student learning outcomes with a more personalized and adaptive approach.

Differentiated learning in education is not new and is essential to teaching in the 21st century (Herwina, 2021). Differentiated learning is an effort to adjust the learning process in the classroom and meet the individual learning needs of each student (Tomlinson, 2001). According to (Marlina, 2020), differentiated learning is an adjustment to students' interests, learning preferences, and readiness to achieve improved learning outcomes. Differentiated learning is an approach based on the principle that each student is a unique person with different abilities, interests, needs and learning styles (Almujab, 2016). The effectiveness of the method is also influenced by the psychological condition of students. The development and psychological condition of students will affect the effectiveness of the application of Islamic education methods, which can be seen from the internalization of values and knowledge transformation. Thus, students' potential must be developed by educators (Jamaluddin, 2022). Consequently, differentiated learning refers to the strategy used by educators to maximize the learning outcomes of their students by meeting their learning requirements and potential. This ensures that learning goals are met.

The use of methods must be in line with students' needs to maximize student potential and support their learning requirements. Low learning outcomes are caused by problems in the subject learning activities when learning difficulties arise (Darimi, 2016). In this research, learning difficulties could be interpreted as student's difficulties in receiving or absorbing lessons at school (Nusroh & Ahsani, 2020). Basically, student's learning difficulties are indications that appear in various phenomena of student behavior, both directly and indirectly according to the level of student learning difficulties (Muntari, 2015). When a student has learning problems related to challenges in the processes of perception, conceptualization, language, memory, attention, concentration, and self-control, their average intellect is standard or above.

Differentiated learning in its implementation must begin with the teacher's understanding of student learning needs. Teachers need to identify differences in each

student's readiness, interests, and learning profile. Differentiation strategies can be applied to four aspects: content, process, product and environment (Marlina, 2020). Content differentiation means differentiating the material presented according to students' needs and abilities. Process differentiation involves adapting classroom learning activities to suit students' interests and talents. Product differentiation relates to the variety of work outcomes or assignments given to students, allowing them to demonstrate their understanding in a way that suits their individual learning styles. Environmental differentiation or "classroom condition" includes the way students work and experience the learning atmosphere, including the classroom setting and atmosphere, rules, furniture, lighting, and procedures that influence the learning environment. By paying attention to all these aspects, teachers could create a more effective and enjoyable learning experience for each student.

Student learning difficulties receive lessons vary, according to ((Pasaribu et al., 2024), namely: 1) Learning disorder or learning chaos where the learning process is disrupted because there are conflicting responses; 2) Learning dysfunction is where the learning process does not function properly even though there is no visible psychological disorder; 3) Under achiever is a student with an intelligence level above normal but his learning results are low; 4) slow learner or slow in the learning process is a student who takes relatively longer when compared to other students who have the same intelligence potential; 5) Learning disabilities are learning disabilities with symptoms of students avoiding learning so that learning outcomes are below their intellectual potential.

From the description above, it is expected that the application of differentiated learning can overcome students' learning difficulties. Indicators of the success implementation can be seen from students' ability to absorb the knowledge taught, so that their learning outcomes are not low, as well as students' learning activities that appear where students could focus more during the lesson. This research is expected to provide several benefits that can be seen from two main perspectives: theoretical and practical. Theoretically, this research allows the author to determine the effectiveness of applying the differentiation learning method in PAI learning in class IV of Cibadak State Elementary School, Rancabali District, Bandung Regency. The results of this research are expected to contribute significantly to the development of knowledge, especially in educational institutions. With a better understanding of how learning differentiation can be implemented effectively, this research can add insight and become a reference for further studies.

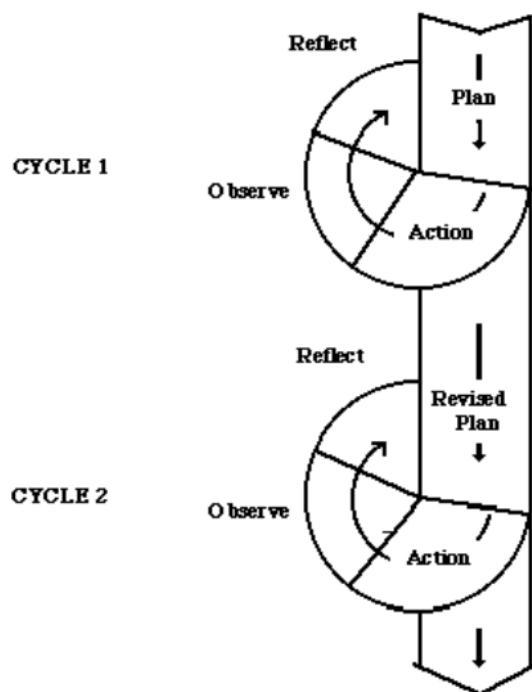
Practically, this research provides direct benefits for several stakeholders. For the author, this research is a means to develop and expand the scientific repertoire that has been obtained, so as to increase competence and expertise in the field of education. For students, the application of differentiated learning is expected to assist them to overcome their learning difficulties, so that they can learn more effectively and achieve better learning outcomes. Students will be more motivated and focused on learning if they are engaged in a learning process that is customized to their requirements, interests, and abilities.

For the teachers, this research can be a valuable reference in preparing lesson plans and implementing learning using the differentiation method. With guidance and

examples of good practice, teachers can develop teaching strategies that are more effective and appropriate to the needs of their students. This does not only improve the quality of classroom learning, but also helps create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for all students. Overall, the effective application of differentiated learning can have a broad positive impact in the field of education.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The research method used in this study is classroom research (PTK) which consists of the stages of planning, action, observation, and reflection adopted from Kemmis & Taggart (Habeb Al-Obaydi et al., 2021), as in Figure 1. At these stages, namely by implementing differentiated learning in an effort to overcome student learning difficulties. The research was conducted at SDN Cibadak in the semester of the 2022/2023 academic year, the participants are 4 from 30 students.



**Figure 1.** Stages of Classroom Action Research

The research procedure followed the PTK flow, namely: the first stage begins with planning, namely by compiling research tools consisting of learning devices (compiling lesson plans, student worksheets, materials), observation sheets, and evaluation instruments. The second stage is the implementation of action, in this case applying differentiated learning. The third stage is observation by observing the differentiated learning process carried out by the observer, in this case the teaching partner, namely the 4th grade teacher by filling in the observation sheet provided. Then the fourth stage is reflection, by identifying the shortcomings and advantages of differentiated learning implementation at the end of the

learning cycle. At the end of each cycle, a final evaluation is also conducted to determine the achievement of learning outcomes.

The data used for analysis were collected using observation sheets obtained through observations assisted by observers while the learning process was taking place. Data was also obtained through evaluation test results at the end of each learning cycle, namely cycle 1 and cycle 2 using test instruments. The data obtained was then analyzed using descriptive quantitative analysis, with reference to the achievement of Minimum Completeness Criteria. The KKM on Basic Competency 3.13 Understanding the exemplary story of Prophet Ayyub a.s., Zulkifli a.s., Harun a.s., Musa a.s. and Muhammad saw. which has been previously determined is 70.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Research Results

The curriculum used at SDN Cibadak in the 2022-2023 academic year has been using curriculum in education units under special conditions based on the Decree of the Minister of Education and Culture number 719 / P / 2020 as an adjustment due to the co-19 pandemic. One of the essential materials contained in the subject of Islamic religious education and Budi Pekerti in historical material in grade 4 is the basic competency 3.13 Understanding the exemplary stories of Prophet Ayyub a.s., Zulkifli a.s., Harun a.s., Musa a.s. and Muhammad saw. This Classroom Action Research was conducted in semester 1 of the 2022-2023 academic year in two research cycles which can be described more clearly as follows:

#### Cycle 1

The research process in cycle one was carried out through two meetings, namely on November 21 and 23, 2022, where each meeting amounted to 2 meeting hours ( $2 \times 35$  minutes). The material presented in this first cycle is the sub material of basic competency 3.1, namely understanding the exemplary story of Prophet Ayyub a.s and the exemplary story of Prophet Zulkifli a.s. can be described as follows:

##### 1. Planning

Differentiated learning planning in cycle I is by preparing lesson plans with differentiated learning stages. Developing teaching materials, presenting various teaching materials and learning media for students with different needs and abilities individually, and making student worksheets. This is done as a form of differentiation of content to be delivered according to the learning style of students. Then the researchers prepare the observation sheets for learning implementation and evaluation materials in the form of questions to be done by students at the end of cycle I.

##### 2. Action

In the action stage, students are grouped based on their learning needs consisting of auditory, visual and kinesthetic groups. In the application of differentiated learning, students with auditory learning style categories are asked to first read the prepared teaching materials (Grade 4 PAI package books, Prophet stories books) in turn where students who do not gain to read are asked to pay attention to the material read by their friends, while students with visual learning styles carry out learning activities by watching video shows about the exemplary stories of prophet Ayyub and prophet Zulkifli, while for groups with kinesthetic learning styles, their learning styles are

facilitated by studying learning materials through posters of prophet stories that have been installed in the corners of the classroom. This is done as a process differentiation in the implementation of differentiated learning. The next step is for students to discuss in groups with the guidance of filling out the Student Worksheet that has been provided to deepen the material that has been learnt and make group presentation materials with the help of peer tutors in their groups. Each group is given the opportunity to design the results of their group discussions by telling stories verbally, making reports with pictures or other ways according to their choice. Then each group presents the results of its discussion in front of the class with the results of the product according to the agreement of the group, which can be in the form of singing, clapping, drawing stories, making simple videos through applications on cellphones, or telling stories (this is a form of product differentiation).

### 3. Observation

Observations were carried out by peers, namely class 2 teachers, with the results of observations that learning on kd 3.13 Understanding the exemplary story of Prophet Ayyub a.s., Zulkifli a.s., Harun a.s., Musa a.s. and Muhammad saw has been carried out seen from the existence of various activities in the form of differentiation of content, process and product. Students do not seem to experience learning difficulties because of the various choices of content, process and product so that students look enthusiastic about learning and are also active.

### 4. Reflection

The results of the reflection of Classroom Action Research in cycle 1 is there were students whose learning ability is not the same as other students in their group. This is because the abilities of students are not the same, some are low and some are high. Thus, the teacher must be more active in guiding students who have low abilities as well as providing reinforcement to peer tutors in each group so that students with high abilities can help students with low abilities.

### 5. Cycle 1 learning outcomes

The results of the evaluation carried out in cycle 1, which was attended by all 4th grade students, from a total of 30 students. Based on the evaluation results in cycle 1 of this Classroom Action Research, the following data were obtained:

**Table 1.** Cycle 1 Evaluation result data

No	Aspect	Data
1	Number of students taking the evaluation	30 Students
2	Total number of evaluation scores	2127
3	Average number of evaluation scores	70.9
4	Score Range	Moderate
5	Highest Score	90
6	Lowest Score	50
7	KKM	70
8	Number of Students Who Achieved KKM	21 Students (70%)
9	Number of Students Who Did Not Achieve KKM	9 Student (30%)

From the data in table 1, the average evaluation result score is 70.9 with the highest score is 90 and the lowest score is 50. The Minimum Completeness Criteria (KKM) for KD 3.13 is 70. A total of 21 students or 70% achieved the KKM, while 9 students or 30% did not reach the KKM. A comparison of the percentage of students who achieved and did not achieve the KKM can be seen in Figure 2. This shows the distribution of achievement scores among students. This data provides an overview of the effectiveness of learning and things that need to be improved in the next cycle. For more details, see the following analysis diagram.



**Figure 2.** Diagram of Evaluation Result Analysis Cycle 1

## Cycle 2

The research process in cycle one was carried out through two meetings, namely on November 28 and 30, 2022, where each meeting amounted to 2 meeting hours (2 x 35 minutes). The material presented in this first cycle is the sub material of basic competency 3.1, namely understanding the exemplary story of Harun a.s., understanding the exemplary story of the prophet Musa a.s. and understanding the exemplary story of the prophet Muhammad PBUH. can be described as follows:

### 1. Planning

Differentiated learning planning in cycle 2 is by preparing lesson plan by employing differentiated learning stages. Arranging teaching materials, preparing various teaching materials and learning media for students with different needs and abilities individually, making student worksheets have been carried out. Then prepare observation sheets of learning implementation and evaluation materials in the form of questions to be done by students at the end of cycle 2.

### 2. Action

The student action stages in cycle 2 are the same as in cycle 1 where students are grouped based on their learning needs consisting of auditory, visual and kinesthetic groups. In the implementation of differentiated learning, students with an auditory learning style are asked to read aloud in turns the teaching materials that have been prepared (Class 4 PAI package books, books on Prophetic stories), students with a visual learning style carry out the learning process by watching learning videos about exemplary learning. the story of the prophet Harun as and the prophet Musa as and the Prophet Muhammad saw, while students with a kinesthetic learning style learn by

studying posters of the prophet's story which are stuck in the corners of the classroom. These differences in learning methods are a form of content differentiation. The next step is the students discuss in groups with guidance on filling in the student worksheets that have been provided and making group presentation materials with the help of peer tutors in their groups and at the same time making group presentation materials (process differentiation). Then the students from each groups presents the results of their discussion in front of the class with the product results according to the agreement of the group, this can be by singing, clapping, drawing a story, making a simple video via an application on a cellphone, or telling a story (this is a form of product differentiation)

### 3. Observation

Observations in cycle two is not different. The other teacher from grade 2 was also participated, with the same results as in cycle 1 that the differentiated learning succeeded based on the scenario in the lesson plan. Students engaged actively and had no difficulty learning because there were various choices of content, process and reporting products.

### 4. Reflection

In cycle two the teacher had paid more attention to students who have low learning abilities and provided them reinforcement for the delivery of material by peer tutors in each group.

### 5. Cycle 2 learning outcomes

The evaluation in cycle 2 was attended by all grade 4 students, with a total of 30 students. Based on the evaluation results, the following data was obtained:

**Table 2.** Cycle 1 Evaluation result data

No	Aspect	Data
1	Number of students taking the evaluation	30 Students
2	Total number of evaluation scores	2475
3	Average number of evaluation scores	82,5
4	Score Range	Good
5	Highest Score	97,5
6	Lowest Score	55
7	KKM	70
8	Number of Students Who Achieved KKM	27 Students (90%)
9	Number of Students Who Did Not Achieve KKM	3 Students (10%)

From the data in table 2, it can be seen that the average evaluation score is 82.5 with the highest score of 97.5 and the lowest score of 55. The KKM for kd 3.13 is 70, students who reach the KKM are 27 students or 90% and students who do not reach the KKM are 3 students or 10% of the total number of students. A comparison of the percentage of students who reached the KKM and did not reach the KKM can be seen in Figure 3, as follows:



**Figure 3.** Diagram of Evaluation Result Analysis cycle 1

The outcomes of the second cycle demonstrated a substantial increase in student achievement, with 90% of students attaining the Minimum Completeness Criteria (KKM) in contrast to 70% in the initial cycle. This growth suggests that the various learning tactic that were used were well received. The second cycle's results indicate a more efficient distribution of learning outcomes among various student groups, as seen by the highest score rising to 97.5 and the lowest score improving to 55. Cycle two's improve performance indicates that cycle one's reflection and subsequent changes were successful in resolving the learning challenges that had previously been identified.

## Discussion

From the two research cycles that have been carried out, including planning, action, observation and reflection, as well as evaluation at the end of each cycle, the results showed significant improvement. Evaluation was carried out continuously at the end of each cycle to measure the effectiveness and impact of the actions taken. A comparison of the evaluation results from the two cycles can be seen in table 3. This research included a thorough planning process, structured implementation of actions, careful observation of action implementation, and reflection to assess success and identify areas that need improvement. Each cycle provided new insights that were used to refine actions in the next cycle. Evaluations carried out at the end of each cycle provide data that shows the development and improvement of student learning outcomes. Table 3 contains a comparison of evaluation results between the first and second cycles, showing a significant increase in student learning outcomes. This indicates that the corrective steps taken after reflection in each cycle succeeded in increasing learning effectiveness:

**Table 3.** Recap of 2 Cycle Action Results

Action	Student Completion		Incomplete Students		Average	Predicate
	Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage		
<b>CYCLE 1</b>	21	70%	9	30%	70,9	Moderate
<b>CYCLE 2</b>	27	90%	3	10%	82,5	Good

The results of this study highlight crucial it is for teaching methods to be continuously reflective and adaptable. The enhancements shown in the second cycle show that differentiated instruction may result in significant increases in student

learning outcomes when implemented wisely and responsively by teachers. This study adds to the increasing amount of data that supports the use of individualized instruction in a variety of educational contexts, especially when it comes to Islamic Religious Education. Education professionals may provide more inclusive learning environments that promote greater academic accomplishment and personal development by customizing their teaching strategies to each student's requirements.

The comparison of data from the two action cycles showed an increase in the percentage of students completing from 70% to 90%, this shows an increase of 30%. Students who did not complete from 30% decreased to 10%, a decrease of 20%. The average score obtained increased by 11.6 points, with the predicate of the KKM range from sufficient to good.

From the results of observation made by colleagues in cycles 2, it can also be concluded that students learn actively by doing various differentiated learning activities, this revealed that differentiated learning is able to bridge the problems that arise due to differences in student learning styles, student learning readiness in order the same obstacle does not appear for those whose learning styles are not facilitated effectively by the teacher. In short, the result proved that the teacher's efforts by applying differentiated learning have succeeded in overcoming the learning difficulties of grade 4 students at SDN Cibadak in semester 1 of the 2022-2023 academic year.

## CONCLUSION

Literature and research on effective ways, methods, strategies and approaches to teaching are constantly evolving as science advances and life challenges. The ultimate goal is to make learning not a burden for students, but a fun and interesting activity. Adjusting learning to students' interests and talents is one the efforts to meet this goal. When students learn according to their interests, motivation and enthusiasm, the success of learning activity increases. Paying attention to students' learning profiles, including their learning styles and individual needs, is also important to ensure learning effectiveness. An approach that accommodates learning to students' interests and aptitudes will reduce learning difficulties. Students who are interested in the subject matter find it easier to understand and overcome learning obstacles. In addition, fun learning increases students' motivation and participation in class. This strategy could also assist students to achieve the learning objectives, including preparing them for the challenges of life in the present and future. With meaningful learning experiences, students develop the skills and knowledge necessary for success beyond school. The goal is to ensure students are not only academically successful but also prepared for the challenges of current life and the future.

The employment of differentiated learning is one of the new strategies that can be conducted by teachers to facilitate student learning difficulties. When student learning difficulties are overcome, learning objectives will be easily achieved as one of the indicators of an increase in learning outcomes. This can be seen from the results of research on the application of differentiated learning in Islamic Religious Education and Ethics subjects in class IV in the scope of historical material with basic competencies 3.1, namely understanding the exemplary story of Harun a.s., understanding the exemplary story of the prophet Musa a.s. and understanding the exemplary story of the

prophet Muhammad Saw. There is a significant increase in learning outcomes. The scope of material for Islamic Religious Education and Ethics at the primary school level is not only history material, but there are also other material scopes, namely al-Qur'an and hadith, aqidah, morals, fiqh and history. To be able to evaluate more fully how the application of differentiated learning in Islamic Religious Education and Ethics, further research is also expected to apply differentiated learning in the classroom in other material scopes besides history, so that it will further enrich the scientific repertoire of the application of differentiated learning in Islamic Education field.

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