



Implementation Of Differentiated Learning Model In Independent Curriculum In PAI Subject For Grade XI (F1) At Sman 13 Padang

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the implementation of differentiated learning within the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) for Grade XI students at SMAN 13 Padang. A qualitative approach with a phenomenological method was employed, with the researcher acting as the main instrument assisted by interview guides, observation sheets, and documentation formats. Data were collected through interviews with teachers, students, and the vice principal, classroom observations, and documentation of teaching materials and student evaluations. The data were analyzed through data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing, while data credibility was ensured using source and technique triangulation. The findings reveal that differentiated learning implementation was carried out in three stages. First, in the planning stage, teachers conducted diagnostic assessments to map students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles as the basis for developing learning modules and adaptive strategies. Second, in the implementation stage, teachers adjusted the content, process, and product of learning to suit students' characteristics through creative techniques such as appreciation, ice breaking, MARSHA, crossword puzzles, and group discussions. Third, in the evaluation stage, authentic formative and summative assessments were applied, including oral and written tests as well as attitude assessments. The results emphasize contextual understanding, active student engagement, and the internalization of religious values. This study provides empirical evidence that differentiated learning can be effectively implemented in PAI, offering both theoretical implications for instructional design and practical recommendations for teachers in applying the Merdeka Curriculum.

Keywords: *Differentiated Learning; Merdeka curriculum; Islamic Religious Education*

INTRODUCTION

The Merdeka Curriculum represents a strategic reform in Indonesian education aimed at restoring learning quality after the COVID-19 pandemic while strengthening students' competence and character development in line with the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (Kemendikbudristek., 2022). This curriculum emphasizes learning flexibility, student autonomy, and the accommodation of learner diversity through adaptive instructional approaches (Sindy Dwi Jayanti et al., 2023).

One of the core pedagogical foundations of the Merdeka Curriculum is differentiated learning. Differentiated learning is defined as an instructional approach that proactively adjusts content, process, product, and learning environment based on students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles (Tomlinson, 2017). Empirical studies have consistently shown that differentiated learning enhances student engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes across various subjects (Hapsah et al., 2025; Wahyuningsari et al., 2022).

In the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), differentiated learning holds particular significance. PAI learning is not merely cognitive but also aims to foster affective and behavioral dimensions, including religious attitudes, moral awareness, and character internalization. (Afdal et al., 2022) Therefore, instructional strategies that recognize students' individual differences are essential to ensure meaningful religious learning experiences (Agustina et al., 2020).

Previous research indicates that the implementation of differentiated learning in PAI can promote contextual understanding, student independence, and active participation (Gusteti & Neviyarni, 2022; Yuliana et al., 2025). However, several studies also reveal persistent challenges, such as teachers' limited understanding of diagnostic assessment, lack of experience in designing differentiated learning activities, and inadequate learning resources (Usman et al., 2022). These findings suggest a gap between the theoretical framework of differentiated learning and its practical implementation in schools.

Based on this gap, it is important to examine how differentiated learning is actually implemented within the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in Islamic Religious Education at the senior high school level. This study aims to describe the implementation of differentiated learning in PAI for Grade XI students at SMAN 13 Padang, focusing on three key stages: learning planning, learning implementation, and learning evaluation. The results of this study are expected to contribute empirical evidence to the development of differentiated instructional practices in PAI and provide practical recommendations for teachers implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore teachers' experiences, strategies, and dynamics in implementing differentiated learning in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SMAN 13 Padang. Phenomenology is suitable for understanding the meanings participants attach to their experiences and practices in the classroom (Moustakas, 1994).

The research was conducted at SMAN 13 Padang during the even semester of the 2024/2025 academic year. This school was selected because it has fully implemented the Independent Curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*), including in PAI, making it relevant to the study. The primary participants were 11th-grade PAI teachers, while 11th-grade students served as

supporting informants to provide insights into their learning experiences. The vice principal for curriculum was also included as a key informant to confirm school policies regarding the Independent Curriculum (A. Ang'ana & Walter J. Ongeti, 2023).

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (Miles & Huberman, 1994), consisting of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing with verification. Data reduction involved selecting and focusing on information relevant to the research questions. Data display presented the findings in narrative form, based on interviews, observations, and documentation. Conclusion drawing and verification were conducted continuously throughout the data collection process to identify patterns, meanings, and implications of differentiated learning implementation.

To ensure the credibility of the findings, triangulation of sources and techniques was applied (Denzin, 1978). Source triangulation compared information from teachers, students, and school officials, while technique triangulation integrated data from interviews, observations, and documentation, ensuring comprehensive and reliable results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study found that the implementation of differentiated learning in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) for grade XI students at SMAN 13 Padang was carried out through three main stages: planning, implementation, and evaluation.

1. Planning of Differentiated Learning in PAI

The findings indicate that differentiated learning planning in PAI at SMAN 13 Padang begins with diagnostic assessment to identify students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. This practice aligns with Tomlinson's (Tomlinson, 2017) assertion that diagnostic assessment is the foundation of effective differentiated instruction. Diagnostic assessment enables teachers to design adaptive learning objectives, teaching modules, and instructional strategies that respond to classroom diversity (Fitrotul Insani et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the collaborative development of CP, ATP, and teaching modules by the PAI teacher team reflects the principles of flexible and contextual curriculum design emphasized in the Merdeka Curriculum (Kemendikbudristek., 2022). This finding supports previous studies stating that collaborative planning enhances teachers' capacity to implement differentiated learning effectively (Ningrum et al., 2023).

2. Implementation of Differentiated Learning in PAI

The implementation stage demonstrates differentiation in content, process, and product. Content differentiation is realized through the use of diverse learning resources such as texts, videos, and practical activities tailored to students' learning styles. This approach corresponds with differentiated instruction theory, which emphasizes multimodal learning experiences to accommodate learner variability (Andini, 2022).

Process differentiation is implemented through flexible grouping, discussion-based learning, and the application of the MARSHA (Memorize, Articulate, Share) strategy. Similar strategies have been found to enhance student engagement and collaborative learning in differentiated classrooms (Dwi Putriana Naibaho, 2023). Additionally, contextualization of PAI material—such as linking the concept of *tabayyun* to students' daily experiences—supports meaningful learning, as suggested by contextual learning theory (Sinaga, 2020).

Product differentiation allows students to demonstrate understanding through written tests, presentations, and mini-projects. This practice aligns with research emphasizing student

choice as a key factor in fostering autonomy and self-confidence (Sindy Dwi Jayanti et al., 2023).

3. Evaluation of Differentiated Learning in PAI

Evaluation in this study is conducted using authentic assessment encompassing formative, summative, and attitudinal assessments. This holistic evaluation approach is consistent with the principles of authentic assessment, which prioritize process, performance, and real-life application of knowledge (Kemendikbudristek., 2022).

The emphasis on assessing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains reflects the comprehensive objectives of PAI learning. Previous studies confirm that authentic and continuous assessment supports students' reflective learning and internalization of values (Rifqiyah & Nugraheni, 2023).

Summary of Research Findings

The following table summarizes the implementation of differentiated learning across three main stages:

Table 1. Summary of Differentiated Learning Implementation in the Independent Curriculum for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SMAN 13 Padang

Implementation Stage	Strategy/Main Findings	Impact on Students
Planning	Diagnostic assessment (readiness, interests, learning profiles); development of ATP and adaptive	teaching modules Materials and strategies tailored to student characteristics
Implementation	Differentiation of content (reading, audio, practice), process (discussion, MARSHA, TTS, icebreaker), product (tests, presentations, projects)	Increased participation, increased self-confidence, and more meaningful learning
Evaluation	Authentic assessment: oral, written, portfolio, attitude observation	Emphasis on contextual understanding and internalization of Islamic values

Discussion

1. Differentiated Learning Planning in the Independent Curriculum for Islamic Religious Education

Islamic Religious Education teachers begin by conducting diagnostic assessments to identify students' learning readiness, interests, and profiles. These assessments, which include questionnaires, interviews, and initial tests, provide the foundation for designing Learning Objective Flows (ATP), teaching modules, and adaptive learning strategies.

The planning process also considers the effective weeks of the semester to ensure systematic instruction aligned with intended learning outcomes. Teachers prepare diverse instructional materials, such as reading texts, videos, and worksheets, tailored to students' learning styles (visual, auditory, and kinesthetic).

This study examines the implementation of differentiated learning within the Independent Curriculum for grade XI (F1) students at SMAN 13 Padang. Launched in 2019, the Independent Curriculum emphasizes self-directed learning, allowing students to develop their individual potential and learning preferences.

The philosophy of Ki Hajar Dewantara underpins this approach, promoting student autonomy, independent thinking, and self-regulation. Consequently, learning planning requires teachers to develop adaptive materials that meet students' unique needs.

To clarify the implementation of differentiated learning planning, the following table compares theory and practice:

Table 1. Comparison of Theory and Practice of Differentiated Learning Planning

Aspects	Theoretical (Tomlinson, 2014)	Practice at SMAN 13 Padang
Content	Material is tailored to student readiness and interests.	Teachers develop contextual and flexible CP, ATP, and teaching modules according to student needs.
Process	Learning approaches/methods vary according to student learning styles	Teachers use the MARSHA strategy, which accommodates visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles
Product	Students are given a choice of ways to demonstrate understanding	Students express understanding through discussions, practice, presentations, and crossword puzzles
Learning Environment	A safe, supportive atmosphere that allows for mistakes as part of the process	Teachers create a reflective and safe space; students are free to express themselves and learn from their mistakes
Evaluation	Formative, summative, authentic, and reflective assessments	Teachers use observations, anecdotal notes, questionnaires, portfolios, and individual/group projects

The research results show that SMAN 13 Padang formed a special Islamic Religious Education (PAI) team to develop CP, ATP, and teaching modules. The learning tools were designed collaboratively, flexibly, and contextually, truly taking into account student characteristics.

2. Implementation of Differentiated Learning

The implementation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at SMAN 13 Padang demonstrates the application of differentiation strategies in content, process, and product. Teachers are free to choose their instructional approaches as long as they comply with the curriculum.

The learning implementation phase reflects the application of content, process, and product differentiation principles. In content differentiation, teachers present material using a variety of media tailored to students' learning styles. For instance, visual learners are facilitated

through reading materials or visual displays, auditory learners receive oral explanations and discussions, while kinesthetic learners are encouraged to engage in hands-on activities.

Process differentiation is achieved by organizing students into discussion groups based on their interests and readiness levels. To maintain engagement, teachers employ various creative methods, such as icebreakers, crossword puzzles, and the MARSHA (Memorize, Articulate, Share) strategy, which encourages students to actively memorize, express, and share knowledge.

In product differentiation, students are allowed to demonstrate their understanding through a range of assignments. Some opt for written tests, others present group projects, and some produce mini-projects such as posters reflecting Islamic values.

The differentiation strategies employed by teachers have been shown to increase student participation, enhance self-confidence, and make learning more meaningful by connecting materials directly to students' real-life experiences.

Table 2. Comparison of Theory and Practice of Differentiated Learning Implementation

Components of the Differentiation Theory Implementation	Differentiation Theory	Praktik di SMAN 13 Padang
Introduction	The teacher identifies student needs and builds an inclusive atmosphere	The teacher begins with prayer, icebreakers, apperception, and provides flexibility in choosing learning methods
Learning Strategies	Adapted to learning styles (visual, auditory, kinesthetic)	The teacher uses the MARSHA (Memorize, Articulate, Share) strategy, which adapts to learning styles
Student Participation	Students actively choose the process and format of learning activities	Students choose their learning methods and explore with teacher support
Meaningful Experience	Learning is relevant and contextual	Material such as gossip and tabayyun are linked to students' daily lives
Closing	Reflection and Feedback	The teacher uses reflection, discussion, and crossword puzzles (TTS) as a fun closing activity

Teachers implement differentiation in the initial, core, and closing activities. The MARSHA strategy is used to accommodate students' differing learning styles. Additionally, methods such as group discussions, mini-projects, and simulations are used to promote active participation.

3. Differentiated Learning Evaluation

Learning evaluation is conducted authentically, holistically, and continuously, encompassing formative, summative, and attitudinal assessments. Formative assessment is implemented through oral tests, short quizzes, and evaluations of the discussion process. Summative assessment includes written exams, presentations, and portfolios. Attitudinal

assessment, on the other hand, is carried out by observing students' religious behavior, cooperation, and discipline.

This evaluation approach emphasizes contextual understanding and the internalization of religious values, rather than mere memorization.

Table 3. Comparison of Differentiated Learning Evaluation Theory and Practice

Evaluation Aspects	the Theory of Differentiation	of Practice at SMAN 13 Padang
Assessment Type	Balanced summative and formative assessments are used	Teachers prepare process and outcome assessments through observation, reflection, and oral/written tests
Authentic Approach	Real-life task-based and project-based assessments are used	Project assessments, portfolios, and contextual worksheets are used
Various Instruments	Observation, journals, peer assessment, and self-reflection	Teachers use questionnaires, anecdotal notes, recordings, and student reflections
Assessment Focus	Not only cognitive, but also affective and psychomotor	All domains are assessed: attitudes, skills, and knowledge
Function of Reflection	Reflection as a means of learning and personal growth	Reflection is conducted regularly to foster student learning awareness and self-evaluation

Evaluation at SMAN 13 Padang not only measures final results but also assesses students' learning processes, religious attitudes, and social skills. Thus, teachers act as both facilitators and mentors, enabling students to grow to their full potential.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of differentiated learning within the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) for Grade XI students at SMAN 13 Padang is carried out systematically through three interconnected stages: planning, implementation, and evaluation.

In the planning stage, teachers utilize diagnostic assessment to identify students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles as the basis for developing adaptive learning tools. In the implementation stage, differentiation of content, process, and product enables students to actively engage in meaningful and contextual PAI learning experiences. In the evaluation stage, authentic assessment is applied to assess not only cognitive achievement but also students' attitudes and religious behavior.

These findings answer the research objective by demonstrating that differentiated learning can be effectively implemented in PAI and contributes to increased student participation, self-confidence, and contextual understanding of religious values. The novelty of this study lies in providing empirical evidence that differentiated learning transforms PAI from a predominantly normative subject into a more interactive, student-centered, and value-internalizing learning experience.

Therefore, PAI teachers are encouraged to continuously develop competencies in diagnostic assessment and differentiated instructional design. Schools should support this effort through professional development programs and collaborative learning communities. Future research may expand this study by involving multiple schools or comparative subject areas to enrich understanding of differentiated learning implementation within the Merdeka Curriculum.

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