



ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TEACHERS' STRATEGIES IN IMPLEMENTING PROCESS DIFFERENTIATION IN ISLAMIC CULTURAL HISTORY LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

This research is motivated by the learning conditions of Islamic Cultural History (ISCR) at SMA Negeri 1 Ciranjang, which still tends to be monotonous and has not adapted to the diverse learning styles of students, resulting in low understanding and motivation to learn. The purpose of this study is to determine the strategies of Islamic Education teachers in implementing process differentiation, its implementation in grade XI, and the form of student understanding of ISCR material. This study uses a qualitative approach with a field study method, through observation, interviews, and documentation techniques. The results show that teachers apply process differentiation strategies through methods such as group discussions and mind mapping that are adapted to student characteristics. The implementation of this strategy has been proven to increase student engagement and understanding. Thus, process differentiation can be an effective approach in creating more adaptive and meaningful ISCR learning.

Keywords: process differentiation, student understanding.

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a central role in shaping the character, morality, and competence of future generations. It serves not only as a means of transferring knowledge, but also as a medium for instilling moral and cultural values in social life (Shofiyah & Siregar, 2025). In this context, religious education holds a significant responsibility in shaping students to be not only intellectually intelligent but also possess noble morals, ethics, and a strong spiritual awareness (Yenuri, 2024).

However, the current reality shows that the challenges in education are increasingly complex. The phenomenon of moral crisis among students has become a major focus, with numerous cases of norm violations occurring, ranging from juvenile delinquency and school violence to negative misuse of technology (Jaelani et al., 2025). This is a significant indicator that education has not fully succeeded in addressing the affective domain and the development of students' character as a whole (Rahma et al., 2025). Yet, religious values such as respecting parents, being polite to teachers, and maintaining good manners in social interactions are essential in shaping students' identity (Hamalik, 2023).

Islamic education in Indonesia has experienced significant development, both in terms of institutions and curriculum approaches. From the classical era to the

contemporary era, Islamic education has continuously adapted to meet the dynamics of the times, including through institutions such as Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), madrasahs (Islamic schools), and formal schools (Fatoni et al., 2025). The Independent Curriculum currently implemented by the government opens up ample room for innovation for teachers to create student-centered learning. One approach offered in this curriculum is differentiated learning, a teaching strategy tailored to the diverse needs, interests, and learning styles of students (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

Process differentiation, as part of this approach, allows teachers to offer a variety of learning styles. This strategy aims to ensure that each student feels valued for their unique learning style and is able to optimally develop their potential (Tomlinson, 2017). In practice, Islamic Cultural History (ISC) instruction is still dominated by a classical, teacher-centered approach that emphasizes memorization of historical events, thus neglecting the diversity of student learning styles (Sulaeman, 2023).

In fact, Islamic Education (SKI) is not just a subject that conveys historical facts, but also a means to instill exemplary values and build awareness of Islamic identity. Therefore, implementing a process differentiation strategy in Islamic Education (SKI) learning is crucial so that students not only understand the material cognitively but also internalize the values in real life (Maulana, 2024).

Based on this background, this study aims to examine the strategies of Islamic Religious Education teachers in implementing process differentiation in Islamic Religious Education (IS) learning at SMA Negeri 1 Ciranjang. The primary focus is on how these strategies are designed and implemented in grade 11, and their impact on students' understanding of IS material within the Merdeka Curriculum framework.

Based on this background, this study aims to examine the strategies of Islamic Religious Education teachers in implementing process differentiation in Islamic Religious Education (IS) learning at SMA Negeri 1 Ciranjang. The primary focus is on how these strategies are designed and implemented in grade 11, and their impact on students' understanding of IS material within the Merdeka Curriculum framework.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To meet the needs of 21st-century education, teachers are required to develop adaptive and responsive learning strategies to address student diversity. One relevant approach is process differentiation, as explained by Carol Ann Tomlinson (2017), which is a learning strategy tailored to students' readiness, interests, and learning styles. This approach allows teachers to not only deliver material but also design flexible and meaningful learning activities, providing space for each student to learn according to their unique characteristics.

The link between the process differentiation strategy and the theory of multiple intelligences also strengthens the basis of this approach. Howard Gardner (2023), through the concept of Multiple Intelligences, explains that each individual possesses different intelligences, such as verbal-linguistic, visual-spatial, interpersonal, and others. By understanding these variations, teachers can direct students to activities that align with their dominant strengths. For example, students with visual

intelligence find it easier to understand material through pictures and concept maps, while students with interpersonal intelligence tend to be active in group discussions.

The psychological foundation of differentiated learning can also be found in constructivist theory. In the constructivist view, knowledge is actively constructed by students through direct experience, not solely acquired from teachers. Vygotsky (2024) emphasized the importance of the Zone of Proximal Development as a space for students to develop through guidance or scaffolding from teachers and peers. In this context, strategies such as group discussions and mind mapping are effective methods for encouraging students to construct understanding independently while remaining within the reach of support.

In line with this, active and collaborative learning are also important pillars of the process differentiation strategy. Sanjaya (2023) states that good learning is learning that creates balanced cognitive, affective, and psychomotor engagement. When students are given the opportunity to engage in visual conceptualization, convey ideas through group presentations, and reflect on their understanding, they develop not only intellectual competence but also social and emotional skills.

The application of process differentiation in the context of the Independent Curriculum is increasingly relevant because it emphasizes the importance of student-centered learning. The Independent Curriculum provides teachers with the freedom to design learning that is not uniform but tailored to individual student characteristics (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). This approach provides teachers with the opportunity to develop fairer and more flexible strategies, enabling each student to learn optimally according to their individual potential.

Thus, differentiated learning, especially in the process aspect, is not just an alternative strategy, but a transformative approach that is able to answer the challenges of learning in the modern era, especially in religious education such as the History of Islamic Culture.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore the strategies of Islamic Religious Education teachers in implementing process differentiation in Islamic Cultural History (SKI) learning in class XI of SMA Negeri 1 Ciranjang. Data collection techniques used include observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to observe the learning process and student engagement: interviews were conducted with Islamic Religious Education teachers, students, principals, curriculum, and guidance counselors; while documentation was used to collect data on grades, mind mapping products, and other learning records. Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model analysis through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was strengthened through source and technique triangulation techniques, to ensure the consistency and credibility of the research results.

RESULTS

The implementation of the process differentiation strategy by Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in the History of Islamic Culture (SKI) learning in grade XI

of SMA Negeri 1 Ciranjang has been proven to have a significant influence on improving student understanding. This strategy is implemented through a mind mapping-based cooperative learning model designed to adapt the learning process to the learning needs, interests, and learning styles of individual students. The teacher divides students into small groups and gives them the freedom to choose roles, such as writer, illustrator, presenter, or material structurer. According to Dr. Hj. Maspuroh (2024), this strategy has a significant impact not only on students' academic achievement but also plays a crucial role in shaping their character. Thus, the implementation of this strategy can be seen as a holistic effort that focuses not only on academic achievement but also on the development of moral and ethical values that will shape students' personalities in the future. This shows that effective education must include both cognitive and affective aspects, so that students become not only academically intelligent but also have good character.

The first observation on November 16, 2024, showed that students appeared more active and engaged when they had the space to contribute according to their individual strengths. Enthusiasm, collaboration, and creativity emerged in various forms, from recording ideas and visualizing materials to discussions. This aligns with Tomlinson's (2017) view that process differentiation is a systematic effort to adapt learning to student profiles to create a meaningful and inclusive process.

During the second observation on February 5, 2025, the teacher facilitated learning activities using a mind mapping approach that combined group discussions and visual processing of historical material. There was a shift in role dynamics in the classroom, where students who previously tended to be passive began to actively engage both in the preparation of concept maps and in the question and answer process. This activity demonstrated higher cognitive engagement, where students construct knowledge independently through idea mapping and collaboration, in line with the constructivist principles of Vygotsky (2024), particularly in the aspect of the Zone of Proximal Development.

The third observation on February 11, 2025, demonstrated the peak success of the implemented strategy. Students presented their group work through mind map presentations. Several students demonstrated distinct learning styles. Haikal felt he understood the material better when reading it aloud to his group, indicating auditory tendencies. Sri, the note-taker, stated that she understood the lesson more easily when writing it down. Keizia found the use of color and images in the mind map helpful because it strengthened her memory of historical figures and events. Intan Sophia helped organize the narrative flow so the material could be understood coherently, and Munif admitted to having a better grasp of the material when he had to convey it to others. These findings support Gardner's (2023) theory of multiple intelligences, which emphasizes that each individual has a unique learning style and requires different facilitation.

Field findings were also reinforced by in-depth interviews with Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, who acknowledged that this strategy was able to awaken students' potential previously unseen in classical learning patterns. One teacher stated that students who were usually quiet became more confident, students who enjoyed drawing were more involved, and students who enjoyed speaking were

given space to become presenters. This approach reflects the philosophy of Islamic education as emphasized by Dadang Zenal Mutaqin (2021), namely that learning that humanizes students is learning that provides space for exploration in accordance with the natural state and potential of students as learning subjects, not passive objects.

In terms of learning outcomes, students' understanding of the SKI material increased cognitively, affectively, and socially. Cognitively, students were able to organize and re-present the material in the form of a systematic mind map. Affectively, students demonstrated greater self-confidence and enthusiasm for learning. Socially, collaboration-based learning fostered responsibility and communication skills. Quantitative data in the form of daily grades obtained by students showed that most students who were actively involved in this process, such as Haikal, Sri, Keizia, Intan Sophia, and Munif, obtained grades above the Minimum Completion Criteria (KKM), including 87 to 95. Teacher notes showed improvements not only in the final results, but also in the participation process during the learning process.

This strategy also doesn't stand alone, but is supported by the synergy of all school components. The curriculum team views the mind mapping strategy as a concrete form of differentiated learning visualization and aligned with the direction of the Independent Curriculum policy. Guidance and counseling teachers assist Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in identifying students' psychological conditions and developing appropriate approaches based on regular informal assessments.

Overall, the implementation of this process differentiation strategy not only impacts material understanding but also strengthens reflective and collaborative skills, as well as exemplary and moral values within the context of Islamic Cultural History learning. This aligns with the spirit of the Independent Curriculum, which prioritizes student-centered learning and develops the Pancasila Student Profile (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

From the perspective of national educational philosophy, this learning strategy is relevant to the thinking of Ki Hajar Dewantara, who emphasized the importance of education that respects the nature and the nature of the times of students. Learning designed based on students' characteristics, potential, and needs allows for meaningful and sustainable learning experiences. In this context, learning methods serve as a link between learning objectives and classroom activities. Selecting the right method can help teachers present concepts systematically and concretely, increase active student participation, and adapt learning materials to the differences in students' individual characteristics and needs. (Latipah, 2022).

Furthermore, the process differentiation strategy implemented by Islamic Religious Education teachers in Islamic Religious Education (SKI) learning also shows great potential in supporting the achievement of long-term learning objectives. By providing space for students to actively experience and internalize the material, this strategy not only produces momentary understanding but also fosters critical thinking, a sense of ownership of the learning process, and communication skills needed in real life. When students are given the opportunity to choose roles, discuss, formulate ideas, and convey their results, they are being trained to become

independent learners who are able to take responsibility for their own learning process. This aligns with the essence of 21st-century education, which is oriented not only towards academic outcomes but also towards generative competencies such as collaboration, creativity, and character.

Thus, the application of process differentiation in Islamic Religious Education (IS) learning not only provides a solution to monotonous and uniform learning practices, but also provides a learning model that is relevant to the local context and pedagogically progressive. This research makes an important contribution to the development of student-centered learning strategies and can serve as a reference for Islamic Religious Education (IS) teachers at the high school level and beyond in designing learning that respects diversity and optimizes student potential. The success of this strategy confirms that when teachers deeply understand students' learning needs, religious learning can be enjoyable, meaningful, and transformative.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research exploring the strategies of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in implementing process differentiation in Islamic Cultural History (SKI) learning in grade XI of SMA Negeri 1 Ciranjang, it can be concluded that this strategy plays a significant role in increasing student engagement and understanding. Teachers provide space for students to learn according to their learning styles, such as through discussions, note-taking, drawing, and presentations, which are carried out in mind-mapping-based group learning.

Furthermore, students become more active, confident, and comfortable in participating in learning because they are given roles according to their individual strengths. This encourages learning that is not only cognitive but also touches on affective and social aspects. Learning becomes more enjoyable and meaningful because students feel fully involved in the process. This strategy has proven effective in creating a collaborative, adaptive, and participatory classroom atmosphere, and supports the principles of the Independent Curriculum that favors students. Thus, process differentiation is a relevant approach to building SKI learning that respects differences, explores student potential, and shapes the character of active and reflective learners.

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