

The Implementation of Differentiated Instruction in Islamic Religious Education Courses

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Abstract

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) plays a crucial role in shaping students' character and religious understanding, despite their diverse backgrounds and abilities. Therefore, instructional strategies that accommodate these differences are essential, one of which is differentiated instruction. This article aims to examine the implementation of differentiated instruction in Islamic Religious Education, with a particular focus on adapting instructional methods to students' abilities. This approach emphasizes that each student possesses different learning styles, interests, and levels of understanding, requiring teachers to design flexible and adaptive learning experiences. This study employed a literature review approach by analyzing various sources related to differentiated instruction within the educational context, particularly in Islamic Religious Education. The findings indicate that differentiated instruction can be implemented through a variety of instructional methods, including group discussions, project-based learning, and individualized approaches tailored to students' needs. Teachers can also adjust the level of content difficulty, instructional media, and assessment methods according to students' respective abilities. Such adaptations have been shown to increase students' active participation, deepen their understanding of the subject matter, and enhance their learning motivation. Furthermore, differentiated instruction contributes to the creation of an inclusive learning environment that values diversity. Therefore, the implementation of differentiated instruction in Islamic Religious Education represents an effective strategy for optimizing students' overall potential. This article is expected to serve as a reference for educators in developing Islamic Religious Education practices that are more adaptive, effective, and responsive to students' diverse learning needs.

Keywords: differentiated instruction; Islamic Religious Education; instructional strategies; adaptive learning; student centered learning.

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) plays a strategic role in shaping students' character, moral values, and religious understanding. Amid the diversity of students' social and cultural backgrounds, as well as their varying academic abilities, Islamic Religious Education is expected not only to emphasize the delivery of subject matter but also to facilitate the effective internalization of Islamic values (Indonesia, 2021). This challenge becomes increasingly complex when teachers are required to accommodate differences in students' learning styles, interests, and levels of understanding within the same classroom.

In practice, uniform instructional approaches are often unable to address the diverse learning needs of all students. Consequently, this may lead to low student

participation, decreased learning motivation, and disparities in students' levels of understanding. Therefore, a more flexible and responsive instructional approach that accommodates individual differences is required. One relevant approach to addressing this challenge is the implementation of differentiated instruction (Subban, 2006).

Differentiated instruction is an instructional approach that emphasizes the adaptation of learning processes, content, products, and learning environments according to students' needs, readiness, and interests. This approach enables teachers to design more inclusive and student-centered learning experiences (Tomlinson, 2014). Within the context of Islamic Religious Education, implementing differentiated instruction is essential to ensure that Islamic values are meaningfully understood by all students without exception.

Through the implementation of differentiated instruction, teachers may employ various instructional methods, including group discussions, project-based learning, and individualized instructional approaches. Such adaptations not only enhance students' engagement but also foster a learning environment that values diversity (Hall, 2002). Therefore, investigating the implementation of differentiated instruction in Islamic Religious Education is essential to promote adaptive, effective, and learner-centered instructional practices that address students' diverse learning needs.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach using a descriptive research design. This approach was selected because the study aimed to obtain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of differentiated instruction in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) and to examine how this instructional strategy accommodates the diverse characteristics of students. Through a qualitative approach, the researchers were able to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the learning process, teacher, student interactions, as well as the challenges and solutions associated with implementing differentiated instruction in the classroom.

The study was conducted at a secondary school that has implemented differentiated instruction in Islamic Religious Education courses. The research participants consisted of Islamic Religious Education teachers and students who were directly involved in the learning process. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, whereby informants were chosen based on specific criteria, including teachers' experience in implementing differentiated instruction and students' active participation in classroom learning. This sampling technique was employed to ensure that the collected data were relevant to the objectives of the study.

Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to directly examine the implementation of differentiated instruction during Islamic Religious Education lessons in the classroom. Interviews were carried out with teachers and several students to obtain information regarding their experiences, perceptions, and evaluations of the effectiveness of differentiated instruction. Meanwhile, documentation was used to complement the research data by collecting learning materials, teaching modules, photographs of learning activities, and other supporting documents related to the implementation of Islamic Religious Education instruction.

The collected data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved selecting and focusing on information relevant to the research objectives. Subsequently, the data were presented in descriptive form to facilitate interpretation. The

final stage involved drawing conclusions based on the research findings concerning the implementation of differentiated instruction in Islamic Religious Education.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the study employed source triangulation and methodological triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from teachers, students, and instructional documents. Methodological triangulation involved comparing data collected through observations, interviews, and documentation. Accordingly, these triangulation techniques enhanced the validity and credibility of the research findings, ensuring that the results could be accounted for scientifically.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Results

The findings indicate that the implementation of differentiated instruction in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) had a positive impact on students' engagement throughout the learning process. IRE teachers implemented differentiated instruction by adapting teaching methods, instructional media, and assignment formats according to students' learning needs and individual characteristics. During classroom instruction, students were grouped based on their academic readiness, learning interests, and learning styles, enabling them to understand the instructional materials more effectively. This strategy created a more active, interactive, and conducive learning environment for all students. Differentiated instruction was found to enhance students' learning motivation, as they perceived that their individual learning needs were addressed in a more personalized manner (Tomlinson, 2014).

Classroom observations revealed that IRE teachers employed a variety of instructional strategies, including group discussions, student presentations, project based learning, and digital learning media to accommodate students' diverse learning needs. Students with higher academic achievement were provided with enrichment activities, whereas those experiencing learning difficulties received additional guidance and simplified learning tasks. This instructional approach enabled students to learn according to their respective levels of readiness. Furthermore, the use of diverse instructional media successfully increased students' attention and participation throughout the learning process (Santangelo & Tomlinson, 2012).

Interview findings indicated that IRE teachers perceived differentiated instruction as an effective strategy for creating a more inclusive learning environment. Teachers were able to gain a deeper understanding of students' individual characteristics, thereby improving the overall effectiveness of classroom instruction. Students also reported feeling more comfortable and confident when they were provided with learning opportunities that matched their abilities and interests. Moreover, differentiated instruction encouraged students to become more actively involved in asking questions, participating in discussions, and expressing their opinions during classroom activities. These findings are consistent with the principles of student-centered learning, which positions students as the primary actors in the learning process (Marlina, 2019).

Nevertheless, the study also identified several challenges in implementing differentiated instruction in Islamic Religious Education. The primary challenge encountered by teachers was the limited amount of time available to prepare differentiated instructional materials tailored to students' diverse learning needs. In addition, the relatively large number of students in each classroom made it difficult for teachers to comprehensively identify students' learning characteristics. Limited educational facilities

and instructional resources also constrained the use of more diverse learning media. Despite these challenges, teachers attempted to overcome these obstacles through collaboration with fellow teachers and by maximizing the use of simple instructional media available within the school environment (Herwina, 2021).

Document analysis further revealed that the school had supported the implementation of differentiated instruction through the development of teaching modules, instructional materials, and assessment instruments designed to accommodate students' learning needs. IRE teachers had also begun implementing diagnostic assessments to identify students' learning readiness prior to classroom instruction. With these institutional supports, the implementation of differentiated instruction in Islamic Religious Education could be carried out more effectively. Overall, the findings demonstrate that differentiated instruction contributes positively to improving the quality of Islamic Religious Education, particularly in terms of student engagement, learning motivation, and comprehension of instructional content (Kementerian Pendidikan, Riset, dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia, 2022).

Discussion

The implementation of differentiated instruction in Islamic Religious Education demonstrates that this instructional strategy is effective in accommodating the diverse characteristics of students. Rather than employing a uniform instructional approach for all learners, teachers adapted the learning process according to students' readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles. These findings indicate that differentiated instruction creates a more flexible and learner centered educational environment. This is consistent with Tomlinson's theory, which defines differentiated instruction as an effort to address students' diverse learning needs through modifications of instructional content, learning processes, learning products, and the learning environment (Tomlinson, 2014).

Furthermore, the use of diverse instructional methods and learning media in Islamic Religious Education was found to increase students' participation and learning motivation. Students became more actively engaged in classroom activities because they were provided with learning opportunities that matched their individual learning styles. Learning activities involving group discussions, project, based learning, and digital instructional media created more meaningful and engaging learning experiences. These findings are consistent with previous research suggesting that differentiated instruction enhances student engagement while promoting more effective and inclusive learning environments for all students (Subban, 2006).

Despite these positive outcomes, the implementation of differentiated instruction continues to face several challenges, particularly those related to limited instructional time, large class sizes, and teachers' readiness to design differentiated learning experiences. Teachers require strong professional competencies to accurately identify students' learning needs and develop appropriate instructional strategies. Therefore, continuous professional development programs and mentoring are essential to optimize the implementation of differentiated instruction. Institutional support is equally important, particularly in providing adequate learning facilities and promoting the continuous professional development of teachers (Faiz, 2022).

Overall, differentiated instruction in Islamic Religious Education makes a substantial contribution to improving the quality of the teaching and learning process. This instructional strategy not only helps students achieve a better understanding of instructional materials but also promotes a more humanistic, inclusive, and learner-centered educational environment that respects individual differences. When implemented effectively, differentiated instruction can serve as an appropriate solution for addressing the diversity

of students' characteristics in the classroom while supporting the achievement of educational goals aimed at maximizing students' individual potential (Kementerian Pendidikan, Riset, dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia, 2022).

CONCLUSION

The implementation of differentiated instruction in Islamic Religious Education has proven to be an effective strategy for accommodating the diverse characteristics of students in the classroom. By adapting instructional content, learning processes, learning products, and the learning environment to students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles, teachers are able to create a more inclusive, engaging, and student centered learning experience. This instructional approach not only enhances students' participation and learning motivation but also improves their understanding of Islamic Religious Education materials.

Nevertheless, the implementation of differentiated instruction continues to encounter several challenges, particularly in terms of limited instructional time, large class sizes, and teachers' preparedness to design learning experiences that address students' diverse needs. These challenges require teachers to exert greater effort in planning and delivering instruction that is responsive to individual learning characteristics. Therefore, institutional support in the form of professional development programs, adequate learning facilities, and continuous capacity building is essential to optimize the implementation of differentiated instruction.

Overall, differentiated instruction in Islamic Religious Education offers an effective solution for addressing the diversity of students' characteristics within the classroom. This approach not only improves the quality of teaching and students' understanding of learning materials but also promotes a more humanistic, flexible, and inclusive learning environment that recognizes and values each student's individual potential. With appropriate implementation and sustained institutional support, differentiated instruction is expected to contribute significantly to improving the overall quality of education.

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