



## **THE PARADIGM OF DIFFERENTIATED ISLAMIC LEARNING IN RESPONDING TO STUDENT DIVERSITY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The diversity of conditions and needs of students in understanding teaching material is a challenge for educators to be able to implement accommodative learning strategies. This qualitative research in the form of a case study aims to describe the strategies and supporting factors related to differentiated learning in Akidah Akhlak subjects at Madrasah Aliyah Salafiyah (MAS) Yapensa Pekalongan City. Data were obtained through documentation, observation and interview techniques. Data analysis uses reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results showed that the differentiation learning strategy in the Akidah Akhlak subject at MAS Yapensa was effective. Through this strategy, the delivery of Akidah Akhlak material is carried out using various methods, such as the use of visual and audio media, and activities that involve motor skills. Meanwhile, there are supporting factors for the strategy, including the existence of training and professional development for teachers, teachers' skills and concern in moral education, policies and support from Madrasah, and the participation of parents. This research contributes to the importance of creative, contextual, and accommodating learning strategies amidst the diversity of learners' conditions and needs

**Keywords:** Differentiated learning, Madrasah Aliyah Salafiyah, Yapensa, Pekalongan

## A. Introduction

The practice of learning Islam in the midst of the plurality of conditions and needs of students if not managed properly, it can cause ineffective learning problems. This requires the importance of an innovative Islamic learning strategy (Qomar and Fitri 2024). Especially in the context of the development of Islamic education models in the midst of the ever-evolving currents of modernity, the use of creative and dynamic learning approaches is urgent. (Widodo, n.d.). Therefore, the management of Islamic education learning can be adapted to the challenges and developments of the times. (Sakarina et al. 2022). In other words, the development of Islamic education practices is an imperative (Zakariyah 2024). This is so that innovation in Islamic education learning practices can be adaptive and transformative with the conditions that surround it. (Haris 2025).

Responding to the above issues, the existence of differentiated learning strategies is one of the learning approaches designed to meet the diversity of learning needs for each learner. This is because differentiated learning can provide space for each learner to have equal opportunities to learn and develop according to their respective potentials, without feeling hampered by their limitations. Differentiated learning is an approach by adjusting the learning process, content, or products based on the needs, interests, or learning readiness levels of learners (Furqon and Haryanti 2024). Through this differentiation approach, learners can become more active, creative, and innovative, as well as independent in the learning process (Harfiani and Setiawan 2024). In this context, differences in individual potential with other individuals among learners can be accommodated (Abdullah 2020). This condition requires the strategic importance of Islamic education to be tolerant of various differences (Anwar et al. 2024). Therefore, an Islamic education model is needed that is supported through policies and regulations of the education system holistically (Fitriani 2023).

An example of the implementation of differentiated learning strategies that is the object of this research, namely in the Akidah Akhlak subject for students at Madrasah Aliyah Salafiyah (MAS) Yapensa Pekalongan City. In practice, the differentiated learning method in the Akidah Akhlak subject is intended for students with varied abilities, so it is implemented with an adaptable approach through various learning media, so that it can contribute positively in deepening students' understanding of the material (Salim 2025).

The focus of this research aims to describe the differentiated learning strategy applied to Akidah Akhlak Subjects at Madrasah Aliyah Salafiyah (MAS) Yapensa Pekalongan City. In addition, it is also to identify supporting factors in the application of these differentiated learning strategies. This type of research is qualitative research with a descriptive approach. The object of this research is a differentiated learning strategy in the Merdeka Curriculum in the Akidah Akhlak Subject of MA Salafiyah Yapensa Pekalongan City, Central Java. This research was

conducted at MA Salafiyah YAPENSA Pekalongan City, Central Java, which is located in Pekalongan Selata District. The research time started on 3 March to 31 June 2025. The subjects of this research involved the principal, teachers, and students. The selection of subjects was based on the research objectives, which aimed to increase the usefulness of information obtained from a limited group of subjects. Informants in this study were interviewed, observed, and directly observed to obtain relevant data. data collection techniques can involve several methods such as in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Meanwhile, data analysis includes the stages of data reduction, presentation and verification.

As for the various relevant previous studies, between research by Gadafi, Saputra, and Gusmaneli which stated that differentiation strategies can contribute to increasing students' understanding and motivation towards learning Islamic teachings (Khalib Gadafi, Andika Saputra, and Gusmaneli Gusmaneli, n.d.). Then research by Lestari, Wati, Afandi, Subhan, and Sahbana explained that in the context of Islamic religious learning, differentiation strategies do not just focus on cognitive aspects, but also emotional and social students (Lestari et al. 2024). Furthermore, Widiastuti, Fana, and Muhibbin's research states that differentiated learning can provide space for students to choose their own way of learning and is in line with the orientation of Islamic education (Widiastuti and Fana 2023). This is also corroborated by Taufiq's research which concludes that differentiated learning strategies can increase students' active involvement, and provide them with more equal learning opportunities and increase students' understanding of the values of religious teachings (Taufiq 2025).

Unlike the various studies above, the focus of this research is to describe the implementation of differentiated learning strategies in Akidah Akhlak subjects at MA Salafiyah Yapensa. In addition, it is also to identify the supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation of the differentiated learning strategy. This research is expected to make a useful contribution to science, especially in differentiated learning strategies, which examine differentiated learning strategies in Akidah Akhlak subjects for students. Therefore, this research is important to do.

## **B. Differentiated Learning Concept**

Differentiated learning is a way or effort made by teachers to fulfil students' needs and expectations. This is in line with Tomlinson's opinion, that differentiated learning is an attempt to adjust the learning process in the classroom to meet the individual learning needs of each student, rather than providing different tasks for each child. Differentiated learning is also not a disorganised learning process

Simply put, differentiated learning is a series of common-sense decisions made by teachers that are orientated towards the needs of students. (Kusumaningpuri 2024). Therefore, differentiated learning requires various

supporting factors that involve aligning the type of learning with students' interests, talents and learning styles amidst their individual differences. But it is also important to evaluate differentiated learning so that it has a positive impact on student achievement in order to shape their interests, talents and learning styles in achieving more optimal learning outcomes (Ramadani and Inayati 2024).

The objectives of differentiated learning are as follows. Firstly, to assist all students in learning so that teachers can increase awareness of students' abilities, so that learning objectives can be achieved by all students. Secondly, to increase student motivation and learning outcomes so that students obtain learning outcomes that are in accordance with the level of difficulty of the material provided. Third, to establish a harmonious relationship between teachers and students because differentiated learning promotes strong relationships between teachers and students. Fourth, to help students become independent learners. Fifth, to increase teachers' satisfaction in implementing differentiated learning.

The various steps of implementing differentiated learning are as follows. Firstly, finding learners' needs. Teachers must understand the diversity of students in terms of learning readiness, interest, and learning profile before implementing differentiated learning. Second, defining fluid learning objectives. Learning objectives should be made in such a way that they can be achieved by all students, regardless of their different abilities. Teachers can set different objectives based on students' readiness levels and create various indicators of achievement. Thirdly, building a variety of learning methods.

### **C. Overview of Madrasah Aliyah Salafiyah YAPENSA Pekalongan**

Madrasah Aliyah Salafiyah (MAS) YAPENSA is an educational institution at the senior high school level under the auspices of the Salafiyah Jenggot Education Foundation. MAS YAPENSA was established in 2014, located on Jalan Pelita IV RT.01 RW.10 Jenggot Village, South Pekalongan Sub-district, Pekalongan City.

MAS YAPENSA Pekalongan City has various institutional orientations, including. Firstly, strengthening the Aqidah Ahlussunnah Wal Jama'ah among its students, with a target of 95% of students being able to explain the basic principles of Ahlussunnah Wal Jama'ah correctly. Second, increasing student participation in daily worship activities in Madrasah, with a target of 100% of students routinely performing dhuha prayers and congregational prayers every day within one school year. Third, increasing the application of akhlakul karimah values in students' daily lives, with a target of 90% of students getting good or very good assessments in aspects of behaviour and character in one school year. Fourth, increasing academic achievement, by increasing the average Madrasah Assessment score by 15% in two years, and increasing the number of students who achieve academic achievements at the district/city level by 20% within three years. Fifth, increasing the number of students who have working skills through automotive or fashion skills

programmes, with a target of 75% of students being able to master motorcycle engine repair techniques for automotive skills and basic sewing techniques for fashion skills within one school year.

#### **D. Differentiated Learning Strategy in Akidah Akhlak Subject at MAS Yapensa Pekalongan.**

Based on the results of interviews with Muhamad Agus Salim as the head of MAS Yapensa Pekalongan regarding differentiated learning strategies in Akidah Akhlak for students at Madrasah Aliyah Salafiyah Yapensa, that diverse learning methods in Akidah Akhlak subjects are aimed at students with varying abilities, so it is implemented with an adaptable approach. Agus Salim emphasises the importance of understanding the needs of each student, so that the Akidah Akhlak material can be delivered in various ways, such as through visual media, sound, and activities that involve motor skills to help students deepen their understanding of the material. In addition, teachers at MAS Yapensa are given training to give more attention to students with special needs, by modifying tasks or giving more time, so that all students, including those with special needs, can learn with appropriate methods according to their abilities. Through this approach, it is hoped that students can achieve the maximum possible success in learning Akidah Akhlak lessons even with variations in different learning speeds. (Salim 2025).

Based on the results of the interview above, it can be concluded that the Differentiated Learning Strategy in the Merdeka Curriculum for Akidah Akhlak Subjects at MAS Yapensa Pekalongan City is an effective method to meet student needs, especially for those with special needs. Through an adaptable approach and understanding of the individual needs of these students, Akidah Akhlak material can be presented in various ways, such as with the use of images, sound media, and physical activities, making it easier for students to understand. In addition, special training for teachers to give extra attention to students with special needs as well as adjustments in assignments and additional time, provide opportunities for students to learn according to their capabilities. Thus, this differentiated learning strategy provides equal opportunities for every student, including those with special needs, to achieve success in Akidah Akhlak lessons.

The results of observations made in the field show that the Differentiated Learning Strategy in the Merdeka Curriculum for Akidah Akhlak Subjects at MAS Yapensa Pekalongan City has been implemented well and has a positive effect on students. Akidah Akhlak teachers actively utilise various types of learning media, such as pictures and teaching aids, which help students with slower learning speeds understand the material. This proves that differentiated learning can create an inclusive and efficient learning environment for all students, including those with special needs.

According to the results of the author's interview with Fikhra as the Akidah Akhlak Teacher at MAS Yapensa, she said that in the process of teaching students, especially those with special needs, the application of different learning strategies plays a very important role in creating an effective learning environment. According to Fikhra, each student has a unique learning method, so the Akhlak material must be adapted to their individual needs and abilities. Therefore, she applies various methods, such as the use of pictures and videos, as well as practical activities that involve motor skills to improve understanding. In addition, she also provides additional time and adjusts the difficulty level of the questions so that students who learn at a slower pace can more easily understand the material and feel more confident in participating in the lesson (Fikhra 2025).

The author also conducted interviews with Abdul Hamid and Abdul Fatah as grade XI students at MAS Yapensa regarding differentiated learning applied by teachers. He stated that the Akidah Akhlak teaching method carried out by the teacher in various ways, such as utilising videos and pictures, really helped him in understanding the material. The student felt more comfortable in learning because the teacher often gave additional explanations and gave enough time to complete the assignment, so she did not feel rushed. In his opinion, this method boosted his confidence and helped him to understand the lesson more effectively (Hamid and Fatah 2025). Based on the results of these interviews, it can be concluded that the application of different learning strategies in Akidah Akhlak subjects at MAS Yapensa has had a good impact on students, especially for those with special needs. By applying various teaching methods that are tailored to the abilities and needs of students, such as the use of visual media, additional time, and task adjustments, students become easier to understand lessons and feel more confident when learning. This shows that customised and personalised learning can support students with varying learning speeds in achieving success in Akidah Akhlak lessons.

Furthermore, based on observations made by the author in the field, it was found that the implementation of differentiated learning strategies at MAS Yapensa Pekalongan was effective in helping students, especially those with special needs, to understand Akidah Akhlak material. The students show a higher level of activeness and enthusiasm in participating in learning, especially when the teacher applies various media such as pictures, videos, and practical activities related to the material being taught. In addition, giving extra time and adjusting assignments also supports students in dealing with learning difficulties, so they feel more confident and less pressured in achieving learning goals. With this method, education increasingly includes all students and meets their individual needs.

## **E. Supporting Factors for Differentiated Learning in Akidah Akhlak at MAS Yapensa Pekalongan**

There are a number of supporting factors for the implementation of differentiated learning strategies in Akidah Akhlak subjects at MAS Yapensa Pekalongan City, including the following.

### **1) Professional Development and Training for Teachers**

The factor of training and professional development for teachers is one of the elements that greatly supports the implementation of different learning strategies in the independent curriculum, especially in the Akidah Akhlak subject at MAS Yapensa Pekalongan. Training and professional development for teachers has a very significant role because it can improve teachers' skills in managing learning that suits the needs of various students, including students who need a special approach.

Based on the results of the author's interview with Fikhra as an Akidah Akhlak teacher, she stated that training and professional development for teachers is a very instrumental aspect in implementing different learning strategies in the classroom. As a teacher, she feels helped by the training organised by the school and the Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs through various platforms available. The training provides greater insight into how to recognise the learning needs of each student, especially for students who have varying learning speeds, such as slow learners (Fikhra 2025).

The interviews above show that training and professional development for teachers are crucial and supportive factors in implementing differentiated learning strategies in the classroom. This training provides teachers with greater insight into the diverse learning needs of students and the methods that can be used to tailor learning materials and methods according to each student's ability. Through the training, teachers can structure more appropriate and efficient lessons, utilise a variety of educational aids and modify tasks to make them accessible to students with different skill levels. This helps students with special needs to more easily understand the Akidah Akhlak material, and increases their confidence in the learning process.

### **2) Moral Skills and Care of Moral Education Teachers**

The ability and attention of Islamic Religious Education teachers play an important role in the implementation of different learning strategies in the independent curriculum in the subject of moral creed at MAS Yapensa Pekalongan. The competence of the Akidah Akhlak teacher includes knowledge and skills to design and implement learning that can be adapted to the varied abilities and needs of students.

Based on an interview conducted by the author with Mr Fikhra, as the Akidah Akhlak teacher related to the competence and attention of Akidah Akhlak teachers in implementing differentiated learning for students at MAS Yapensa, he stated that the ability and attention of Akidah Akhlak teachers are very important elements in implementing differentiated learning strategies, especially for students. As a teacher, I always strive to improve myself through various training and experiences that I have gained. Attention to each student, especially to those who require more attention such as students with special needs, is very important. I feel obliged to support them in developing, understanding Akidah Akhlak material, and achieving learning goals according to their potential (Fikhra 2025).

The interview results above show that the ability and attention of Akidah Akhlak teachers are crucial factors that support the implementation of differentiated learning strategies, especially for MAS Yapensa Pekalongan students. Qualified teachers can plan learning according to students' abilities, as well as apply various methods that help students understand the material, such as discussion-oriented learning or the use of tools. In addition, teachers' attention to students' learning needs, especially for those who require special attention, enables teachers to provide the necessary support and encouragement. Therefore, the skills and attention of Akidah Akhlak teachers are very important in realising learning that is effective, flexible, and supports students' progress according to their potential.

### 3) Madrasah Policy and Assistance

Madrasah policy and support factors play a significant role in the implementation of different learning strategies in the independent curriculum in the subject of Akidah Akhlak for students at MAS Yapensa. The Madrasah's policy in favour of education ensures that every student, including those with special needs, receives attention appropriate to their learning needs. Support from the school, whether in the form of facilities, resources or time allocated for teacher training, creates an atmosphere that supports the implementation of customised and flexible learning strategies. Policies that encourage collaboration between teachers, including homeroom teachers, provide opportunities for Akidah Akhlak teachers to design and implement more focused learning, so that students can learn in ways that are more efficient and appropriate to their abilities.

Based on the author's interview with Muhamad Agus Salim as the head of Madrasah regarding the policies and support by Madrasah in MAS Yapensa Pekalongan, he explained that policies and support from Madrasah play an important role in the implementation of differentiated learning strategies, especially for students of MAS Yapensa Pekalongan as an effort to ensure that every student, regardless of their ability, and get equal opportunities to learn and develop. In this context, the Madrasah supports the implementation of

differentiated learning strategies in the independent curriculum for Akidah Akhlak subject. Periodically, training is organised for teachers to enhance their competence in managing adaptive and inclusive learning.

MAS Yapensa is also committed to providing the necessary facilities and resources, such as learning aids, as well as ensuring adequate time for collaboration between teachers, including special support teachers. We also encourage the utilisation of technology in education to make it easier for students to access materials in a way that better suits their needs. With these policies and support in place, we are optimistic that the learning process can take place more efficiently and the results will show in their progress (Salim 2025).

The interview results above show that the policies and support provided by the madrasah head greatly facilitate the implementation of differentiated learning strategies. The madrasah shows its commitment by providing regular training for teachers to improve their competence in managing more adaptive and inclusive learning. They also provide the necessary facilities and resources, such as visual learning aids and technology, and encourage co-operation among teachers. Through this policy, the school creates an atmosphere that supports effective learning so that students have a better chance of accessing materials and achieving learning objectives.

#### 4) Parental Involvement in the Education Process

Parents' participation greatly contributes to the implementation of different learning strategies in the independent curriculum for Akidah Akhlak lessons at MAS Yapensa Pekalongan. The role of parents in their children's learning process provides extra support outside the madrasah, such as helping children understand lessons, providing motivation, and strengthening their understanding of the religious values taught at school. An effective communication relationship between parents and teachers allows teachers to access important information about students' special needs, so that learning strategies can be tailored more precisely to students' conditions and development. Actively involved parents can provide the emotional and practical support needed by students to make them more confident and enthusiastic in learning about Akidah akhlak.

Based on the author's interview with Fikhra as the Akidah Akhlak teacher regarding the role of parents in the implementation of differentiated learning strategies in the independent curriculum in Akidah Akhlak subjects at MAS Yapensa, he stated, that parental participation is very important in the implementation of differentiated learning strategies in the independent curriculum in Akidah Akhlak subjects at MAS Yapensa. Parents play an important role in supporting children's learning process at home, such as helping children prepare assignments, repeating material that has been taught in class, and providing motivation and support so that children remain enthusiastic (Fikhra 2025) This

statement was also corroborated by Hinda Aliana as an Indonesian language teacher at MAS Yapensa. She stated that through effective communication, she can better understand students' needs and design more appropriate learning. For example, if she realises that a child is having difficulty in understanding the material, parents can provide additional explanations at home, which will certainly accelerate their understanding. With active parental participation, children can feel more confident and supported in their learning process at MAS Yapensa Pekalongan (Aliana 2025).

The results of the interviews above show that parental participation is an important element that supports the implementation of differentiated learning strategies in the independent curriculum in the Akidah Akhlak subject at MAS Yapensa Pekalongan City. An effective communication relationship between parents and teachers creates a learning process that is more in line with student needs, so that students can get more support both at school and at home. Parents who are involved in providing motivation and assistance to students in understanding the material will accelerate their learning process, increase self-confidence, and strengthen understanding of Akidah Akhlak.

## **F. Conclusion**

Based on the main discussion of this research, it is concluded that the differentiation learning strategy in Akidah Akhlak subjects at MAS Yapensa Pekalongan City is effective and can improve the quality of learning and student understanding. Through this differentiation strategy, the delivery of Akidah Akhlak material is carried out using various methods, such as the use of visual and audio media, and activities that involve motor skills. Through these various methods, students can understand the material better. Meanwhile, a number of factors can support differentiated learning, including training and professional development for teachers, teachers' skills and concern in moral education, policies and support from Madrasah, and the participation of parents.

This research emphasizes the importance of creative, contextual, and accommodative learning strategies in supporting the effectiveness of Islamic learning in the midst of the diversity of conditions and needs of students. The research also recommends the head of Madrasah and teachers to continue to maintain and improve the programs implemented at MAS Yapensa, especially in the aspect of differentiated learning in Akidah Akhlak subject. Furthermore, the limitations of this research have not analyzed the obstacles and challenges in the implementation of differentiated learning strategies in Akidah Akhlak subjects at MAS Yapensa Pekalongan City. Therefore, further research is important.

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