

# Implementation of Differentiated Learning Methods in Increasing Student Learning Motivation at SMPN 23 Surakarta

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## Abstract

This study investigates the application of differentiated learning methods to boost student motivation in Islamic religious education at SMPN 23 Surakarta. Utilizing a qualitative approach, it examines the implementation process and its impact, highlighting strategies such as mapping learning needs, creating tailored learning plans across four aspects (content, process, product, and environment), and conducting reflective evaluations. This research shows the implementation of differentiated learning methods at SMPN 23 Surakarta in Islamic religious education subjects: 1) Mapping learning needs based on learning readiness, interests, and learning profiles. 2) Make a differentiated learning plan using four aspects (content, process, product, and environment). 3) Carry out differentiated learning by the learning implementation plan that has been made. 4) Reflect and evaluate after the learning process. The impact of differentiated learning methods in increasing student learning motivation at SMPN 23 Surakarta has a positive effect on students; students become more enthusiastic and motivated to participate in Islamic religious education learning activities.

**Keywords:** *Differentiated Learning, Learning Motivation, Implementation*

## Introduction

Education is an essential thing in human life. Even for Muslims, education is the first thing Allah taught to the Prophet Muhammad through surah al-'Alaq verses 1-5, first revealed to the Prophet SAW because humans can live better with education. Education has a broad meaning. The basis of education is the interaction between educators and students to achieve educational goals. This form of teacher and student interaction occurs in the educational environment (Agustina et al., 2023; Alfiyanto, 2020; Alfiyanto et al., 2022). Education and learning are related to values for students; namely, educating means giving, growing, and planting values for students and playing an active role in helping the development of students' potential, abilities, and characteristics for the better (Andriani et al., 2023).

The development of education continues to change, and the implementation of educational activities that have been running as a reference for revising improvements continues to be evaluated. An improvement that appears today is the Merdeka Belajar activity. Merdeka Belajar is a vision of the thoughts of an Indonesian education figure, Ki Hadjar Dewantara. The Meaning of Free Learning directs ability, freedom, and empowerment to achieve happiness (Pasaribu et al., 2022; Widyastuti, 2021). Merdeka Belajar is in the view of the Merdeka Curriculum. The curriculum implemented in Indonesia is often seen as inflexible because it directs more to the content, time for reflection is considered less likely to provide opportunities to understand the meaning of a lesson, curriculum content that emphasizes more theory, teachers have difficulty explaining it practically and operationally in classroom learning materials and activities (Purba et al., 2021).

The learning process involves many components in it. The components in it are reciprocal or influence each other. In other words, one component's effectiveness will affect other

components' effectiveness (Askar et al., 2021). Similarly, the ineffectiveness of one component will affect other components. This is related to learning activities in conditions in the field. What educators think or imagine is not easy to apply because, in actualization, educators often face problems arising from the internal environment and from the external environment of learning, as well as in physical or non-physical forms. The quality of learning is still low in class, as indicated by students' everyday activities. These learning outcomes have not been maximized, and students are noisy, ignore learning process activities, are not actively involved in learning activities, and have not been actively involved in group discussion activities (Siti &).

In learning activities at school, teachers are constantly confronted by several diverse student characteristics. That uniqueness makes it diverse so that one student and another are not the same. Some students look smart and stand out in counting. Some students like and are passionate about sports, and some like to talk and argue. Some students have difficulty speaking and conveying their ideas orally in other conditions.

On the other hand, these students can be creative through animation and video. This condition is familiar to the learning process in the classroom, at school, and maybe even in a family where brothers and sisters can exhibit these differences. However, some teachers still cannot apply classroom learning strategies to meet the individual learning needs of each student, such as monotonous learning that does not vary. The variety of characteristics and abilities of students makes a teacher think creatively to provide learning activities that can meet the needs of interests and are appropriate based on the development of students. Cognitive development theory says that learners have different learning styles according to their level of cognitive development. The heterogeneity of students in the classroom has become a certainty, and they have different emotional, intelligence, social, academic, parental, and other abilities (Kremneva et al., 2020; Puspitasari et al., 2020).

One of the learning efforts that accommodates differences in the learning abilities of diverse students is differentiation learning. Differentiated learning is learning that meets the needs of learners. In differentiation learning, there is an adjustment to the interests of learning preferences and the readiness of participants to be educated to achieve improved learning outcomes (Smale-Jacobse et al., 2019). This differentiation learning has a vital role in increasing student learning motivation because this differentiation learning creates a diverse class by providing opportunities to achieve content, process an idea, and improve the results of each student so that students will be able to learn more effectively and motivate students to learn with good results.

SMPN 23 Surakarta is a school that implements an independent curriculum. In the independent curriculum, learning uses learning methods that adjust the characteristics of students. Especially in the subject of Islamic Religious Education, some teachers have applied differentiated learning. However, there are still obstacles in the learning process, one of which is the condition of the classroom, which is less conducive. In learning activities, some students are still asleep, the abilities of diverse students, and some students whose cognitive scores are less than optimal. So, based on the background above, researchers examined the implementation of differentiated learning to increase student learning motivation and the impact of differentiated learning methods on improving student learning motivation at SMPN 23 Surakarta.

## Method

This type of research is a qualitative method research with a qualitative descriptive approach, according to Bogdan & Taylor, as a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the

form of written or spoken words about people and observed behavior (Bogdan & Taylor, 2010). So, this study will explore data on implementing differentiated learning methods to increase student motivation at SMPN 23 Surakarta. Researchers collecting data must have a basic data collection technique to achieve maximum results. In obtaining valid data, data collection techniques are the most critical step in research. At this stage, researchers make direct observations during the differentiated learning process in Islamic Religious Education subjects, then interview teachers about the differentiated learning process at SMPN 23 Surakarta and collect documentation during the learning process at SMPN 23 Surakarta. Data validity is a technique or method that researchers can use to collect data. The data collection method is processed through observation, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis is the organization, presentation of data, and conclusion.

## Results

### ***Mapping Student Learning Needs***

The application of differentiated learning is the first step that must be done, namely mapping student learning needs that are a priority for students' needs. This step is carried out to find out what kind of needs are needed by students in the process of learning activities. Early before the learning activity begins, the teacher will conduct an assessment of the students. By using direct interviews with students related to learning styles and learning readiness, teachers communicate directly with parents and then collaborate with BK teachers who handle the class about students.

From the teacher assessment results, students' needs during the learning process have been obtained. Student learning readiness, in general, is relatively adequate, but some students still cannot follow learning readiness due to student environmental conditions. One example is in the subject of Islamic religious education. One participant could not take part in the preparation for learning Islamic religious education because in his neighborhood, there was no TPA / TPQ, and it was also far from the mosque.

### ***Planning Differentiated Learning***

Careful planning before implementing differentiated learning is undoubtedly essential. This is based on mapping student learning needs analyzed by previous teachers. According to Wahyuningsari et al., teachers can choose four aspects of differentiated learning in learning activities, namely aspects of content, processes, products, and learning environments (Wahyuningsari et al., 2022). In the planning carried out by teachers at SMPN 23 Surakarta in class VII (B, C, E), teachers use differentiated learning strategies of content, processes, environments, and products. This strategy was chosen because students in class VII (B, C, E) tend to have a kinesthetic learning style that likes a different learning environment in each learning activity and direct practice process. So, in the material of Islamic religious education, teachers plan activities for students to practice Islamic religious education directly in the school environment by inviting students to learn outside the classroom according to the material to be discovered.

### ***Implementing Differentiated Learning***

Learning readiness mapping that has been done is the basis for differentiated learning planning. After planning, then the teacher implements the planning that has been made. In the Islamic Religious Education learning material, differentiated learning carried out by teachers at SMPN 23 Surakarta is observing learning activities directly in the school environment. Then, the teacher makes groups to discuss the tasks that the teacher has given through PPT media,

videos, and package book media. The students then presented the results of the group discussion to be assessed by the teacher on how the students presented the results. When the differentiated learning process occurs, students seem motivated to follow the learning process. However, some students still play or joke during the learning process.

### ***Reflection and Evaluation***

Learning activities must run well so that the objectives of learning are achieved. But, in its implementation, it is not uncommon to find conditions where the learning process experiences obstacles. Therefore, after the learning process takes place, reflection and evaluation activities must be carried out. According to Susiloningsih, reflection is a response to the activity of events or newly acquired knowledge. This evaluation and reflection activity is done for students and teachers (Susiloningsih, 2018).

Reflection results show that students become more enthusiastic when the learning process takes place, but some students still play and joke. Students also seem motivated in learning activities with differentiated learning, which can be seen when students present the results of group discussions. However, some things must be considered, including making a learning agreement between teachers and students before the learning process so that students are not allowed to play games or joke when learning occurs.

### ***Impact of Differentiated Learning Implementation***

Differentiated learning has been completed in class VII (B, C, E) SMPN 23 Surakarta. Differentiated learning has a positive impact on student learning motivation. At the beginning of learning, almost half of the students from each class are less enthusiastic or less motivated in learning activities. However, only a few students are still less motivated in learning process activities after differentiated learning. Differentiated learning can be one of the right choices in the learning process at SMPN 23 Surakarta to increase student learning motivation.

## **Discussion**

In today's educational context, student learning motivation is one of the critical factors that support the success of the learning process. Research conducted at SMPN 23 Surakarta revealed that the implementation of differentiation learning methods has a significant impact on increasing student learning motivation, especially in Islamic Religious Education subjects. This method adapts the learning approach based on the student's needs, interests, and learning profile, so each student gets a relevant and challenging learning experience according to their abilities.

Differentiated learning allows teachers to design learning activities that are diverse and appropriate to students' individual characteristics. This is in line with Liu's research, which found that the presence of teachers' verbal and non-verbal familiarity with students contributes positively to students' learning motivation (Liu, 2021). In addition, Chiu et al. emphasized the importance of teacher support in increasing student motivation to learn with Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based technology, which shows the crucial role of teachers in implementing innovative learning methods (Chiu et al., 2023).

Research related to differentiation learning methods also shows positive results on students' science literacy, as explained by Kamila et al., who found that differentiation learning materials oriented to natural sciences can improve students' science literacy skills (Kamila et al., 2023). This confirms that the differentiation approach increases learning motivation and students' academic abilities.

Furthermore, Lestari et al. describe the application of differentiated learning-based Lesson Study in secondary schools that successfully improve student learning outcomes, demonstrating the effectiveness of collaboration between teachers in designing and implementing differentiated learning (Lestari et al., 2023). Finally, Hariyati et al.'s research reveals the instructional leadership role of school principals in realizing student well-being through implementing differentiated learning (Hariyati et al., 2023).

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the differentiation learning method is a practical approach to increasing student motivation and learning outcomes. Implementing this method requires careful planning, cooperation between teachers, and school leadership support to create a learning environment that is conducive and responsive to the learning needs of each student.

The researcher suggests that future researchers further explore the effectiveness of different learning in other subjects and educational levels to validate its application and benefits in various educational contexts. In addition, researchers recommend research into the long-term impact of these teaching methods on student motivation and learning outcomes. As a follow-up action, educational practitioners can implement differentiated learning strategies in their curricula, ensure adaptation to diverse student needs, and conduct regular assessments to refine and optimize these strategies to improve educational outcomes. This approach aims to foster a more inclusive and engaging learning environment, which has the potential to improve overall student performance and satisfaction.

## Conclusion

The study concludes that differentiated learning significantly enhances student motivation in Islamic religious education at SMPN 23 Surakarta. Key findings include improved student engagement and personalized learning experiences through tailored strategies across content, process, product, and learning environment. Practically, the study recommends educators adopt differentiated learning to cater to diverse student needs, fostering an inclusive and stimulating educational atmosphere. For future research, exploring differentiated learning's effectiveness across different subjects and educational levels is advised to further understand its impact and refine its implementation for broader educational benefits.

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