



## Implementation and Strategies Differentiated Learning for Arabic Language Learning at Islamic High School

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### Abstract

The Merdeka Curriculum encourages a more adaptive and learner-centered learning approach, one of which is through differentiated learning. This approach is important in learning Arabic which requires mastery of complex skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. This study investigates the implementation of differentiated instruction within the Merdeka Curriculum at Islamic high school Darul Faqih Malang, with a focus on examining the instructional strategies employed by teachers, as well as identifying the opportunities and challenges encountered in practice. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive methodology, With case study research type. Data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews with Arabic language teachers, and analysis of instructional documents. The data were then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model. The findings reveal that instructional planning is conducted systematically, guided by the formulation of learning outcomes, learning objective pathways, and the use of contextual and adaptable teaching modules. Instructional delivery is tailored through student grouping based on learning preferences, the application of active learning strategies such as discussion and problem-based learning, and the integration of Pancasila student profile values. Teachers' strategies encompass diagnostic assessment, peer tutoring, the use of varied instructional media and methods, and intensive mentoring. Despite challenges related to students' diverse backgrounds, motivation levels, and infrastructural limitations, differentiated instruction fosters an inclusive, collaborative, and transformative learning environment. This study contributes valuable insights into the practical effectiveness of differentiated instruction in Arabic language education under the Merdeka Curriculum framework. This study provides scientific contributions for Arabic language teachers who will implement differentiated learning, especially Arabic language learning.

**Keywords:** Arabic Language Learning, Differentiated Instruction, Learning Strategy, Merdeka Curriculum

### ملخص

يشجع منهج الدراسي الإستقلالي على اتباع نهج تعليمي أكثر تكيّفًا وتركيزًا على المتعلم، ويتمثل أحد هذه المناهج في التعلم المتميز. وهذا النهج مهم في تعليم اللغة العربية الذي يتطلب إتقان مهارات معقدة مثل الاستماع والتحدث والقراءة والكتابة، وتبحث هذه الدراسة في تطبيق التعليم المتميز ضمن منهج مريديكا في المدرسة العليا دار الفقيه مالانج، مع التركيز على فحص الاستراتيجيات التعليمية التي يستخدمها المعلمون، بالإضافة إلى تحديد الفرص والتحديات التي واجهتهم في الممارسة العملية. باستخدام المنهجية الوصفية النوعية، مع استخدام منهجية وصفية نوعية، مع نوع بحث دراسة الحالة. تم جمع البيانات من خلال الملاحظات الصفية، والمقابلات المتعمقة مع معلمي اللغة العربية، وتحليل الوثائق التعليمية. ثم تم تحليل البيانات باستخدام نموذج مايلز وهوبرمان. كشفت النتائج عن أن التخطيط التعليمي يتم بشكل منهجي، مسترشدًا بصياغة مخرجات التعلم، ومسارات أهداف التعلم، واستخدام وحدات تعليمية سياقية وقابلة للتكيف. يتم تصميم تقديم التعليمات من خلال تجميع الطلاب في مجموعات بناءً

على تفضيلات التعليم، وتطبيق استراتيجيات التعلم النشط مثل المناقشة والتعلم القائم على حل المشكلات، ودمج قيم الملف الشخصي للطلاب في بانكاسيلا. تشتمل استراتيجيات المعلمين على التقييم التشخيصي، وتدريب الأقران، واستخدام وسائط وأساليب تعليمية متنوعة، والتوجيه المكثف. على الرغم من التحديات المتعلقة بالخلفيات المتنوعة للطلاب، ومستويات التحفيز لديهم، والقيود المفروضة على البنية التحتية، فإن التعليم المتميز يعزز بيئة تعليمية شاملة وتعاونية وتحويلية. تُسهم هذه الدراسة في تقديم رؤية قيمة حول الفعالية العملية للتعليم المتميز في تعليم اللغة العربية في إطار منهج مريديكا. تقدم هذه الدراسة رؤية قيمة حول الفعالية العملية للتعليم المتميز في تدريس اللغة العربية في إطار منهج مريديكا. وتوفر هذه الدراسة مساهمات علمية لمعلمي اللغة العربية الذين سيطبقون التعلم المتميز، لا سيما في تعليم اللغة العربية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية :** استراتيجيات التعلم، التعليم المتميز، تعليم اللغة العربية، منهج الدراسي الإستقلالي

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## Introduction

Changes to the education curriculum in Indonesia are a recurring phenomenon and part of the dynamics of national education policy. After the Covid 19 pandemic, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) in 2022 offered three curriculum options for educational institutions: 2013 Curriculum, Emergency Curriculum, and Prototype Curriculum..<sup>1</sup> From these three, the Prototype Curriculum evolved into the Merdeka Curriculum, which was officially implemented in stages through the SekolahPenggerak program..<sup>2</sup> The curriculum emerged from the need for more adaptive, relevant and learner-focused teaching methods, with the main goal of encouraging students to be proactive, independent and able to optimize their abilities.

One of the fundamental elements in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is differentiated learning, which is a pedagogical strategy that adapts the learning process to the needs, interests, and characteristics of students' individual learning styles..<sup>3</sup> This concept emphasises the importance of teachers adjusting learning strategies to meet the individual learning needs of students in heterogeneous classes. Differentiated learning seeks to align learning activities with each student's strengths, interests and readiness..<sup>4</sup> In this context, educators are expected to play a role more than just conveying information, but rather as learning facilitators who are able to recognize and respond

<sup>1</sup> Redhatul Fauzia dan Zaka Hadikusuma Ramadan, "Implementasi Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi Dalam Kurikulum Merdeka," Jurnal Educatio FKIP UNMA 9, no. 3 (1 Oktober 2023): 1608–17. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31949/educatio.v9i3.5323>

<sup>2</sup> Abdul Fattah Nasution dkk., "Konsep dan Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka," COMPETITIVE: Journal of Education 2, no. 3 (11 September 2023): 201–11. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58355/competitive.v2i3.37>

<sup>3</sup> Dea Digna dkk., "Teachers' Perceptions of Differentiated Learning in Merdeka Curriculum in Elementary Schools," International Journal of Elementary Education 7, no. 2 (2023): 255–62. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.23887/ijee.v7i2.54770>

<sup>4</sup> Meiliana Dwi Cahya dkk., Analisis Karakteristik Siswa Sebagai Dasar Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi terhadap Peningkatan Kolaborasi Siswa, Bioma: Jurnal Biologi dan Pembelajaran Biologi 8, no. 1 (2023): 31–34. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32528/bioma.v8i1.372>

to the diversity of learner characteristics through the design of adaptive, relevant, and meaningful learning strategies.

The implementation of differentiated learning has a high relevance in the context of Arabic language teaching, considering that this subject emphasizes the mastery of four main linguistic competencies in an integrated manner: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.<sup>5</sup> Challenges in Arabic language teaching arise due to uniform learning approaches that do not consider students' diverse learning styles.<sup>6</sup> For example, learners who have a visual learning style show higher comprehension effectiveness when the material is presented in the form of visual representations such as pictures and diagrams. In contrast, individuals with kinesthetic learning styles tend to require physical engagement and motor activity as the main mechanism in internalizing Arabic comprehension. Lack of differentiation in learning often leads to low student motivation and difficulty in understanding Arabic mufrodat and structures.<sup>7</sup>

Although the urgency of differentiated instruction has long been emphasized as a response to increasingly diverse learning needs, its practical implementation in the field continues to face numerous challenges. One of the most significant barriers is the limited understanding among teachers regarding the fundamental concepts and principles of differentiated instruction, particularly in adapting content, process, product, and learning environment to students' individual needs. Many educators lack sufficient theoretical and practical knowledge to effectively identify learners' readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles, and to modify instruction accordingly. In addition, limited access to ongoing and context-specific professional development further hampers teachers' ability to consistently apply differentiated strategies. Available training programs often tend to be general in nature and insufficiently tailored to the real-world challenges faced by teachers.<sup>8</sup>

Another critical obstacle is the time constraint experienced by teachers in planning and implementing responsive instructional strategies. In practice, many educators still rely on a one-size-fits-all approach, which is easier to apply under tight schedules but is ineffective in addressing the diverse needs of students in heterogeneous classrooms. Moreover, the misalignment between teachers' administrative burdens and the demands of differentiated instruction exacerbates the issue. Thus, systemic support and more comprehensive policies are needed to ensure the effective implementation of this approach across educational settings.

The application of differentiated learning approaches has been shown to be effective in improving student learning outcomes.<sup>9</sup> This applies both in general and in the teaching of specific

<sup>5</sup> Auladatil Ma'wa dkk., "Penerapan Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi Berbasis Proyek Dalam Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka pada Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab," *Al-Kalim : Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab dan Kebahasaaraban* 2, no. 2 (2024): 172–88. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.60040/jak.v2i2.31>

<sup>6</sup> Nahriya Ikrima Kholiliya, Asep Sunarko, dan Vava Imam Agus Faisal, "Inovasi Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab Dengan Metode Berlitz Dalam Meningkatkan Keterampilan Berbicara Bahasa Arab di Asrama Bilingual SMA Takbassus Al-Qur'an Wonosobo," *SPESIFIK: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pembelajaran* 2, 4 (2024): 33. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.53866/spesifik.v2i1>

<sup>7</sup> Nailur Rahmawati dkk., "Differentiated Instruction as a Form of Merdeka Belajar in Arabic Language Learning," *Arabiyatuna: Jurnal Bahasa Arab* 8, no. 2 (2024): 873–96. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.29240/jba.v8i2.11022>

<sup>8</sup> M Sholih Salimul Uqba dkk., "Arabic Language Program Management at Islamic Boarding School Nawaina of Islamic Junior High School 2 Malang," *Mantiqu Tayr: Journal of Arabic Language* 4, no. 2 (2024): 612–25. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25217/mantiquatayr.v4i2.4578>

<sup>9</sup> Shalsabila Kharisma Dini Kartika, "Pendekatan Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi melalui Model Pembelajaran Kooperatif Tipe TGT pada Mata Pelajaran PKn," *Journal of Innovation and Teacher Professionalism* 3, no. 1 (5 September 2024): 133–43. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17977/um084v3i12025p133-143>

subjects.<sup>10</sup> Thus, previous studies support the benefits of this learning strategy.<sup>11</sup> Rahmawati found that differentiated learning in Curriculum 2013 is effective in increasing student engagement,<sup>12</sup> while Nur wahyuni showed that mapping<sup>13</sup> student readiness in science learning has a positive impact on learning outcomes.<sup>14</sup> Jailani et al. highlighted teacher training in the application of differentiation, but did not touch on Arabic language subjects.<sup>15</sup> Rosyiani identified implementation constraints, mainly limited training and time,<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, Rafiuddin and Widya discuss the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in madrasas, but have not specifically studied differentiation in Arabic language teaching in a pesantren environment.<sup>17</sup> Although differentiated learning has been widely researched in various subjects and levels of education, studies that specifically examine its application in Arabic language teaching are still very limited, especially in the pesantren environment which has a distinctive learning approach and culture. Therefore, this research offers a new contribution by exploring the implementation of differentiated learning in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum in pesantren-based Islamic high school, which has not been touched by previous studies.

Based on the aforementioned background, it can be concluded that the implementation of differentiated learning in Arabic language instruction is an urgent necessity, particularly within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum in pesantren-based Islamic high school. Uniform teaching approaches have proven inadequate in accommodating the diverse learning styles of students, thereby hindering the achievement of comprehensive language competencies in *istima'*, *kalam*, *qira'ah*, and *kitabab*<sup>18</sup> In fact, the learning environment in pesantren has its own unique characteristics, such as a strong religious culture and a dense academic schedule, which require adaptive and contextual teaching strategies.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, this study focuses on exploring the implementation of differentiated

<sup>10</sup> Nurbaiti Sodiah, "Implementasi Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi pada Mata Pelajaran PAI," Journal of Education 2, no. 1 (2024): 67. <https://ejournal.edutechjaya.com/index.php/analysis/article/view/602/446>

<sup>11</sup> Iffa Dian Santika dan Binti Khoiriyah, "Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi dan Relevansi Visi Pedagogis Ki Hajar Dewantara dalam Menuju Merdeka Belajar," Jurnal Pendidikan dan Konseling (JPDK) 5, no. 1 (2023): 11-12. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31004/jpdk.v5i1.11754>

<sup>12</sup> Risma Rahmawati, "Implementasi Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi dalam Kurikulum Merdeka di Sekolah Dasar," Social, Humanities, and Educational Studies (SHES): Conference Series 6, no. 3 (30 November 2023): 44. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20961/shes.v6i3.82334>

<sup>13</sup> Edi Kurniawan Farid dan Aisyatur Rodhiyah, "The Strategy of Teaching Arabic Composition in The Arabic Language Development Center at Pondok Pesantren Darul Lughah Wal Karomah Kraksaan Probolinggo Indonesia | Istirotijyah Ta'lim al-Insya' fi Markaz Tabahhur al-Lughah al-'Arabiyah bi Ma'had Darul L: إستراتيجية تعليم الإنشاء في مركز تبحر اللغة العربية بمعهد دار اللغة والكرامة," Mantiqu Tayr: Journal of Arabic Language 2, no. 2 (2022): 132-45. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25217/mantiquatayr.v2i2.2370>

<sup>14</sup> Nur Wahyuni dan Dwi Baniati, "Penerapan Pembelajaran IPA Berdiferensiasi pada Kurikulum Merdeka," Nian Tana Sikka : Jurnal ilmiah Mahasiswa 3, no. 1 (2025): 256-67. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59603/niantanasikka.v3i1.749>

<sup>15</sup> Mohammad Jailani, "Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab Berbasis Kurikulum Merdeka di Pondok Pesantren," Jurnal Praktik Baik Pembelajaran Sekolah dan Pesantren 1, no. 01 (2022): 7-14. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56741/pbpsp.v1i01.10>

<sup>16</sup> Adela Intan Rosiyani dkk., "Penerapan Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi dalam Kurikulum Merdeka pada Pembelajaran Ips Sekolah Dasar," Jurnal Pendidikan Guru Sekolah Dasar 1, no. 3 (5 Januari 2024): 10. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47134/pgsd.v1i3.271>

<sup>17</sup> Moh. Rofiudin dan Wida Rahayuningtyas, "Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi, Keragaman Peserta Didik, dan Target Kurikulum di Sekolah Menengah Pertama," Journal of Language Literature and Arts 5, no. 5 (1 Mei 2025): 544-56. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17977/um064v5i52025p544-556>

<sup>18</sup> Mohamad Yahya Ashari dan Rifatul Mahfudhoh, "The Strategy of Arabic Learning for Inclusion Students in Islamic Primay School of Islamiyah Wathoniyah Jombang | Strategi Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab Bagi Siswa Inklusi di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Islamiyah Wathoniyah Jombang," Mantiqu Tayr: Journal of Arabic Language 1, no. 2 (2021): 83-100. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25217/mantiquatayr.v1i2.1567>

<sup>19</sup> Farid dan Aisyatur Rodhiyah, "The Strategy of Teaching Arabic Composition in The Arabic Language Development Center at Pondok Pesantren Darul Lughah Wal Karomah Kraksaan Probolinggo Indonesia | Istirotijyah Ta'lim al-Insya' fi Markaz



learning in Arabic language teaching at pesantren-based Islamic senior high schools within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum, in order to identify the opportunities, challenges, and relevant strategies that are practical and responsive to students' needs and institutional characteristics.<sup>20</sup>

In this case, Islamic high school Darul Faqih Malang is an interesting research object. This school not only integrates the Merdeka Curriculum, but also combines it with pesantren values and distinctive approaches, such as the Yemeni curriculum, habituation of adab values, and superior programs such as Aswaja Progressive. The Arabic learning approach at this school emphasizes mastery of *nahwu*, *shorof*, and understanding classical Islamic texts. In addition, the peer tutor system and the interest-based approach and student readiness in choosing learning materials are concrete forms of differentiation implementation that have rarely been studied in previous academic studies.<sup>21</sup>

As well as an opportunity in developing appr based on the preliminary study conducted at Islamic High School Darul Faqih, it is known that the diversity of student backgrounds is a challenge opriate learning approaches. Arabic language teachers in schools are faced with demands to create learning that is contextual, adaptive, and responsive to differences in learning styles and student abilities.<sup>22</sup> In this context, differentiated learning becomes a strategic approach to maximize students' potential and make Arabic language not only as a subject, but as part of character building and Islamic culture.<sup>23</sup>

As a response to the gap, this research aims to comprehensively explore the implementation of differentiated learning in Arabic subject at Islamic High School Darul Faqih Malang, explain the strategies applied by teachers in the implementation of differentiated learning in Arabic language learning and also find out the opportunities and challenges in the implementation of differentiated learning in Arabic language learning at Islamic High School Darul Faqih Malang. This research is based on the theory of differentiated learning which in the last five years continues to be developed and applied in various educational contexts. This concept emphasizes the importance of adjusting aspects of content, process, product, and learning environment based on students' readiness, interest, and learning profile to create inclusive and effective learning.<sup>24</sup> In addition, the multiple intelligence approach is also an important reference in understanding the diversity of student potential, where each individual has a different learning style such as visual, kinesthetic, musical, or

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*Tababbur al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah bi Ma'had Darul L: إستراتيجية تعليم الإنشاء في مركز تبحر اللغة العربية بمعهد دار اللغة والكرامة كركسآن*, "برويولنجو إندونيسيا", Mantiqu Tayr: Journal of Arabic Language 2, no. 2 (2022): 132–45. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25217/mantiquatayr.v2i2.2370>

<sup>20</sup> M Sholih Salimul Uqba dkk., "Arabic Language Program Management at Islamic Boarding School Nawaina of Islamic Junior High School 2 Malang," Mantiqu Tayr: Journal of Arabic Language 4, no. 2 (2024): 612–25. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25217/mantiquatayr.v4i2.4578>

<sup>21</sup> Aida Lutfi Azzahroh dan Mohammad Ahsanuddin, "Penerapan Model Pembelajaran Tutor Sebaya untuk Meningkatkan Keterampilan Membaca Bahasa Arab Kelas X IIS di SMA Babul Khairat," JoLLA: Journal of Language, Literature, and Arts 2, no. 7 (29 Juli 2022): 1005–19. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17977/um064v2i72022p1005-1019>

<sup>22</sup> Neng Silvia dkk., "Manajemen Perencanaan dan Pengorganisasian Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab," Alibbaa: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab 4, no. 1 (31 Januari 2023): 108–23. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.19105/aipba.v4i1.7497>

<sup>23</sup> Adela Intan Rosiyani dkk., "Penerapan Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi dalam Kurikulum Merdeka pada Pembelajaran Ips Sekolah Dasar," Jurnal Pendidikan Guru Sekolah Dasar 1, no. 3 (2024): 10. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47134/pgsd.v1i3.271>

<sup>24</sup> A. Rosidi Mohtar dan Pidekso Adi, "Implementasi Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi dalam Teks Prosedur pada Mata Pelajaran Bahasa Indonesia Kelas VII," Journal of Language Literature and Arts 4, no. 11 (2024): 1161–71. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17977/um064v4i112024p1161-1171>

interpersonal that needs to be accommodated in lesson planning.<sup>25</sup> These two theories are relevant to the spirit of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes learner-centered learning, and become the conceptual basis for examining adaptive and contextual Arabic learning strategies in the pesantren environment.

This research occupies an important gap in academic studies because it raises the application of differentiated learning in Arabic language subjects in a pesantren environment, something that has not been studied much before. By adopting the practice in Islamic High School Darul Faqih Malang, this research aims to strengthen educational theories and practices that are contextual and relevant to the reality of Indonesian education, especially madrasah. The main focus is directed at the teacher's strategy in designing, managing, and evaluating the learning process based on the principles of differentiation in line with the independent curriculum and boarding school values. This research is expected to contribute both theoretically to the development of education science, as well as practically in the formulation of adaptive learning strategies in pesantren-based educational institutions. In addition, the results of this study are also expected to be a strategic reference for educators, madrasah leaders, and policy makers in optimizing the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in a more contextual and effective manner.

## Method

This research adopts a qualitative approach with a type of field research and descriptive method, which was chosen to obtain an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the practice of implementing differentiated learning in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic language subjects at Islamic High School Darul Faqih Malang. This research uses a case study design as the main strategy to intensively explore information about the implementation of learning in a specific and complex environment.<sup>26</sup> The presence of researchers in the field is very important as the main instrument in collecting valid data through direct involvement and intense interaction with research subjects. The data sources used consist of primary data, namely Arabic language teachers at Islamic High School Darul Faqih Malang as curriculum implementers, as well as the principal of Islamic High School Darul Faqih Malang and Waka Curriculum as supporting informants, and secondary data in the form of learning documents, guidebooks, and school archives.

Data collection was conducted using several techniques, including direct observation during the learning process, in-depth interviews with key informants who are directly related to the research, and documentation analysis which includes learning tools and various documented learning activities. Observations were conducted in a participatory manner to obtain a real picture of learning implementation, while interviews aimed to reveal teachers' understanding, strategies, and challenges in implementing differentiated learning. The documentation method is used as a complementary instrument to strengthen the validity of data obtained through observation and interviews. All data collected was then analyzed systematically with a descriptive-analytic approach, which involved several critical stages. These stages include thorough data collection, data reduction process to filter out relevant information, presentation of data in a structured form to facilitate interpretation, and

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<sup>25</sup> Muhammad Rosihan Anwar dkk., “Strategi dan Tantangan Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka untuk Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab di Madrasah Aliyah,” *Proceeding of International Conference on Islamic Education (ICIED)* 9, no. 1 (20 Desember 2024): 304. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18860/icied.v9i1.3158>

<sup>26</sup> Marinu Waruwu, “Pendekatan Penelitian Pendidikan: Metode Penelitian Kualitatif, Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif dan Metode Penelitian Kombinasi,” *Jurnal pendidikan tambusai* 7, 1 (2023): 2896-2910. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31004/jptam.v7i1.6187>

drawing conclusions based on empirical evidence. Furthermore, verification of the conclusions obtained was carried out to ensure the validity and consistency of the research findings. In the analysis process, researchers interpreted and clarified the data based on relevant themes, compared with theory, and related to the context of the real situation in the field in order to obtain a complete and in-depth picture.

## Results and Discussion

### A. Implementation of Differentiated Learning in the Independent Curriculum in Arabic Language Learning

The implementation of differentiated learning in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic language subjects at Islamic High School Darul Faqih Malang is the main focus of this research, with the aim of examining how the implementation of learning is tailored to student needs. This process begins with comprehensive planning, where Arabic teachers compile learning documents including Learning Outcomes, Learning Objectives, Flow of Learning Objectives, and teaching modules that are compiled based on differentiation principles. This planning is not merely an administrative obligation, but rather reflects the teacher's conscious efforts in designing learning that is responsive to students' backgrounds, learning styles, and academic readiness. In the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, Learning Outcomes is a substitute for Core Competencies and Basic Competencies, which have been the reference in the 2013 Curriculum.<sup>27</sup> At Islamic High School Darul Faqih, Learning Outcomes is formulated to support the mastery of fusha Arabic with an emphasis on developing linguistic, affective, and spiritual competencies in an integrated manner according to the characteristics of pesantren-based education.

The learning implementation stage shows that teachers have integrated various approaches that are tailored to students' learning profiles. Learning is carried out through the formation of student groups based on the dominance of their respective learning styles, namely visual, auditory and kinesthetic.<sup>28</sup> This approach aims to optimize the learning process by adjusting methods and media to suit each group's learning preferences. Each group receives different treatment in the way they absorb and produce information, although the learning objectives remain the same. For example, on the theme of *al-Hayātu al-Yaumiyah*, visual groups are given materials in the form of pictures and illustrated texts, auditory groups listen to recorded conversations, and kinesthetic groups are asked to act out dialog in the form of drama. This approach reflects the principle of Universal Design for Learning, which emphasizes the importance of providing a variety of learning pathways so that all students have equitable access to the subject matter.<sup>29</sup> This strategy also strengthens the application of student-centered learning, which places students not only as passive recipients of information, but as active actors who independently shape learning experiences according to their individual needs and characteristics. This approach provides opportunities for students to participate actively and meaningfully in the learning process, so as to increase their sense

<sup>27</sup> Iwan Ramadhan, "Dinamika Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di Sekolah Pada Aspek Perangkat dan Proses Pembelajaran," *Academy of Education Journal* 14, no. 2 (19 Juli 2023): 622–34. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47200/aoej.v14i2.1835>

<sup>28</sup> Dea Digna, Minsih, dan Choiriyah Widyasari, "Teachers' Perceptions of Differentiated Learning in Merdeka Curriculum in Elementary Schools," *International Journal of Elementary Education* 7, no. 2 (29 Mei 2023): 255–62. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.23887/ijee.v7i2.54770>

<sup>29</sup> Audrey M. K. Dempsey dkk., "Awareness of Universal Design for Learning among Anatomy Educators in Higher Level Institutions in the Republic of Ireland and United Kingdom," *Clinical Anatomy* 36, no. 1 (Januari 2023): 137–50. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/ca.23947>

of personal responsibility and encourage intrinsic motivation which is the main driver in the sustainability and success of the learning process. Thus, students are not only passive recipients of materials, but also the main drivers in the construction of knowledge and the development of self-learning skills.

In addition, learning activities at Islamic High School Darul faqih are divided into three main stages, namely introduction, core, and closing activities. This is in line with Gagne's theory of the Nine Events of Instruction, which states that an effective learning process begins with activities to direct attention and motivate students, provide information on learning objectives, and relate to previous knowledge, before entering the core material.<sup>30</sup> In the observed preliminary activities, the teacher starts the learning with greetings, prayers, and reviews the previous material, as well as conducting a diagnostic assessment to determine students' readiness and background knowledge. This approach reflects the application of the constructivistic approach, where learning builds on students' experiences and prior knowledge.<sup>31</sup>

In the preliminary activities observed, the teacher began the lesson with a greeting, prayer, and review of the previous material, as well as conducting a diagnostic assessment to determine the students' readiness and background knowledge. This reflects the application of a constructivist approach, in which learning is built upon the experiences and knowledge that students already possess.<sup>32</sup> This approach is in line with Vygotsky's socio-constructivism theory, which asserts that knowledge is built through social interaction and active engagement in meaningful contexts.<sup>33</sup> In this learning activity, teachers not only transfer material, but also insert character and spiritual values, such as independence, responsibility, politeness, and respect for knowledge and teachers. These values are part of the Pancasila Student Profile as well as reflecting the pesantren culture which is the identity of Islamic High School Darul Faqih.

Evaluation in the learning process is carried out thoroughly by integrating various forms of assessment, namely diagnostic assessment to identify students' initial needs, formative assessment that serves as feedback throughout the learning process, and summative assessment to measure overall competency achievement.<sup>34</sup> Diagnostic assessment is conducted before the learning process begins to map students' initial abilities, interests, and learning styles, which then become the basis for further differentiation strategies.<sup>35</sup> During the learning process, teachers conduct formative assessment through observations, anecdotal notes, student reflections, and group discussion results. Summative assessment is used at the end of the session to measure quantitative and qualitative learning outcomes. This evaluation approach is in line with the principle of assessment for learning,

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<sup>30</sup> Almira Ulimaz, Jesi Yardani, dan Dewi Amelia Widiyastuti, "Increase Student Learning Activities by Using A Problem-Based Learning Model in Legum Technology Lecture Materials," *Edunesia: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan* 4, no. 1 (9 Januari 2023): 238–46. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51276/edu.v4i1.329>

<sup>31</sup> Suparlan Suparlan, "Teori Konstruktivisme dalam Pembelajaran," *ISLAMIKA* 1, no. 2 (31 Juli 2019): 79–88. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36088/islamika.v1i2.208>

<sup>32</sup> Agung Tri Wibowo, Duwi Nuvitalia, dan Husni Wakhyudin, "Analisis Gaya Belajar Dalam Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi pada Mata Pelajaran Bahasa Indonesia di SD Negeri Sendangmuljo 02," *Didaktik : Jurnal Ilmiah PGSD STKIP Subang* 9, no. 2 (30 Juni 2023): 3878–90. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36989/didaktik.v9i2.1227>

<sup>33</sup> Paul Agmabire Akendita dkk., "Investigating the Effect of Socio-Constructivist Mathematics Teaching on Students' Mathematics Achievement: The Mediating Role of Mathematics Self-Efficacy," *Educational Point* 1, no. 2 (2024): e110. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.71176/edup/15662>

<sup>34</sup> Rustambek Qo'ldoshev dkk., "RETRACTED: Assessment of the Effectiveness of the Physical Education Process in Preschool Educational Organizations," *E3S Web of Conferences* 538 (2024): 05042. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1051/e3sconf/202453805042>

<sup>35</sup> Dennis Nugroho dkk., "A Sistematis Literature Review : Implementasi Asesmen Diagnostik pada Kurikulum Merdeka," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 9, no. 2 (2023): 50–61. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37286/ojs.v9i2.197>



which not only functions as a measuring tool for learning outcomes, but also as an instrument to improve learning processes and strategies in a sustainable manner.<sup>36</sup>

## **B. Teacher's Strategy in Differentiated Learning in Arabic Language Learning at Islamic High School Darul Faqih Malang**

The implementation of differentiated learning strategies is a concrete response to the challenges of learner diversity in the context of Arabic language learning at Islamic high school Darul Faqih Malang. Each student shows significant variations in terms of educational background, level of learning readiness, interests, and learning style preferences. Therefore, teachers are required to develop learning strategies that can accommodate these variations, so as to create an inclusive, adaptive, and effective learning environment in supporting the learning process. One of the main strategies implemented is the integration of the Merdeka Curriculum with the typical pesantren curriculum, especially the Yemeni Curriculum. This strategy not only aims to answer the demands of the national curriculum which emphasizes strengthening competencies, but also maintains the depth of mastery of tool knowledge such as nahwu and shorof which is characteristic of pesantren. In its implementation, differentiated learning is developed through three main dimensions, namely content, process, and learning products, as proposed by Tomlinson.

This approach is then realized in the form of learning that adjusts the level of students' abilities. For example, for beginner students, teachers use visual-based communicative methods, such as infographic media and language games that stimulate active participation. Meanwhile, for advanced students, a text-based approach is used that emphasizes syntactic and semantic analysis in classical Arabic texts. The variety of approaches is designed to ensure that each student has the opportunity to grow and develop according to their level of readiness and individual potential.<sup>37</sup>

This approach is implemented in the form of learning that adapts to the students' ability levels. For example, for beginner students, teachers use visual-based communicative methods, such as infographics and language games that stimulate active participation. Meanwhile, for advanced students, a text-based approach is used that emphasizes syntactic and semantic analysis in classical Arabic texts. These varied approaches are designed to ensure that every student has the opportunity to grow and develop according to their individual readiness and potential.<sup>38</sup> In addition to strengthening cognitive aspects, this strategy also fosters the value of cooperation, social care, and a sense of responsibility among students.

In order for the learning strategy to be truly targeted, teachers first conduct a diagnostic assessment at the beginning of the lesson. This assessment is designed to identify students' learning readiness, interests and learning styles. The information obtained from the assessment then becomes the basis for developing differentiated learning plans, starting from the preparation of materials, selection of methods, to assessments that are tailored to student characteristics. Thus, assessment is not just an evaluation tool, but an integral part of the formative learning process.

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<sup>36</sup> Imelda Gozali dkk., "Celebrating Mistakes: The Alignment of Assessment for Learning (AfL) and Motivational Strategy (MotS) in a Constrained Context," *Applied Research on English Language* 12, no. 4 (November 2023): 53. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22108/are.2024.139553.2178>

<sup>37</sup> Dwi Putriana Naibaho, "Strategi Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi Mampu Meningkatkan Pemahaman Belajar Peserta Didik," *Journal of Creative Student Research* 1, no. 2 (31 Januari 2023): 81–91. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55606/jcsrpolutama.v1i2.1150>

<sup>38</sup> Dawood Al Hamdani dan Jabar H. Yousif, "Artificial Intelligence Revolution for Enhancing Modern Education Using Zone of Proximal Development Approach," *Applied Computing Journal*, (30 Maret 2025): 386–98. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52098/acj.20255239>

Based on the assessment results, teachers form strategically heterogeneous learning groups. This grouping considers various factors, such as students' interests, abilities and learning tendencies. The aim is to create synergy within the group, where students can complement each other and learn collaboratively.<sup>39</sup> The division of tasks in the group is also adjusted to the strengths of each member, so that each student has a meaningful role in achieving common learning goals. To support the effectiveness of the strategy, teachers consistently use a variety of learning methods and media. Methods such as group discussion, role simulation, hands-on practice, as well as the use of videos and animations become part of daily learning. Through this approach, teachers try to reach all students' learning styles, whether visual, auditory or kinesthetic, so that the learning process becomes more interesting, participatory and meaningful.

However, the variety of strategies and methods does not always guarantee the success of all students equally. Therefore, teachers also provide an intensive mentoring program for students who need additional guidance. This assistance is carried out both individually and in small groups, focusing on mastering basic skills such as reading Arabic texts, understanding sentence structures, and writing correctly. This effort also strengthens the relationship between teachers and students in the frame of a humanist and supportive pedagogy.

Thus, the differentiated learning strategy implemented at Islamic High School Darul Faqih Malang not only answers the needs of the curriculum, but also reflects a commitment to the holistic development of student potential. The collaboration between academic approaches, Islamic values, and sensitivity to individual differences makes Arabic learning practices more adaptive, inclusive, and contextualized.

### **C. Opportunities and Challenges of Implementing Differentiated Learning in the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic Language Learning at Islamic High School Darul Faqih Malang**

The implementation of differentiated learning in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum at Islamic High School Darul Faqih Malang shows complex dynamics, where the interaction between opportunities and challenges takes place simultaneously. This approach requires readiness not only from educators and students, but also requires synergistic collaboration between the learning environment, supporting facilities, and an adaptive evaluation system. Especially in Arabic language learning, the implementation of differentiation provides a wider opportunity to adapt the learning process to the needs and individual characteristics of learners, although it must still be faced with various obstacles that require the application of appropriate and effective pedagogical strategies.

#### **1. Opportunities**

One of the main potentials of implementing this approach is its significant role in encouraging the development of 21st century skills, including critical thinking skills, effective communication, teamwork, and the development of learners' creativity.<sup>40</sup> Varied learning activities such as group discussions, presentations and task-based projects allow students to express their ideas through their own strategies with different learning styles. For example, students with visual tendencies can produce creative works in the form of Arabic infographics, while students with auditory styles are more comfortable developing their abilities through listening and speaking activities. This finding is

<sup>39</sup> M. Husni Arsyad, "Metode-Metode Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab Berdasarkan Pendekatan Komunikatif untuk Meningkatkan Kecakapan Berbahasa," *Shaut al Arabiyyah* 7, no. 1 (27 Juni 2019): 13. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24252/saa.v1i1.8269>

<sup>40</sup> Sandi Irawan dan Muhammad Mukhlis, "Keterampilan Abad 21 dalam Modul Ajar Bahasa Indonesia Kurikulum Merdeka di Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan," *Diglosia: Jurnal Kajian Bahasa, Sastra, dan Pengajarannya* 6, no. 1 (21 Februari 2023): 235–46. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30872/diglosia.v6i1.634>

in line with the concept of Differentiated Instruction developed by Tomlinson, which emphasizes the importance of adjusting the content, process, and learning outcomes according to the level of readiness, interest, and learning profile of each learner.<sup>41</sup>

This condition is strengthened by the learning environment at Islamic High School Darul Faqih Malang which is relatively conducive to Arabic language learning. As a madrasah under the boarding school system, students' interaction with Arabic is not only limited to the classroom, but also takes place in daily life. Oral communication, slogans, information boards, and worship activities use a lot of Arabic, which indirectly expands the learning domain to be more contextual and functional. In Maslow's view, the need for a sense of security and acceptance is very influential on the achievement of self-actualization, and the pesantren atmosphere that supports the practice of Arabic language also accelerates the process of language internalization by students.<sup>42</sup>

This environmental support also has a direct impact on student learning outcomes. Preliminary data shows an increase in grade attainment in reading, writing and speaking skills. Teachers who implement regular diagnostic and formative assessments can identify individual student development and learning barriers, allowing for flexible adjustments to teaching strategies. This reflective and data-driven approach is in line with the principles of assessment for learning, which emphasizes the use of evaluation information as a basis for continuous instructional improvement.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to the support from the environment and the assessment system, another advantage is seen in the integration of Arabic learning with diniyyah lessons. Religious materials such as tafsir, hadith and fiqh, which are delivered using scriptural Arabic, provide opportunities for students to hone their language skills authentically. Through this learning activity, students not only gain an understanding of the content of religious texts, but also hone their ability to read and analyze the grammatical structure of classical Arabic. This integration reflects the connectivism approach, where understanding is formed from connections between various contexts and learning experiences that complement each other.<sup>44</sup>

An equally significant opportunity lies in the quality of human resources available. Most of the teachers at Islamic High School Darul Faqih are master graduates, and some are currently pursuing doctoral programs, which shows the institution's commitment to improving the quality of education. Teachers who have mastery of Pedagogical Content Knowledge are able to deliver Arabic language materials contextually, interestingly, and in accordance with student needs.<sup>45</sup> Teacher creativity in designing varied learning activities is also one of the keys to successful implementation of differentiated learning, especially in the context of limited facilities which are still an issue in many new educational institutions.

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<sup>41</sup> Carol A. Tomlinson dan Tonya R. Moon, *Assessment and Student Success in a Differentiated Classroom*, (Alexandria, Va: ASCD, 2013), hlm: 8-9. <https://www.itpd.ac.ke/?mdocs-file=5555>

<sup>42</sup> Audrey M. K. Dempsey dkk., "Awareness of Universal Design for Learning among Anatomy Educators in Higher Level Institutions in the Republic of Ireland and United Kingdom," *Clinical Anatomy* 36, no. 1 (2023): 137–50. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/ca.23947>

<sup>43</sup> Paul Black dan Dylan Wiliam, "Assessment and Classroom Learning," *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice* 5, no. 1 (1998): 7–74. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0969595980050102>

<sup>44</sup> John Gerard Scott Goldie, "Connectivism: A Knowledge Learning Theory for the Digital Age?," *Medical Teacher* 38, no. 10 (2 Oktober 2016): 1064–69. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3109/0142159X.2016.1173661>

<sup>45</sup> Lee S. Shulman, "Those Who Understand: Knowledge Growth in Teaching," *Educational Researcher* 15, no. 2 (Februari 1986): 4. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/1175860>

## 2. Challenges

Although it offers various opportunities, the implementation of differentiated learning is also faced with quite complex challenges, especially in the context of the diversity of student backgrounds. Many students come from educational institutions with very varied Arabic language skills. Some have the provision of reading and writing Arabic letters, while others start from zero. This condition creates a wide competency gap and poses challenges in classroom management. Without a careful differentiation strategy, the learning process will tend to benefit students who already have a strong foundation, and make it difficult for those who are not ready.

Furthermore, students' limited ability to read Arabic texts, especially in understanding grammatical structures and vocabulary, is a barrier to further learning. Many students struggle to understand even simple texts, which results in their reluctance to actively engage in learning activities. Based on Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development theoretical framework, teachers are expected to be able to provide appropriate learning support (scaffolding), for example through a strategy of grouping tasks according to the level of student readiness or providing gradual direction in text reading activities. This requires a lot of time and energy from the teacher, especially in large classes.

This condition is also exacerbated by the low motivation to learn Arabic found in some students. Most students perceive learning Arabic as something challenging and lacking a direct connection to the reality of their daily lives, thus showing resistance both cognitively and affectively. In this context, interest-based learning strategies and the current context become very relevant. Teachers need to design learning that can relate Arabic to the real world of students, such as through social media, religious songs, or educational games. Thus, the learning process is not only understood as an academic obligation, but also as a fun and meaningful experience for students.

Another significant challenge is the limited learning facilities and infrastructure. As a relatively new madrasah, Islamic High School Darul Faqih does not yet have complete Arabic learning facilities, such as language laboratories, digital devices, or interactive teaching materials. This certainly limits the exploration of modern technology-based teaching methods. However, this limitation actually encourages the birth of learning innovations that are more contextual and based on local resources. Teachers, for example, develop simple teaching media such as vocabulary cards, visual posters, and the use of short dramas for speaking practice.

Taking into account the dynamics above, it can be concluded that the implementation of differentiated learning in Islamic High School Darul Faqih Malang is a promising process that requires pedagogical readiness, systemic support, and continuous innovation. The synergy between teachers, students, learning environment, and institutional policies is an important element in answering challenges while maximizing opportunities. Going forward, strengthening teacher training, providing learning facilities, and fostering student motivation are strategic steps that need to be prioritized to ensure the sustainability and success of this learning approach.

## Closing

This study conclusively demonstrates the optimal implementation of differentiated learning within the Merdeka Curriculum for Arabic language subjects at Islamic High School Darul Faqih Malang, aligning perfectly with learner-oriented principles. The systematic planning, adaptive teaching strategies (like group discussions and problem-based learning), and integration of character values were crucial in fostering active student engagement and improving learning outcomes, including 21st-century skills. Despite challenges such as diverse student backgrounds and limited facilities, the success observed at Islamic High School Darul Faqih Malang, especially within its pesantren-based madrasah context, highlights its potential as a model for holistic, adaptive, and inclusive Arabic language education that nurtures cognitive, affective, and spiritual development.

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