



## The Implementation of Differentiated Learning as an Effort to Improve Student Learning Outcomes in the Subject of Akidah Akhlak at MTsN 2 Magelang

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### Abstract:

As an effort to improve student learning outcomes in the Akidah Akhlak subject at MTsN 2 Magelang, differentiated learning was implemented. The differentiated learning applied in this study focused on adjusting learning materials, processes, and products while considering students' differences in learning styles, interests, and abilities. This study aimed to explore how the implementation of differentiated learning could contribute to improving student learning outcomes in the Akidah Akhlak subject at MTsN 2 Magelang. This research employed a classroom action research (CAR) approach conducted in two cycles, each consisting of planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. The results showed that the application of differentiated learning could improve student learning outcomes. In the first cycle, although there was an increase in student engagement, test results indicated that most students had not yet achieved the expected performance standards. However, in the second cycle, there was a significant improvement in test results, with over 94.28% of students successfully achieving better outcomes. The implementation of this approach also successfully increased active student participation in various learning activities, both individually and in groups. Therefore, differentiated learning can be an effective strategy for improving student learning outcomes, especially in the context of Akidah Akhlak learning. This study is expected to contribute to the development of more appropriate teaching methods tailored to students' needs at MTsN 2 Magelang.

**Keywords:** Differentiation, Learning Outcomes, Classroom Action Research.

### INTRODUCTION

A madrasa is an educational institution under the auspices of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. It is an institution established to implement an Islamic education system with the hope of producing graduates who are not only Islamic in character but also excel in knowledge. In its existence within the ever-evolving field of education, a madrasa must continually develop to achieve its goal of shaping individuals who are devout to Allah,

knowledgeable, of noble character, competent, creative, and innovative. In the effort to develop madrasas, a good managerial system is essential. A madrasa must create effective strategies to achieve its goals. Educational standards must be continually improved to face the challenges of the industrial revolution era. Good management is expected to keep madrasas thriving, despite the various challenges they face today. There are various challenges that madrasas must overcome to maintain their existence. One of the challenges in the endemic period is related to the mental decline of the nation's children. The lack of supervision during the pandemic has reduced children's motivation to learn, which in turn has lowered learning outcomes, not only in terms of knowledge but also in terms of religious values. During the pandemic, students were introduced to digitalization, which inadvertently brought negative impacts, such as a lack of wisdom in the use of gadgets.

These problems have prompted educational institutions to think about how to address the existing issues. An Islamic educational environment is expected to produce pillars of strong moral and ethical formation for the next generation. In an Islamic educational environment, a child will learn how to respect and appreciate others, how to take care of themselves and their surroundings for the sake of order and world peace, which is part of Indonesia's national goals. Addressing these issues, the subject of Akidah Akhlak emerges as one of the solutions to mitigate the mental decline. The subject of Akidah Akhlak is one of the subjects that significantly influences the formation of students' character. However, this subject, often considered easy, is frequently overlooked, despite the fact that a lack of religious understanding can lead to an identity crisis among the younger generation, which in turn can affect their future performance and ethics. Therefore, it is crucial to develop teaching methods that not only focus on mastering the material but also enhance understanding and application of religious values in daily life. In addition to being seen as easier compared to exact sciences, the subject of Akidah Akhlak faces many challenges in its teaching activities, particularly with the diverse abilities, needs, and interests of students. To address these differences, this study offers a solution through the implementation of differentiated learning. Differentiated learning is an approach that adjusts to each student's learning style based on their needs, making learning more effective. Learning tailored to the individual differences of students can help them understand the material in a way that suits their characteristics and abilities. Therefore, this study aims to explore how the implementation of differentiated learning can contribute to improving student learning outcomes in the subject of Akidah Akhlak at MTsN 2 Magelang.

## **METHODS**

This study employs the Classroom Action Research (CAR) method, which is a research approach aimed at improving and enhancing the learning process through reflective and systematic actions conducted in the classroom. CAR allows researchers to identify issues in the learning process, plan actions to address them, implement these actions, and analyze the results to determine the extent to which these actions can improve the quality of learning. Action research is oriented towards implementing actions with the goal of improving quality or solving problems within a group of subjects under study, observing the success rate or consequences of the actions, and then applying further actions to refine or adjust them according to the conditions and situations, thereby achieving better results (Samsu, 2017). This study follows a cycle-based design with several stages, namely: Planning: Preparing a learning plan that incorporates differentiated learning strategies to improve student outcomes in the Akidah Akhlak subject. Implementation: Executing the differentiated learning plan in the classroom as designed. Observation: Observing the learning process, including the interactions between the teacher and students, as well as the students' responses to the differentiated approach. Reflection: Analyzing the observation results to evaluate the effectiveness of the actions taken and planning improvements for the next cycle if needed. This study will be conducted in two or more cycles, depending on the reflection results and the need to further improve the learning process.

## **RESULTS**

Based on the results of the formative test during the pre-cycle phase with 35 students, the outcomes were far from expectations, as many students scored below the minimum passing grade (KKM). The required passing score for students was 70. The formative test results from the pre-cycle phase are shown in the table below. It can be seen that only 13 students, or 37.14%, passed, while 22 students, or 62.85%, did not meet the required standard. The failure of these students to achieve passing grades was largely due to their lack of attention to the lessons provided by the teacher. To address this issue and motivate students while making it easier for them to understand the Akidah Akhlak subject, differentiated learning was introduced as a strategy for improving the learning process. The improvement was conducted through Classroom Action Research (CAR) in two stages: Cycle I and Cycle II. After implementing the differentiated learning approach in Cycle I, the results showed an improvement in students' learning outcomes, as reflected in the data below. The average score increased from 70.1 in the pre-cycle phase to 75.6 in Cycle I.

After Cycle I, 21 students, or 60%, successfully passed, while 14 students, or 40%, still did not meet the standard. Subsequently, differentiated learning was applied again in Cycle II, yielding the following results. After Cycle II, 33 students, or 94.28%, passed, with only 2 students, or 5.7%, not meeting the standard. This indicates a significant improvement in learning outcomes. The implementation of differentiated learning had a positive impact on improving student achievement. The comparative data from the pre-cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II phases shows a clear improvement in both individual scores and the overall class average.

## **DISCUSSION**

Education is a service product that is intangible but can fulfill consumer needs, processed either with or without the use of physical products, where the process involves interaction between the service provider and the service user without transferring rights or ownership (Kacung Wahyudi, 2017). According to Solimun and Fernandes in (Halim & Colleagues, 2021), the determining factor of a company's success and quality is the company's ability to provide service to its customers. The success of a company in delivering high-quality services to its customers, achieving a large market share, and increasing profitability is highly dependent on the strategy approach employed. Similarly, in education, the success of an educational institution depends on its ability to provide services to its students.

To achieve educational goals, a curriculum that facilitates the educational process is necessary. The Merdeka Curriculum is a curriculum introduced as an improvement of the 2013 curriculum (Mulyasa, 2023). It emerged as a response to the educational crisis post-pandemic, addressing the gaps that arose during the pandemic. The Merdeka Curriculum introduces several new policies to resolve educational challenges in the post-pandemic era, including giving educational institutions and students more freedom in their learning activities. This curriculum aims to foster changes in character development and skills based on competencies. Through Merdeka Learning, it is hoped that students will be motivated to explore knowledge, fostering independent characters (Ilmawan, 2024). The implementation of the curriculum is a long-term learning process, allowing educators and educational units to implement the Merdeka Curriculum according to their readiness, including in learning strategies and approaches.

Differentiated learning, as a pedagogical approach, has the potential to address diverse academic needs in the "Merdeka Belajar" curriculum. By tailoring learning experiences to meet individual student needs—such as their learning styles, abilities, and interests—differentiated instruction can contribute to creating a more inclusive and effective learning environment. High-quality education is expected to produce a generation of human resources excelling in various aspects of life (Azmy & Arif Mag, 2024).

Differentiated learning is an investment in the learning process that considers students' needs in terms of willingness to learn, learning profiles, interests, talents, and abilities. There are three differentiated approaches: content, process, and product. 1) Content differentiation refers to what students learn in relation to the curriculum and learning materials. 2) Process

differentiation refers to how students process ideas and information, including how they choose their learning style. 3) Product differentiation is where students demonstrate what they have learned (Hayati et al., 2020).

According to Andini (2016), differentiated instruction employs various approaches (multiple approaches) in content, process, and product. In a differentiated classroom, teachers focus on three key elements: (1) Content (input), which refers to what students are learning; (2) Process, which refers to how students acquire information and generate ideas about what they are learning; and (3) Product (output), which refers to how students demonstrate what they have learned. These three elements are modified and adapted based on assessments that take into account students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles (Suwartiningsih, 2021).

One of the main goals of differentiated instruction is to improve student learning outcomes. Differentiated learning can enhance student outcomes by adjusting the content, process, and products to suit students' abilities, interests, and learning styles. This individual-focused approach makes students more active, motivated, and capable of understanding material more deeply. Differentiated learning means blending differences to acquire information, generate ideas, and express what students have learned. In other words, it creates a diverse classroom by providing opportunities for students to engage with content, process ideas, and improve their learning outcomes, allowing students to learn more effectively (Tomlinson, 2001). The steps in implementing differentiated instruction aim to maximize each student's abilities and success. Teachers assist throughout this process. These steps are explained in the diagram below. Figure 1. Steps in Differentiated Learning

The diagram above illustrates the Differentiated Instruction (DI) process. First, the teacher conducts an initial assessment or pre-test to determine the abilities of each student, enabling the teacher to plan modifications to curriculum design based on the students' readiness, interests, learning styles, and prior knowledge. Each student will achieve different standards, and this assessment is essential for the teacher to understand each child's level of capability (Andini, 2020). By understanding students' knowledge, abilities, interests, and talents, teachers can easily choose methods and strategies for instruction, aiming for maximum learning outcomes. Learning outcomes represent a process where individuals acquire new behavior changes as a result of their own experiences, reflecting interactions with their environment (Suwartiningsih, 2021). Based on the opinions above, learning outcomes are the results of efforts in learning activities, in this case, the subject of Akidah Akhlak. These outcomes manifest as changes in knowledge, attitudes, and skills, which vary from one student to another. Knowledge and skills are the results of student efforts evident in behavior changes, which can be assessed through formative tests.

In this study, differentiated instruction was applied specifically to the Akidah Akhlak subject. It was chosen as a problem-solving strategy by providing diverse methods for understanding new information for all students in the diverse classroom community. This includes methods to access content, process ideas, and develop learning products and assessment criteria, ensuring that all students in a class with varied backgrounds can learn effectively. The process of differentiating instruction addresses students' needs, learning styles, or interests. Based on these considerations, the author believes that the application of differentiated instruction specifically on the topic of land and its sustainability for students who struggle with understanding this subject will motivate them to be more actively involved in the learning process, based on their readiness, interests, and learning profiles.

The implementation process follows the steps outlined in the prepared module. During the pre-cycle, student activities were limited to observing slides. In Cycle I, differentiated instruction was applied by adjusting the learning materials and strategies to the students' needs and characteristics. Observations showed that while most students' understanding of the material improved, some students still struggled due to significant differences in learning styles. Visual learners followed along easily with visual aids like images and diagrams, whereas kinesthetic learners needed a more interactive approach. In Cycle II, changes were made based on reflections from Cycle I. The teacher added more diverse learning media and optimized approaches suited to the students' learning styles. As a result, a significant improvement in understanding Akidah Akhlak material was observed, accompanied by better test scores among students.

Data analysis showed the following learning outcomes. The summary of student performance across the cycles of differentiated instruction is displayed in the table below:

<b>Description</b>	<b>Students Passed</b>	<b>Students Failed</b>	<b>Average</b>
Pre-Cycle	13 (37.14%)	22 (62.85%)	70.14
Cycle I	21 (60%)	14 (40%)	75.57
Cycle II	33 (94.28%)	2 (5.7%)	83.40

From the comparison, it can be seen that during the pre-cycle, 13 students (37.14%) passed, while 22 students (62.85%) failed, with an average score of 70.14. In Cycle I, 21 students (60%) passed, while 14 students (40%) failed, with an average score of 75.57. In Cycle II, 33 students (94.28%) passed, and 2 students (5.7%) failed, with an average score of 83.40. From this study and discussion, it can be concluded that the application of differentiated instruction improves learning outcomes in Akidah Akhlak. Evaluation results show an increase in learning completeness from 37.14% in the pre-cycle to 60% in Cycle I, and to 94.28% in Cycle II. Therefore, based on the research and observations, there was a significant improvement from Cycle I to Cycle II, starting from the initial application of differentiated instruction in the Akidah Akhlak subject. In Cycle II, the results were better than in Cycle I, demonstrating students' understanding and meeting the average achievement indicators.

Reflection: During the pre-cycle, student activity was minimal. In Cycle I, students primarily observed slides and videos presented by the teacher via LCD and projector, and some began participating in activities. In Cycle II, besides observing slides and videos, students started conducting demonstrations on the role of plants in preventing soil erosion, and some produced summaries during learning activities, while others created observation tables. Each cycle had its strengths, with the teaching process starting by displaying engaging slides and videos. A shortcoming of Cycle I was inefficient time management, with too much time spent on showing slides and videos, and during the demonstration, the teacher allowed students to work independently. In Cycle II, however, the teacher directed students to conduct demonstrations in groups based on their learning styles.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the results and discussion above, it can be concluded that the implementation of differentiated instruction in the subject of Akidah Akhlak at MTsN 2 Magelang significantly improves students' learning outcomes. Instruction tailored to the characteristics and needs of students makes them more engaged, motivated, and able to understand the material better. Although there are challenges in its implementation, the findings of this research show that differentiated instruction can be an effective strategy for improving the quality of education, particularly in subjects related to character development, such as Akidah Akhlak. Moreover, differentiated instruction also has the potential to create a more inclusive learning environment, where each student feels valued according to their abilities, interests, and learning styles. With the right strategies, teachers can more easily identify individual student needs and provide relevant teaching methods for each group. This not only enhances academic outcomes but also develops students' social and emotional skills, which are crucial for shaping their character and

attitudes in the future. Therefore, the implementation of differentiated instruction can serve as a long-term solution for improving the overall quality of education.

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