

Differentiation Strategies for Arabic Language Learning in the Context of the Independent Curriculum: A Solution for Diverse Student Abilities

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Article History	ABSTRACT
Received 20-09-2024: Accepted: 25-11-2024: Published: 05-12-2024:	<p>Background: The process of teaching Arabic in Indonesian schools is quite a complicated challenge for teachers, especially when faced with differences in student abilities that require adjusting the teaching model.</p> <p>Purpose: This study aims to analyze the application of differentiation strategies in Arabic language learning within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum through a review of available literature, as well as identify challenges and opportunities for success as reflected in the results of previous studies.</p> <p>Methods: This research uses a literature study approach, in which researchers review existing literature to collect, analyze, and summarize information related to differentiation strategies in Arabic language learning and the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.</p> <p>Results and Discussion: The results show that differentiation strategies contribute significantly to learning effectiveness, improving student engagement and learning outcomes. However, challenges such as limited time, resources and institutional support remain. This research provides guidance for teachers and policy makers to design more inclusive and effective learning.</p> <p>Conclusions and Implications: The conclusion of this study shows that differentiation strategy significantly contributes to improving the effectiveness of Arabic language learning. In its implementation, this strategy has a positive impact on the aspect of increasing students' engagement and their learning outcomes, especially in adjusting their very diverse abilities and learning styles. In addition, the role of technology is very important in supporting the process of implementing differentiation strategies, although the limitations of time and resources remain a major challenge in its implementation. The implications of implementing differentiation strategies from both theoretical and practical perspectives indicate the need to develop new learning models and teacher training programs.</p>
Keywords:	<i>Communication Strategy; Single Tuition Fee (UKT); Systemic Functional Linguistics (LSF).</i>
	ABSTRAK

Latar Belakang: Proses pengajaran bahasa Arab di sekolah-sekolah di Indonesia menjadi tantangan yang cukup rumit bagi guru, apalagi jika dihadapkan dengan perbedaan kemampuan siswa yang menuntut untuk menyesuaikan model pengajaran

Tujuan: penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis penerapan strategi diferensiasi dalam pembelajaran bahasa Arab dalam kerangka Kurikulum Merdeka melalui kajian literatur yang tersedia, serta mengidentifikasi tantangan dan peluang keberhasilannya yang tercermin dari hasil penelitian terdahulu

Metode: Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan studi pustaka, di mana peneliti mengkaji literatur yang ada untuk mengumpulkan, menganalisis, dan merangkum informasi terkait strategi diferensiasi dalam pembelajaran bahasa Arab dan implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka

Hasil dan Pembahasan: Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa strategi diferensiasi berkontribusi signifikan terhadap efektivitas pembelajaran, meningkatkan keterlibatan siswa dan hasil belajar. Namun, tantangan seperti keterbatasan waktu, sumber daya, dan dukungan institusi tetap ada. Penelitian ini memberikan panduan bagi guru dan pembuat kebijakan untuk merancang pembelajaran yang lebih inklusif dan efektif.

Kesimpulan dan Implikasi: Kesimpulan dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa strategi diferensiasi memberikan kontribusi yang signifikan dalam meningkatkan efektivitas pembelajaran bahasa Arab. Dalam penerapannya, strategi ini memberikan dampak positif pada aspek peningkatan keterlibatan siswa dan hasil belajar mereka, khususnya dalam menyesuaikan kemampuan dan gaya belajar mereka yang sangat beragam. Di samping itu, peran teknologi sangat penting dalam menunjang proses pelaksanaan strategi diferensiasi, meskipun keterbatasan waktu dan sumber daya tetap menjadi tantangan utama dalam implementasinya. Implikasi dari penerapan strategi diferensiasi jika ditinjau dari segi teoritis maupun praktis menunjukkan adanya kebutuhan pengembangan model pembelajaran baru dan program pelatihan guru.

Kata Kunci

Strategi Komunikasi; Uang Kuliah Tunggal (UKT); Linguistik Sistemik Fungsional (LSF)



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INTRODUCTION

The process of teaching Arabic in schools in Indonesia is quite a challenge for teachers, especially when faced with the difference in students' ability to adjust the teaching model.[1] The diversity of students' levels of understanding and skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening, is not only influenced by their intellectual aspects or educational background, but also influenced by their different learning styles, motivations, and tendencies/interests.[2] This results in difficulties for teachers in designing teaching models that are fair and effective for students as a whole. On the other hand, the difficulties faced stem from the level of complexity of the Arabic language itself, as well as the limited resources in each educational institution.

In recent years, in Indonesia, the Independent Curriculum has been enacted in the teaching and learning process. This curriculum is special, because it provides space and focuses on teaching that is more personalized, so that teachers are more free to adjust the right learning models and methods for the needs and diversity of each student's potential. The essential value of the Independent Curriculum is the flexibility for each teacher to apply a variety of approaches, including differentiation strategies in maximizing the quality of their teaching.[3] However, it should be noted that the success rate of the application of these principles is highly dependent on how well teachers understand the comprehensive learning strategies, and their ability to implement them in the learning process.

The Independent Curriculum emphasizes a learning approach that is tailored to the needs of students.[4] Based on this, differentiation strategies are very relevant to be applied in the learning process. Teachers can use this strategy to tailor learning materials, processes, and evaluations based on students' different abilities, interests, and learning styles.[5] In learning Arabic, this strategy is very beneficial because each student has a different level of mastery. Teachers can provide a variety of activities and materials that suit individual needs. For example, students with a weak understanding of basic vocabulary may need more help and daily routines, while more advanced students may work on more challenging tasks, such as debate or text analysis. Through differentiation, teachers can effectively manage diverse classrooms and help all students reach their potential.

However, in implementing differentiation strategies in the Arabic language teaching process, it will usually be faced with various challenges. Many teachers find it difficult to design and implement these strategies due to the lack of time, resources, and training available.[6] In addition, not all schools support the implementation of the Independent Curriculum to the fullest.[7] The gap between central policies and their practices in schools is an obstacle to the implementation of innovative learning strategies such as differentiation. This challenge is even greater because of the demand to improve the professionalism of teachers so that they can integrate this strategy in teaching.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the application of differentiation strategies in Arabic language learning within the framework of the Independent Curriculum through the review of available literature, as well as identify the challenges and opportunities for success reflected in the results of previous research. This research is expected to provide practical guidance for teachers and education policymakers in designing more inclusive and effective learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Independent Curriculum and Arabic Language Learning

The Independent Curriculum implemented in Indonesia provides freedom for educators to develop learning materials that are relevant to the context and characteristics of students. The curriculum emphasizes character development, 21st century skills, and an understanding and appreciation of diversity. Arabic, as one of the subjects taught in many schools, requires an approach that can accommodate differences in students' abilities. Therefore, learning differentiation becomes very relevant in this context.

Learning differentiation is a strategy that recognizes the diversity of students' abilities and provides responses that are in accordance with their needs, both in terms of materials, methods, and evaluations (Tomlinson, 2001). In learning Arabic, this strategy can be applied to help students with different levels of ability, both in speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills.

Theory and Concept of Learning Differentiation

According to Tomlinson (2001), learning differentiation is a teaching process that adjusts learning materials, processes, products, and learning environments according to student characteristics. In the context of Arabic, this differentiation can be done by:

1. Content: The material taught is adjusted to the level of understanding of the student. For example, for students who are still beginners, teaching can start with basic vocabulary and simple phrases, while for more advanced students, more complex texts, such as quotes from the Qur'an or Islamic historical texts, can be given.

2. **Process:** The teaching approach used should vary. For students who need more time or explanations, teachers can use visual aids or technology-based activities to explain Arabic concepts in a more understandable way.
3. **Product:** Student learning outcomes can be determined based on their ability level. For example, students who master the material faster may be given more challenging assignments, while students who take longer may be assigned simpler tasks.
4. **Learning Environment:** A supportive classroom atmosphere for diverse student learning styles, such as providing space for group discussions or collaborative assignments that allow for interaction between students with different abilities.

Diversity of Students' Abilities in Learning Arabic

The diversity of students' abilities is the main challenge in education. In learning Arabic, students have different backgrounds, both in terms of initial knowledge, learning speed, and interest in the language. Some students may already be familiar with Arabic due to their religious or family background, while others may need more time to adapt.

Differentiation strategies help teachers to understand and accommodate these differences, by providing a more personalized learning experience. Thus, diversity of abilities is not an obstacle, but rather the potential to create a more inclusive and effective learning experience.

Differentiation Strategies in Arabic Language Learning

Various differentiation strategies can be applied in Arabic learning to address the diversity of students' abilities:

1. **Utilization of Technology:** The use of language learning apps, interactive videos, or online platforms can help students in self-study according to their abilities. Technology allows for more flexible learning, allowing students to learn at their own pace.
2. **Collaborative Learning:** Study groups consisting of students with different abilities can enrich the learning process. In this group, more advanced students can share knowledge with others, while weaker students can get support from their peers.
3. **Implementation of Constructive Feedback:** Providing clear and constructive feedback is essential in learning Arabic. For students who are still struggling, feedback should be focused on specific things that need to be fixed and how to improve them.

Challenges and Solutions in the Implementation of Arabic Language Learning Differentiation

While learning differentiation offers many benefits, there are several challenges that need to be faced in its implementation. Key challenges include time constraints, uneven resources, and difficulty in managing diverse classes.

However, solutions to these challenges can be found with creative and collaborative approaches. Efficient use of technology and digital resources can reduce logistical barriers and provide a more dynamic learning experience. In addition, training for teachers in terms of classroom management and the implementation of differentiation strategies is also very important to improve learning effectiveness.

METHOD

This study uses a literature study approach, where researchers review existing literature to collect, analyze, and summarize information related to differentiation strategies in Arabic language learning and the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. This method was chosen because it allows researchers to gain a thorough understanding of the research topic from existing theoretical and practical perspectives. The research process involves identifying and gathering relevant sources, such as books, journals, and reports, which are then evaluated based on their quality and relevance to the research. Data from these sources are further analyzed to uncover key themes and draw conclusions. Through this literature study method, the research is expected to identify best practices and key challenges in the implementation of Arabic language learning differentiation strategies in Indonesia, as well as offer relevant recommendations.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of Learning Differentiation

Learning differentiation is an approach that aims to adapt the learning experience to the needs, interests, and learning characteristics of each student. This strategy focuses on modifying different aspects of learning, so that students can learn in a way that suits their abilities and learning styles. According to Tomlinson, differentiation involves a series of decisions taken by teachers to adjust to individual differences in the classroom, such as readiness, interests, and diverse learning profiles among students.[9]

In differentiated learning, there are three main elements that must be considered, namely content, process, and product. Content differentiation is related to the material that students are learning, which must be adjusted to their learning styles and abilities. These adjustments are essential to ensure that the curriculum and learning materials can be absorbed more effectively.[10] The process of differentiation involves the way students process information and interact with the subject matter, giving students the freedom to choose the learning method that best suits their needs and style, taking into account their family background, culture, and language. Outcome differentiation, on the other hand, refers to how students demonstrate their understanding of the material, through various forms of evaluation such as essays, projects, or presentations, which can reflect students' understanding in a more personal way.[11]

In practice, teachers must be able to recognize and adapt their teaching approach to meet the needs of a variety of students in the classroom. One strategy that can be applied is to divide students into groups based on their interests or level of readiness to learn. In this way, teachers can assign tasks that vary according to the abilities of each student.[12] Understanding a student's learning profile in depth, including their learning style, cultural background, and level of readiness to learn, is essential to ensure that the learning process runs effectively.[3]

Differentiation strategies in learning contribute a lot to learning, such as increasing student enthusiasm and learning achievement. When the material is taught with each student's unique needs in mind, they feel more cared for and motivated to learn harder.[10] However, the implementation of this strategy was not without its challenges. Teachers must prepare themselves more deeply and be ready to face difficulties in balancing the various needs of students in one class.

Various studies have shown that implementing differentiation strategies in learning can spur the development of critical thinking skills and creativity among students. Research that assesses the implementation of this strategy in the classroom shows that differentiation is very effective in improving student engagement and learning outcomes. In addition, the use of teaching materials that align with the principles of differentiation—such as Student Worksheets (LKS) designed to

accommodate individual differences—has also been shown to increase the success of the learning process.[13]

Independent Curriculum: Principles and Characteristics

The Independent Curriculum is an innovation in education in Indonesia that provides flexibility and flexibility for both students and teachers. By emphasizing a student-centered approach, reducing administrative burden for teachers, and focusing on competency development that spans a wide range of disciplines, the curriculum aims to improve the quality of education and prepare students for global challenges.[14] The main principles of the Independent Curriculum include student-oriented learning[15], freedom of choice[16], and the use of technology in the learning process, including the use of digital platforms such as PMM (Platform Merdeka Mengajar) that supports the teaching and learning process to be more effective and interactive.[17]

The main characteristic or characteristic of the Independent Curriculum lies in its focus that prioritizes student-oriented learning, with teachers functioning as supporters and facilitators.[18] This curriculum provides significant freedom in the learning process, allowing educational institutions and teachers to choose materials and methods that best suit the needs and tendencies of students.[19] In this curriculum, creativity and innovation are highly valued, providing ample opportunities for teachers and students to develop their creative potential both in the delivery of subject matter and in teaching methods.[20]

The differentiation strategy is one of the main foundations in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, where the learning process is designed to meet the unique needs of each student by adjusting methods and materials according to the characteristics and potential of each individual.[21] In addition, collaboration and participation from the community are also considered very important, highlighting the need for cooperation between schools, study groups, and the general public to enrich and give more meaning to the learning process.[22]

The Independent Curriculum is designed to strengthen students' multidisciplinary skills in facing various challenges in the industrial era 4.0.[16] Students have the freedom to choose their field of study, including those involving various departments, so that they not only become experts in one field, but also develop relevant skills in various sectors. Assessments in the Independent Curriculum are conducted early and continuously, which helps in identifying students' abilities, strengths, and shortcomings, as well as monitoring their progress thoroughly.[23]

Overall, the Independent Curriculum is an educational approach that offers freedom and flexibility in the teaching and learning process. Its main characteristics or characteristics include student-focused learning, flexibility in methods and materials, development of creativity and innovation, application of a differentiation approach, collaboration with the community, strengthening cross-disciplinary competencies, and assessments that are carried out early and continuously. This approach is designed to meet the needs of each student and answer the challenges of the times, especially in the context of industry 4.0, with the aim of creating a more innovative and adaptive generation.

Learning Arabic in Indonesia

Learning Arabic in Indonesia has a long journey and is closely related to the development of Islam in the country. Since Islam first entered Indonesia in the 7th century AD, Arabic began to be introduced as an important language in the context of religion and science.[24] Over time, the teaching of Arabic was not only limited to Islamic boarding schools and madrasas, but also began to be integrated into the formal education curriculum in public schools. This development reflects the growing awareness of the importance of Arabic, not only as a religious language, but also as an international language that has strategic value in today's global world.

In the framework of national education, learning Arabic in Indonesia faces a number of challenges as well as opportunities.[25] One of the main challenges faced is the diversity of students' backgrounds and abilities, which can lead to gaps in the learning process. Some students, especially those from Islamic boarding schools or madrasas, have a strong foundation in Arabic, while others may be new to the language in their school environment. This situation demands the application of a more adaptive and inclusive approach in Arabic language teaching, so that each student can develop according to their individual potential.

The latest developments in Arabic language learning in Indonesia are marked by efforts to integrate technology and more modern pedagogical approaches. The use of digital media, interactive learning applications, and more communicative teaching methods have begun to be implemented to increase the effectiveness and attractiveness of the learning process. In addition, there has been a shift in focus from the traditional grammatical approach to the development of more practical communicative skills. The implementation of the Independent Curriculum also provides a breath of fresh air for Arabic language learning, by providing greater flexibility to teachers to adjust teaching materials and methods according to existing local needs and contexts.[26]

Differentiation Strategies in Arabic Language Learning

Differentiation strategies in language learning, including Arabic, are based on several key theories that emphasize the importance of understanding and accommodating individual differences among students. These theories provide the conceptual framework necessary to design and implement effective differentiation practices in language classes.

1. Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligence (1983): Gardner proposed that intelligence consists of eight different types, including linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, kinesthetic-physical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. In language learning, teachers can design activities that accommodate these different types of intelligence.[27]
2. Lev Vygotsky's Theory of Zones of Proximal Development (1978): Vygotsky argued that learning occurs most effectively in the "zones of proximal development" – the distance between what students can do on their own and what they can do with help. Differentiation allows teachers to tailor instruction to fit into these zones for each student.[28]
3. Jean Piaget's Theory of Constructivism (1936) emphasizes the importance of students building their own understanding based on previous experience.[29] In learning Arabic, this can be applied by connecting new concepts with the knowledge students already have.

By implementing differentiation strategies based on these theories, Arabic teachers can create a more personalized, effective, and enjoyable learning experience for each student. This approach not only improves students' understanding and language skills, but also fosters a positive attitude towards learning Arabic, which is often considered a difficult language to learn.

Based on the literature analysis that has been carried out, some of the main findings and discussions can be described as follows:

1. Implementation of Differentiation Strategies in Arabic Language Learning

Literature studies show that the application of differentiation strategies in Arabic language learning has significant potential to improve learning effectiveness.[30] Some key points found:

- a. Content, Process, and Product Customization: Differentiation strategies allow teachers to tailor three key components of learning: content (what is learned), process (how students learn), and product (how students demonstrate their understanding). In the context of learning Arabic, this can be translated into:

- 1) Content: Provides reading materials with varying levels of difficulty. Examples of application:

Nested Text: Provides reading texts with varying levels of difficulty. For example, for the theme of "family" (الأسرة), teachers can prepare three levels of text:

- Basic Level: Simple vocabulary and short sentence structure.
- Intermediate Level: Addition of adjectives and more complex sentence structures.
- Advanced Level: Text that includes idioms and more complex grammatical structures.

Differentiated Vocabulary: Provides a vocabulary list that is tailored to the student's ability level. For example, in the theme of "food" (الطعام):

- Basis: كُرَّة الأرز (Rice Balls), خُبْز (bread), حَلِيب (milk)
- Intermediate: وَجِبَّة خَفِيفَة (cemilan), طَبَق رَئِيسِي (Main Course)
- Next: نِظَام غِذَائِي مُتَوَازِن (balanced diet), أَطْعِمَة عُضْوِيَّة (organic food)

- 2) Process: Using diverse teaching methods, such as project-based learning or cooperative learning. Examples of application:

Learning Stations: Create various stations with different activities. For example, for the theme "market" (السوق):

- Listening Station: Students listen to dialogues in the market and answer questions.
- Talking Station: Students role-play buying and selling transactions.
- Writing Station: Students write shopping lists in Arabic.
- Reading Station: Students read and understand texts about the Arabic currency system.

Project-Based Learning: Providing a choice of projects that suit the student's interests and abilities. Example for the "environment" theme (البيئة):

- Making posters about environmental conservation with Arabic vocabulary.
- Writing and presenting short speeches on environmental issues.
- Creating a short documentary video about local environmental issues with Arabic narration.

- 3) Product: Provides students with the option to demonstrate their understanding, for example through oral presentations, writing, or multimedia projects.

- b. Increased Engagement and Learning Outcomes: Research shows that the implementation of differentiation strategies can improve student engagement and their learning outcomes. This is especially relevant in Arabic language learning, where students' proficiency levels often vary greatly.
- c. Use of Technology: The integration of technology in Arabic language learning, such as the use of interactive learning apps and digital platforms, can support the implementation

of differentiation strategies by providing resources that can be tailored to the individual needs of students. Some examples:

- **Adaptive Learning Apps:** Use of apps like Duolingo Arabic or Rosetta Stone that adjust the difficulty level based on student performance.
- **Interactive Platform:** The use of platforms like Kahoot! or Quizlet to create interactive quizzes with varying levels of difficulty.
- **Virtual Reality (VR):** Implementation of VR technology to create immersive experiences, such as virtual tours to Arab countries, that can be tailored to the level of language proficiency of students.

2. Challenges in Implementing Differentiation Strategies

Although it has great potential, the implementation of differentiation strategies in learning Arabic also faces several challenges:[31]

- a. **Time and Resource Constraints:** Many teachers have difficulty designing and implementing differentiation strategies due to time and resource constraints. It becomes more complex in the context of Arabic, which may have more limited learning resources than other foreign languages.
- b. **Training Needs:** Teachers need specialized training to effectively implement differentiation strategies. In the context of the Arabic language, this may involve training not only in the pedagogy of differentiation but also in the use of Arabic-specific technologies and resources.
- c. **Balance between Differentiation and Standardization:** There is a challenge in balancing the need for differentiation with the demands of standard curriculum and assessment.

3. Independent Curriculum as a Catalyst for Differentiation

The Independent Curriculum offers a significant opportunity to implement differentiation strategies in Arabic language learning:

- a. **Flexibility:** The Independent Curriculum provides teachers with greater flexibility to adjust teaching materials and methods according to student needs. This strongly supports the implementation of differentiation strategies.
- b. **Student-Centered Learning:** The Independent Curriculum's emphasis on student-centered learning is in line with the principles of differentiation, which aim to meet the individual needs of each student.
- c. **Technology Integration:** The push to integrate technology in the Independent Curriculum can support the implementation of differentiation strategies in Arabic language learning, for example through the use of digital platforms for more personalized learning.

4. Theoretical and Practical Implications

The application of differentiation strategies in Arabic language learning in the context of the Independent Curriculum has significant theoretical and practical implications:

- a. **Development of Learning Models:** There is a need to develop Arabic learning models that explicitly integrate the principles of differentiation and are in line with the Independent Curriculum.
- b. **Teacher Training:** A comprehensive training program is needed to prepare Arabic teachers to implement differentiation strategies effectively.

- c. Resource Development: There is an opportunity and need to develop Arabic language learning resources that support differentiation, including digital materials and adaptive learning platforms.
- d. Further Research: Further empirical research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of differentiation strategies in the specific context of Arabic language learning in Indonesia.

The differentiation strategy has significant potential to increase the effectiveness of Arabic language learning in the context of the Independent Curriculum. However, its implementation requires systematic support, including resource development, teacher training, and further research to optimize its benefits in the context of Indonesian education.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The conclusion of this study shows that the differentiation strategy makes a significant contribution in improving the effectiveness of Arabic language learning. In its implementation, this strategy has a positive impact on the aspect of improving student engagement and their learning outcomes, especially in adjusting their very diverse abilities and learning styles. In addition, the role of technology is very important in supporting the implementation process of differentiation strategies, although time and resource limitations remain the main challenges in its implementation. The Independent Curriculum has opened up a large space to implement this strategy, with an emphasis on flexibility and student-centered learning. The implications of the implementation of differentiation strategies when reviewed from a theoretical and practical perspective show the need to develop new learning models and teacher training programs.

Based on these conclusions, the main recommendations that can be proposed as an effort to maximize the implementation of differentiation strategies in Arabic language learning, namely: developing an integrated learning model, which combines the principles and characteristics of differentiation with the Independent Curriculum, implementing a comprehensive and intensive teacher training program as an effort to improve teacher competence in implementing learning strategies, especially differentiation, and continue to carry out advanced empirical research, adjustment of supporting policies, cross-sector collaboration, improvement of technological infrastructure, curriculum adjustment, and increasing awareness of the importance of differentiation. With these recommendations, it is hoped that the differentiation strategy can be implemented optimally, so that the effectiveness of Arabic language learning will increase, and ultimately it can improve the Arabic language competence of students in Indonesia in the context of the Independent Curriculum.

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