

## Answering the Challenges of Inclusive Education: Differentiation Practices of Arabic Language Learning in Islamic Boarding Schools

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 <https://doi.org/10.58194/eloquence.v5i1.3125>

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Article History	ABSTRACT
Received 19-11-2025 Accepted: 22-01-2026 Published: 01-04-2026	<p><b>Background:</b> Inclusive education poses challenges for Arabic language teaching in pesantren-based madrasahs, where student diversity in abilities and backgrounds requires adaptive learning approaches.</p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> This study aims to analyze the implementation of differentiated learning in Arabic language instruction as a response to inclusive education challenges in pesantren contexts.</p> <p><b>Method:</b> This research employed a qualitative case study design conducted at Darul Faqih Senior High School Malang, which integrates the Independent Curriculum with the Islamic Boarding School curriculum. Observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation were used to gather data. The participants included Arabic language teachers and students representing diverse learning profiles. The research instruments consisted of interview guidelines and observation sheets. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns of differentiated learning practices and their impact on inclusivity.</p> <p><b>Results and Discussion:</b> Observation was used to gather data. The findings indicate that differentiated learning is implemented through diagnostic assessments, grouping based on readiness and learning styles, peer tutoring, variation in learning methods and media, and intensive mentoring. The pesantren environment also reinforces Arabic language learning through the use of language in daily life and character-building activities. This strategy improves students' language competence, independence, and collaboration while supporting the principle of inclusivity. This research fills a gap by showing that traditional educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools can effectively implement modern pedagogical approaches to address learning diversity.</p> <p><b>Conclusions and Implications:</b> Differentiated learning in pesantren based schools successfully bridges modern pedagogy and traditional values, fostering inclusive and character-based Arabic education. Future research should explore scalable models for integrating differentiated instruction into other language and cultural education settings.</p>
<b>Keywords:</b>	<i>Inclusive Education; Differentiated Learning; Arabic Language; Independent Curriculum.</i>

**ABSTRAK**

**Latar Belakang:** Pendidikan inklusif menghadirkan tantangan dalam pengajaran Bahasa Arab di madrasah berbasis pesantren, di mana keberagaman kemampuan dan latar belakang peserta didik menuntut pendekatan pembelajaran yang adaptif.

**Tujuan:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis penerapan pembelajaran berdiferensiasi dalam pengajaran Bahasa Arab sebagai respon terhadap tantangan pendidikan inklusif di lingkungan pesantren.

**Metode:** Penelitian ini menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif yang dilaksanakan di SMA Darul Faqih Malang, lembaga yang mengintegrasikan Kurikulum Merdeka dengan kurikulum pesantren. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi. Partisipan penelitian meliputi guru Bahasa Arab dan peserta didik dengan berbagai profil belajar. Instrumen penelitian terdiri atas pedoman wawancara dan lembar observasi. Analisis tematik digunakan untuk mengidentifikasi pola penerapan pembelajaran berdiferensiasi serta dampaknya terhadap praktik pendidikan inklusif.

**Hasil dan Pembahasan:** Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pembelajaran berdiferensiasi dilaksanakan melalui asesmen diagnostik, pengelompokan berdasarkan kesiapan dan gaya belajar, tutor sebaya, variasi metode dan media pembelajaran, serta pendampingan intensif. Lingkungan pesantren turut memperkuat pembelajaran Bahasa Arab melalui penggunaan bahasa dalam kehidupan sehari-hari dan kegiatan pembentukan karakter. Strategi ini meningkatkan kompetensi bahasa, kemandirian, dan kolaborasi peserta didik sekaligus mendukung prinsip inklusivitas. Penelitian ini mengisi kesenjangan dengan menunjukkan bahwa lembaga pendidikan tradisional seperti pesantren dapat mengimplementasikan pendekatan pedagogis modern secara efektif untuk menghadapi keragaman belajar.

**Kesimpulan dan Implikasi:** Pembelajaran berdiferensiasi di sekolah berbasis pesantren berhasil menjembatani pedagogi modern dengan nilai-nilai tradisional, sehingga tercipta pendidikan Bahasa Arab yang inklusif dan berkarakter. Penelitian selanjutnya disarankan untuk mengembangkan model penerapan pembelajaran berdiferensiasi yang dapat direplikasi pada konteks pendidikan bahasa dan budaya lainnya.

**Kata Kunci**

*Pendidikan Inklusif; Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi; Bahasa Arab; Kurikulum Merdeka.*



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**INTRODUCTION**

The goal of inclusive education is to create a learning atmosphere where all students, regardless of their aptitude, background, or preferred method of learning, feel appreciated, accepted, and encouraged to realize their full potential. Diversity in the classroom is not viewed as an obstacle but as a strength that enriches the learning experience. The philosophy of inclusive education arises from the belief that each learner possesses unique strengths and learning needs, and that the education system has a moral and professional responsibility to accommodate this diversity fairly and adaptively.[1] Inclusive education does not demand that students conform to an existing system; rather, it calls upon the system to transform itself to meet the needs of all learners without exception.[2] Inclusion, therefore, is not merely about physical integration into regular classrooms but a continuous process aimed at removing barriers to access, participation, and achievement.[3]

Recognizing student diversity and providing equitable learning opportunities are key principles of inclusive education.[4] Numerous studies confirm that inclusive education benefits not only students with special needs but also those without such needs by fostering empathy, collaboration, and social awareness.[5] It helps build a positive school climate, encourages acceptance, and enhances academic outcomes and social-emotional development.[6] Implementing

inclusion requires active participation from all stakeholders. Boyle and Anderson emphasize, through the *Inclusion Index*, the importance of a whole-school approach that integrates inclusive values into policy, culture, and classroom practice.[7]

However, there are particular difficulties in implementing inclusive education in pesantren-based madrasahs. Students come from highly diverse backgrounds in terms of prior knowledge, motivation, and linguistic readiness—especially in mastering Arabic, a core subject in both madrasah and pesantren settings.[8] Arabic is not only a means of communication but also a key to understanding Islamic knowledge. Consequently, Arabic language instruction must be designed to accommodate all learners, including those with learning difficulties or diverse needs. Alharbi and Madhesh highlight that the main challenge of inclusive education lies not merely in policy implementation but in how teachers effectively respond to learner diversity in the classroom.[9]

One pedagogical approach considered effective in addressing such diversity is differentiated learning. This method modifies the learning environment, process, product, and content based on the learning profiles, interests, and readiness of the students.[9] Within the *Merdeka Curriculum* (Independent Curriculum) framework, differentiation serves as a core strategy supporting the “student-centered learning” principle. Yet, in pesantren-based madrasahs, its application remains underexplored. Such institutions have distinct characteristics: integrated religious and general curricula, dense learning schedules, and a boarding environment that provides opportunities for holistic education.[10] These contextual features require flexible and culturally sensitive models of differentiated instruction.

A systematic review by Lindner and Schwab (2020) underscores the importance of differentiation in inclusive education, showing that differentiation goes beyond technique—it represents a holistic pedagogical philosophy aimed at accommodating diversity within the regular classroom.[11] Differentiated instruction through adaptation of content, process, and product has proven effective in meeting diverse learning needs. Nonetheless, various obstacles persist, including limited teacher professional development, lack of collaborative planning, and insufficient curricular flexibility.[8] These barriers are particularly relevant to pesantren-based madrasahs, where teachers often face additional challenges such as overlapping curricula and limited pedagogical resources.

Previous studies on differentiated learning have predominantly focused on mainstream schools and on science or general education subjects. Research exploring differentiation within Arabic language education especially in pesantren based madrasahs is still scarce.[12] This gap is significant because the Arabic language holds not only academic but also spiritual and cultural importance within Islamic education systems. Some pesantren-based institutions, such as Darul Faqih Senior High School in Malang, have demonstrated promising practices by integrating the *Merdeka Curriculum* with pesantren traditions. These include using peer tutors, integrating character education (*tarbiyah*) values, and utilizing contextual language exposure within the boarding environment. Such practices reflect potential synergy between modern pedagogical frameworks and traditional Islamic education models, yet they have not been systematically examined.

From this review, a clear research gap emerges: there is limited empirical evidence that describes how differentiated learning is operationalized in Arabic language instruction within pesantren contexts, and how these practices address inclusivity challenges. Few studies have looked at how the theories of inclusive education and differentiation interact in Islamic educational institutions. By examining the development and application of differentiation techniques in pesantren-based madrasahs that use the *Merdeka Curriculum*, this study closes this gap. Furthermore, it explores how these strategies enhance both language proficiency and inclusive values among students.

The novelty of this research lies in its contextualization of differentiation within pesantren-based Arabic language education a domain rarely discussed in prior literature. Unlike studies

conducted in secular or urban schools, this research bridges modern pedagogical concepts with the cultural and spiritual ethos of pesantren learning. It contributes new insights into how inclusive pedagogy can harmoniously coexist with religious education values. The study also provides a framework for teachers to design adaptive Arabic language learning experiences that align with both the Merdeka Curriculum and pesantren traditions.

This study is important because it adds to the larger conversation on differentiated instruction and inclusive education in Islamic educational environments. It provides a paradigm that can guide curriculum development, professional training programs for teachers, and policy. This study supports a more inclusive, equitable, and context-sensitive approach to education that respects diversity while preserving cultural authenticity by demonstrating how differentiation may be incorporated into pesantren-based Arabic instruction.

Therefore, the specific objectives of this study are twofold: (1) To describe the implementation of differentiated learning practices in Arabic language instruction at pesantren-based madrasahs; and (2) To analyze how these practices respond to the challenges of inclusive education by accommodating the diverse learning needs of students. Based on these objectives, the study is guided by the following research questions: (1) In what ways are different learning methods used in Arabic education in pesantren-based madrasahs? and (2) In what ways do these differentiated practices address the challenges of inclusive education and support diverse learners? Through these objectives and research questions, the study seeks to enrich both theoretical understanding and practical approaches to inclusive pedagogy in Islamic educational contexts, paving the way for more adaptive and transformative Arabic language learning models in Indonesia.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Inclusive education represents a transformative paradigm in modern pedagogy that emphasizes equality, participation, and access for all learners regardless of their individual differences. Diversity in the classroom is not seen as a challenge but as a valuable resource that enriches the learning process through varied perspectives, experiences, and learning styles.[1] Within the context of foreign language learning, inclusion is particularly significant because students bring diverse cognitive, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds into the classroom. The principle of inclusive education asserts that it is not students who must adapt to the system, but the system that must adapt to the needs of all learners.[2] In Arabic language education, inclusivity takes on an even deeper meaning since the Arabic language functions not only as an academic subject but also as a cultural and spiritual medium of Islamic knowledge. Therefore, inclusive Arabic language instruction is not only pedagogically necessary but also integral to ensuring that religious and linguistic education remain accessible to all students.

Conceptually, inclusive education is defined as a systematic and continuous process of restructuring educational policy, culture, and practice to promote participation, acceptance, and success for all learners, especially those at risk of exclusion.[13] It demands fairness in learning opportunities and equitable treatment that acknowledges the uniqueness of every learner. In the Islamic educational context, inclusivity is aligned with the moral foundation of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, meaning that education should bring mercy, benefit, and justice to all people. As emphasized by Yang et al., inclusion is therefore not merely a pedagogical technique but a moral and spiritual responsibility of educators to embrace diversity as an essential part of human development. This moral dimension makes inclusion in Islamic educational institutions such as pesantren-based madrasahs not only a professional obligation but also an act of religious and ethical devotion.[14]

One of the key pedagogical strategies to realize inclusive education in practice is differentiated learning. Differentiated learning, or differentiated instruction, refers to the adaptation of teaching content, process, product, and environment to meet students' varying levels

of readiness, interests and learning profiles.[15] This approach rests on the belief that diversity among learners is the norm, not the exception, and therefore instruction should be flexible and responsive. Differentiation does not mean individualizing instruction for every learner, but rather creating multiple pathways that enable all students to achieve success based on their own strengths and needs. In inclusive classrooms, differentiation acts as the bridge between equity and excellence, ensuring that all students regardless of their ability level receive appropriate challenges and support.[11]

Differentiated instruction is supported by a number of important educational ideas. According to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, social contact, scaffolding, and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) are crucial for students' advancement. The collaborative and adaptable classroom methods that are essential to differentiation have a solid foundation thanks to this notion. The premise that people learn differently some through linguistic, logical, musical, or interpersonal modalities is further supported by Gardner's hypothesis of multiple intelligences, which calls for adaptable teaching strategies. Tomlinson's differentiation model offers a useful framework that helps educators modify the learning environment, method, product, and material in accordance with student profiles. This method takes into account each student's unique skills, history, and learning preferences in order to meet their varied demands.[16] Meanwhile, Krashen's input hypothesis contributes linguistic insight by emphasizing the importance of comprehensible input at varying levels of difficulty to support language acquisition. Together, these theories form an integrative pedagogical and psychological basis for implementing differentiated instruction in inclusive Arabic language education.[17]

Empirical studies in international contexts have shown that differentiated instruction is a highly effective tool for promoting inclusivity and improving learning outcomes. Lindner and Schwab, through a systematic review, demonstrate that differentiation functions not just as a method but as a comprehensive philosophy of education that operationalizes the ideals of inclusion[18]. Johler & Krumsvik similarly argues that teachers who consistently implement differentiation experience higher levels of student engagement, academic achievement, and social-emotional growth among diverse learners. However, successful implementation depends heavily on teacher competency, collaborative planning, and curriculum flexibility. In developing countries, particularly in Southeast Asia, limited teacher professional development and lack of pedagogical resources often hinder the practice of differentiation. These constraints are also evident in Indonesian Islamic education, especially in pesantren-based madrasahs where educators face overlapping curricula, limited facilities, and high student-to-teacher ratios.[19]

Within Indonesia's educational reform through the *Merdeka Curriculum*, differentiated learning has been institutionalized as a central pillar of student-centered pedagogy. The curriculum promotes teacher autonomy and flexibility in designing learning experiences tailored to students' readiness, interest, and learning profiles. Nonetheless, implementation in Islamic educational settings remains limited. Maula et al. note that many pesantren-based teachers are still constrained by conventional teaching methods and lack sufficient professional training on differentiation. This is concerning, as the pesantren environment inherently accommodates diverse learners—students with varying academic preparedness, motivation, and linguistic ability, particularly in mastering Arabic, which serves as both a religious and communicative language.[10]

Research focusing specifically on differentiated instruction in Arabic language education within Islamic schools is still scarce. Nurhamim et al. highlight that most differentiation research in Indonesia has been conducted in mainstream schools or in general education subjects such as science and mathematics, while Arabic language education remains underexplored.[12] This gap is significant because Arabic occupies a central role in Islamic education it is not only an academic discipline but also a spiritual medium for accessing classical Islamic texts and religious understanding. In this regard, designing inclusive and differentiated Arabic instruction is critical

for ensuring that all students regardless of their cognitive or linguistic background can meaningfully engage with Islamic learning materials.[20]

The pesantren-based madrasah context offers unique opportunities as well as challenges for implementing differentiation. As an educational ecosystem that integrates religious and general knowledge, pesantren fosters a holistic learning environment where formal instruction, moral education (*tarbiyah*), and community life coexist.[10] This environment can support innovative pedagogical practices such as peer tutoring, contextual learning, and integration of spiritual values within academic instruction. For instance, several pesantren-based institutions like Darul Faqih Senior High School in Malang have begun adopting differentiated learning strategies by blending Merdeka Curriculum principles with pesantren traditions. Their practices include collaborative learning, contextual language exposure, and the integration of religious character education into Arabic instruction. However, as Tanjung et al. note, these practices remain anecdotal and have not been systematically examined or empirically validated.[8]

Ainscow argues that inclusion must always be contextually grounded; what works in one context cannot simply be replicated elsewhere without adaptation.[1] This principle holds true for pesantren-based education, which embodies unique cultural, spiritual, and institutional characteristics. Therefore, the adaptation of differentiation in such settings must be culturally responsive, integrating Islamic values with inclusive pedagogy. The synergy between differentiation and pesantren learning traditions has the potential to cultivate empathy, cooperation, and respect for diversity values that are central to both inclusive and Islamic education. Furthermore, differentiated Arabic instruction could help address persistent challenges such as students' varied language proficiency levels and differing motivations for learning Arabic.

From the literature reviewed, a clear research gap emerges. While inclusive education and differentiated learning have been widely studied as separate domains, there remains limited empirical research exploring how differentiation can operationalize inclusion in Arabic language instruction within pesantren-based madrasahs.[12] Most previous studies have focused on general education contexts or examined inclusion at the policy level without delving into classroom-level practices. Consequently, little is known about how differentiation strategies are designed and implemented in pesantren contexts and how these practices contribute to inclusivity in language learning. Addressing this gap is essential for understanding how inclusive pedagogy can be harmonized with Islamic educational values and adapted to the realities of pesantren life.

Theoretically, integrating differentiated instruction into inclusive Arabic education contributes to expanding the scope of inclusive education theory by incorporating cultural and spiritual dimensions often overlooked in secular frameworks. It also enriches the field of foreign language pedagogy by demonstrating how language learning can be made equitable and contextually meaningful. Practically, such research provides actionable insights for curriculum designers, policymakers, and teacher education programs, helping them to design adaptive Arabic learning models that align with the Merdeka Curriculum while preserving pesantren traditions. Moreover, by situating differentiation within a pesantren-based framework, this study offers an example of how modern pedagogical innovation can coexist harmoniously with local educational wisdom.

In summary, the literature highlights that inclusive education and differentiated instruction share a common goal of addressing learner diversity through equitable, adaptive, and student-centered pedagogy. Yet, in pesantren-based Arabic education, these ideals have not been fully realized or systematically investigated. The current study thus seeks to fill this gap by exploring how differentiated learning practices are implemented in Arabic language instruction at pesantren-based madrasahs and how these practices respond to the challenges of inclusive education. By doing so, it contributes to both theoretical understanding and practical application of inclusive

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pedagogy within Islamic education, offering a model of teaching that is academically sound, spiritually grounded, and culturally responsive.

## METHOD

In order to thoroughly examine the application of differentiated learning in Arabic language instruction within the framework of inclusive education in pesantren-based madrasahs, this study used a qualitative methodology with a case study design. This approach was chosen because it allows for a comprehensive understanding of naturally occurring phenomena, including the interactions among educational stakeholders, curriculum policies, and the socio-cultural dynamics that shape classroom practices. The research was conducted at Darul Faqih Senior High School Malang, an Islamic educational institution that integrates the *Merdeka Curriculum* (Independent Curriculum) with the traditional pesantren system. The site was selected purposively because it represents an innovative model of Islamic education that bridges formal schooling and religious learning, making it highly relevant for examining the synergy between modern pedagogical strategies and pesantren values. Participants in this study included three Arabic language teachers, school leaders, and 125 students with diverse backgrounds and learning abilities. Data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The observations were conducted in a participatory manner to identify differentiation strategies applied in the classroom, such as variations in content, process, and learning products. In-depth interviews with Arabic teachers and the head of the madrasah were carried out to explore their understanding of differentiation principles, lesson planning, and the challenges they face in the pesantren context. Meanwhile, documentary evidence such as lesson plans, teaching modules, diagnostic assessments, and teachers' reflective notes was analyzed to support and validate findings from the field.

The main research instrument was the researcher himself as a *human instrument*, responsible for collecting, interpreting, and validating data within its natural setting. To ensure systematic and consistent data collection, several supporting instruments were also used, including observation sheets, semi-structured interview guides, and document analysis forms. Throughout the research process, data analysis was carried out iteratively using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which included data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Raw data from classroom observations, interview transcripts, and institutional documents were carefully chosen, coded, and condensed during the data reduction stage. For example, observation notes like "the teacher provided different Arabic reading texts based on students' proficiency levels" were coded as content differentiation, while interview excerpts like "students are allowed to demonstrate understanding through oral presentation or written tasks" were coded as product differentiation. Differentiation of content, differentiation of learning processes, differentiation of learning products, and the supportive role of the pesantren environment in inclusive practices, such as religious routines, peer support, and teacher-student relationships, were among the more general thematic categories into which these initial codes were subsequently arranged. The categorized data were displayed in narrative descriptions and thematic matrices at the data display stage to highlight teacher tactics, practice patterns, and difficulties in implementing differentiated instruction. In order to draw conclusions and verify them, recurrent patterns across data sources were interpreted, and new findings were continuously validated through cross-checking observations, interviews, and documents. The accuracy of the researcher's interpretations was also verified through member checking and source and method triangulation. Through this analytical process, the researcher was able to demonstrate how differentiated instruction is implemented in Arabic language classrooms, as well as how it strengthens inclusive education and enhances students' Arabic proficiency in pesantren-based madrasahs that use the *Merdeka Curriculum*. By receiving institutional approval, gaining informed consent from each participant, and guaranteeing anonymity and confidentiality throughout the research procedure, this study adhered to research ethics guidelines.

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## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Implementation of Differentiated Learning in Arabic Language Subjects at Darul Faqih High School Malang

The implementation of differentiated learning at Darul Faqih High Schools Malang shows a high pedagogical awareness in responding to the diversity of students in a planned and systematic manner. In the context of a pesantren-based madrasah, student diversity is not only evident in academic ability, but also in previous learning experiences, expectations of Arabic, to religious orientation and literacy culture. This is in line with the idea of Antoninis et al. that inclusive education is not enough to integrate students into the same classroom, but requires a transformation of learning culture that recognizes differences as educational assets.[21] Therefore, a uniform pedagogical approach is no longer relevant. Instead, a learning strategy based on the principle of fairness is needed, which provides different treatment according to the needs and readiness of each student.[22]

The methodical application of diagnostic testing as the cornerstone of differentiated instruction operationalizes this pedagogical understanding. Teachers must first get a tangible, evidence-based understanding of students' preparation, past experiences, and learning requirements before they can acknowledge student diversity as an educational benefit. This understanding is purposefully established at Darul Faqih High School Malang through diagnostic assessments that are carried out at the start of each semester. These assessments provide information for later instructional planning and differentiation methods.

At Darul Faqih High School Malang, differentiated education starts with a thorough diagnostic test at the beginning of each semester. Teachers evaluate students' learning experiences and emotive aspects in addition to their cognitive proficiency in Arabic. An experienced Arabic instructor clarified:

"We map pupils' abilities before the course begins. While some pupils still have difficulty reading Arabic letters, others already comprehend the fundamentals of nahwu. Some will be left behind if we teach them in the same manner. (T1)

Another teacher emphasized the importance of understanding students' motivation and learning habits:

We also inquire about their prior experiences studying Arabic in a pesantren. This has a significant impact on their ability to absorb the information quickly. (T2)

This technique is supported by document analysis of instructors' lesson plans (RPP). In order to group students and assign differentiated activities, the lesson plans specifically include sections on the preliminary diagnostic results. These methods are in line with inclusive assessment principles that emphasize responsiveness to learner preparedness and Tomlinson's concept of assessment for learning, which views assessment as diagnostic rather than selective.

Mind maps containing Arabic language patterns, color-coded texts, and infographics are given to students who are primarily visual learners. Students that are more auditory-oriented participate more actively in Arabic songs, oral repetition, dialog exercises, and murottal vocabulary acquisition. Role-playing, language games, and creating educational materials like vocabulary cards or themed posters are among activities that kinesthetic learners engage in.

Data from observations suggest that when learning activities match their identified preferences, pupils are more engaged. A student's statement supports this:

"It's easier for me to understand and remember when we learn Arabic through role-playing and games." (S1)

All students can access the same learning objectives through various pathways thanks to this varied process, which demonstrates that learning activities are not standardized but rather tailored to each student's preferred learning style.

Diagnostic information not only helps differentiate learning processes but also helps differentiate learning products. Through a variety of products, such as audio recordings, visual dictionaries, brief conversations, or reflective notes, students are given numerous opportunities to demonstrate learning outcomes. According to portfolio analysis, rather than following set output standards, these goods are created based on the identified learning preferences of the students.

Teachers respond to these variations by using formative assessment techniques. Feedback is given one-on-one and focuses on how students have improved from their first diagnostic profiles. As one educator pointed out:

"The purpose of assessment is to determine how far each student has progressed from their beginning point, not to compare students." (T3)

In addition to supporting the use of diverse learning strategies, this evaluation method increases students' self-awareness and confidence and is consistent with inclusive assessment principles.

The link between differentiation dimensions, diagnostic data, and observed learning impacts is shown in Table 1, which summarizes the combination of differentiated instruction and diagnostic evaluation.

**Table 1.** Integration of Diagnostic Assessment and Differentiated Learning Practices

Differentiation Aspect	Diagnostic Source	Data	Instructional Practice	Observed Impact
<b>Content</b>	Diagnostic observation checklist		Tiered Arabic materials	Improved accessibility
<b>Process</b>	Classroom observation, interviews		Modality-based activities	Higher engagement
<b>Product</b>	Student portfolios		Flexible learning outputs	Diverse achievement
<b>Assessment</b>	Formative records	feedback	Personalized evaluation	Increased learner confidence

The implementation process of differentiated learning in this madrasah starts from the planning stage which is based on a comprehensive diagnostic assessment. Arabic teachers not only measure students' initial achievements through cognitive tests, but also examine affective and sociocultural aspects. For example, teachers explore motivation to learn Arabic, the extent of students' exposure to the Arabic environment, whether through books, media, or worship practices, as well as their dominant learning styles. This process reflects the Assessment for learning approach at the core of Tomlinson's differentiated learning strategy [23], and in line with the principle of inclusive assessment, which emphasizes diagnostic rather than selective functions. [24]

With this approach, students are not forced to learn along the same path, but are given access to the same goal through different means. This is the essence of differentiation: not homogenizing the learning experience, but ensuring all students have a pathway to grow. [25] This principle is in line with the concept of tarbiyah in Islam which views learners as unique entities, with their own fitrah, potential and iradah. The teacher as murabbi is tasked with not only transferring knowledge, but fostering this potential with methods that are full of wisdom, patience, and empathy. This

perspective is reinforced by the findings of Lindner and Schwab[26], which in its systematic review shows that differentiated and individualized learning is an effective means of overcoming learning barriers in inclusive contexts.

In the implementation stage, the learning approach used shows an integration of modern pedagogical strategies with typical pesantren values. Teachers use various learning media such as infographics, learning videos, podcasts, and dialog simulations to accommodate visual and auditory learning styles. In addition, the project-based learning model is applied in the form of making thematic visual dictionaries, Arabic-language Islamic vlog content, and writing poetry on the theme of morals or the lives of santri. This strategy strengthens the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principle which emphasizes that access to learning must be provided in various forms of representation, expression, and engagement.[27]

Moreover, learning also takes place outside the classroom. The character of pesantren as an institution with 24-hour activities is utilized to strengthen Arabic language learning through informal interactions. Students practice conversation in daily forums such as halaqah, morning khitobah, or tadarus kitab activities. The dormitory environment is also conditioned as a space for Arabic interaction, through daily instructions, information boards, and the habituation of prayers or motivational slogans in Arabic. This approach shows that differentiated learning does not only take place cognitively, but also ecologically, where the environment plays an active role as the third teacher after parents and educators.[28] This corroborates the idea of Wales & DoE that inclusion should be embedded in all aspects of school life.[29]

In his role, the teacher no longer functions as the only source of knowledge, but as a facilitator, guide, and companion.[30] The relationship model between teachers and students shifts from a top-down to a dialogic relationship.[31] This is especially important in the context of language education, where communication skills and reflective thinking are unlikely to grow in an authoritative atmosphere[32]. Teachers provide participatory space for students to explore ideas, ask questions, even initiate forms of learning that suit their preferences.[32] This approach is in line with the philosophy of student-centered learning and shows that teachers who are in favor of inclusive education do not see differences as obstacles, but as a source of strength.[33]

The evaluation aspect also shows an inclusive and reflective approach. Teachers apply the principles of assessment for learning and assessment as learning, which makes assessment not only a means of measuring results, but also a process of strengthening learning and developing self-awareness.[24] Assessments range from daily formative, portfolio assignments, to self-reflection and peer feedback. Teachers provide feedback that is personalized and oriented towards improvement, not punishment. This approach is aligned with the concept of muhaasabah in Islam, which encourages each individual to honestly assess his or her process for continuous growth, and is supported by differentiation practices that uphold individual progress.[34]

Overall, the implementation of differentiated learning in Arabic language subjects at Darul Faqih High Schools Malang reflects a transformative approach. Madrasa This approach not only provides equal access to learning for all students, but also instills the values of responsibility, independence and love of learning. In the context of Islamic education, this is a tangible form of the principle of rahmatan lil 'alamin in the practice of educating with compassion, respecting diversity, and bringing each student to the peak of his or her potential.[35] This research emphasizes that differentiation is not just a method, but a manifestation of the philosophy of inclusive education that favors humanity and the future of children.

### **Differentiation in Arabic Language Learning in Islamic Boarding Schools as an Answer to the Challenges of Inclusive Education**

Inclusive education in the context of pesantren-based madrasas is a necessity amid the increasing complexity of learner profiles.[36] Darul Faqih High Schools Malang as a pesantren-based integrative madrasah shows that the diversity of students' social backgrounds, academic abilities, and learning experiences is a real challenge that cannot be overcome with a uniform instructional approach. Especially in Arabic language learning, this diversity becomes even more complex given the nature of the subject that demands simultaneous competence in the phonological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic domains.[37] This reflects the challenges of inclusion as described by [38], that the success of inclusive education depends on the ability of the education system to respond actively and flexibly to student diversity.

In these conditions, a differentiated learning approach becomes a relevant and solutive strategy. Arabic teachers at Darul Faqih High Schools Malang not only design learning based on achievement standards, but also take into account students' learning readiness through initial diagnostic assessments. This approach is in line with the findings[39] which emphasizes the importance of initial assessment as a basis for building learning that favors students' actual needs. The results of the assessment are used to determine the type of learning activity that suits students' abilities and learning styles. Thus, learning strategies are not generalized, but based on the principles of individuality and diversity.

Learning activities are designed in several levels of complexity. Students who have not mastered the basics of Arabic are given tasks based on letter recognition, vocabulary reinforcement, and simple phonetic exercises. While students who are more linguistically prepared are directed to the analysis of classical Arabic texts, the application of nahwu-sharaf rules, to the interpretation of high-level texts. This type of learning illustrates the principle of tiered instruction as explained by[40], which emphasizes the importance of matching task complexity to students' readiness level to ensure optimal participation in learning. This principle is also in line with the findings [26], which highlights the importance of needs-based instructional adjustments in an inclusive education system.

One of the strengths of the differentiated approach lies in its ability to increase learning motivation through linking the material to students' interests.[41] At Darul Faqih High Schools Malang, the mufradat materials and learning themes are linked to issues close to students' lives, such as social media, Islamic music, and daily worship practices. This approach reflects the interest-based learning strategy, which in the study of [42] It has proven to be effective in increasing students' learning engagement and satisfaction in the madrasah environment. In this context, differentiation not only spans cognitive aspects, but also builds an affective connectedness between students and the language being learned.[43]

The positive impact of differentiation can also be seen in the social dynamics of the classroom. The learning process takes place in a more egalitarian and less intimidating atmosphere.[42] The classroom becomes an inclusive space where every student feels valued according to their capacity. Teachers do not standardize student achievement in a single indicator, but rather facilitate diverse achievements through different learning pathways. This shows that inclusivity is not just the physical presence of students in the classroom, but manifests in providing space for participation and recognition of differences.[44] This supports the view [22], that true inclusion demands systemic change, not just symbolic policies.

The context of pesantren as a 24-hour continuous living space also strengthens the effectiveness of this approach. Arabic language habituation activities are not only carried out in the classroom, but also in informal forums such as tadarus kitab, group discussions, and khitobah at Duha prayer time. In this framework, differentiation is supported by a holistic and integrated learning environment between academic and affective aspects. As emphasized by[16], An inclusive

environment requires support from the entire school ecosystem, in this case, the pesantren ecosystem provides an ideal space.

The contribution of peer tutors in learning is also an important part of differentiation practices in this madrasah. More advanced students are encouraged to guide their friends in understanding texts or completing exercises. This approach is in line with the Zone of Proximal Development theory.[45], and in the present context is reinforced by the findings [46], which shows that collaboration between students in differentiated learning can improve social competence and a sense of shared responsibility. Peer tutors create a more comfortable learning space and build confidence, while strengthening informal learning networks.

A differentiated approach also contributes to strengthening students' character. When students are given the freedom to choose how to learn or the form of learning products, they not only develop language skills, but also the ability to make decisions, think critically, and assess themselves. This is an important asset in strengthening the 21st century competencies reflected in the dimensions of the Pancasila Learner Profile, especially in terms of independence, critical reasoning and creativity.[37] In Islamic education, this is in line with the spirit of tarbiyah which encourages the growth of students as intellectually, spiritually, and socially complete human beings.[36]

To analytically capture how differentiated Arabic language learning functions as a response to the challenges of inclusive education in a pesantren-based madrasah, the following table synthesizes the main dimensions of differentiation identified in this study. It illustrates how differentiation functions as a systemic technique integrated into classroom procedures, assessment, and the pesantren learning environment rather than as a stand-alone tactic. It does this by mapping inclusive education difficulties to specific instructional practices and their pedagogical implications.

**Table 2.** Core Dimensions of Differentiated Arabic Language Learning in Response to Inclusive Education Challenges

Dimension	Inclusive Challenge	Practice at Darul Faqih High School Malang	Pedagogical Significance
<b>Learner Readiness</b>	Diverse academic backgrounds and prior Arabic exposure	Diagnostic assessment used to map students' readiness and learning profiles	Ensures equity-based instruction rather than uniform teaching
<b>Learning Process</b>	Varied levels of Arabic competence	Tiered tasks from basic literacy to advanced text analysis	Aligns task complexity with students' readiness
<b>Learning Interest</b>	Low motivation and engagement	Learning themes linked to students' interests and daily religious practices	Strengthens affective engagement in learning
<b>Learning Environment</b>	Limited classroom-based exposure	Arabic habituation through pesantren activities and peer tutoring	Supports inclusive learning beyond formal instruction
<b>Learning Outcomes &amp; Assessment</b>	Standardized output expectations	Flexible learning products and formative, progress-based assessment	Promotes autonomy, confidence, and inclusive achievement

From the whole practice, it can be concluded that differentiation is not just a technical strategy, but a pedagogical approach that fosters the values of justice, empowerment and active participation in learning. In the hands of reflective teachers and in a supportive institutional context, differentiation becomes a means of educational transformation that is in line with the spirit of Islam which recognizes diversity as *sunnatullah*. By staying grounded in the *pesantren* tradition, differentiated learning at Darul Faqih High Schools Malang proves that inclusive education is not only possible, but it is very contextual and relevant in today's madrasah environment.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

### Conculsion

The application of differentiated learning in Arabic instruction at Darul Faqih High School Malang, according to the study's findings, is a thoughtful, relevant, and adaptable pedagogical approach to learner variety in a madrasah with a *pesantren*. Teachers are able to create learning experiences that are in line with students' readiness, interests, and learning modalities since instruction is methodically based on diagnostic tests that cover cognitive, affective, and sociocultural aspects. Students are given equal opportunity to meet common learning goals using a variety of instructional tactics, including peer tutoring, multimedia use, tiered activities, creative learning products, and the incorporation of *pesantren* learning environments. Assessment procedures provide a strong emphasis on assessment as learning and assessment for learning, which promotes students' self-awareness, ongoing development, and holistic growth.

### Implications

Several conclusions about educational practice and policy in Islamic educational contexts can be made based on these findings. The findings suggest that in order for instructors to effectively address learner diversity in inclusive classrooms, more focus should be placed on fostering competencies in formative assessment, differentiated instructional design, and diagnostic assessment in teacher training programs. Differentiated learning should be established as a fundamental pedagogical principle in Arabic language instruction at the curriculum and policy level. Instead of imposing rigid standards, curricular frameworks should permit flexibility in learning procedures, outputs, and evaluation. Additionally, by utilizing regional institutional and cultural resources, the incorporation of *pesantren* environments into formal education underscores the possibility of creating replication models that modify differentiated learning for use in other Islamic educational contexts. In this way, differentiated learning advances inclusive, equitable, and character-based education by acting as a scalable pedagogical framework in addition to an instructional technique.

It should be noted that this study has a number of limitations in spite of these contributions. First, the study's conclusions are limited in their generalizability because it is centered on a single madrasah with a unique institutional culture and a *pesantren*. Second, conclusions on long-term learning effects are limited by the lack of quantitative measures, and the dependence on qualitative data may involve subjective interpretation and possible researcher bias. Therefore, it is advised that future studies use mixed methods approaches to investigate differential learning across various educational contexts and to further create and validate contextualized models that may be used to more extensive language and cultural education settings.

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