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Evaluation of Islamic Education Assessment Instruments for Differentiated Learning

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Abstrak

Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka menekankan pembelajaran berdiferensiasi yang menyesuaikan kebutuhan, minat, dan kesiapan siswa. Namun, dalam praktiknya, penilaian pada mata pelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) masih cenderung seragam dan belum mencerminkan prinsip diferensiasi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis kesesuaian instrumen penilaian PAI dengan prinsip pembelajaran berdiferensiasi. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara terhadap guru PAI di SMP dan SMA. Analisis data dilakukan melalui reduksi, penyajian, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar guru belum mengembangkan penilaian yang memperhatikan variasi individu siswa. Kendala utama adalah kurangnya pemahaman guru terhadap asesmen berdiferensiasi dan keterbatasan pelatihan. Kesimpulan menunjukkan perlunya peningkatan kapasitas guru, dukungan kebijakan, dan integrasi prinsip diferensiasi dalam perencanaan dan evaluasi pembelajaran.

Kata kunci: Evaluasi, Instrumen Penilaian PAI, Pembelajaran Diferensiasi

Abstrack

Implementation of the Merdeka curriculum emphasizes learning that adapts to students' needs, interests, and readiness. However, in practice, assessment in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) subjects still tends to be uniform and does not reflect the principle of differentiation. Subjects still tend to be uniform and do not reflect the principle of differentiation. This study aims to analyze the suitability of PAI assessment instruments with the principle of differentiated learning. Principle of differentiated learning. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through interviews with PAI teachers in junior and senior high schools. Data analysis was conducted through reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results showed that most teachers had not developed an assessment that paid attention to individual student variations. The main obstacle is the lack of teachers' understanding of differentiated assessment and limited training. Conclusions indicate the need for teacher capacity building, policy support, and integration of differentiation principles in lesson planning and evaluation.

Keywords: Evaluation, PAI Assessment Instrument, Differentiated Learning

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INTRODUCTIONS

The implementation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in various educational units still tends to prioritize a uniform approach, neglecting the individual characteristics of students. (Asep A. Aziz, Ajat S. Hidayatullah, Nurti Budiyanti, 2020). This condition affects the gap in learning outcomes, where students with high academic abilities find it easier to follow the learning process and achieve maximum results. In contrast, students who need additional support or different approaches are left behind. (Mukromin et al., 2024; Salsabil et al., 2025). The lack of differentiation in assessment processes and instruments leads to a less inclusive and less equitable learning experience. If this situation is left unchecked, it will hinder the achievement of PAI learning objectives, which should encourage each student to develop a deep and personal understanding of religious values.

This situation is further complicated by the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum, which places differentiated learning as one of its main pillars. Although the implementation of this curriculum has been taking place gradually at various levels of education, the reality is that it still faces many challenges in the field, especially in assessment. Most PAI teachers still tend to use conventional assessment instruments that are not aligned with the principle of differentiation. (Hazyimara et al., 2024). As a result, the evaluation results cannot represent students' abilities thoroughly and fairly because they do not consider the diversity of needs, potential, and learning styles of different learners. (Sukmawati, 2022).

Differentiated learning, according to Tomlinson (2001), is an instructional approach that adapts learning content, processes, and products to the individual needs of students. (Maharani, 2024). In this context, assessment instruments must also be developed to accommodate this diversity. Some previous studies have shown that the use of undifferentiated assessment instruments tends to inhibit students' learning potential and is unfair to those with special learning needs. (Kuswanto Arif, 2023).

In some previous studies, it was found that only a small proportion of PAI teachers have a deep understanding of differentiation in assessment. (Sanjari, 2024). This is due to the lack of training and references that support the development of differentiated assessment instruments in PAI learning. The available literature is still limited in specifically reviewing how PAI assessments can be adapted to the principle of differentiation, which is crucial for creating a fair and inclusive evaluation system.

Assessment instruments in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) play a strategic role in measuring students' overall competency achievements, covering cognitive, affective, and

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psychomotor aspects. (Putra et al., 2024). However, various studies have shown that PAI assessment practices in schools still tend to focus on mastery of material through uniform written tests, without considering the diversity of learning styles, interests, and abilities of students. (Putri Wulandari, 2024). In fact, a good assessment approach should reflect an inclusive and holistic learning process, in line with the purpose of PAI in shaping students' character and spirituality.

In the context of differentiated learning, assessment instruments need to be designed flexibly to accommodate students' individual differences. (Maharani, 2024). The Merdeka curriculum emphasizes the importance of this approach, but in reality, many PAI teachers do not have sufficient understanding and skills in developing adaptive and contextual instruments (Mukromin et al., 2024). Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate the assessment instruments used so far to determine how well they support the principles of differentiation in learning and provide a basis for continuous improvement.

Differentiated learning is an approach designed to adapt learning processes, content, and products to the needs, interests, readiness, and learning styles of diverse students. (Sanjari, 2024). According to Tomlinson (2001), the basic principle of differentiation is to provide opportunities for each student to learn optimally through flexible and responsive strategies. In practice, teachers are expected to modify learning activities and assessments to suit individual student characteristics better. This approach aims to create a fair and meaningful learning experience, not only for high-achieving students but also for those who need additional support. (Busro et al., 2023).

In the context of the Indonesian curriculum, particularly the Merdeka curriculum, differentiated learning is a key approach promoted to enhance the quality of student-centered education. The application of differentiated learning requires teachers to be more reflective and creative in designing learning strategies, including in formulating the form and content of assessment. (Zahra & Mubin, 2024). Research conducted by Salsabil et al. (2025) shows that teachers who can implement differentiation effectively tend to result in increased student engagement and learning outcomes. (Ferdiansyah, 2025). However, challenges still arise when this approach is not fully translated into the assessment aspect, which is crucial for ensuring the fairness and effectiveness of differentiated learning.

Differentiated assessment is an evaluation process designed to accommodate the diverse needs, learning styles, and readiness levels of students in a class. This assessment is not single or uniform, but flexible and adaptive, both in form, content, and presentation. According to

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Tomlinson (2014), differentiated assessment allows teachers to provide a fair opportunity for each student to demonstrate their understanding through the means that best suit their individual characteristics (Hariyati et al., 2021). It can take the form of written tests that vary in difficulty, as well as projects, portfolios, demonstrations, or other performance assessments that are more contextualized. This type of assessment is crucial in encouraging active student engagement and in providing more meaningful feedback. (Alqarny & Ridha, 2024).

In learning Islamic Religious Education (PAI), the application of differentiated assessment is crucial because students are assessed not only in cognitive aspects but also in affective and psychomotor aspects. One-size-fits-all traditional evaluations are unable to capture the diversity of students' understanding and spiritual experiences. A study by Suprapto & Hidayat (2021) showed that when teachers implemented differentiated assessment strategies, students felt more motivated and appreciated for their achievements (Gymnastiar, 2024). However, the main challenge still lies in teachers' lack of understanding of how to develop assessment instruments that are relevant to the principle of differentiation. Therefore, it is essential to evaluate and redesign PAI assessment instruments to reflect equity, inclusiveness, and diversity in the teaching and learning process. (Ferdiansyah, 2025).

This article aims to evaluate the quality and relevance of assessment instruments used in PAI learning to the principles of differentiated learning. This evaluation includes aspects of content suitability, question form, and flexibility in measuring diverse student learning outcomes. Thus, it is expected to obtain a comprehensive picture of the weaknesses and potential for developing more adaptive assessment instruments. This article also aims to provide practical recommendations for PAI teachers in designing or modifying assessment instruments to be more responsive to students' needs. The results of this evaluation are expected to serve as the basis for decision-making to improve the quality of PAI learning, both at the education unit level and in the formulation of more inclusive education policies.

Assessment instruments that do not consider the principle of differentiation will produce evaluation data that is biased and unrepresentative of students' real competencies (Anggraini et al., 2023; Kuswanto Arif, 2023). In the context of religious education, where moral and spiritual values are very contextual, rigid and uniform assessments can actually obscure the potential of students in internalizing religious teachings personally (Mujadi, 2022). Therefore, updating the assessment instrument is necessary to improve the quality of PAI learning (Ridho Aliffiansyah, 2024).

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Differentiated assessment is not only related to the principle of justice in education but also plays an essential role in improving the overall effectiveness of the teaching-learning process. (Mulyanto et al., 2023). When assessment instruments are developed by considering the diversity of student characteristics—such as learning styles, levels of understanding, interests, and backgrounds—the evaluation results will be much more accurate and meaningful. Instruments that are sensitive to these differences allow teachers to provide feedback that is more personalized and appropriate to the needs of each student.

Furthermore, the use of differentiated assessment creates an inclusive learning environment where every student feels valued and their contributions are recognized, regardless of their academic ability. This encourages higher learning motivation and increases student engagement in the learning process. Therefore, evaluating and readjusting assessment instruments in PAI subjects is a strategic and crucial step to optimize the implementation of differentiated learning. This effort will not only strengthen the quality of evaluation but also help realize the goal of Islamic religious education, which is humanist and oriented to the holistic needs of learners. (Lestari et al., n.d.).

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to evaluate Islamic Religious Education (PAI) assessment instruments in the context of differentiated learning. The research subjects consisted of PAI teachers at the MI/MTs level who have implemented the Merdeka curriculum, namely MI Plus Al-Fatimah Bojonegoro PAI teachers, and MTs Plus Al-Fatimah Bojonegoro. The data collection technique involved in-depth interviews conducted by teachers in the learning process. The data obtained were analyzed using thematic analysis, which includes stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing to identify the extent to which the assessment instruments used reflect the principles of differentiated learning. (Yin, 2015). The focus of this research is to analyze the current condition of PAI assessment instruments, their suitability for differentiated learning, the obstacles teachers face, and the strategies they use to overcome these obstacles.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Current Condition of PAI Assessment Instruments

Based on the findings in the field, the majority of PAI teachers still use conventional and uniform assessment instruments, such as multiple-choice written tests, short forms, and standardized descriptions. The instruments are made with less attention to the characteristics of

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each student. Assessment is mainly focused on cognitive aspects, while affective and psychomotor dimensions are often assessed only observationally, without clear and structured measurement tools. As a result, the assessment results have not been able to describe students' learning achievements as a whole.

In addition, the assessment instruments used are often not developed in a contextual manner or based on students' real lives. Teachers frequently use questions from textbooks or old question banks that are not adapted to curriculum developments or the actual conditions of students. (Okvani Kartika et al., 2024; Wahid & Hamami, 2021). This shows a gap between the holistic learning objectives of PAI and the measurement tools applied in the classroom. In this context, it is essential to review the relevance and quality of assessment instruments to align with the demands of 21st-century learning and the principle of inclusiveness.

Conformity with Differentiated Learning

From the results of document analysis and interviews, it was found that most of the assessment instruments used by PAI teachers did not fully support the differentiated learning approach. The available instruments still take a one-size-fits-all approach for all students, without considering differences in learning styles, academic readiness, and individual interests. This makes students with special needs or different learning styles feel less supported in optimally demonstrating their competence. Uniform assessments also tend not to encourage creativity or personal reflection, which should be an essential part of PAI learning.

Some teachers admitted that they had not yet understood deeply how to apply the principle of differentiation in assessment. Although they have started using variations in teaching methods, assessment is still considered the most challenging aspect to adjust. This mismatch between the learning approach and the form of the evaluation has the potential to reduce the validity of the assessment results (Mills et al., 2014). Therefore, there is an urgent need for teacher training and mentoring in designing appropriate and fair differentiated assessment instruments.

Constraints Faced by Teachers

Teachers face various challenges in their efforts to develop differentiated assessments. One of the main obstacles is the limited understanding and competence in designing instruments that are adaptive to individual student differences (De Neve & Devos, 2016). Some teachers stated that they have not had adequate references or training on the principles, formats, and techniques of differentiated assessment. In addition, the high administrative burden and limited

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time are obstacles in the process of planning and developing more complex and varied assessments.

Another obstacle is the lack of support facilities and collaboration between teachers in designing innovative assessments. Many PAI teachers work alone in developing assessment instruments, without discussion forums or validation from peers. This condition increases the possibility of assessment bias and incompatibility with the needs of students. In addition, some teachers still adhere to the old mindset that assessment is only about measuring learning outcomes and not an integral part of the continuous learning process.

Innovative Strategies from Teachers

Despite the many obstacles faced, some teachers have begun to show initiative in developing assessment strategies that are more responsive to students' needs. Among these are final projects based on worship practices, religious reflective journals, presentation-based assessments, and digital works. These forms allow students to express their understanding of PAI materials through various means that suit their individual interests and abilities. This strategy also makes it easier for teachers to evaluate aspects of attitude and spirituality more authentically. (De Jager, 2013).

In addition, some teachers have started to integrate formative assessments based on observation and group discussions to assess the learning process, not just the result. Teachers also try to give choices in the form of assignments, such as choosing between making a da'wah video, writing an essay, or creating an infographic, so that students can choose the most suitable way for them to demonstrate competence. (Alvunger, 2018). These steps demonstrate that with proper understanding and creativity, teachers can create PAI assessment instruments that are relevant, contextual, and aligned with the principles of differentiated learning.

Differentiated learning itself is not merely a method but a pedagogical approach that systematically adjusts the content, process, and product of learning to suit students' readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles. (Almujab, 2023; AZ Sarnoto, 2024). This approach requires a shift in mindset where diversity among students is seen not as a challenge, but as the foundation of instructional planning. In the context of PAI learning, this means designing learning experiences that are inclusive and responsive to the moral, emotional, and intellectual development of each learner.

To implement this approach effectively, teachers need to employ specific instructional models that support differentiation, such as learning stations, tiered assignments, choice boards, and project-based learning. These models provide students with options on how they access and

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demonstrate knowledge, which in turn fosters deeper engagement and ownership over their learning process. (Darmadi et al., 2024; Kamal, 2019).

Equally important is the development of assessment instruments that align with the differentiated approach. A high-quality assessment instrument must meet three essential criteria: validity (measuring what it intends to measure across cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains), reliability (yielding consistent results across varied conditions), and visibility (clearly and transparently capturing student learning outcomes). In the PAI context, this might include performance-based tasks, student portfolios, reflective journals, and structured observations, each tailored to individual student profiles.

As such, assessment in differentiated learning is not uniform, but flexible and student-centered. Teachers must be equipped with the competence to design and implement instruments that are both pedagogically sound and administratively feasible. Therefore, collaborative practice, targeted professional development, and institutional support are crucial to ensure that assessment tools not only evaluate learning fairly but also serve as a means to humanize and empower every student in their spiritual and academic growth. (Najah & Suasti, 2024).

Written questions that do not accommodate the different characteristics of students. Teachers tend to focus on assessing cognitive aspects and systematically ignore affective and psychomotor assessments. In addition, only a small number of teachers have begun to apply alternative forms of assessment, such as projects, portfolios, or presentation-based evaluations. However, these are still in the experimental and unstructured stage. This condition indicates that the implementation of differentiated assessment in PAI is still not optimal. (Wahyudi et al., 2024).

When compared with previous research, this finding aligns with the results of Suparno's study (2019) and Mukromin et al. (2024), which revealed that PAI teachers still face difficulties in applying the principle of differentiation in assessment, even though they have begun using it in learning strategies. (Mukromin et al., 2024). The difference lies in the initiative of teachers in the field who are now starting to innovate, even though it is limited. This indicates a growing awareness among teachers, although it is not yet fully supported by adaptive assessment systems and policies. In other words, practices in the field have developed, but have not been accompanied by systematic planning and guidance (Wahyudi et al., 2024).

The findings indicate that the current PAI assessment instrument fails to reflect the principle of differentiated learning, which is central to the Merdeka curriculum. A uniform and non-inclusive assessment approach risks increasing the inequality of learning outcomes among

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students with different backgrounds and abilities. This reflects that the diversity of learners has not been the primary consideration in evaluating learning. In the context of PAI, this is crucial because religious education is supposed to instill values of justice, tolerance, and respect for differences.

This finding has far-reaching implications. In terms of practice, schools and teachers need to review the assessment tools used and start designing instruments that are more adaptive, contextual, and favorable to student diversity. (Grierson & Woloshyn, 2013). Policy-wise, the results emphasize the importance of continuous training for teachers to design and implement differentiated assessments. Academically, this study provides an empirical basis for the importance of further research on adaptive assessment strategies in religious education, particularly in shaping moderate and reflective student characters.

The main obstacle in implementing differentiated assessment is teachers' limited understanding of this concept and the lack of applicable examples as references. (Kaur et al., 2019). Many teachers have not received special training on developing indicators and assessment instruments that suit various student profiles. In addition, challenges such as time constraints, administrative burdens, and a lack of collaboration between educators are also obstacles in developing responsive assessments. (Sanjari, 2024). This suggests that changes in assessment cannot be left to teachers alone but need to be a collective effort at the school and education system level.

As a follow-up, several concrete steps need to be taken. First, a training module and intensive mentoring program for PAI teachers on differentiated assessment should be developed. (Morgan, 2014). Second, a teacher learning community should be established to encourage collaboration and the sharing of good practices in assessment. Third, school learning evaluation policies need to be revised to allow for the application of more adaptive alternative assessments. Fourth, the active role of PAI supervisors or coaches is essential in providing input on the assessment design made by teachers. (Lestari et al., n.d.). Through these steps, PAI assessment instruments are expected to function not only as tools for evaluating learning outcomes but also as means to empower and humanize the educational process for each student according to their needs. (Chandra Handa, 2019).

CONCLUSION

The implementation of assessment in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning is still not optimal in accommodating the principle of differentiated learning as mandated in the

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Merdeka curriculum. The majority of PAI teachers still use uniform and conventional assessment instruments, which tend to focus on cognitive aspects and ignore affective and psychomotor dimensions in a structured manner. The mismatch between the differentiated learning approach and the still uniform assessment instruments results in an inaccurate and unfair evaluation of student achievement.

Teachers' limited understanding of differentiated assessment, lack of training, and administrative workload are the main obstacles to its implementation. Nevertheless, some teachers have taken the initiative to develop alternative assessment strategies, such as religious practice-based projects, reflective journals, and optional assignments tailored to students' interests and learning styles. These efforts demonstrate an initial awareness of the need for more inclusive and contextualized assessment. Therefore, a thorough evaluation and development of adaptive assessment instruments based on the diverse characteristics of learners is needed. In addition, continuous training, strengthening collaboration between teachers, and supporting educational policies that favor diversity are essential keys to encourage the transformation of PAI assessment towards a more humanist, fair, and practical direction.

This study has limitations due to its scope, which only includes several schools and PAI teachers, so the findings cannot be generalized widely. In addition, the data obtained remains descriptive and qualitative, lacking quantitative measurement of the effectiveness of the differentiated assessment developed. For future researchers, it is recommended to conduct a study with a broader scope and involve a mixed methods approach to obtain more comprehensive and measurable data.

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