

## Differentiated Assessment in Islamic Religious Education: Concept, Implementation, and Challenges

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### Abstract

Differentiated assessment has emerged as an important evaluation approach alongside differentiated instruction and student-centered learning. In Islamic Religious Education (IRE), assessment is expected not only to measure students' cognitive achievement but also to evaluate their spiritual, affective, social, and practical religious competencies comprehensively. However, the implementation of differentiated assessment in IRE remains challenging due to limited teacher assessment literacy, the predominance of cognitive-oriented evaluation, and the lack of assessment models that accommodate students' diverse learning characteristics. This article aims to analyze the concepts, implementation, and challenges of differentiated assessment in Islamic Religious Education through a Narrative Review approach. The study draws upon scholarly literature, including peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, policy documents, and other relevant publications. The data were analyzed using thematic identification, classification, comparison, and synthesis. The findings indicate that differentiated assessment in IRE should be designed based on students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles while addressing spiritual, social, cognitive, and practical competencies. Its implementation may involve diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments, as well as portfolios, project-based assessment, performance assessment, observation, and self-reflection. The major challenges include inadequate teacher assessment literacy, limited assessment instruments, administrative burdens, technology integration, and insufficient policy support. This review contributes a comprehensive conceptual synthesis of differentiated assessment in Islamic Religious Education and offers recommendations for developing more adaptive, authentic, and student-centered assessment practices.

### Keywords

Authentic Assessment; Differentiated Assessment; Differentiated Instruction; Islamic Religious Education; Narrative Review.



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## INTRODUCTION

The paradigm shift in global education in the 21st century has brought significant implications for learning systems and assessments. If previously assessment was more oriented towards measuring learning outcomes (assessment of learning), now the paradigm has shifted

towards assessments that support the learning process (assessment for learning) and assessment as part of the learning process (assessment as learning). This shift is driven by the demand to produce students who not only master knowledge, but also have critical thinking skills, creativity, collaboration, communication, problem-solving, and strong character in accordance with the changing needs of the global society (Black & Wiliam, 2009; OECD, 2023).

In line with these changes, the concept of differentiated instruction is increasingly developing as one of the approaches that is able to accommodate the diversity of student characteristics. Each student has a different readiness, interest, and learning profile, so that the learning and assessment process can no longer be standardized. In this perspective, assessment not only functions as a tool for evaluating learning outcomes, but also as a basis for teachers to design learning experiences that suit the individual needs of students (Tomlinson, 2017). Therefore, differentiated assessments are an integral part of the implementation of differentiated learning.

Another global phenomenon is the development of digital transformation and the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education, which has also changed assessment practices. Various countries have begun to implement digital assessments, learning analytics, and AI-based automated feedback to increase the effectiveness of the learning evaluation process (OECD, 2023). However, these developments also pose new challenges, especially related to assessment validity, ethics of using AI, academic integrity, data security, and teachers' ability to utilize technology pedagogically. These challenges are becoming increasingly complex in subjects oriented towards the formation of values, morals, and character, such as Islamic Religious Education (PAI).

In the context of Islamic Religious Education, assessments have different characteristics compared to other subjects. The main goal of PAI is not only to develop cognitive competence, but also to form faith, piety, noble morals, and students' ability to implement Islamic values in daily life. Therefore, the PAI assessment system should ideally be able to fully measure aspects of knowledge, spiritual attitudes, social attitudes, and religious skills through various forms of authentic assessment such as observation, portfolios, projects, worship practices, self-reflection, and performance assessment. However, various studies show that the practice of PAI assessment in various countries is still dominated by written tests oriented towards cognitive achievement, so it is not fully able to measure the internalization of Islamic values comprehensively (Andrade, 2019; Brookhart, 2020).

In Indonesia, the transformation of the assessment system has strengthened since the implementation of the Independent Curriculum which places diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments as an integral part of the learning process. This curriculum emphasizes the importance of student-centered learning, so teachers are required to understand the characteristics, needs, and learning development of each student before determining the right learning strategy. In this context, differentiated assessment is one of the important instruments to support the implementation of differentiated learning in schools.

However, the implementation of differentiated assessments in Islamic Religious Education subjects still faces various challenges. Various research results show that most PAI teachers are still oriented towards assessing learning outcomes through written tests, while assessments of affective, spiritual, character, and religious practice aspects have not been carried out optimally. In addition, teachers also face limitations in developing assessment instruments that are able to accommodate the diversity of students' abilities, low literacy regarding differentiated assessments, high learning administrative burdens, and limitations in the use of digital technology in the assessment process. This condition causes the function of assessment as a tool to improve the quality of learning has not been fully achieved.

On the other hand, studies on assessment in Islamic Religious Education have so far mostly discussed authentic assessments, formative assessments, evaluation of learning outcomes, or the implementation of the Independent Curriculum separately. Research that specifically examines differentiated assessments in Islamic Religious Education is still relatively limited, especially those that integrate conceptual, implementation, and challenging aspects in one comprehensive study. In fact, the synthesis of various research results is needed to provide a complete picture of the development of concepts, implementation practices, as well as the direction of development of differentiated assessments in PAI subjects.

Based on these conditions, there is a research gap in the form of the absence of a narrative study that comprehensively integrates various research results on differentiated assessment in Islamic Religious Education. Most of the research still focuses on implementation in certain educational units or only discusses one aspect of assessment, so it does not provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between conceptual foundations, implementation practices, and challenges faced by PAI teachers in implementing differentiated assessments.

Therefore, this article aims to examine the concept, implementation, and challenges of differentiated assessment in Islamic Religious Education through the Narrative Review approach. This study is expected to provide a conceptual synthesis of existing research developments, identify research gaps, and provide recommendations for the development of a PAI assessment system that is more adaptive, inclusive, authentic, and able to accommodate the diversity of student characteristics in accordance with the demands of 21st century education.

## **METHODS**

This study uses a qualitative approach with the Narrative Literature Review (Narrative Review) method. This method was chosen because it aims to present a conceptual synthesis of differentiated assessments in Islamic Religious Education (PAI), especially related to the concept, implementation, and challenges of its application based on various research results and scientific literature. In contrast to Systematic Literature Review (SLR) which emphasizes strict literature search and selection procedures, Narrative Review provides flexibility for researchers to integrate various theoretical perspectives and empirical findings to produce a more

comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon (Grant & Booth, 2009; Baumeister & Leary, 1997).

The literature used is prioritized to be published in the 2020–2026 period to obtain an overview of the latest research developments. However, some classic references, such as the works of Tomlinson (2017), Black and Wiliam (2009), and Brookhart (2020), are still used as theoretical foundations because they have a fundamental contribution to the concept of differentiated learning and assessment.

Data collection was carried out through documentation studies on various literature obtained from scientific databases, including: Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, ERIC, DOAJ, Garuda, Garuda Portal of the Ministry of Education and Culture. Data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis of the selected literature. The stages of analysis refer to the literature synthesis approach developed by Grant and Booth (2009), including: Literature identification, which is collecting various references relevant to the research topic; Literature selection, which is selecting literature based on the suitability of the theme, publication quality, and relevance to the research objectives; Data classification, which is grouping the results of the study into several main themes, Thematic synthesis, which is comparing, connecting, and integrating various theories and research results so as to obtain a comprehensive understanding of differentiated assessments in Islamic Religious Education; Drawing conclusions, namely formulating conceptual implications and compiling a conceptual framework for differentiated assessments as a result of literature synthesis. The validity of the data is carried out through triangulation of sources, which is comparing various theories, research results, and policy documents from different sources. In addition, the researcher also applies cross-check literature by comparing findings from international journals, national journals, and academic books to obtain a more objective and comprehensive synthesis.

Overall, the flow of this research shows that the Narrative Literature Review method is carried out through systematic stages, starting from topic identification, literature search and selection, thematic analysis, to the preparation of a conceptual framework and drawing conclusions. This approach allows researchers to produce a comprehensive conceptual synthesis of differentiated assessments in Islamic Religious Education, so that it can contribute to the development of theories and learning practices and assessments in the era of the Independent Curriculum.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The results of this study are a synthesis of various literature on differentiated assessment in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) obtained from articles in international journals, accredited national journals, academic books, and education policy documents. The synthesis was carried out to identify trends in the development of the concept, implementation, and challenges of differentiated assessment in the context of PAI learning. Based on the results of the thematic analysis, four main themes were obtained, namely: (1) the development of the concept of differentiated assessment; (2) the implementation of differentiated assessment in

PAI; (3) implementation challenges; and (4) the conceptual synthesis of differentiated assessment in Islamic Religious Education.

### **Development of the Concept of Differentiated Assessment in Islamic Religious Education**

The results of the literature synthesis show that the concept of differentiated assessment has developed as a consequence of a change in the student-centered learning paradigm. The international literature confirms that assessment is no longer positioned as a tool to measure learning outcomes alone, but as an integral part of the learning process that functions to provide information for teachers in adjusting learning strategies according to the needs of students (Tomlinson & Moon, 2013; Black & Wiliam, 2009).

In the context of Islamic Religious Education, differentiated assessments have more complex characteristics than general subjects because they must measure spiritual, social, knowledge, and skills competencies in an integrated manner. The results of the study show that most of the research still focuses on the assessment of cognitive aspects, while the assessment of the spiritual dimension and the internalization of Islamic values is still relatively limited. This condition shows that there is a research gap that needs attention in the development of the PAI assessment model.

In addition, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum encourages a paradigm shift in assessment from a results-oriented approach to an assessment that supports the learning process. Therefore, differentiated assessments are seen as one of the relevant approaches to accommodate the diversity of learners' abilities, interests, and learning profiles without changing the competency standards that must be achieved.

### **Implementation of Differentiated Assessment in Islamic Religious Education**

The results of the synthesis show that the implementation of differentiated assessments in PAI is generally carried out through three main stages, namely diagnostic assessment, formative assessment, and summative assessment. Diagnostic assessments are used to map learning readiness, ability to read the Qur'an, understanding basic religious concepts, and learning characteristics of students before learning begins. This information is the basis for teachers to determine appropriate learning strategies.

During the learning process, teachers apply formative assessments through observation, discussions, quizzes, reflection journals, and self-assessments. The literature shows that formative assessments have a positive impact on increasing learning motivation, student involvement, and the quality of feedback received by students. Meanwhile, summative assessment in differentiated learning is not only carried out through written tests, but also through various forms of authentic assignments, such as projects, portfolios, presentations, worship practices, learning videos, and digital works. The variety of assessment forms allows students to show their competence according to their potential.

In the context of Islamic Religious Education, the most recommended forms of authentic assessment in various literature include:

Table 1. The Most Recommended Form of Assessment

| Form of Assessment | Competencies Assessed |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
|--------------------|-----------------------|

|                     |                                             |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Observations        | Spiritual and social attitudes              |
| Practice assessment | Prayer, ablution, reciting the Qur'an       |
| Portfolio           | Learning progress                           |
| Projects            | Collaboration and problem-solving           |
| Presentation        | Communication and understanding of concepts |
| Self-reflection     | Spiritual awareness                         |
| Peer rating         | Collaboration and responsibility            |

These findings show that differentiated assessments are more able to comprehensively describe student competencies than conventional assessments.

### **Challenges of Implementing Differentiated Assessments**

A synthesis of various studies shows that the implementation of differentiated assessments still faces several key challenges. First, **teacher competence**. Most studies report that teachers still have difficulty in compiling varied assessment instruments, determining assessment rubrics, and providing individual feedback to students. Second, the administrative burden. Differentiated assessments require more complete documentation than conventional assessments so they take more time. Third, the heterogeneity of students. Differences in Qur'anic reading ability, family backgrounds, and religious experiences cause teachers to design various assessment alternatives so that all students get the same learning opportunities. Fourth, the use of digital technology. Although various digital platforms are able to support differentiated assessments, not all teachers have adequate digital competencies. In addition, the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in PAI assessments also raises challenges related to ethics, assessment validity, and student data protection. Fifth, the measurement of spiritual competence. In contrast to cognitive competence, the spiritual aspect cannot be measured only through a written test, so a combination of observation, self-reflection, portfolio, and cooperation between teachers and parents is required.

### **Synthesis of Literature and Conceptual Models of Differentiated Assessment in Islamic Religious Education**

Based on the results of a synthesis of various literature, this study proposes a conceptual model of differentiated assessment in Islamic Religious Education.

The model shows that the implementation of differentiated assessments begins with the identification of student characteristics, namely readiness, interest, and learning profile. This information is the basis for choosing the appropriate form of assessment, both diagnostic, formative, summative assessments, portfolios, projects, performance assessments, and observations.

Furthermore, all forms of assessment are directed to measure the four dimensions of Islamic Religious Education competencies, namely spiritual, social, knowledge, and skill competencies. If all of these processes are carried out systematically, it will result in more equitable, authentic, inclusive, and student-centered learning.

However, the implementation of the model is greatly influenced by teacher competence, school policy support, technology availability, and assessment culture that develops in the educational environment.

The results of this study have several implications; Theoretical implications, this study reinforces the concept that differentiated assessment is an integral part of differentiated learning and is relevant to be applied in Islamic Religious Education through holistic measurement of student competencies; Practical implications, PAI teachers need to develop various forms of authentic assessments that are more flexible according to the characteristics of students. In addition, schools need to provide support through training in the preparation of differentiated assessment instruments and the use of digital technology; Policy implications, the results of this research support the implementation of the Independent Curriculum which emphasizes student-centered learning and assessment. Therefore, the government needs to provide technical guidance and examples of differentiated assessment instruments that are specific to Islamic Religious Education subjects.

## CONCLUSION

This research aims to examine the concept, implementation, and challenges of differentiated assessment in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) through the Narrative Literature Review approach. Based on the results of a synthesis of various literatures, it can be concluded that differentiated assessment is an assessment approach designed to accommodate the diversity of student characteristics, especially in the aspects of readiness, learning interest, and learning profile, without changing the standards of learning outcomes that have been set. In the context of Islamic Religious Education, differentiated assessments are not only oriented towards the measurement of cognitive aspects, but also include spiritual, social, knowledge, and skill dimensions as the main goals of Islamic education.

The results of the study show that the implementation of differentiated assessments in Islamic Religious Education is carried out through the integration of diagnostic assessments, formative assessments, and summative assessments supported by various forms of authentic assessments, such as portfolios, project assessments, performance assessments, observations, self-reflection, and peer-to-peer assessments. This approach allows teachers to obtain a more comprehensive picture of student development while providing opportunities for each individual to demonstrate their competencies according to their characteristics and potential. Thus, differentiated assessments are instruments that support the realization of more equitable, inclusive, adaptive, and student-centered learning as mandated in the Independent Curriculum.

However, the results of the synthesis also show that the implementation of differentiated assessments still faces various challenges, including the limitations of teacher assessment literacy, the complexity of the preparation of assessment instruments, the heterogeneity of students, limited time and administrative burden, the use of digital technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI), and difficulties in measuring spiritual competence objectively. Therefore, the

successful implementation of differentiated assessments requires improving teacher competence, developing contextual assessment instruments, using technology ethically and proportionately, as well as school and government policy support in the form of training, mentoring, and the provision of more operational implementation guidelines.

As a conceptual contribution, this study offers a conceptual framework for differentiated assessment in Islamic Religious Education that integrates student characteristics, assessment strategies, learning implementation, measured competencies, learning outcomes, and implementation challenges in one complete model. The framework can be a theoretical foundation for teachers, researchers, and curriculum developers in designing assessment systems that are more relevant to the characteristics of PAI learning.

This study has limitations because it only uses secondary data sourced from various literatures so that it cannot describe the implementation of differentiated assessments in certain school contexts. Therefore, further research is recommended to use an empirical approach, either through case studies, qualitative research, mixed methods, and research and development, to test the effectiveness of differentiated assessment models in improving the spiritual, social, knowledge, and skills competencies of students at various levels of Islamic Religious Education.

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