



Differentiated Learning Based on Students' Talents and Interests in the *Salat Akhlak* Subject at Sekolah Dasar ICP Al-Falah Darussalam Waru Sidoarjo

Annisa Rahmania Azis, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya
Balqisa Ratu Nata, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya
Ahmad Zakki Fuad, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya

Corresponding Author: Annisa Rahmania Azis

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the concept of identifying students' talents and interests, and the implementation of talent- and interest-based differentiated learning in the subjects of Salat Akhlak at Sekolah Dasar (SD) ICP Al-Falah Darussalam Waru Sidoarjo. The research used a qualitative case study approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with teachers, observation of the learning process, and analysis of curriculum documents and teaching tools. The data were analyzed descriptively through the stages of reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing to obtain a comprehensive picture of the learning practices applied. The results of the study show that the subjects of Salat Akhlak are local curriculum innovations that emphasize the habit of worship and character building through contextual learning experiences. The identification of students' talents and interests was carried out through observation of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles, as well as mapping of students' confidence and participation levels. Differentiation was implemented through a variety of activities, including poster-making, drama, songs, and educational games. This strategy has been proven to increase motivation, active involvement, understanding of Islamic values, and student confidence. This research shows that differentiated learning in religious education is effective in strengthening cognitive, affective, and psychomotor skills while building religious character in a sustainable manner. This model can be used as a reference in developing contextual and student-centered curricula in elementary schools.

Keywords

Differentiated learning; Talents and interests; Salat akhlak; Sekolah dasar.



Introduction

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at the elementary school level plays a strategic role in instilling character and shaping noble morals in students from an early age (Jannah, 2023). The success of PAI is not solely determined by the curriculum delivered, but is also significantly influenced by the strategies and teaching methods employed. Teachers are required to present material in a contextually relevant manner that is adaptable to students' diverse needs and characteristics (Elviya, 2023).

The diversity of student characteristics—in terms of learning styles, interests, and talents (Susilo et al., 2024), necessitates a flexible and personalized approach to instruction (Gadafi et al., 2025). In this context, differentiated instruction becomes increasingly relevant. This approach emphasizes the importance of tailoring teaching strategies to meet learners' individual needs, enabling them to learn optimally and meaningfully (Ritonga et al., 2024). Talent- and interest-based differentiated instruction can help teachers uncover each student's unique potential while conveying Islamic values in a deeper and more personal way (Magfiroh & Hilman, 2025). Thus, the learning process serves not only as a medium for knowledge transfer but also as a means of developing strong character aligned with each student's natural disposition.

At SD ICP Al-Falah Darussalam Waru Sidoarjo, religious education is innovated through the *Salat Akhlak* subjects. This replaces the conventional Islamic Education (PAI) approach. It is designed to integrate spiritual and moral values using practical, contextual methods. The school implements a differentiated approach based on students' talents and interests. This ensures that each learner can access material according to individual characteristics. The initiative shows the school's commitment to providing Islamic education that is adaptive and responsive to contemporary challenges.

Previous studies have explored the application of differentiated learning in Islamic education. For instance (Efrianeffian, 2024), emphasized differentiation in lesson planning to accommodate various learning styles, while examined how differentiated learning supports the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (Halimah et al., 2023). However, these studies tend to focus on theoretical frameworks or limited classroom trials. In contrast, this research presents a more in-depth, contextually grounded qualitative case study that underscores the urgency of adopting an inclusive, adaptive approach to Islamic education. Similarly, addressed the implementation of interest- and talent-based education within



Islamic pedagogy, yet their findings remain broad in scope and lack deep contextualization within elementary-level practices (Magfiroh & Hilman, 2025).

This study bridges these gaps by conducting a qualitative case study that specifically examines how talent- and interest-based differentiated instruction is applied in the *Salat Akhlak* subjects at SD ICP Al-Falah Darussalam Waru, Sidoarjo. The objectives are to explore the implementation processes, identify challenges and strategies, and understand the outcomes for student learning and character development. Developed as a local innovation, this subject integrates spiritual and moral Islamic teachings into daily student practices. Unlike conventional PAI, *Salat Akhlak* use creative methods such as drama, chants, and posters to address individual learning profiles and foster joyful, meaningful character development.

The study's core novelty lies in uniquely detailed documentation of how educators practically align pedagogy with students' diverse traits, offering empirical insight rarely addressed in the field. This research not only fills a critical gap in theory but also provides a directly replicable model for Islamic schools to foster inclusive, responsive, and context-sensitive religious education. Strategic recommendations are offered for PAI teachers to optimize differentiated instruction rooted in Islamic values. This research is important because it specifically examines how teachers design and implement differentiated instruction based on students' talents and interests in the *Salat Akhlak* (PAI) subject at SD ICP Al-Falah Darussalam Waru Sidoarjo. The study seeks to identify the particular strategies and challenges teachers face in this process. Understanding these practices contributes to religious education theory and offers a practical model for schools in similar contexts. Thus, the study urgently calls for a more inclusive and adaptive approach to Islamic education.

Method

This study employs a qualitative case study design (Yin, 2018), to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of talent- and interest-based differentiated instruction in the subjects of *Salat Akhlak* at SD ICP Al-Falah Darussalam Waru Sidoarjo. This approach was chosen as it allows the researcher to explore the dynamics of classroom learning in a contextual and comprehensive manner, particularly in settings with diverse student characteristics. The primary focus of this research is to examine how educators identify students' talents and interests, and adjust teaching methods and instructional media to align with students' learning styles, thereby enhancing their engagement and comprehension of Islamic values.



Data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews with the *Salat Akhlak* teacher, and documentation of instructional activities, including student worksheets, teaching materials used, and students' creative work. The interview was conducted with Ustadzah Ana Lutfiyah, who serves as both the *Salat Akhlak* teacher and the homeroom teacher. She provided insights into differentiation strategies, learning challenges, and practical applications in designing activities based on students' talents and interests. These included lectures, role-play (drama), creative projects, songwriting and chants, as well as interactive digital media (e.g., PowerPoint). Data analysis was conducted using a model consisting of three stages: data collection, data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). This study is expected to offer a comprehensive portrayal of how differentiated instruction can effectively address the unique learning needs of students within the context of *Salat Akhlak* (Islamic Religious Education) in an Islamic-based elementary school.

Results Discussion

1. The Concept of *Salat Akhlak* Learning at SD ICP Al-Falah Darussalam Waru Sidoarjo

The *Salat Akhlak* learning program at SD ICP Al-Falah Darussalam Waru Sidoarjo represents a local curriculum innovation that emphasizes two fundamental aspects of Islamic education: the practice of *salat* (ritual prayer) and the cultivation of noble character (*akhlak*). The terms *Salat Akhlak* were deliberately chosen by the school to distinguish it from the conventional structure of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), which typically comprises four core components: Qur'an-Hadith, Fiqh, Sirah, and Adab (Dinata, 2022). The primary focus is on the practical implementation of fiqh values in salat and on reinforcing Islamic etiquette and manners in students' daily behavior. In an interview, Ustadzah Ana Lutfiyah, the teacher of the *Salat Akhlak* subject, explained:

The terms *Salat Akhlak* were chosen to place greater emphasis on both prayer (*shalat*) and moral character (*akhlak*). The Qur'anic component is already addressed in the Qur'an recitation lessons, although elements of prophetic history (*tarikh*) are also included in *Salat Akhlak*. Generally, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) consists of four main components: Qur'an and Hadith, Sirah, Fiqh, and Adab. However, our focus is more on the prayer aspect. *Salat* falls under Fiqh, and *Akhlak* relates to Adab (Lutfiyah, 2025).

The founders of the *Al-Falah Group* envisioned enhancing students' character through practical, contextually relevant religious instruction. Today, religious education cannot rely solely on theory; it must be internalized through habituation



and example (Panjaitan, 2024). *Salat Akhlak* use this approach, emphasizing worship skills and social behavior, aligning with the school's vision to integrate spiritual and moral values into students' lives.

In practice, the *Salat Akhlak* curriculum is crafted by the school's internal Islamic Education Teacher Working Group (*Kelompok Kerja Guru PAI*) and customized to students' needs. The materials are divided into two semesters and feature themes such as *Asmaul Husna* (Names of Allah), Islamic etiquette, Qur'anic translation, purification, and prayer practices. This method allows students to grasp religious concepts intellectually and actively develop character through experiences that engage both affective and psychomotor domains.

In the interview, Ustadzah Ana Lutfiyah also stated:

The initiative originated from the school. The Al-Falah Group coined the term *Salat Akhlak* and developed it as part of a local curriculum (their own innovation). At Al-Falah, three curricula are in use: the Cambridge, Merdeka, and local curricula. Subsequently, the Islamic Education Teacher Working Group (*KKG PAI*) formulated and further developed what is commonly referred to as Islamic Religious Education (PAI) under the name *Salat Akhlak* (Lutfiyah, 2025).

Salat Akhlak differ from conventional PAI in their structure. Unlike PAI in public schools, where BTQ (Qur'anic Reading and Writing) is separate, at SD ICP Al-Falah Waru Sidoarjo, Qur'an recitation is a standalone class. This lets *Salat Akhlak* focus more on worship, character, and also integrate sirah and Qur'anic translation.

In the past, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) did not include Qur'anic Reading and Writing (BTQ) as a separate subject, unlike today, when PAI and BTQ are distinct, with BTQ categorized as a local content subject. Since Qur'anic recitation classes have long been part of the curriculum here, the focus is placed more on *Salat Akhlak*. In public schools, BTQ has only recently been introduced as a formal subject (Lutfiyah, 2025).

The introduction of this subject has received support from school supervisors, though it remains administratively classified under Islamic Religious Education (PAI). In practice, the *Salat Akhlak* approach and content are fully applied. This innovation addresses students' real needs and exemplifies curriculum differentiation consistent with the *Merdeka Curriculum*, which empowers schools to design relevant, contextualized learning. This aligns with Ustadzah Ana Lutfiyah's statement:

The founders of Al-Falah intended to improve and place greater emphasis on the students' prayer practices and moral character. Currently, the *Salat Akhlak* textbook contains comprehensive material, including elements of sirah (Prophetic history) and Qur'anic translation. Therefore, it now encompasses



all four core components of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) within the Salat Akhlak curriculum (Lutfiyah, 2025).

Salat Akhlak aim to nurture a love of worship and build good character in children from an early age. The goal is for habitual prayer and ethical behavior to become lasting traits into adulthood (Wasila & Pasaribu, 2024). Learning goes beyond the classroom, including practice in the school mosque, morning activities, and broader social interactions.

In conclusion, the *Salat Akhlak* concept represents a dynamic, responsive model of religious education that addresses students' spiritual needs. Beyond serving merely as a medium for delivering knowledge, this approach functions as a means of character formation. Through systematically and integratively designed instructional materials, SD ICP Al-Falah Darussalam Waru Sidoarjo has demonstrated that local curriculum innovations can yield religious learning models that are relevant, effective, and sustainable.

Table 1. Comparison Between the Subject Matter of Salat Akhlak and Islamic Religious Education for Grade 1 Elementary School

<i>Salat Akhlak</i>	Islamic Education
Semester 1	
I Love the Qur'an (Surah <i>al-fatihah</i> and Surah <i>al-ikhlas</i>)	I Love the Qur'an (Learning Harakat and Hijaiyah Letters, and Memorizing Surah Al-Fatiha)
Asmaul Husna (<i>al-kholiq, ar-rahman, and ar-rahim</i>)	Learning the Pillars of Faith (Faith in Allah and His Messengers)
Good Words (<i>basmalah, hamdalah, and salam</i>)	I Like to Read <i>basmalah and hamdalah</i> (<i>basmalah, hamdalah, and Being Polite</i>)
Islamic Etiquette (Etiquette in Learning, Respectful and Obedient Behavior, and Etiquette in Urination and Defecation)	Understanding the Pillars of Islam (Understanding and Interpreting the Two Testimonies of Faith)
Allah Loves Those Who Are Pure (Purity, Types of Purification and Tools for Purification, and How to Perform Wudu)	Prophets and Messengers as My Role Models (25 Prophets and Messengers, and the Miracles of Prophets and Messengers)
Prophetic Biography (Prophetic Stories: Prophet Adam AS and Prophet Idris AS)	
Translation of Surah Al-Fatiha (Recitation and Translation)	
Semester 2	



The Five Pillars of Islam (Shahada, Salat, Zakat, Fasting during Ramadan, and Hajj)	The Qur'an: My Guide in Life (Understanding Harakat, Reading Hijaiyah Letters, and Surah <i>al-ikhlas</i>)
I Enjoy Salat (Salat Movements)	Compassion for Others (Asmaul Husna: Ar-Rahman and Ar-Rahim, and the Compassion of Prophet Muhammad SAW)
Islamic Etiquette (Etiquette for Eating and Drinking, Sleeping, Dressing and Wearing Shoes, and Praiseworthy Character: Loving Allah's Creation)	I Like to Be Grateful and Disciplined (Being Grateful to Others and Behaving Disciplined, and How to Apply It)
Prophetic Biography (Prophetic Stories: Prophet Noah AS and Prophet Muhammad SAW)	Getting Used to a Clean Life (Clean Living, Purification, Ablution, and <i>tayamum</i>)
Translation of Surah Al-Ikhlâs (Reciting and Translating)	Prophet Adam AS, the First Human Being (Allah Created Prophet Adam AS, Prophet Adam AS and Eve Lived in Heaven, then were sent down to Earth, and the Example of Prophet Adam AS.

2. Identification of Talents and Interests of Students at SD ICP Al-Falah Darussalam Waru Sidoarjo

Grade 1.3 students at SD ICP Al-Falah Darussalam Waru, Sidoarjo, exhibit a diversity of prominent individual characteristics, ranging from personality traits and learning styles to preferences for learning activities. Interview results indicate that most students demonstrate high enthusiasm for learning; however, some are quiet and lack self-confidence. This suggests that the development of student potential should be approached with a personalized, responsive approach that considers their psychological conditions (Ulfah & Arifudin, 2019). In this regard, teachers need to develop differentiated strategies and diverse instructional approaches to optimally explore students' interests and hone their talents.

Based on observations of learning styles, students were identified as having preferences for visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning. Teachers successfully leveraged this by designing project-based learning activities and educational games such as *Ammar Puzzle*, which effectively accommodates these various learning styles. For instance, visual learners were assigned poster-making tasks; auditory learners engaged with songs and chants; and kinesthetic learners participated in physical activities such as assembling puzzles and performing drama. This strategy aligns with Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences theory, which posits that



intelligence is not singular but multiple, and that every child possesses distinct potential for intelligence (Gardner, 2020).

Regarding interests, students tend to be strongly attracted to creative and collaborative activities. This is reflected in their positive responses during group assignments, such as creating songs, composing drama stories, drawing posters, and making chants. When students are given the freedom to choose activities aligned with their interests, they demonstrate increased participation and motivation to learn (Lestari et al., 2023). These findings support an interest-based learning approach, which is believed to enhance student engagement and learning success (Rusmalawati et al., 2024).

Nonetheless, in the process of identifying and developing talents and interests, several significant challenges were found. One major challenge is students' limited focus and attention span. Early childhood students generally have short attention spans, which are exacerbated by non-conducive classroom environments or monotonous teaching methods (Sadiyah et al., 2024). This challenge requires teachers to continuously innovate in their use of varied and engaging teaching methods to maintain students' focus and enhance their comprehension of the subject matter (Susanti et al., 2024).

Another challenge is the varying levels of self-confidence among students. Some of them are reluctant to perform or participate actively due to fear of making mistakes, embarrassment, or a lack of confidence in their own abilities. This condition not only affects their engagement in learning but also potentially hinders the development of communication and teamwork skills, which are crucial for 21st-century learning. In this regard, teachers play a significant role in creating a safe, comfortable, and supportive classroom environment, enabling students to feel valued and given opportunities to develop according to their potential (Ani, 2025). Strengthening the affective aspect through sincere praise, recognition of efforts, and assigning roles according to the child's capacity are effective strategies for building self-confidence (Macarau & Stevanus, 2022). With a positive learning environment and adequate emotional support, initially passive students can grow to become more active, confident, and capable of optimally actualizing their potential in various aspects of learning (Noviyanti et al., 2024).

3. Implementation of Talent- and Interest-Based Differentiated Instruction in the Salat Akhlak Subject at SD ICP Al-Falah Darussalam Waru Sidoarjo

The study results indicate that the implementation of talent- and interest-based differentiated instruction in the Salat Akhlak subjects at SD ICP Al-Falah Darussalam Waru Sidoarjo was conducted through a systematic, context-based approach, with careful consideration of students' individual characteristics. This



strategy stems from educators' awareness of the importance of respecting the diversity of abilities, interests, and learning styles of elementary school children at the concrete cognitive developmental stage. Teachers actively identify students' learning preferences through direct observation, classroom reflection, and formative evaluation to design adaptive and meaningful learning experiences.

The differentiated instruction implementation involves offering a variety of task options that allow students to express their understanding of the material in ways that suit their talents and interests. In practice, teachers provide multiple activity choices, such as creating chants, composing songs, organizing dramas, or designing posters about the manners of eating and drinking as exemplified by the Prophet. These choices provide opportunities for students who excel in the verbal-linguistic, musical, kinesthetic, or visual-spatial domains, thereby facilitating each child's full potential in an inclusive and empowering learning environment.

These activities are concrete manifestations of the differentiated learning theory developed by Carol Ann Tomlinson, which emphasizes that teachers should adjust content, process, and product according to students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles (Tomlinson & Mctighe, 2006). Teachers demonstrate instructional adaptation through careful planning, such as surveying students' learning styles and tendencies beforehand. The survey results serve as a foundation for designing varied and enjoyable activities. Tasks such as puzzle assembly, group discussions, and presentations also reflect the use of project-based and experiential learning approaches, which positively impact students' focus and participation throughout the learning process.

Differentiated learning is also realized through the integration of various learning styles: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. The teacher initiates the learning process by presenting the material using PowerPoint media and verbal narration as visual and auditory stimuli. Subsequently, students are guided to select follow-up activities that align with their dominant strengths. For example, students with a visual preference tend to choose creating posters, while those with a kinesthetic inclination are more interested in organizing or delivering presentations in the form of drama. This approach enables active student engagement, thereby significantly enhancing both motivation and material retention (Purwowidodo & Zaini, 2023).

From a pedagogical perspective, the implementation of differentiated learning successfully fosters a collaborative and constructive learning environment (Azizah & Astutik, 2025). Students are not merely passive recipients of information but are encouraged to construct meaning through creative and reflective activities. This practice supports the development of critical thinking, teamwork, and communication skills all of which align with the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila*. Moreover,



providing choice and limited autonomy in the learning process has been shown to boost self-confidence, especially among students who were initially reluctant to participate or afraid of making mistakes.

Despite the positive outcomes yielded by differentiation strategies, teachers continue to face several challenges during implementation. One primary challenge is the limited face-to-face time, which requires teachers to manage the classroom carefully to ensure that all groups receive proportional guidance. Additionally, fluctuating student attention and significant differences in learning pace compel teachers to continually innovate in designing adaptive learning scenarios. Nonetheless, teachers' efforts to anticipate these challenges by modifying instructional methods and utilizing educational technology demonstrate a strong commitment to the quality of the teaching and learning process.

Technology serves as an indispensable supportive tool in the differentiation process. Teachers leverage digital media such as animations, educational videos, and interactive applications that can capture students' attention and improve memory retention. Technology is also employed as a means of creative assessment through digital presentations or group portfolio-based evaluations. This illustrates that the *Salat Akhlak* (SA) learning process is no longer confined to conventional approaches but has transformed toward more contextual, engaging, and student-characteristic-aligned learning suitable for the 21st century.

Overall, the implementation of talent- and interest-based differentiated learning in the *Salat Akhlak* subject at SD ICP Al-Falah Darussalam Waru Sidoarjo has been carried out effectively and systematically. This strategy not only enhances students' understanding of Islamic values but also fosters enthusiasm for learning and a sense of responsibility. Supported by a thematic approach, the use of technology, and teachers' awareness of student-centered learning principles, this differentiation practice constitutes a contextual learning model worthy of replication in other educational institutions.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the *Salat Akhlak* program at SD ICP Al-Falah Darussalam Waru Sidoarjo represents a contextual and innovative model of Islamic religious education that emphasizes the integration of worship practice and character formation. As a locally developed curriculum, *Salat Akhlak* shifts the focus of learning from purely theoretical religious instruction



toward the internalization of values through habituation, practical application, and exemplary conduct. By prioritizing prayer competence and moral cultivation while still encompassing Qur'anic understanding and prophetic history, the program demonstrates a holistic approach to nurturing students' spiritual and ethical development from an early age. Identifying students' talents and interests reveals diverse learning profiles, including visual, auditory, and kinesthetic preferences, as well as varying levels of confidence and attention span. These characteristics highlight the need for responsive, personalized instructional strategies. Through observation, reflection, and formative evaluation, teachers can recognize students' unique potential and design learning experiences that align with their psychological and developmental needs. The implementation of talent- and interest-based differentiated instruction in the *Salat Akhlak* subjects has been carried out systematically and effectively. By providing varied task options—such as creating chants, composing songs, performing dramas, and designing posters—teachers accommodate multiple intelligences and empower students to express their understanding in ways that suit their strengths. The integration of project-based learning, experiential activities, and educational technology further enhances engagement, motivation, and comprehension. Although challenges such as limited instructional time, fluctuating attention spans, and differences in learning pace persist, teachers demonstrate adaptive classroom management and continuous innovation in instructional design. Overall, the differentiated approach not only strengthens students' mastery of Islamic values but also fosters confidence, collaboration, responsibility, and active participation. The *Salat Akhlak* model thus reflects a sustainable and replicable framework for student-centered religious education that harmonizes spiritual growth, character development, and 21st-century learning competencies.

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