

IMPLEMENTATION OF DIFFERENTIATED LEARNING MODEL WITH INQUIRY METHOD IN IRE LEARNING IN IMPROVING STUDENTS' CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

Muhammad Izzul Islam

Universits Islam Raden Rahmat Malang

izzul.i92@gmail.com

Ilma Fahmi Aziza

Universits Islam Raden Rahmat Malang

ilmaaziza@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyse the application of the differentiated learning model with the inquiry method in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning and its impact on improving students' critical thinking skills. Differentiated learning tailored to students' needs, abilities, and interests, as well as inquiry methods that focus on active inquiry and questioning, are seen as two mutually supportive approaches to developing critical thinking skills. This literature study examines various relevant sources regarding both approaches, as well as how they can be applied in the context of IRE learning to create more effective and meaningful learning experiences. The results of the study show that the application of differentiated learning models can provide space for students to learn according to their ability level, making it easier for them to understand and analyse the teachings of Islam in more depth. In addition, the inquiry method, which emphasises students' active involvement in seeking and investigating information, can encourage them to think more critically about religious concepts. The combination of these two approaches has been proven to improve students' ability to analyse, evaluate, and relate religious knowledge to a broader social situation. This study concludes that the implementation of differentiated learning models with inquiry methods in IRE learning can improve students' critical thinking and make a positive contribution to shaping a more reflective and applicable understanding of religion.

Keywords: Differentiated Learning, Inquiry Method, Critical Thinking, Islamic Religious Education, Active Learning.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in Indonesia plays a pivotal role in fostering students' character, morals, and religious dispositions. As a subject that imparts religious values and ethical principles, IRE aims to develop students' critical thinking skills, which are essential for their application in daily life. Nonetheless, the instructional approach in many schools often remains focused on rote memorisation and passive reception, lacking sufficient opportunities for students to engage in critical analysis, reflection, and in-depth evaluation of complex issues. This reliance on traditional pedagogical methods presents a significant obstacle to enhancing the quality of education, limiting the development of analytical and evaluative skills that are crucial for students' holistic growth.

According to the results of research by Rohayah (2024), many IRE teachers still use the traditional learning approach, which emphasises more one-way teaching from teachers to students. In this learning model, students tend to be passive and not actively involved in the critical thinking process. This kind of transactional learning hinders students from developing their critical thinking skills. IRE learning that only focuses on cognitive aspects, without involving aspects of critical thinking skills, makes students less able to face increasingly complex social and religious challenges (Rohayah et al., 2024).

To improve students' critical thinking skills, various innovations in learning methods and models need to be implemented. One of the most relevant models is the differentiated instruction model. This model emphasises teaching that is tailored to each student's needs, interests, and learning styles, thus allowing students to learn in a way that is most effective for them. Based on research conducted (Budiyanto, 2016), differentiated learning models can increase student motivation and understanding because the approach applied is more student-centred. This model also provides students with the opportunity to work according to their level of ability, allowing each student to develop at a pace and in a way that suits their needs (Budiyanto, 2016).

In the context of IRE learning, the application of differentiated learning models can help maximise student learning outcomes by accommodating individual differences in the classroom. For example, students who are faster to understand religious concepts may be given more complex challenges or assignments, while students who need more help may be given material with a simpler and more in-depth approach. In this way, learning is not only one-way, but students have a more active role in their learning process. Research by Sukmawati also emphasises that differentiated learning is very effective in creating an inclusive learning atmosphere where all students can develop according to their capacity (Furewati, 2022).

In addition to the differentiated learning model, the inquiry method is also very effective in improving students' critical thinking skills. The Inquiry Method encourages students to actively engage in the learning process by searching for information, asking questions, and exploring various possible answers. In IRE learning, this method can be applied to invite students not only to receive religious information passively but to actively think, analyse, and evaluate religious teachings and socio-religious issues in society. Research by Asror shows that the application of the Inquiry method in learning can encourage students to develop critical thinking skills, as they are trained to independently dig into knowledge and construct logical arguments (Asror, 2022).

The inquiry method also provides students with the opportunity to learn deeply about the topic being studied. By using this approach, students are expected to not only acquire knowledge about religion but also be able to filter information and make decisions based on critical and reflective understanding. In the context of IRE, the application of the Inquiry

method can involve students in activities such as group discussions, case studies, or small research related to contemporary religious issues. In this way, students not only learn about religious teachings but are also trained to think critically about the relevance of those teachings in real life.

The application of these two approaches (differentiated learning model and Inquiry method) in IRE learning is expected to overcome learning problems that are still trapped in conventional methods. By combining these two approaches, teachers can create a more interactive and well-rounded learning experience for students. Learning that is based on students' individual needs, coupled with an approach that challenges them to think critically, can create an atmosphere that supports the development of higher-order thinking skills in a religious context.

However, although these two approaches have great potential in improving students' critical thinking skills, their implementation in the field is not always easy. IRE teachers need to have a good understanding of these two models and how to integrate them into their learning planning. Research by Wantini reveals that many teachers still experience difficulties in implementing student-focused learning models, such as differentiated learning models, due to a lack of skills in adapting materials and strategies to diverse student needs. Therefore, proper training and mentoring for teachers is essential to ensure the successful implementation of these two learning models (Wantini et al., 2023).

Despite these challenges, various studies show that the use of differentiated learning models combined with the Inquiry method can have a positive impact on the development of student's critical thinking skills. In a study conducted by Solichin (2017), it was found that students who engaged in inquiry-based learning showed significant improvements in their critical thinking skills and analytical abilities. This shows that by applying the right methods, teachers can help students not only understand the IRE material but also develop a critical attitude towards religious and life issues (Solichin, 2017).

Based on an extensive review of relevant literature and empirical studies, it can be inferred that implementing a differentiated learning model in conjunction with the Inquiry method within Islamic Religious Education (IRE) possesses significant potential for fostering students' critical thinking abilities. This pedagogical approach allows learners the autonomy to engage with instructional content in ways that resonate with their individual learning preferences. Concurrently, the Inquiry method facilitates an active learning environment by promoting critical engagement, collaborative discourse, and in-depth exploration of religious topics. Consequently, IRE is envisioned not merely as a mechanism for knowledge transmission but as a dynamic space that cultivates essential critical thinking competencies, which are crucial for students' personal and intellectual development.

However, although these two learning models have great potential, there are still few studies that specifically examine their application in IRE learning. Therefore, this study aims to explore the implementation of differentiated learning models with the Inquiry method in IRE learning and

to see the extent to which these two approaches can improve students' critical thinking skills. Thus, the results of this study are expected to make a significant contribution to the development of more effective learning methods and models in religious education.

Based on the above background, the main purpose of this study is to find out how the implementation of differentiated learning models with the Inquiry method in IRE learning can improve students' critical thinking skills. This research will also look at the factors that affect the successful implementation of the two models, as well as the challenges faced by teachers in implementing them in the field. In addition, this research is expected to provide new insights into the development of learning methods in Indonesian schools, especially in the field of religious education.

METHOD

This research is qualitative research using the literature study method. Literature study is research that is carried out through the collection and analysis of reading materials derived from books, articles and other written materials related to the discussion. The researcher aims to identify the application of differentiated learning models and inquiry methods in IRE learning and their impact on the development of student's critical thinking skills.

Researchers will also evaluate the results of previous studies to see how the two models can support each other in creating a more interactive and reflective learning experience. Solichin (2017) suggests that a learning approach that emphasises critical thinking can help students not only understand the subject matter but also evaluate and make decisions based on a deep understanding of the (Solichin, 2017). Thus, this research is expected to contribute to the development of more effective learning methods and models to improve the quality of IRE learning in Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Application of Differentiated Learning Model in IRE

The Differentiated Instruction model is an approach that adapts teaching to the diverse needs, interests, and abilities of students. Furewati (2022) Explains that the model focuses on three main elements: content, process, and product, which are tailored to match different ways of learning for students. In the context of Islamic Religious Education Learning (IRE), this model allows teachers to adapt religious teaching materials to make them easier to understand by students with various levels of ability. Learning tailored to individual needs is essential to create an effective learning experience where students can think more critically about the religious topics being taught, both in terms of understanding and the application of religious values in daily life. Likewise, in its implementation, it is hoped that all students can be fully facilitated. Teachers are also expected to include this differentiated learning model in the curriculum (Kamila et al., 2024).

The Importance of Differentiated Learning in Improving Critical Thinking

Differentiated learning has great potential in developing students' critical thinking skills. When students are provided with learning tailored to their learning style and ability level, they are better able to internalise knowledge and develop analytical and evaluative abilities. Ningsih *et al.* (2024) Emphasises that "Differentiated learning for students with different abilities allows each student to reach their maximum potential in thinking critically and creatively" (Ningsih et al., 2024). In IRE learning, for example, students can more easily engage in discussions that discuss complex religious issues because they already have an understanding that is appropriate to their level of ability, which underlies sharper critical thinking skills.

Difficulties in the Implementation of Differentiated Learning

While differentiated learning models offer many benefits, they are not always easy to implement, especially in classrooms with large numbers of students and very diverse abilities. Teachers must have skills in designing activities that can accommodate the individual needs of each student. (Kamila et al., 2024) States that "Teachers who implement differentiated learning must be prepared to provide a variety of teaching materials, instruction, and assessments that can be understood by all students, which sometimes requires more time and effort" (Kamila et al., 2024). In the context of IRE, this difficulty can occur when teachers are faced with topics that require a deep understanding and application of religious values in real life, which, of course, varies from student to student.

Overall, the application of differentiated learning models in IRE learning can contribute significantly to improving students' critical thinking skills. When students are allowed to learn in a way that best suits their learning style, they tend to be more actively involved in the thought process and analyse information. This is reflected in research by Asror (2022), which states that "The learning presented by students' needs and interests allows them to develop stronger critical thinking skills, especially in the context of religious learning" (Asror, 2022). The application of this model allows students to explore religious topics in a more in-depth and critical way, which enriches their understanding of the teachings of Islam.

Definition and Principles of the Inquiry Method

The inquiry method is a learning approach that focuses on developing critical thinking skills through active inquiry and information retrieval. Astor (2022) explains that "The inquiry method provides students with the opportunity to ask questions, conduct investigations, and find answers to problems they face independently" (Asror, 2022). In the context of Islamic Religious Education (IRE), this method allows students to not only receive religious information but also engage in the process of searching for and analysing religious concepts through a more reflective and in-depth learning experience.

Application of the Inquiry Method in IRE Learning

The inquiry method is very relevant to be applied in IRE learning because it can encourage students to think critically about Islamic religious teachings. For example, on the topic of justice in Islam, teachers can start learning by asking questions such as, "What is justice according to Islam?" or "How are the principles of justice applied in daily life?" Through this approach, students not only learn by receiving answers from teachers, but they are invited to develop their understanding through inquiry and discussion. This allows them to dig deeper and criticise religious teachings more analytically. Solichin (2017) emphasises that "The inquiry method in IRE learning facilitates students to more actively ask, seek, and find solutions to problems related to religious teachings, which in turn can improve their critical thinking skills" (Solichin, 2017).

Active Involvement of Students in the Learning Process

The inquiry method requires students to be actively involved in the learning process. This encourages them to think critically in understanding the subject matter, not just memorising or receiving information passively. According to Sugiyono (2017), "The inquiry method provides students with the opportunity to explore and find answers to their questions, which facilitates the development of critical and reflective thinking skills" (Sugiyono, 2017, Educational Research Methods: Quantitative, Qualitative, and R&D Approaches). In IRE learning, by using the inquiry method, students will not only gain knowledge about religious teachings but also be invited to reflect and analyse their understanding of these teachings, as well as relate them to their social and life situations.

Advantages of the Inquiry Method in Improving Students' Critical Thinking

One of the main advantages of using the inquiry method in IRE learning is the improvement of students' critical thinking skills. When students are asked to seek answers to questions or problems given by teachers, they tend to be more involved in the thought process and information processing. It also allows them to see different perspectives and develop the analytical skills necessary to understand religious teachings more deeply. (Arlina et al., 2023) states that "The inquiry method not only teaches students to memorise facts, but also to evaluate information, connect ideas, and make decisions that are more based on deep understanding" (Arlina et al., 2023). In IRE learning, this can improve students' ability to think critically about various religious topics they study.

Challenges in the Application of the Inquiry Method in IRE Learning

Although the inquiry method is very effective in developing critical thinking, its application in IRE learning also faces several challenges. One of the main challenges is the need to create a learning environment that is supportive and provides space for students to think freely and critically. Teachers need to manage the classroom well and provide appropriate guidance so that students stay focused on finding information and

developing their arguments. Asror (2022) states that "Teachers must be able to design learning that can encourage students to actively ask questions and explore their ideas without feeling inhibited or intimidated by the majority view" (Asror, 2022). Another challenge is developing students' skills in conducting research or investigations independently, which requires extra time and support from teachers.

Application of Differentiated Learning Model in IRE

The differentiated learning model provides an opportunity for each student to learn according to their abilities, interests, and learning styles, which can improve their understanding of the learning material. (Elcery & Because, 2023) stated that in differentiated learning, "Teachers need to adapt teaching materials, learning processes, and assignments to suit the individual needs of students, allowing them to learn at a level that suits their abilities" (Elcery & Because, 2023). In the context of Islamic Religious Education (IRE), this model provides opportunities for teachers to adjust the way religious teaching materials are delivered, for example, by using various visual resources, texts, and group discussions, so that students can gain a better understanding. This approach not only improves understanding but also opens up space for the development of students' critical thinking towards religious concepts (Elcery & Because, 2023).

The Effect of Differentiated Learning on Critical Thinking

Learning tailored to students' individual needs has the potential to improve their critical thinking skills. In IRE learning, this approach provides students with the opportunity to analyse and discuss religious concepts in more depth, as well as relate them to contemporary social or ethical issues. According to Sukmawati (2022), "With differentiated learning, students can obtain a more personalised and relevant learning experience, which in turn can improve their ability to think critically and reflectively on religious teachings" (Furewati, 2022). For example, students with different abilities may be given the task of analysing Qur'anic verses or hadiths related to social justice in different ways, allowing them to develop their critical perspectives.

Application of the Inquiry Method in IRE Learning

The inquiry method prioritises the search for information through questions and investigations, which encourages students to be active in the learning process. Solichin, (2017) explains that "The inquiry method allows students to not only passively receive knowledge, but to explore, analyse, and infer their information, which is very effective in improving critical thinking skills" (Solichin, 2017). In IRE learning, teachers can ask questions that spark reflection and discussion, such as "What is the meaning of justice in Islam, and how can we apply it in modern life?" Through this approach, students are invited to think more critically about religious teachings and assess the relevance of religious principles in today's context (Maulana et al., 2023).

Student Engagement in the Learning Process Through Inquiry

One of the main advantages of the inquiry method is the active involvement of students in the learning process. Sugiyono (2017) states that "The inquiry method allows students to take on the role of investigators, who are directly involved in the search for solutions and problem-solving through in-depth analysis and evaluation" (Sugiyono, 2017, Educational Research Methods: Quantitative, Qualitative, and R&D Approaches). In IRE learning, students who are involved in the investigation of religious issues through the inquiry method not only acquire knowledge but also develop their critical thinking skills. For example, through group discussions or individual research on religious topics, students can explore a variety of perspectives and develop their arguments based on the understanding they have gained, which encourages the development of critical thinking and argumentative skills.

Analysis

Strategies in the Application of Differentiated Models to Improve Critical Thinking

To improve critical thinking in IRE learning, teachers can use various strategies contained in the differentiated learning model. One effective strategy is to use an open-ended question-based approach, where teachers ask questions that challenge students to think more deeply about a particular topic. For example, in learning about social justice in Islam, teachers can ask questions such as, "How can the principles of justice in Islam be applied to social issues today?" This encourages students to think critically and connect religious teachings with social reality. According to Sani (2013), "Differentiated learning allows each student to be actively engaged in critical discussions relevant to their personal and social contexts" (Sani, 2013, Differentiated Learning: Concepts, Strategies, and Implementation).

Collaboration of Differentiated Models and Inquiry Methods in Improving Critical Thinking

The combination of differentiated learning models with inquiry methods has been proven to create a more holistic and immersive learning experience. According to research conducted by Harfiani, "The combination of differentiated learning and inquiry provides greater space for students to critically explore religious topics, as both emphasise students' active involvement in seeking and processing information" (Harfiani & Setiawan, 2024) In IRE learning, teachers can tailor materials and approaches to different levels of students' abilities while facilitating them to ask questions and investigate religious concepts further. Thus, these two approaches support each other in developing students' critical thinking skills, which are indispensable in understanding and applying religious teachings correctly and relevant to the context of their lives.

Application of the Inquiry Method in IRE Learning

The inquiry method is very relevant to be applied in IRE learning because it can encourage students to think critically about Islamic religious teachings. For example, on the topic of justice in Islam, teachers can start learning by asking questions such as, "What is justice according to Islam?" or "How are the principles of justice applied in daily life?" Through this approach, students not only learn by receiving answers from teachers but they are invited to develop their understanding through inquiry and discussion. This allows them to dig deeper and criticise religious teachings more analytically. Arlina (2023) emphasises that "The inquiry method in IRE learning facilitates students to be more active in asking, seeking, and finding solutions to problems related to religious teachings, which in turn can improve their critical thinking skills"(Arlina et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

Based on a comprehensive literature review, it can be concluded that the integration of differentiated learning models alongside inquiry-based methods within Islamic Religious Education (IRE) holds significant promise for fostering students' critical thinking skills. Differentiated learning accommodates individual student needs, aptitudes, and learning preferences, thereby enabling each learner to engage with religious content in a more nuanced and personally relevant manner. This adaptive approach to instruction and assessment not only enhances students' cognitive engagement but also supports a learning environment where critical thinking is actively nurtured. Through differentiated and inquiry-based activities, students are encouraged to critically analyse, evaluate, and contextualise religious concepts, facilitating a deeper connection between the material and their personal life experiences.

The inquiry method, which focuses on active inquiry and questioning, strengthens the differentiated learning process by allowing students to think critically and reflectively. Through this method, students not only receive knowledge from teachers, but they actively seek, criticise, and relate the information they obtain to personal experiences or contemporary issues. This active inquiry encourages students to develop critical thinking skills, such as analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of information, which are crucial to a deeper understanding of Islamic religious teachings. Therefore, the incorporation of differentiated learning models and inquiry methods can create more effective and meaningful learning experiences, which not only improve religious understanding but also develop critical thinking skills necessary in daily life.

Thus, the implementation of these two approaches in IRE learning has been proven to have a positive impact on improving students' critical thinking skills, which allows them to be more critical in analysing and understanding the teachings of Islam. This shows the importance of using adaptive and active inquiry-based learning strategies in shaping the younger generation, who not only understand religion theoretically but are also able to apply religious values critically in their lives.

REFERENCES

- Arlina, A., Ramadhan, M. R., Pohan, N., Mandasari, D., & Nurhasanah, N. (2023). Penerapan Strategi Inquiry dalam Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam. *Anwarul*, 3(5), 888–898.
<https://doi.org/10.58578/anwarul.v3i5.1418>
- Asror, F. M. (2022). Implementasi Metode Inquiry dalam Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam. *DAYAH: Journal of Islamic Education*, 5(1), 75. <https://doi.org/10.22373/jie.v5i1.11230>
- Budiyanto, M. A. K. (2016). Sintaks 45 Metode Pembelajaran dalam Student Centered Learning (SCL). In *Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang. Malang* (pp. 1–174).
- Elcery, M., & Satria, R. (2023). Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam Berbasis Diferensiasi Gaya Belajar Siswa Kelas IX di SMP Negeri 7 Padang. *As-Sabiqun*, 5(3), 861–873.
<https://doi.org/10.36088/assabiqun.v5i3.3336>
- Harfiani, R., & Setiawan, H. R. (2024). Differentiated Learning Process in the Independent Curriculum for the Subject of Islamic Religious Education. ... *International Journal of Education ...*, 5(5), 1083–1090.
<https://dinastipub.org/DIJEMSS/article/view/2676%0Ahttps://dina>
[stipub.org/DIJEMSS/article/download/2676/1789](https://dinastipub.org/DIJEMSS/article/download/2676/1789)
- Kamila, C. A., Taufiq, H. N., & Yusuf, Z. (2024). Analisis Kesiapan Guru PAI dalam Implementasi Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi di SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Malang. *Jurnal PAI ...*, 6(4), 219–232.
- Maulana, A., Rasyid, A., Hasibuan, F. H., Siahaan, A., & Amiruddin. (2023). Upaya Guru PAI Melakukan Refleksi Pembelajaran Diferensiasi dalam Kurikulum Belajar Mandiri. *Jurnal Pendidikan*, 3(1), 203–212.
- Ningsih, T., Sit, M., & Rakhmawati, F. (2024). Differentiated Learning In Islamic Religious Education Subject In Improving Students' Creativity. ... *Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 10, 91–101.
<https://jurnal.radenfatah.ac.id/index.php/Tadrib/article/view/18906>
- Rohayah, A. A., Lathifah, H., Adelin, N., Saleha, T. N., & Khasanah, U. (2024). Efektivitas Penggunaan Metode Ceramah dan Diskusi dalam Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam Kelas XI di SMA N 3 Babelan. *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 6(2), 130–139.
- Solichin, M. M. (2017). Penerapan Model Pembelajaran Inquiry Discovery dalam Pendidikan Agama Islam. *Tadris*, 12(2), 214–231.
<http://repository.iainmadura.ac.id/id/eprint/224>
- Sukmawati, A. (2022). Implementasi Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi dalam Kurikulum Merdeka pada Mata Pelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam. *EL-BANAT: Jurnal Pemikiran Dan ...*, 12(117), 126.
<http://ejournal.kopertais4.or.id/susi/index.php/elbanat/article/view/3633>

Wantini, Hopid, A., Rosa Butam, B. M., Arqam, L., & Perawironegoro, D. (2023). Differentiated Learning in the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum To Improve the Learning Outcome of Islamic Education in the Elementary School. *International Journal of Education Humanities and Social Science*, 06(06), 185–200. <https://doi.org/10.54922/ijehss.2023.0620>