

## Enhancing Social Skills in Islamic Religious Education at the Junior High School Level: A Differential Instruction Approach

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**Abstract:** This research aimed to see how the cultivation and improvement of students' social skills through a differentiated instruction approach. The research used quantitative with quasi-experimental method. Data collection was done by reviewing documents, interviews with related parties, especially teachers and students related to social skills and differentiated instruction approaches. Observation was used to see the development of social skills and learning. Questionnaires used to see how the development of students' social skills after learning with a differentiated approach, these resulted combined with observation results. The resulted showed that differentiated instruction was conducted by conducting a needs analysis of students' learning styles in the classroom. Then, the teacher analyses the results and determines the strategy that suits the students' learning styles to be used in delivering the material. The presentation used with a variety of methods and techniques that facilitate students' learning styles. So, the results showed that this approach has a significant effect on improving students' social skills. Suggestions for future researchers, conduct further research with a larger population and different types of learning styles.

**Keywords:** social skill; differential; instruction; islamic education

### Introduction

Students in junior high school are in a critical stage of development, where they begin to form their identity and values. Therefore, the learning environment should be designed in such a way as to provide learning experiences that are not only academic but also shape character and positive social attitudes. Islamic Religious Education provides a strong foundation for

achieving this goal, given the moral and ethical values taught in its curriculum. In this context, it is important to recognize that each student has a different instruction style. Some may be more responsive to formal approaches, while others may respond better to more interactive methods. Differential instruction, or learning tailored to individual needs and learning styles, offers a solution to cater for this diversity (Sarah et al., 2019).

Junior high school students often grapple with various social issues that can

affect their overall well-being and development. **Bullying**, peer pressure, social exclusion and lack of empathy are some of the common challenges. Let's discuss a few examples to better understand the multifaceted nature of these issues. **Bullying:** Bullying is still a rampant problem in junior high school (Alhamuddin, 2019; Alhamuddin, Alhamuddin, Bukhori, 2016) I. The dynamics of adolescence can sometimes lead to an imbalance of power and social hierarchy, thus fostering an enabling environment for bullying. Differential instruction can be used to create awareness about the detrimental effects of bullying and to promote a culture of mutual respect and understanding (Schleicher A, 2019).

Tabel 1: Bullying Data

No	Type of Bullying	%
1	Intimidate	15%
2	Ostracized	18%
3	Insulted	20%
4	Threatened	14%
5	Pushed	13%
6	Gossiped	20%
<b>Total</b>		100%

Source: PISA (2018)

**Peer Pressure**, the desire to conform to peer expectations is a common struggle among junior high school students. Whether it is related to appearance, behaviour or academic performance, peer pressure can significantly influence one's choices. A differential instruction approach can empower students to make informed decisions, instilling confidence and resilience to resist negative influences. **Social Ostracization**, the fear of being socially ostracized can be emotionally

challenging for students. It can lead to feelings of isolation and negatively impact mental health. Differential instruction strategies can foster an inclusive classroom environment, emphasizing the value of diversity and encouraging students to respect each other's differences (Sarah et al., 2019).

Differential instruction recognizes that each student has unique strengths, weaknesses, interests and learning styles. By capitalizing on this diversity, teachers can create more relevant and engaging learning experiences for each student. In the context of Islamic Religious Education in junior secondary schools, this becomes even more important as it covers spiritual and moral aspects that require a more personalized approach (Alhamuddin, 2018).

When considering social skills, the role of differential instruction becomes very significant. Some students may already have good social skills, while others may need additional support to develop these abilities. Differential instruction allows teachers to provide an approach that suits each student's level of social skills, ensuring that no student is left behind in the development of this aspect.

The advantage of differential instruction also lies in its ability to tailor learning content to students' needs. In the context of Islamic Religious Education, this can result in a deeper understanding of religious values and their application in daily life. For example, through this approach, students can be invited to reflect on how religious teachings can guide them in their behaviour and interactions with others. It is important to remember that differential instruction is not just about delivering material differently, but also involves a deeper understanding of students' individual needs and potential. Teachers must understand the characteristics of each student, both in terms of spiritual and social intelligence, to design appropriate

learning experiences. In the development of social skills through Islamic Religious Education, this approach can incorporate a variety of methods, including group discussions, role plays and collaborative projects. Students can be invited to understand and apply religious values in everyday life situations, promoting attitudes of tolerance, empathy and cooperation.

As such, this article will further explore how differential instruction approaches can be integrated in the context of Islamic Religious Education at the junior secondary level to enhance students' social skills. Through a better understanding of individual needs and holistic social skills development, we can create a more inclusive and relevant educational environment for the younger generation.

## Literature Review

### *Differential Instruction*

Differential instruction is a learning approach that adapts teaching methods and materials to the needs, abilities and learning styles of individual students. The concept was first introduced by Benjamin Bloom in 1971 and then further developed by educational experts. This approach focuses on diversity in the learning process, recognizing that each student has unique characteristics and learning needs. The Importance of Differential Instruction in Educational Contexts (Lodge et al., 2018; Sun et al., 2022).

Differential instruction and multiple intelligences are interrelated in the context of inclusive education. Differential instruction adapts teaching methods to suit students' learning styles, while multiple intelligences recognize the diversity of students' intelligences (Alhamuddin et al., 2023). This approach allows teachers to present material

in a variety of ways, utilizing students' intellectual potential holistically. By understanding the diversity of intelligence types, teachers can design teaching that supports the full development of each student's potential, creating an inclusive and motivating learning environment.



**Picture 1:** Multiple Intelligences

Differential instruction has significant relevance in improving learning effectiveness, especially when applied to the development of students' social skills. By recognizing individual differences, this approach can create an inclusive and responsive learning environment. Teachers who apply differential instruction can provide more intensive support to students who need it while challenging students who have higher skill levels.

The Relationship Between Differential Instruction and Social Skills Differential instruction not only focuses on cognitive aspects but also pays attention to the development of students' social skills. As an integral part of character education, social skills include interpersonal skills, effective communication, empathy, tolerance and cooperation. Through differentiated learning, teachers can tailor teaching approaches to facilitate the development of social skills, recognizing the unique needs of each student in terms of social interaction (Saubari & I Gde Wawan Sudatha, 2023; UNESCO, 1972).

Differentiation Strategies to Improve Social Skills-operative Groups: Group

learning can improve students' social skills, and by applying differentiation, teachers can form groups that support positive interactions between individuals with different abilities. Use of Various Materials and Media: Providing a variety of learning resources and media helps students with different learning styles to respond to information in ways that are most effective for them, while building social skills through various forms of interaction(Ally, 2004; Bulkani et al., 2022; Visser et al., 2023).

Formative Assessment: Differentiation can also be done through formative assessment which provides continuous feedback to students. This allows teachers to understand students' social progress and provide additional support if needed. The Impact of Differential Instruction on Social Skills of Junior High School Students Empirical studies show that the implementation of differential instruction at the junior high school level can significantly improve students' social skills. By considering differences in learning styles, levels of understanding, and social needs, differential instruction creates a supportive environment for positive character building and strong interpersonal skills in junior high school students.

Challenges in Implementing Differential Instruction Despite its many benefits, the implementation of differential instruction also faces challenges. It requires in-depth knowledge of each student, efficient time management, and adequate administrative support to ensure the success of this approach.

### *Social Skill*

Social skills refer to an individual's skills and proficiency in interacting,

communicating and collaborating with others. At the junior high school level, the development of social skills becomes a critical aspect in the formation of students' social identity, preparing them to interact in an increasingly complex society. Development of Social Skills in Junior High School is a significant phase of social development. They begin to develop a more complex understanding of social relationships, build self-identity, and explore their role in social groups. Social skills at this stage include aspects such as empathy, conflict resolution, collaboration, and interpersonal communication.(Ghavifekr & Rosdy, 2015)

Circle Social Skill is a learning model that emphasizes the development of students' social skills through a circle-based approach. With a focus on aspects of communication, cooperation and empathy, this approach provides a learning environment that supports social growth. Students are encouraged to participate in group activities, respond to their friends' opinions and build positive relationships. Through Circle Social Skills, students learn to recognize emotions, increase self-understanding and develop interpersonal skills vital for success in everyday life. This model creates an inclusive environment that encourages collaboration, bridges relationships between individuals and strengthens social intelligence.



**Picture 2:** Circle of Social Skill

Social skills have a strong impact on the academic success, mental well-being, and social adaptation of middle school children. Improved social skills not only facilitate healthy interactions with peers and authority figures but also form the basis for positive character and ethical development (Saleh et al., 2016; Snow, 2004). The school environment plays an important role in shaping the social skills of junior high school students. Daily interactions with teachers and classmates, extracurricular activities, and learning approaches that support collaboration and communication all contribute to the development of social skills.

**Family Support:** The family environment plays a crucial role in shaping social skills. Children who get emotional and social support from their families tend to have better social skills.

**Peer Interaction:** Interaction with peers provides opportunities for junior high school children to develop their social skills. These include the ability to communicate, cooperate and handle conflicts (Triwardhani et al., 2023).

Positive role models, whether teachers or neighbourhood figures, can provide inspiration and guidance for students in developing social skills. Islamic Religious Education in junior high school has a significant role in shaping students' social skills. The values of religious teachings, such as compassion, justice and tolerance, can be the basis for the development of healthy social skills. Challenges that may be faced in the development of junior high school students' social skills involve individual differences, interpersonal conflicts, and the exploration of identity and social roles. Teachers and school administrators need to understand these challenges to design effective strategies for developing students' social skills (Rachmah et al., 2022).

## **Research Method**

This research uses a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design. This approach was chosen to enable more in-depth statistical analyses of the influence of independent variables on dependent variables without fully manipulating the variables, as in a real experiment. The study population includes junior high school students at PGII 2 Junior High School Bandung. The sample will be purposively selected from several schools to ensure adequate representation. Students will be randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups (Miles, 1986). The manipulated or observed variables in this study are, for example, differential instruction methods applied in PAI subjects. The variable was measured to see the impact of the independent variable, for example, the improvement of students' social skills. Instruments in the form of tests will be given before and after the treatment to measure the initial level and changes in students' social skills. Questionnaires can be used to obtain students' perceptions and responses to the differential instruction method applied.

The experimental group will receive a differential instruction method, while the control group will receive a conventional learning method. The treatment is conducted during a certain predetermined period. The data collected will be analyzed using statistical methods such as t-tests to compare the differences between the experimental and control groups. Regression analysis may also be used to identify the relationship between the independent and dependent variable.

## **Findings**

*Identify Student Needs*

Before starting learning, evaluate the social needs and learning styles of each student in the class. Surveys, observations or interviews can be effective tools to understand individual differences. *First, Student Profile Analysis: Demographic Data:* Involves understanding the student's background, including ethnic origin, family environment, and socioeconomic factors. *Academic Skills:* Evaluation of students' level of comprehension of previous PAI materials and understanding of their reading, writing, and speaking skills. *Second, Interests and Motivations Survey.* Personal Interests: Assess the topics or aspects of Islamic Education that are of most interest to students, for example, stories of the Prophet, ethics, or aspects of Islamic history. Motivation to Learn: Identifies factors that motivate students in learning PAI, such as personal goals, family expectations, or personal experiences.

*Third, Learning Style Evaluation:* Visual, Auditory, or Kinesthetic (VAK): Identify students' learning style preferences to tailor more effective teaching methods. Active Engagement: Evaluating whether students learn better through hands-on interaction, discussion, or practical activities. *Fourth, Social Skills Analysis: Communication Skills:* Assesses the extent to which students can communicate effectively, both orally and in writing. Collaboration Skills: Identifies students' ability to work together in groups and contribute to class discussions.

#### *Adjustment of Learning Materials*

Design Islamic Religious Education learning materials by considering different instruction styles, levels of understanding and student needs. Provide variety in teaching methods, including written materials, visual presentations and group discussions. Adjustment of learning materials is a crucial aspect of the instructional process, ensuring that educational content is tailored to meet the diverse needs and characteristics

of learners. This adaptive approach acknowledges the variability in student's existing level of comprehension, ensuring that the content is neither too advanced nor too basic.

Additionally, educators must consider the diverse learning styles prevalent in their classrooms. Students may have distinct preferences for visual, auditory, kinesthetic, or tactile learning. The adjustment of learning materials involves incorporating a variety of instructional approaches, such as visual aids, interactive activities, and hands-on experiences, to cater to these different instruction preferences. A mother's crucial aspect of material adjustment is accommodating different pacing needs. Some students may grasp concepts quickly and prefer a more accelerated pace, while others may require additional time for deeper understanding. Teachers need to provide supplementary materials, extension activities, or additional explanations to support both fast-paced and slower-paced learners.

Furthermore, considering the cultural and linguistic diversity of students is essential. Learning materials should be inclusive, avoiding biases and stereotypes, and incorporating examples and contexts that resonate with various cultural backgrounds. This adjustment ensures that all students can relate to the content and find it relevant to their own experiences.

Moreover, the adjustment of learning materials involves incorporating real-world applications and connections. By linking the theoretical concepts to practical scenarios and everyday life situations, educators can enhance students' understanding and appreciation of the subject matter. This approach fosters a deeper engagement with the content and emphasizes its significance beyond the classroom. The use of technology is another element in adjusting learning materials. Integrating digital tools, online

resources, and multimedia elements can enhance the accessibility and appeal of the materials. This adjustment caters to the technological preferences of modern learners and provides opportunities for interactive and dynamic learning experiences.

Regular feedback and assessment play a crucial role in adjusting learning materials. Ongoing evaluation helps educators identify areas where students may struggle or need further clarification. Based on this feedback, learning materials can be modified, additional resources can be provided, and instructional strategies can be adapted to address the evolving needs of the learners. the adjustment of learning materials is a multifaceted process that revolves around understanding and responding to the individual characteristics and needs of students. Through continuous assessment, flexibility in instructional approaches, and the incorporation of diverse resources, educators can create a dynamic and inclusive learning environment that maximizes student engagement and comprehension.

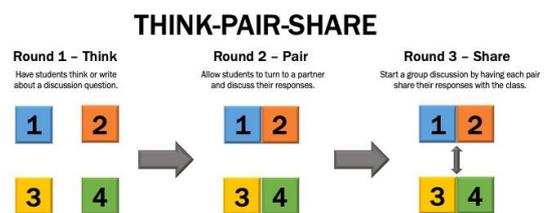
### Co-operative Groups

Implement co-operative group strategies to stimulate positive social interaction. Form mixed-ability groups and facilitate activities that require collaboration, such as group projects, discussions or role simulations. Cooperative groups, also known as cooperative learning or group work, is an instructional strategy that involves organizing students into small groups to work together towards a common goal or task. This collaborative approach aims to foster positive interdependence among group members, encouraging them to rely on each other to achieve success. The detailed implementation of co-operative groups involves several key elements and considerations.



Picture 3: Sampel Cooperative Group

Firstly, the formation of co-operative groups should be purposeful and strategic. Teachers should consider the diversity of skills, abilities and backgrounds of students in the class when forming groups. By combining different strengths and weaknesses, educators can encourage peer support and ensure that each group member makes a valuable contribution to the collaborative effort. Setting clear and specific goals for each co-operative group is essential. These goals should align with the learning objectives of the lesson or unit, encouraging meaningful engagement and focused collaboration. Clearly defined expectations will help guide group efforts and ensure that all members understand their roles and responsibilities within the co-operative structure.



Picture 4: Cooperative Group

Positive interdependence is a fundamental principle of co-operative groups. This means that the success of each individual is linked to the success of the whole group. To encourage positive interdependence, tasks should be structured in such a way that they require each member's contribution for the group to achieve its goal. This will foster a sense of

responsibility and encourage active participation. In addition, effective communication is essential in co-operative groups. Students should be encouraged to express their thoughts, ideas and questions openly. Establishing a supportive and respectful communication environment will help build trust among group members, enhance collaboration, and encourage a sense of belonging.

Teachers should consider the size of the co-operative group, aiming for a balance between sufficient diversity and ensuring that each member has a meaningful role. Small groups often allow for more active participation and increase individual accountability, while larger groups can offer a wider range of perspectives and skills. Monitoring and facilitating group dynamics is an ongoing responsibility for educators. Teachers should circulate among the groups, providing guidance, answering questions, and ensuring that the collaborative process is working well. This active involvement helps maintain focus, resolve conflicts and reinforce positive collaborative behaviors. To increase the effectiveness of co-operative groups, periodic reflection and debriefing are essential. This allows students to assess their group dynamics, discuss what went well, and identify areas for improvement. Reflective practices encourage metacognition, helping students develop a deeper understanding of the content and their learning process. Evaluation methods should recognize both individual and group achievement. Assessment can include a combination of individual contributions, group presentations and peer evaluations. This balanced approach encourages accountability at both levels and ensures that each student's efforts are recognized within a collaborative framework.

#### *Collaborative Projects*

Integrate learning with collaborative projects that involve religious elements. For example, students can work together on a charity project related to Islamic values, promoting teamwork and social awareness. Collaborative projects involve students working together on a shared task or project, emphasizing teamwork, communication, and collective problem-solving. This instructional approach encourages students to pool their skills, knowledge, and creativity to achieve common objectives. The implementation of collaborative projects involves several key aspects and considerations (Sahla & Ardianto, 2023).

The initiation of collaborative projects begins with the selection or design of a task that requires the collective efforts of the group. This task should be meaningful, aligning with learning objectives, and promoting the development of critical skills such as communication, problem-solving, and collaboration. Creating heterogeneous groups with diverse skills, backgrounds, and perspectives is essential for the success of collaborative projects. Heterogeneity enhances the richness of ideas and promotes mutual learning. Teachers can strategically assign roles within the group to ensure that each member contributes to the overall project.

Clear communication is fundamental in collaborative projects. Establishing effective channels for communication within the group ensures that ideas are exchanged, tasks are delegated, and conflicts are resolved constructively. Teachers may introduce communication tools or guidelines to facilitate smooth interactions among group members. Positive interdependence is a key principle in collaborative projects, meaning that the success of each individual is linked to the success of the entire group. Tasks should be structured to require collective efforts, emphasizing that the achievement of project

goals depends on the active participation and contributions of all members.

Regular check-ins and progress assessments help monitor the development of collaborative projects. Teachers can provide guidance, address challenges, and ensure that the project stays on track. This active facilitation ensures that groups are utilizing their time effectively and achieving their objectives within the given timeframe. Collaborative projects often involve a final presentation or product. This can take various forms, such as a group presentation, a written report, or a creative artifact. The culmination of the project provides an opportunity for groups to showcase their collective work and for individual members to reflect on their contributions.

Reflection and feedback are critical components of collaborative projects. After completion, students should engage in reflective discussions about their collaborative experience, including what went well, challenges faced, and lessons learned. Peer evaluations can be incorporated to encourage accountability and provide insights into each member's contribution. Assessment strategies for collaborative projects should consider both the process and the final product. While evaluating the quality of the result is important, assessing the collaboration, communication, and teamwork demonstrated throughout the project is equally valuable. This holistic approach encourages students to develop interpersonal and collaborative skills alongside academic competencies (Barbeau et al., 2022; Hartanto et al., 2022; Nurhaliza Suhada, 2021).

Based on the results of observations and questionnaires obtained data, differentiated learning has a significant influence on improving students' social skills. The data is shown in the following table.

**Table 2:** Results of Odd and Even Semester

<b>Social Skill</b>	<b>Odd Semester</b>	<b>Even Semester</b>
Honest	87.6	88
Discipline	87.8	87
Responsibility	87.8	87
Tolerance	87.1	87
Cooperation	87.1	87
Courtesy	86.8	86
Self-Confidence	86.8	87
<b>Mean</b>	<b>87.3</b>	<b>87.0</b>

Based on the results of the pre-test and post-test on differentiated instruction to improve social skills, it can be seen that there was a slight decrease in the post-test score. However, the difference between odd (87.3) and even semester (87.0) is relatively small, reflecting the stability or maintainability of students' social skills ability after differentiated instruction. The minimal decrease may have been due to natural variation or other factors. With the scores remaining high, these results could indicate the effectiveness of such learning in maintaining and improving students' social skills without experiencing a significant decline.

## Discussion

Understanding of differential instruction concepts. This approach is directed at recognizing that each student has a different learning style, speed of understanding, and learning needs. In the context of PAI in junior high school, this diversity is crucial because it involves the cognitive and social aspects of students (Alhamuddin, Surbiantoro, et al.,

2022; Alifuddin, Alhamuddin, & Nurjannah, 2021; Arif et al., 2023; Tadjuddah et al., 2023). Teachers need to understand these differences and design learning that is responsive to individual needs. The implementation of differential instruction in the context of Islamic Education includes adjustments to learning materials. Teachers need to structure materials that are accessible to different levels of student understanding, utilizing various learning resources and media to facilitate deep understanding. For example, for more visual students, teachers can use pictures or multimedia, while for more auditive students, oral explanations can be given more intensively (Mannan, 2023).

In addition, student grouping strategies need to be considered. Involving students in heterogeneous cooperative groups can enrich social interaction and provide opportunities to learn from each other. In the context of PAI, group discussions can be a means to explore each student's understanding of religious values and how to apply them in daily life (Alhamuddin, Dermawan, et al., 2022). In the following discussion, it is necessary to highlight the impact of implementing differentiated instruction on improving students' social skills at the junior high school level. By considering individualized needs, differentiated instruction can create an environment where students feel supported and valued. This helps in the development of social skills such as empathy, tolerance, and co-operation. Empirical studies that try to apply this approach in the context of PAI in junior high school can provide concrete evidence related to the improvement of social skills. Analyzing data from surveys before and after the implementation of differential instruction can show positive changes in students' social skills. For example, students may show improved communication skills, the ability to collaborate in groups, and a better understanding of others'

perspectives (Alifuddin, Alhamuddin, Rosadi, et al., 2021; Lafifa et al., 2022; Nuriten et al., 2016).

However, the discussion also needs to consider the challenges that may arise in the implementation of differential instruction in the junior high school PAI environment. One of the main challenges is ensuring that teachers have a deep understanding of students' individual needs. This requires additional effort and skill in identifying each student's learning style, level of understanding, and social needs. In addition, time and resource management are key factors in this discussion (Syamsul et al., 2022). Differential instruction requires more intensive preparation in designing materials, customizing teaching approaches and providing additional support where necessary. Teachers need to manage time efficiently so that all students receive sufficient attention (Alhamuddin, Dermawan, et al., 2022; Alhamuddin Alhamuddin et al., 2022; Alifuddin et al., 2022; Weiss et al., 2015).

This article may provide practical and strategic recommendations for PAI educators at the junior secondary level (Anisa et al., 2023; Arif et al., 2023). These recommendations may include additional training for teachers, the development of more diverse learning resources, and the formation of collaborative teams among teachers to share experiences and effective strategies. Differentiated instruction in the context of PAI in junior high schools emerges as a promising approach to improving students' social skills (Agustang et al., 2018; Alamsyah, 2022). By considering individual needs, designing responsive materials, and customizing teaching strategies, teachers can create an environment that supports the development of positive character traits and strong social skills in junior high school students. In this process, the application of differentiated learning can be key to increasing the relevance and positive impact

of PAI learning at that level (Joko Susilo, 2023; Rodliyah & Saraswati, 2020; Tildesley et al., 2022).

### Conclusion

The differential instruction approach has a positive impact on improving students' social skills at the junior high school level, especially in the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI). The discussion of the article reveals that recognition of student diversity, understanding the concept of differential instruction, and implementing strategies that are responsive to individual needs can create a learning environment that supports the development of social skills.

The use of these methods helps to create an inclusive classroom, where every student feels valued and supported. In the context of Islamic Education, this has a positive impact on students' understanding of Islamic values, enriches group discussions and encourages positive collaboration. The differential instruction approach can also increase student engagement, creating a more relevant and meaningful learning experience. Although there are challenges in implementation, such as time and resource management, this article shows that practical recommendations, such as additional training for teachers and the development of diverse learning resources, can help overcome these barriers. This conclusion shows that differentiated learning can be effectively integrated with the PAI curriculum in junior high schools, bringing tangible benefits in the development of students' character and social skills.

Overall, this article provides an in-depth look at how differential learning can improve student's social skills in the context of PAI at the junior high school level. The practical implications of this article provide a basis for educators to design learning that is

more inclusive and responsive to students' individual needs, which in turn can strengthen their connection with Islamic religious values and advance their social skills to face challenges in daily life.

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