Developing An Impactful Strategy For Religious Education: Understanding Student Perspectives And Experiences

Albertos Damni[1*]

Institut Agama Islam Negeri Kerinci*[1]
*[1]email: damnialbertos@gmail.com

Abstract

Adopting religious learning methods that cater to student diversity is increasingly crucial in today's education landscape, particularly in light of technology's role in fostering personalized and interactive learning environments. This research delves into the significance of employing differentiated religious learning approaches and fostering meaningful interactions between educators and students within Islamic religious universities. The study relies on a qualitative approach, including group interviews with students. The findings reveal student perspectives on learning techniques and assigned tasks. While some students express disengagement and reduced motivation with repetitive learning methods, others gravitate toward practical and interactive approaches. Effective teacher-student interaction emerges as pivotal, emphasizing teachers' ability to actively listen, offer constructive feedback, and cultivate a supportive atmosphere. Challenges in engaging with educators encompass unresponsiveness to student inquiries and the use of complex language. An excessive workload, particularly with tight deadlines, also proves burdensome for students. Nevertheless, students positively view technology-related assignments, hands-on experiences, and societal issues.

Keywords: Learning Methods; Student Enthusiasm; Teaching-Learning Process; Teacher Roles.

Abstrak

Penerapan metode pembelajaran agama yang memenuhi keberagaman siswa menjadi semakin penting dalam dunia pendidikan saat ini, terutama mengingat peran teknologi dalam menciptakan lingkungan pembelajaran yang personal dan interaktif. Penelitian ini menggali pentingnya penggunaan pendekatan pembelajaran agama yang berbeda dan membina interaksi yang bermakna antara pendidik dan mahasiswa di lingkungan universitas agama Islam. Penelitian ini

mengandalkan pendekatan kualitatif, termasuk wawancara kelompok dengan siswa. Temuan ini mengungkap spektrum perspektif siswa mengenai teknik pembelajaran dan tugas yang diberikan. Meskipun beberapa siswa menunjukkan ketidakterlibatan dan berkurangnya motivasi dengan metode pembelajaran yang berulang, siswa lainnya tertarik pada pendekatan praktis dan interaktif. Interaksi guru-siswa yang efektif menjadi hal yang sangat penting, dengan penekanan pada kemampuan guru untuk mendengarkan secara aktif, memberikan umpan balik yang konstruktif, dan menumbuhkan suasana yang mendukung. Tantangan dalam berinteraksi dengan pendidik meliputi sikap tidak tanggap terhadap pertanyaan siswa dan penggunaan bahasa yang rumit. Selain itu, beban kerja yang berlebihan, terutama dengan tenggat waktu yang ketat, terbukti memberatkan siswa. Meskipun demikian, siswa memandang tugas yang berkaitan dengan teknologi, pengalaman langsung, dan masalah sosial secara positif.

Kata Kunci: Antusiasme Mahasiswa; Metode Pembelajaran; Peran Guru; Proses Belajar Mengajar.

A. Introduction

Is there a best universal learning method that can be used at any level in all student conditions? No single learning method is considered the best because each has advantages and disadvantages depending on the learning objectives, material studied, and student characteristics (Buerkle et al., 2023; López-Hernández et al., 2023). Therefore, teachers must choose the most suitable method to meet their learning needs and goals (Cutroni & Paladino, 2023; Soeharto et al., 2024). However, the learning method more directed towards this is the differentiated learning method, which focuses on flexibility (Langelaan et al., 2024).

Teachers have begun implementing differentiated learning (Conner et al., 2024; Dorfberger & Eyal, 2023; Karst et al., 2022; Yuen et al., 2022). Then what about college? Differentiated learning is a method that adapts students' teaching and learning experiences to their different needs, interests, abilities, and learning styles. The background to differentiated learning comes from the understanding that each student is a unique individual with different abilities and learning styles and can be traced to the concept of

inclusive learning, which places diversity as a positive thing in learning (Reis & Renzulli, 2018). Therefore, the same approach to learning is not always practical for all students. Differentiated learning can be defined as an approach to learning that considers individual differences in students in terms of learning styles, cognitive levels, interests, and abilities.

In the digital era that we are currently experiencing, education is experiencing a significant paradigm shift that requires a more personal and interactive approach (Fransiska Faberta et al., 2023; Rahmat, 2020). These changes are primarily driven by rapid technological developments that have permeated various aspects of our lives. The dependence of students and educators on technology is no longer secondary but has become an integral element in the religious educational environment and society (Damni, 2022; Zufriani et al., 2022). Modern technology can be an effective tool in helping teachers adapt learning to individual student needs (Pontiara et al., 2023; Risdianti et al., 2024). With technology adoption, teachers can

develop more personalized learning strategies, accommodate different learning styles, and provide more targeted feedback to students. Technology also allows teachers to expand students' access to varied and up-to-date learning resources, including digital and online resources that can be dynamically updated. Thus, the role of technology in education not only follows current trends but is also the key to increasing the effectiveness of education in meeting the needs of diverse students in this digital era (Bedenlier et al., 2020; Haleem et al., 2022).

Differentiated learning methods are an essential approach in the current educational context. This approach has a clear focus: providing adequate and compelling learning experiences for all students, including students who have special needs or require additional support (Puzio et al., 2020; J. L. Roberts & Inman, 2023). This method seeks to accommodate individual differences in students' learning styles, interests, and abilities, increasing students' opportunities to learn effectively and achieve tremendous academic success.

A critical aspect of differentiated learning is the recognition of the uniqueness and differences of each student. By understanding and responding to these differences, educators can design more relevant and meaningful learning experiences for each student (Wormeli, 2023). Thus, differentiated learning is about student-centered teaching and creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment (Fadila & Damni, 2023; Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2023). Feeling valued and supported makes students more motivated to learn and participate actively in their education (Elfianti et al., 2023). Therefore, differentiated learning is not just a method but also an approach that encourages holistic growth and development of students at various levels of their abilities.

Implementing differentiated learning in higher education can help students feel valued and more motivated to learn. Differentiated learning can also improve the quality of learning and maximize student learning potential (Gheyssens et al., 2022; Ginja & Chen, 2020). Lecturers can provide varied learning materials to meet students' different learning needs. Learning materials can be adapted to students' learning styles, cognitive levels, interests, and abilities by paying attention to the appropriate learning methods and technology in the learning process (Muñoz et al., 2022). Meanwhile, lecturers can provide different feedback for each student in assignments so that students can improve themselves according to their learning needs. Feedback can be provided through tests, assignments, or individual meetings between students and lecturers according to the student's interests and abilities.

This research will answer how students in higher education interpret the learning methods and tasks given by lecturers. In the next stage, their expectations regarding the ideal methods and tasks will be analyzed. It is hoped that in the future, this research can become an additional reference for parties involved in the learning process at the tertiary level by adding the perspective of students as objects and also subjects of education.

B. Research Method

The qualitative approach in this research places the researcher at a neutral point as the person who conducts a critical study of the learning phenomena experienced by the participants (students). The research was conducted at one of the Islamic Religious Universities in Sumatra, Indonesia. The researcher was directive by conducting group interviews in several classes to obtain information relevant to the research topic. Focus groups were chosen to make the interview atmosphere more intense and to obtain more comprehensive information (Edwards & Holland, 2020; R. et al., 2020).

The list of interview questions is prepared systematically and focuses on the learning methods and tasks of the lecturer. The final list of research questions desired for the research was 14, and the initial questions successfully created were 32. This initial list of questions was then carried out in pre-testing interviews with several target population judges. This is intended to reduce the potential ambiguity of interview questions that may be difficult to understand or potentially sensitive. This process created 14 systematic questions about the research topic, namely learning methods and lecturer assignments. The interview was set in an informal setting to create a more friendly atmosphere. Meanwhile, the researcher asked for verbal consent from the informant at the beginning of the interview session.

Four focus groups participated in this research. Each group had 5-9 members. Interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes per group and were held 3-4 times—this division of sessions aimed to maintain concentration and avoid boredom among research participants.

The interview results are analyzed and reported proportionally, rationally, and scientifically. The initial data is reduced before being analyzed (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Then, the data is reconstructed through the synthesis stage (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). This research data considers the criteria of adequacy and appropriateness of data (Kyngäs et al., 2020). This research also does not

involve research verification based on secondary informants.

C. Result and Discussion

Result

The first lecture meeting is an essential moment in starting the new semester. At this meeting, lecturers and students usually introduce themselves, discuss the syllabus and learning plans, and convey the hopes and expectations that must be met. The first lecture meeting is an essential time for students to understand the lecturer's expectations and demands and understand the material and assignments that must be done in class.

Students' attention at this first meeting always focuses on learning methods and assignments. Learning methods are methods or techniques lecturers use to teach lecture material to help students understand and apply the material. Meanwhile, course assignments are given by lecturers to students as part of the learning process in specific courses. These assignments can be of various types, such as individual or group assignments, papers, presentations, research, and projects.

Two general perceptions of students regarding learning methods are boredom and enthusiasm. Students will get bored when the learning method is watching or the same as previous lecturers' methods. This is in line with the informant's opinion.

"I feel bored because the learning method used is too monotonous and not interactive enough. I prefer to learn more practically and discuss with classmates and lecturers. The material taught is still relevant. However, I feel unmotivated to learn due to the lack of interaction and the use of learning methods that do not suit my learning style."

The answers given in this interview reflect the problems often faced by students in the educational environment, namely lack of interaction and lack of suitability of learning methods to individual learning styles. The scientific argument drawn from these answers is understanding students' conditions and the suitability of educators' methods in higher education.

Understanding students' conditions is essential because the impression of boredom and lack of motivation in the learning process is not a trivial problem.

Research in educational psychology has shown that student motivation is critical to successful academic achievement. Students who feel bored and lack motivation will most likely have difficulty understanding and mastering the lesson material, even if it is relevant. Therefore, educational institutions must pay attention to students' motivation levels and look for ways to increase them.

Second, the statement highlights the importance of using interactive learning methods appropriate to students' learning styles. Education research has shown that students have diverse learning styles, and varying learning methods can improve understanding and retention of information. Therefore, educational institutions must consider diversifying their learning methods, allowing students to participate actively in the learning process, and facilitating discussions between students and lecturers. This can help improve the quality of learning and motivate students to participate more actively in the educational process.

Thus, the scientific argument drawn from these answers is that a lack of interaction and using learning methods that do not suit students' learning styles can hurt students' motivation and learning. Therefore, educational institutions must strive to increase interactivity and match learning methods with student learning styles to improve educational outcomes.

Lecturers should have the ability to interact with students. This is important for creating a positive and productive learning environment. When lecturers can interact with students well, students will feel more motivated to learn and participate in the learning process. Lecturers can also motivate and encourage students to participate more actively in class. This can clarify the material and help students understand complex concepts. This illustrates the ability to interact and create a positive and inclusive learning environment. Research informants explained this.

"In my opinion, good lecturer-student interaction is when the lecturer can listen and understand the problems students face and provide appropriate solutions. Lecturers should also respect students' views and provide constructive feedback."

"Good lecturer-student interaction is when the lecturer can create a comfortable and not boring class atmosphere. The lecturer should also be able to explain the material well and encourage students to ask questions if something is not clear."

Good interaction is when the lecturer can create a comfortable and friendly atmosphere for students. Based on the answers in the interview, it can be concluded that good lecturer-student interaction involves several vital aspects. First, lecturers are expected to listen and understand the problems faced by students and provide appropriate solutions. This reflects the importance of empathy and the lecturer's ability to support students in overcoming academic or personal problems. Besides that, lecturers are also expected to respect students' views and provide constructive feedback, demonstrating the importance of open and constructive dialogue in learning.

"I feel comfortable when lecturers are open and friendly. Lecturers must also be able to provide feedback that helps me to develop."

"I feel comfortable when the lecturer treats me as a peer and is not too rigid. The lecturer must also be able to explain the material in detail and provide relevant examples."

From these answers, it can be concluded that students' comfort in relationships with lecturers depends on several factors. First, lecturers are expected to be open and friendly, creating an environment that supports effective communication. Second, students feel comfortable when lecturers treat them more informally, like peers, thus creating a less rigid atmosphere in the class. In addition, students expect lecturers to be able to explain material in detail and provide relevant examples, which indicates the importance of clarity and relevance in teaching.

Good interaction between lecturers and students involves closeness, practical communication, and explicit and relevant material delivery. These factors contribute to creating a positive and productive learning experience for students.

However, there are several challenges in interacting with lecturers. Namely the use of terms that are

sometimes difficult for students to understand and lecturer responses that are sometimes slow or non-existent. This is in line with the informant's opinion.

"The biggest challenge is when lecturers do not respond to my messages or emails. I feel unappreciated, and I feel ignored."

"The biggest challenge is when lecturers use too much language that is difficult to understand or focus too much on the material, making students feel bored."

Good interaction between lecturers and students in the classroom learning process can be more effective and enjoyable. This will positively impact the quality of learning and student academic achievement. Several things that lecturers can do are open and transparent communication, being responsive to students, providing support and motivation, respecting students' views, and maintaining a positive and conducive class atmosphere. Several informants also expressed this.

"Good lecturer-student interaction can motivate students to learn and understand the material. Students also feel more appreciated and supported by the lecturer."

"Good lecturer-student interaction can help students overcome difficulties in learning and improve understanding of the material. This will have a positive impact on the quality of learning."

Regarding enthusiasm, lecturers can be essential in creating a learning environment to increase student enthusiasm. Lecturers can create exciting learning methods, provide support and motivation, and open space for students' active involvement in learning. That way, students will be more enthusiastic about learning, and the learning process in class will be more effective. This is because students also understand the importance of learning methods for them.

"Learning methods are essential because they help us understand the material more easily and effectively. The right learning method can influence our enthusiasm for learning and increase our understanding of the material."

Several learning methods are popular with students. Some emphasize intensive involvement between lecturers

and students and the ability to implement theories in society's social life.

"I like learning methods that involve interaction between lecturers and students, such as group discussions or presentations."

"I prefer learning methods that allow us to actively participate in the learning process, such as conducting experiments or direct observation."

Lecturers play an important role in choosing and implementing effective learning methods. As learning facilitators, lecturers are responsible for choosing and implementing learning methods to help students understand the material well, improve their skills, and motivate them to learn enthusiastically. In selecting and implementing effective learning methods, lecturers must consider the characteristics and needs of students and the material being studied. Lecturers must also strive to continually update the learning methods used to suit technological developments and students' ever-changing learning needs.

"Lecturers must understand the characteristics of students and the material being taught so they can choose and apply appropriate learning methods.

"Lecturers also need to consider environmental factors and available resources so that the learning methods can be effective and optimal."

Apart from that, lecturers also often assign assignments to students. The objectives of assignments can vary depending on the context and courses being taught. Some general objectives of assignments given by lecturers are to measure student understanding of the material taught in class, improve student skills and abilities, deepen student understanding of the material, help students prepare for exams or other major assignments, and facilitate student independent learning. However, there are some negative aspects to this.

Students who receive too many assignments from lecturers generally feel burdened and uncomfortable. They feel that these tasks interfere with their free time and other activities, such as organizational or social activities. Some students complain that too many assignments are psychologically burdensome and can affect their mental health. They also feel that too many assignments can reduce the quality of learning because they do not have

enough time to study and understand the material well. However, some students also think the lectures' assignments can help them be more focused and organized.

"Too many assignments make me feel like I am not focused on the material being taught. I have difficulty understanding the material in depth because I have to rush to complete the assignments. I hope the lecturer can consider the number of assignments given so that I can focus on studying better."

The assignments given by the lecturer are too difficult or do not relate to the material being taught, making students feel confused and not helping them understand the material.

"I felt confused and frustrated because I had nothing to do with the lecture material. Apart from that, this assignment also took up time and energy that I should have used to study the actual lecture material. The lectures' assignments should be related to the material being studied in class. "The assignment should also have a clear objective and can help students understand the material better."

Sometimes, the lecturer's time limit is not enough or too short, so students cannot complete it well, which can cause confusion or delays.

"I feel very burdened by the assignments given by several lecturers, especially when the deadlines overlap. I feel that this is very unfair to us as students and makes me feel stressed."

"I do not mind the assignments given by the lecturer, but when there are too many assignments, I feel like I do not have time for other activities. I feel constrained, and sometimes I feel stressed and depressed because of unfinished assignments."

Assignments are indeed burdensome for students. However, some assignments are very popular with students. This is related to using technology, direct experience, working with other students, related to social issues, and providing flexibility in time and scope.

Students like technology because technology makes it easier for them to carry out various activities. With technology, students can obtain information quickly and easily, communicate with friends or lecturers

online, access various learning resources, take lectures online, and carry out various tasks or work more effectively and efficiently. Technology also makes it easier to manage study schedules or time and provides access to various applications that can help develop academic and non-academic skills. This excites students when the lectures' assignments are related to technology.

"The lecturer gave us the assignment to make a presentation using an application other than Microsoft PowerPoint and make a presentation. In my opinion, this assignment is very relevant and useful for lectures. Apart from that, this assignment also honed my presentation skills and the use of technology. However, I had to learn more about applications other than PowerPoint. This task is challenging, but I think it is normal today when technology is an important part of our daily lives. I am happy that the lecturer gives relevant and useful assignments like this."

"I liked this assignment because I felt I had gained valuable experience in the world of education. This assignment also helped me better understand and apply the theory I learned in class. After completing this assignment, I feel more prepared and confident to face the world of work in the future. I also got good grades because I was very serious about completing the assignment."

Discussion

This research underlines the importance of interaction between lecturers and students and the suitability of learning methods to individual student learning styles in the tertiary environment. This aligns with previous research that successfully concluded that lecturers' perceptions greatly influence student learning motivation (Noori et al., 2020). Previous research stated that the relationship between lecturers and students determines the experience and output of a student (Wong & Chiu, 2020). As revealed in this research, the lack of effective interaction between lecturers and students shows a gap that needs to be addressed in the student learning experience. Proper interaction between lecturers and students is crucial in creating a conducive learning environment (Allen et al., 2021; Wanders et al., 2020). Knowledge

transfer occurs when lecturers can communicate and interact with students effectively, and stronger relationships are formed, encouraging students to participate and be more involved in the learning process.

Scientific interpretation of these findings highlights the importance of a deep understanding of student conditions and needs. Every student has a unique learning style (Shamsuddin & Kaur, 2020), and the lack of suitability between the learning methods applied by lecturers and students' learning styles can hinder their ability to understand the material well (Estrada et al., 2020). Therefore, lecturers must pay attention to and accommodate this diversity in their learning design, ensuring each student can respond optimally to the material.

Lecturers who can develop practical interaction skills with students will significantly create a positive and inclusive learning environment (Stentiford & Koutsouris, 2021). Good interaction can produce an atmosphere that motivates and stimulates students to participate actively in learning, thereby increasing their understanding of the

material (Eloff et al., 2023; Trabalíková, 2022). In addition, lecturers can also act as models and mentors for students, providing the support, motivation, and guidance needed to reach their academic potential.

Through this research, it is essential to recognize that interaction between lecturers and students is not the end goal but is a means to achieve optimal learning outcomes. By understanding the importance of effective interactions and matching learning methods to students' learning styles, educators can enhance students' learning experiences, motivate them to learn more enthusiastically and help them achieve better academic achievements (Hajovsky et al., 2020; Longobardi et al., 2021). This provides a strong foundation for developing better learning strategies in the future, which take into account and respect students' individual learning needs and preferences.

In the context of learning in higher education, the ability of lecturers to interact with students is not only the key to increasing student motivation. However, it is also essential in helping

them understand complex concepts. (Frenzel et al., 2021; Snijders et al., 2020). Good interaction between lecturers and students creates an inclusive and dynamic learning environment where students feel comfortable asking questions, discussing, and sharing ideas. Such interactions open space for in-depth dialogue, enable critical thought exchanges and enrich students' learning experiences.

Lecturers who can interact effectively with students are academic mentors and facilitators in the learning process (Pratiwi, 2020). They create an atmosphere where students feel heard and valued and thus feel more confident expressing their thoughts. In this situation, students feel more motivated to learn because they feel actively involved in the learning process.

In addition, good interaction between lecturers and students facilitates a deeper understanding of the material being taught. Students feel more accessible to ask questions about concepts that are difficult to understand, and lecturers have the opportunity to provide additional explanations or

examples that can help students understand better. The discussions also clarify complex concepts through collaborative understanding between lecturers and students (Bulturbayevich et al., 2021).

Effective interaction between lecturers and students has a positive social and psychological impact and directly supports the achievement of learning goals. By opening effective communication channels, lecturers can better understand students' learning needs and challenges so they can design more relevant and effective learning strategies. In addition, good interactions also increase student satisfaction with their learning experience, which can increase retention rates and engagement in learning (Nieminen et al., 2022).

Lecturers have significance in creating a learning environment that arouses student enthusiasm (Moe et al., 2021). Lecturers are responsible for designing and implementing exciting and supportive learning methods, encouraging active student participation in the learning process (Singh & Singh, 2021). When students feel interested and enthusiastic about the material being

taught, this tends to increase the overall effectiveness of learning. High enthusiasm encourages students to be more involved in the learning process, increases their involvement, and deepens their understanding of the learning material (Wardani et al., 2020).

These findings also reveal that some learning methods students prefer more than others. Learning methods emphasizing intensive interaction between lecturers and students and the ability to apply theory in social life tend to be more popular with students. This shows the importance of learning methods that pay attention to interpersonal interactions and practical material application in real-life contexts (Martínez Casanovas et al., 2022; Wagner et al., 2023). Lecturers can use these findings to design more effective and relevant learning strategies.

In this context, lecturers must consider student preferences and learning needs when designing curriculum and methods. Previous research states that not all suitable methods will produce sound output (Sanders, 2023); however, by paying attention to these preferences, lecturers

can create a more enjoyable, meaningful, and relevant learning experience for students, which in turn can improve the quality of interactions and the overall student learning experience (ADALI & Çağlar, 2023).

These findings provide a solid basis for lecturers to design more effective and exciting learning strategies. By paying attention to students' learning needs and preferences, lecturers can create a learning environment that supports, stimulates, and inspires students to reach their academic potential (Aziz et al., 2023; Tambak et al., 2022; Tuma, 2021). Thus, these findings provide insight into students' learning preferences and provide valuable direction for developing better teaching practices in higher education.

D. Conclussion

Differentiated learning methods have significant importance in the world of Islamic education. Flexible learning makes students feel comfortable and challenged at the same time. This method can also increase student involvement deeper understanding, less tedious, and

increased student satisfaction. Assignments that are burdensome to students should be of concern to the teaching staff. Lecturers or teachers can charge output according to students' interests without ignoring the learning objectives that have been set. A workload that is too heavy can hurt students' mental and physical health, including stress, fatigue, anxiety, and depression. On the other hand, if the assignments are too few or too easy, students may not feel challenged and not benefit from learning. Therefore, lecturers must provide assignments appropriate to the student's difficulty and abilities and provide an adequate period to complete the assignment. Lecturers can also provide sufficient guidance and support to students in completing assignments, such as providing additional resources, consultation time, or output flexibility that students can choose.

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