



Differentiated Instruction Approach to Overcoming Heterogeneity in Initial Nahwu Ability of New Students in Arabic Language Education Study Program

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Abstract: Nahwu instruction in Islamic higher education faces challenges from heterogeneous student abilities and conventional teaching methods. This study analyzes Differentiated Instruction in addressing diverse initial nahwu skills among Arabic Education students at IAI Darul A'mal Lampung and measures its effectiveness. Using a qualitative case study with 32 participants, data were collected via diagnostic tests, observations, and interviews, then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model. Findings indicate significant improvement, with average scores rising from 62.3 to 78.6. Approximately 84% of students showed significant progress, particularly those with low initial abilities, highlighting the effectiveness of content differentiation. Furthermore, process and product differentiation enhanced student engagement and motivation. The study concludes that Differentiated Instruction effectively creates adaptive, inclusive learning environments. Consequently, developing differentiated strategies and materials is essential for improving Arabic language learning quality in higher education.

INTRODUCTION

Arabic language learning, particularly in terms of grammar (syntax), still faces various challenges in Islamic religious universities. One of the main problems is students' low mastery of grammar rules, which is often caused by the use of traditional learning methods, such as memorization and lectures centered on lectures. (Zaki et al., 2024) This situation impacts students' low ability to comprehensively understand Arabic language structures. On the other hand, new students in the Arabic Language Education (AEL) Study Program generally come from very

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diverse educational backgrounds, such as Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), madrasahs, and public schools. These differences in background lead to significant heterogeneity in initial nahwu (literary grammar) abilities. Students from Islamic boarding schools tend to have a stronger foundation in nahwu than those from public schools, resulting in gaps in understanding within a class. (Salam et al., 2025) This heterogeneity poses a serious challenge to the learning process because a one-size-fits-all approach is no longer relevant to accommodate diverse learning needs.

In this context, a learning approach that is adaptive and responsive to individual student differences is needed. One relevant approach is Differentiated Instruction (DI), a learning approach that adapts learning content, processes, and products based on students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. This approach emphasizes that each student has a different learning style, so learning strategies must be flexible so that all students can optimally achieve learning objectives.

Several studies have shown that implementing Differentiated Instruction in Arabic language learning can be a solution to address the diversity of student abilities. Research by Rahmawati (2024) explains that the differentiated learning model can create inclusive learning by considering individual student differences. (Rahmawati et al., 2024). In addition, other studies show that differentiation in Arabic language learning, such as adjusting learning materials, processes, and products, can improve understanding and overcome learning difficulties caused by differences in student backgrounds. (Nurlatifah et al., 2024).

Furthermore, differentiation practices have also been applied in qawa'id learning including nahwu through strategies such as scaffolding, student grouping, and adjusting learning activities based on ability levels, which have proven effective in increasing student engagement and understanding. (Salma Salsabila et al., 2025) This shows that the differentiation approach has great potential to be applied in the context of nahwu learning in higher education.

Based on this description, it can be concluded that the heterogeneity of students' initial nahwu abilities is an unavoidable reality, thus requiring an adaptive learning approach. Therefore, this study is important to examine how the Differentiated Instruction approach can be used to address the heterogeneity of initial nahwu abilities of new PBA students at Islamic religious universities, so that learning becomes more effective, inclusive, and oriented to the needs of students.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a descriptive quantitative approach with a case study design to deeply understand the implementation of Differentiated Instruction in addressing the heterogeneity of initial nahwu abilities of PBA new students. A qualitative approach was chosen because it is able to explore learning phenomena contextually and holistically, especially in complex and diverse classroom situations. The case study design was used because this research focuses on one specific context, namely nahwu learning for new students at an Islamic religious college. The case study allows researchers to explore the dynamics of learning in depth, including the interactions between lecturers, students, and the learning strategies implemented. (Yahya et al., 2025).

The subjects of this study were new students of the Arabic Language Education (PBA) Study Program at the Darul A'mal Islamic Institute in Lampung who had diverse educational

backgrounds. Subject selection was carried out using a purposive sampling technique, namely selecting participants who were considered capable of providing relevant information regarding variations in initial nahwu abilities. The number of participants in this study consisted of one lecturer teaching the nahwu course and 32 students representing high, medium, and low ability categories. Classification of initial abilities was carried out through a diagnostic test (pre-assessment) to identify the level of students' initial mastery of nahwu concepts.

The research instruments used included tests, observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Tests were used to classify students' initial abilities, observations were conducted to observe the learning process and the implementation of differentiation in the classroom, and interviews were used to explore lecturers' and students' perceptions of differentiated learning. Documentation in this study included learning tools such as lesson plans (RPS), modules, and student assignments. Analysis of these documents is important to determine the extent to which differentiation is implemented in learning planning and evaluation. (Rikha Ikke Nuriani, Hanik Mahliatussikah, 2024).

The documentation in this study includes learning tools such as lesson plans (RPS), modules, and student assignments. Analysis of these documents is crucial to determine the extent to which differentiation is implemented in learning planning and evaluation. Data collection techniques were triangulated through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Triangulation was used to enhance data validity by comparing various data collection sources and techniques. The data obtained were then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive analysis model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. This model allows for continuous analysis throughout the research process. In the context of implementing Differentiated Instruction, the analysis focused on three main aspects: content differentiation, learning process differentiation, and product differentiation. These three aspects are important indicators in assessing the effectiveness of differentiation strategies in nahwu learning.

Data validity was tested through source and technique triangulation, as well as member checking with participants. This was done to ensure that the data obtained truly reflected the actual conditions in the field. Furthermore, this study considered ethical aspects of research by ensuring that all participants provided informed consent before participating in the study. Participants' identities were kept confidential to protect their privacy. (Adam Mudinillah, Punaji Setyosari, Henry Praherdhiono, Saida Ulfa, nd) Finally, this study's limitations lie in its scope, which only covered one class and one institution, making the results unable to be broadly generalized. Nevertheless, this research is expected to provide an empirical contribution to the development of differentiated learning models in nahwu instruction in higher education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Results

This study involved 32 new students in the Arabic Language Education (AEL) Study Program at the Darul A'mal Islamic Institute in Lampung who were taking a basic nahwu course. Based on the results of an initial diagnostic test (pre-assessment), the distribution of initial abilities was as follows:

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Table 1. Results of Initial Assessment of Student Abilities

Ability Category	Value Range	Number of Students	Percentage
Tall	80 - 100	7	21.90%
Currently	60 - 79	13	40.60%
Low	< 60	12	37.50%
Total		32	100%

The average initial score of students was 62.3, which shows that in general, students' nahwu abilities were in the lower to medium category.

a) Results of Implementing Differentiated Instruction (Learning Content)

After implementing content differentiation (adjusting material based on ability level), there was an increase in learning outcomes:

Table 2. Results of Differentiated Instruction Implementation

Category	Initial Mean	Final Mean	Ascension
Tall	84.5	90.2	5.7
Currently	68.1	78.4	10.3
Low	48.7	67.5	18.8

b) Results of Differentiation of Learning Process

Based on observations during 6 meetings, the level of student activity increased as follows:

Table 3. Results of Differentiation of Learning Process

Activity Indicator	Before DI	After DI
Asking questions in class	28%	63%
Active group discussion	41%	78%
Training participation	52%	85%

c) Results of Differentiation of Learning Products

Students are given a choice of assignment format (i'rab analysis, presentation, or written exercise) and the following are the results:

Table 4. Results of Learning Product Differentiation

Types of products	Number of Students	Mean
Text analysis	12	82.4

Presentation	9	80.1
Written exercises	11	78.6

d) Improving Learning Outcomes

Comparison of learning outcomes before and after implementing Differentiated Instruction:

Table 5. Improvement in Learning Outcomes

Indicator	Average value
Pre-test (<i>pre-assessment</i>)	62.3
Post-test (after-treatment)	78.6
Ascension	16.3

Of the 27 students (84%) who experienced a significant increase, 5 students (16%) experienced an increase in the moderate category.

2. Discussion

The research results show that new PBA students have very diverse initial levels of nahwu ability, which are divided into high, medium, and low categories. This difference is evident from the results of the initial diagnostic test and the students' performance in understanding basic concepts such as *i'rab*, the number of *ismiyyah*, and the number of *fi'liyyah* with an average score of 62.3 which is in the medium to low category. The findings are supported by research stating that Arabic language learning in Indonesia is influenced by educational background factors and previous learning experiences, which cause gaps in students' initial competencies. Helmi Kamal's writing also states that the gap in students' initial competencies is seen in the low basic Arabic language skills they have when they start learning, especially in communicative skills such as speaking and listening. Students generally only have limited experience in the form of memorizing vocabulary or religious texts without a deep understanding or ability to use them in real contexts. (Kamal, 2025) This is exacerbated by the dominance of grammar-translation-based learning methods, which render them linguistically passive and poorly trained in active communication. As a result, there is a gap between the curriculum's demands for language mastery and students' actual abilities, which are still very basic and not applicable to everyday use.

The most significant improvement in the low-ability group indicates that the content differentiation strategy was able to address the learning needs of students who previously experienced fundamental difficulties in understanding the concept of nahwu. This finding is in line with research confirming that Differentiated Instruction is designed to adjust learning based on students' initial readiness and abilities, thus accommodating differences in levels of understanding in heterogeneous classes. Furthermore, a study by Ghaith & Awada showed that the application of differentiation combined with scaffolding strategies can help students overcome learning difficulties gradually through systematic instructional support. (Dhakal, 2019) In this context, students with lower abilities benefit because the material is structured more simply, contextually, and delivered in stages according to their learning needs.

Furthermore, this improvement can also be explained through the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory, which emphasizes the importance of learning support tailored to the

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individual's ability level. Research in international journals (Anwar et al., 2024) A study entitled "The Power of ZPD" demonstrated that the use of differentiation and scaffolding significantly improves students' cognitive development, especially in low-ability groups. Furthermore, other research in international journals has shown that differentiated learning contributes to reducing academic gaps and improving overall learning outcomes. (Langelaan et al., 2024).

This is evident in the results of this study, where students who were previously passive and had difficulty understanding the concept of nahwu became more active, confident, and able to participate optimally in learning. Thus, the improvement in the low-ability group not only demonstrates the cognitive success of the differentiation strategy but also reinforces the importance of an adaptive learning approach in creating an inclusive and effective learning environment.

In the learning process, the application of Differentiated Instruction shows that low-ability students experience improved comprehension when material is simplified and presented in stages. This reinforces differentiation theory, which emphasizes the importance of adapting content based on students' learning readiness. Research by Nurlatifah also shows that content differentiation can address linguistic difficulties such as grammar and vocabulary comprehension.

Furthermore, regarding process differentiation, it was found that the use of strategies such as group discussions, peer teaching, and tiered exercises had a positive impact on student engagement. High-ability students tended to act as peer tutors for other students. This aligns with research findings that collaborative approaches in Arabic language learning can increase student participation and interaction.

Furthermore, process differentiation has also been shown to be effective in increasing student learning motivation. Students demonstrated greater enthusiasm when given a variety of learning methods tailored to their learning styles. This finding supports research by AlHashmi & Elyas, which states that differentiated instruction increases student motivation and learning autonomy in grammar learning. (AlHashmi & Elyas, 2018).

In terms of product differentiation, students are given the freedom to demonstrate their learning outcomes through various formats, such as presentations, writing, or text analysis exercises. As a result, students demonstrated improved ability to apply grammar rules in real-world contexts. This aligns with Setiyadi's research, which demonstrated that a product-based learning approach significantly improves Arabic language skills. (Alif Cahya Setiyadi et al., 2025).

Other findings indicate that the implementation of differentiation is not yet fully optimal, particularly in the aspect of content differentiation, which is still limited. This is due to the limited availability of teaching materials that meet the diverse needs of students. Nuriani's research also revealed a gap between available teaching materials and students' needs in differentiation-based Arabic language learning. (Rikha Ikke Nuriani, Hanik Mahliatussikah, 2024).

Furthermore, lecturers' readiness to implement Differentiated Instruction is a crucial factor in successful learning. Lecturers who have a good understanding of differentiation strategies tend to be more effective in managing heterogeneous classes. This aligns with research by Dawod & Ghani, which states that teacher readiness is a key factor in the successful implementation of differentiation. (Dawod & Abdul Ghani, 2026).

In the context of learning nahwu, the results of this study also show that traditional learning methods that focus on memorization are less effective in accommodating differences in student abilities. In contrast, interactive approaches such as role-playing, discussions, and hands-on practice are more effective in improving student understanding. This is supported by Hamdy's research, which emphasizes the importance of interactive methods in learning nahwu. (Hamdy & Ningsih, 2025).

Furthermore, the results of this study indicate that Differentiated Instruction can create more inclusive and adaptive learning that meets student needs. This also aligns with Al-Khawaldeh's research, which states that differentiation in content, process, and product is a key component in creating effective learning. (Khawaldeh & Shuqairat, 2023).

Based on the comparison between the initial assessment and the final test, 27 students (84%) experienced significant improvement after the implementation of Differentiated Instruction, while 5 students (16%) showed moderate improvement. These data indicate that the majority of students were able to respond positively to learning strategies tailored to their level of readiness and learning needs. Significant improvement in most students indicates that differentiation in content, process, and product aspects is effective in helping students understand the concept of nahwu more optimally. Meanwhile, moderate improvement in a small number of students may be influenced by other factors such as differences in learning styles, motivation, or adaptation to new learning methods. Overall, these findings confirm that Differentiated Instruction has a strong impact on improving student learning outcomes, especially in heterogeneous classroom contexts.

Overall, the results of this study confirm that the application of Differentiated Instruction in learning nahwu (literacy) significantly contributes to addressing the heterogeneity of students' initial abilities. This approach not only improves conceptual understanding but also improves student motivation and engagement in learning. Thus, Differentiated Instruction can be a relevant pedagogical solution in the context of Arabic language learning in Islamic religious universities.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that new students of the Arabic Language Education Study Program (PBA) at the Darul A'mal Islamic Institute in Lampung have heterogeneous initial levels of nahwu ability, which are divided into high, medium, and low categories with an average initial score of 62.3. This condition indicates that in general the students' abilities are still at a medium to low level, so that a learning approach that is able to accommodate these differences is needed. This heterogeneity is the main challenge in learning nahwu, especially in creating an effective and equitable learning process for all students.

The implementation of Differentiated Instruction has been proven to have a positive impact on improving student learning outcomes, particularly through the differentiation of content, processes, and learning products. This is evident in the increase in the average score from 62.3 to 78.6, a 16.3-point increase. Furthermore, the most significant improvement occurred in the low-ability student group, indicating that the differentiation strategy can help students experiencing basic difficulties in understanding the concept of nahwu gradually and systematically.

In terms of the learning process, the implementation of strategies such as group discussions, peer teaching, and tiered exercises significantly increased student engagement and participation. Students became more active in asking questions, discussing topics, and engaging in learning exercises. Furthermore, product differentiation provided students with opportunities to express

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their understanding through various assignments tailored to their individual abilities and learning preferences, resulting in more optimal and meaningful learning outcomes.

Overall, 27 students (84%) experienced significant improvement and 5 students (16%) experienced moderate improvement after implementing Differentiated Instruction. This finding confirms that the differentiation approach is effective in addressing the heterogeneity of students' initial abilities and improving student learning outcomes, motivation, and engagement in nahwu learning. Thus, Differentiated Instruction can be used as a relevant and applicable pedagogical solution in Arabic language learning at Islamic religious universities, although further development is still needed, especially in the provision of teaching materials and lecturer readiness in its implementation.

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