Exploring the Readiness of Arabic Language Teachers towards Differentiated Teaching Approaches

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Abstract

This study explores the readiness and practices of Arabic Language teachers in implementing Differentiated Pedagogy (DP) through the use of teaching aids within Malaysian secondary religious schools. Employing a qualitative research design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with nine Arabic Language teachers at Jawahir Al-Ulum Islamic Religious High School. Thematic analysis revealed four central dimensions of teacher readiness: (1) preparation prior to instruction, (2) selection of appropriate implementation strategies, (3) application of DP across Arabic language skills, and (4) integration of 21st-century learning elements. Findings indicate that teachers demonstrated a strong understanding of students' cognitive levels, multiple intelligences, and learning interests, which informed their adaptive use of teaching aids and materials. Teachers effectively differentiated content, processes, and learning environments while embedding cooperative learning, critical thinking, and ICT literacy into instruction. The use of varied and multifunctional teaching aids enhanced student engagement, linguistic proficiency, and inclusivity in the classroom. The study concludes that Differentiated Pedagogy, supported by purposeful use of teaching aids, provides a transformative framework for Arabic language education by aligning instruction with learner diversity and national educational aspirations. Future research is recommended to expand the scope to other institutions and employ mixed method designs to validate and extend these findings.

Keywords: Differentiated Pedagogy, Arabic Language Education, Teacher Readiness, Teaching Aids, 21st-Century Learning, Multiple Intelligences, Inclusive Instruction

Introduction

Undeniably, global education has evolved in tandem with contemporary technological advancements. An efficient and systematic education system, designed to cultivate competent and competitive human resources, has emerged as the principal mechanism

guiding industrial trajectories, encompassing sectors from manufacturing to technology (Hashim & Mohamad, 2020). Consequently, educators across all levels must acquire new knowledge to enhance their competence and align with these rapid global transformations. Teachers are increasingly required to adapt various pedagogical approaches and instructional methods to address the varying requirements and cognitive levels of students (Mustaffa et al., 2021). As emphasized by Jaafar & Mat Said (2019), acknowledging student variety in the classroom is essential to facilitate active learning and promote reciprocal communication, thereby ensuring educational objectives are met.

However, a critical challenge persists regarding teacher unpreparedness in managing these varied cognitive levels (Mustaffa et al., 2021; Muttalip, 2020). If unaddressed, this unpreparedness diminishes instructional effectiveness and may lead to student attrition. This issue is not unique to a specific region; Kim (2021) notes that in global EFL contexts, teacher unavailability and difficulty in instruction often foster negative perceptions among students. This creates a disconnect, as instructional materials and sessions are not tailored to students' competence levels. The complexity of this challenge is further highlighted by Radi and Amran (2023), who identify that teachers struggle to accommodate specific requirements, manage inclusive classrooms, and address the needs of students requiring special assistance.

In the Malaysian context, the issue of teacher unpreparedness became more pronounced following the Ministry of Education's complete abolition of the class streaming system in 2019. This policy shift resulted in mixed-ability classrooms comprising students with differing levels, learning styles, attitudes, and interests (Mustaffa et al., 2021; Hashim & Mohamad, 2020). With the shift towards holistic assessment, the "One-Size-Fits-All" pedagogical approach is now obsolete and ineffective. Teachers are expected to act as facilitators, yet many struggle to comprehend the content depth required to tailor strategies for such a diverse population.

This gap is particularly evident in Arabic language instruction, where teachers often rely on conventional, teacher-centric methods such as "Chalk & Talk" and translation, resulting in minimal student engagement (Zaini et al., 2019; Mupa & Chinooneka, 2015). The tendency to rely solely on textbooks and a single information source further stifles critical and creative thinking. Consequently, there is an urgent need to reform traditional Arabic instruction into a participatory experience utilizing diverse teaching aids and technology.

Addressing these challenges, this study posits that the integration of Differentiated Pedagogy is crucial. While existing literature acknowledges the problem of teacher readiness, this research contributes to the field of social sciences by specifically exploring the factors facilitating the application of Differentiated Pedagogy within Arabic education. By examining how educators can adjust content, processes, and products based on students' readiness and interests, this study offers a novel framework for enhancing teacher competency and ensuring inclusive education in mixed-ability classrooms.

Background
Since 2005, Malaysia's Jawi, Al-Quran, Arabic Language, and *Fardhu Ain* (j-QAF) program has gradually introduced the Arabic Language Learning Curriculum Mohamad et al., 2017). Arab is also a foreign language that schools can teach provided it is practicable and adequate,

according to the Education Act 1986. The late introduction of Arabic into Malaysia's education system creates limits from teaching staff, teaching aids, innovation creation, and teaching and learning methodologies. Since Arabic language pedagogical skills are the foundation of every teacher's instruction, they must be prioritised. Thus, Arabic language teachers who have their actual options have good language and communication skills and perfect syntactic, morphological, and rhetorical knowledge, which makes their teaching more effective (Atoh et al., 2014).

Arabic language teaching in Malaysia improves every year as more graduates from inside and outside the country study Arabic. To develop qualified, competitive instructors, annual teacher training course research is modified and updated. Shalikin (2024) states that teachers must use technology to produce active and engaged lessons. Thus, teacher training courses should incorporate technology values to help teachers adapt to contemporary developments. All teachers should emphasise student diversity at different levels or stages in schools. Active and effective learning requires teachers to observe and emphasise students' teaching subject comprehension. The teacher, student, and materials make up effective learning, according to Jamian (2021). Teachers must alter teaching materials for students with different levels of expertise to engage them and promote active learning.

From here, Arabic language teachers' unpreparedness for student levels is a dangerous issue in education. Teachers' lack of knowledge about diverse and effective pedagogies and approaches causes Arabic language education to fail owing to inappropriate techniques for diverse student levels. Although the Arabic language teacher education curriculum has been refined using various methods and approaches, a small number of teachers who are not interested in changing Arabic language teaching still do not apply the latest methods and appropriate pedagogy to overcome the diverse levels of students in the classroom, whether it involves modifying learning content or teaching aids (Hilmi et al., 2020). Arabic language teachers who use traditional methods in the teaching and facilitation process, such as translating in traditional Islamic boarding schools, demotivate students to study Arabic diligently and thoroughly (Zaini et al., 2019). The teacher-centered direct teaching style makes students docile.

Next, in today's world, teaching aids are essential for engaging, effective, and impactful lessons, especially when used with ICT technology, which can meet all students' Arabic learning needs (Hamzan, 2016). As everyone knows, instructional aids can be electronic or non-electronic (Mutallip, 2020). For instructional aids, some employ technology and some use actual things. Various teaching approaches, methods, and pedagogies are needed to achieve the Arabic language's general learning objectives, such as mastering the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing and applying them to specific themes and situations. Teachers must also use numerous instructional aids, especially information technology, which is close to students. However, some teachers have yet to master the changes and technology-based teaching methods that are essential to teachers' instruction failing due to students' lack of enthusiasm in learning Arabic (Hamzan, 2016).

Pedagogical teaching practices and teaching aids (TLMs) must match learning content needs and be appropriate for all student levels. ICT-based teaching can also make learning entertaining and improve student performance. Teachers that use traditional teaching

methods that are not suitable for all pupils fail to meet learning objectives due to their mindset. Technology is increasingly considered as a primary driver that produces human capital capable of building a country through information technology consumer skills. Researchers can show that varied pedagogical techniques can overcome teacher unpreparedness in teaching Arabic to varying student levels in a single classroom. The Ministry of Education Malaysia's 2018 announcement to permanently eliminate streaming by level in 2019 makes the "one-size-fits-all" teaching style obsolete. This makes this pedagogical technique ideal for Arabic language teachers.

Differentiated Instruction, established by Carol Ann Tomlinson in 1995 in the US, is still used today (Mustaffa et al., 2021). This pedagogical strategy was also suggested by Badrol Hissam et al. (2017) to boost teacher effectiveness and student motivation. To celebrate student diversity in the classroom, this pedagogical approach modifies learning content, approach or teaching process, products or outcomes, and the learning environment to showcase teachers' creative, innovative, and engaging methods (Tomlinson, 2014). This concept states that teachers can modify the learning curriculum by adapting teaching resources, modifying, combining, and adjusting teaching methods and assessment of student learning outcomes in the classroom to celebrate and meet student diversity (Mustaffa et al., 2021). Thus, this varied educational technique can improve Arabic language instructors' professional growth. This matches the Malaysian Education Development Plan's goal of focussing on education, closing the achievement gap through student outcomes, uniting students, and improving system efficiency (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013).

Methodology

According to Chua (2006), a research design constitutes a systematic framework that guides the collection and analysis of data based on predetermined variables. It provides a structured plan that ensures the study is conducted in a logical and coherent manner. In this study, the researcher adopted a qualitative research design, emphasizing the use of primary data obtained through semi-structured interviews. This approach allows the researcher to explore participants' perspectives in depth, aligning with the research questions and objectives. Qualitative research does not require a large number of respondents; instead, it prioritizes the richness and quality of the data gathered from a smaller, focused sample group (Ang, 2016). The analysis process follows a deductive logical reasoning approach, moving from specific observations to broader generalizations (Neuman, 2014; Resichadt & Cook, 1979). This enables the researcher to derive meaningful insights that address the research questions within the context of Arabic language education.

The population and sampling process play a critical role in determining the validity and reliability of a study. As emphasized by Chua (2006), the selection of an appropriate sample is essential to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. In this study, the population consisted of Arabic language teachers at Jawahir Al-Ulum Religious High School. These individuals were chosen because they possess direct experience and expertise relevant to the study's focus on Arabic language education. The researcher employed a purposive sampling technique, which is commonly used in qualitative research to select participants who can provide rich, relevant, and diverse insights. The selected participants were Arabic language teachers teaching under the Integrated Dini Curriculum *or* in Malays language called *Kurikulum Bersepadu Dini (KBD* at Jawahir Al-Ulum Religious High School. This sampling

strategy ensured that the data collected would be aligned with the study objectives and research questions.

The inclusion criteria for participant selection were established to ensure that respondents possessed sufficient qualifications and experience to contribute meaningfully to the study. The selected teachers met the following criteria:
1. Teachers with a minimum of two (2) years of experience teaching Arabic Language.
2. Teachers holding at least a Diploma qualification in Arabic Language or related fields such as *Usuluddin*, *Syariah*, or Islamic Studies.
3. Teachers who demonstrated commitment and willingness to participate throughout the interview process.

This targeted selection enabled the researcher to obtain high-quality, contextually relevant data from individuals deeply involved in Arabic language teaching, ensuring that the findings are both valid and insightful.

Findings
This section presents the findings of the study derived from semi-structured interviews with nine Arabic Language teachers at Jawahir Al-Ulum Islamic Religious School. The analysis identified four major themes related to teachers' readiness in implementing Differentiated, which is:
1. Teachers' preparedness,
2. Implementation methods,
3. Language skills application, and
4. Integration of 21st Century Learning elements.

Each theme is elaborated below with supporting subthemes and representative quotations from participants.

Theme 1: Teachers' Preparedness Towards Differentiated Pedagogy
The first theme reflects the level of readiness among Arabic language teachers in implementing Differentiated Pedagogy through their pre-instructional preparation.

(a) Understanding Students' Cognitive Levels
Teachers emphasized the importance of understanding students' cognitive abilities and prior knowledge before designing instruction. As stated by several participants:

"Usually before entering class, we observe students' learning levels first, then apply differentiated pedagogy according to their proficiency." (R6)

"I already know students' tendencies and interests in class, so I choose activities like singing, gallery walk, or presentation based on their understanding level." (R7)

"To apply differentiated pedagogy, we must first identify students' proficiency levels and adapt our delivery accordingly." (R8)

Teachers also highlighted that understanding students' weaknesses from previous lessons helps refine subsequent instruction:

"Before starting a new topic, I already know the weaknesses from previous lessons I've identified their cognitive level and knowledge." (R3)

(b) Recognizing Students' Interests
Teachers reported tailoring their teaching strategies according to students' interests to enhance engagement:

"I emphasize teaching strategies based on students' interests so that they remain active in class." (R3)

"Most of the activities I choose are one's students enjoy, such as singing or gallery walk." (R7)

(c) Considering Multiple Intelligences
Teachers also considered students' multiple intelligences verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, kinesthetics, musical, and interpersonal when preparing for instruction:

"We observe the characteristics and tendencies shown by students — that's how we recognize their intelligence and preferences." (R1)

By aligning instruction with students' intelligences and interests, teachers fostered stronger engagement, motivation, and holistic student development in both curricular and co-curricular activities.

Theme 2: Implementation Methods of Differentiated Pedagogy
This theme illustrates the strategic and procedural modifications teachers made in their classroom practices when applying Differentiated Pedagogy.

(a) Activity-Based and Student-Centered Strategies
Most teachers favored activity-oriented, collaborative, and student-centered learning:

"I prefer group-based, student-centered activities." (R2)

"My approach focuses on active learning strategies like gallery walk and presentation-based tasks." (R4, R7, R9)

These strategies encouraged active learning and increased student participation, aligning with the principles of classroom-based formative assessment.

(b) Thematic Lesson Planning
Teachers modified their lesson objectives thematically to align with students' learning needs:

"We plan lessons based on learning objectives and student interests, theming activities to match students' intelligence types." (R4)

(c) Adaptive Content Selection

Teachers adjusted content difficulty and materials according to student proficiency:
"I select lesson content that suits weak, average, and excellent students." (R2)

"Exercises are tiered low, medium, and high levels assigned based on student ability." (R8)

(d) Learning Environment and Teaching Aids

Teachers also adapted classroom environments and teaching aids to suit specific approaches:

"Sometimes, we choose alternative learning spaces like the library or technology-equipped rooms depending on lesson needs." (R1)

"I focus on resource-based teaching with multifunctional materials to attract students' interest." (R6)

(e) Combined Teaching Approaches

Some teachers employed blended methods, combining teacher-centered and student-centered approaches for optimal learning outcomes:

"I start with a teacher-centered explanation, then move to student-centered activities to assess their understanding." (R2)

Theme 3: Application of Differentiated Pedagogy in Arabic Language Skills
This theme explores teachers' readiness to implement Differentiated Pedagogy within the four Arabic language skills listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Teachers adjusted content and instructional materials to match students' proficiency in each skill:

"For listening, I sometimes use texts from outside the textbook that match students' level." (R3)

They also utilized multimedia resources to support skill development:

"For reading, I use electronic audio to ensure correct pronunciation." (R3)

"For speaking, I use video materials from YouTube for role-play activities." (R2)

Furthermore, teachers integrated various 21st century learning activities to enhance communication skills:

"During speaking, I use activities like Think-Pair-Share or Showdown to encourage speaking." (R8, R9)

Teachers also modified activities to accommodate students' diverse intelligences:

"Auditory learners grasp faster during listening, but we add visual materials to support others." (R1)

"I use songs and rhythmic clapping activities to engage kinesthetic learners." (R7)

These differentiated strategies improved student engagement and mastery of Arabic language skills.

Theme 4: Integration of 21st Learning Century Elements in Differentiated Pedagogy
The final theme highlights how 21st Century Learning elements were incorporated into differentiated teaching.

(a) Cooperative and Collaborative Learning
Teachers emphasized peer-assisted learning through cooperative structures such as *mentor-mentee* systems:

"Differentiated pedagogy allows peer collaboration, where students help each other like a mentor-mentee system." (R1, R4)

(b) Active and Interactive Learning
Teachers implemented activity-based strategies that encouraged critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration:

"Game-based and active learning activities train students to think critically and work together." (R2, R6)

(c) Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving
By aligning content and activities to students' levels, teachers were able to foster higher-order thinking skills (HOTS):

"Differentiated pedagogy allows mastery of content before moving to 21st learning century activities that promote critical thinking." (R7)

(d) Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Literacy
Teachers integrated technology to diversify resources and enhance learning engagement:

"We encourage students to use technology to explore learning materials beyond the textbook under teacher supervision." (R9)

The incorporation of 21st learning century activities principles not only reduced achievement gaps among students but also fostered communication, collaboration, and problem-solving abilities:

"21st learning century activities narrow the comprehension gap as students support and interact with one another." (R8)

Overall, the findings indicate that the Arabic Language teachers at Jawahir Al-Ulum Islamic Religious High School demonstrate a moderate-to-high level of readiness in implementing Differentiated Pedagogy. Their preparedness is reflected in their ability to:

- Understand students' cognitive levels, interests, and multiple intelligences.
- Modify teaching strategies, content, and learning environments.
- Integrate Arabic language skills through adaptive activities; and
- Embed 21st learning century activities elements such as collaboration, active learning, and ICT integration.

Collectively, these findings suggest that Differentiated Pedagogy enhances student engagement, language skill acquisition, and classroom inclusivity through tailored and flexible instructional approaches.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that Arabic Language teachers at Jawahir Al-Ulum Islamic Religious High School demonstrated readiness to implement Differentiated Pedagogy across four main dimensions:

1. teacher preparation before instruction,
2. selection of appropriate implementation methods,
3. application of differentiated approaches in Arabic language skills, and
4. integration of 21st-century learning elements

Each dimension is discussed below in relation to existing literature and theoretical perspectives.

Teachers' Preparedness for Implementing Differentiated Pedagogy

Teacher preparedness emerged as the foundation for successful implementation of Differentiated Pedagogy. The findings indicated that teachers prioritized understanding students' cognitive levels, learning readiness, multiple intelligences, and individual interests prior to classroom instruction. This aligns with Tomlinson's (2017) assertion that effective differentiation begins with the teacher's deep understanding of students' needs, enabling them to design inclusive learning environments where students feel recognized and valued.

The participants' emphasis on understanding learners' cognitive abilities and preferences supports the view that teacher awareness promotes adaptive instructional planning and classroom control. Conversely, as highlighted by Mokhlis (2021), instruction that fails to address students' learning diversity may lead to reduced motivation and engagement. This finding also resonates with Santangelo and Tomlinson (2009) and Ziernwald et al. (2022), who emphasized that teachers play a central role in managing student diversity and ensuring equitable learning opportunities. Within the Malaysian educational framework, this perspective aligns with the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013–2025), which envisions teachers as agents of holistic student development through differentiated and inclusive pedagogy. In short, teacher preparedness anchored in empathy, observation, and pedagogical awareness is crucial for realizing the philosophy of differentiation in Arabic language classrooms.

Selection of Appropriate Implementation Methods
The study revealed that teachers employed multiple differentiation strategies, including modification of teaching processes and strategies, content differentiation, material adaptation, environmental adjustment, and method integration. These findings align closely with the differentiation framework proposed by Tomlinson and Imbeau (2014), which highlights readiness, interest, and learning profiles as the key dimensions for effective differentiation.

Teachers' use of process and content modification also reflects Renzulli and Reis's (2014) concept of flexible curriculum adaptation to meet diverse learner needs. By differentiating not only what students learn but also how they learn and how they demonstrate mastery, teachers respect individual differences and promote learner autonomy. These practices are consistent with Mustaffa et al. (2021), who emphasized that differentiated strategies tailored to student readiness and interest can enhance engagement and academic growth. Similarly, Abdul Rahim and Hashim (2017) demonstrated that differentiation in *tahfiz* education improves outcomes when instruction aligns with student profiles and motivation.

A comparable study by Michael & Mahamod (2023) in Malay language instruction reported similar trends, where teachers employed differentiated strategies across process, content, and product dimensions. Collectively, these studies support the current finding that differentiation has become a pedagogical norm across disciplines, adaptable to various educational contexts, including Arabic language instruction.

Application of Differentiated Pedagogy in Arabic Language Skills
In alignment with Malaysia's Curriculum named *Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah* (*KSSM*, 2017) and *Kurikulum Bersepadu Dini* (*KBD*, 2015), Arabic language instruction emphasizes the development of four core language skills listening (*istima'*), speaking (*kalam*), reading (*qira'ah*), and writing (*kitabah*). The present findings indicate that teachers effectively adapted content, learning activities, and instructional materials to support these skills through differentiation.

Teachers reported modifying existing materials and integrating external resources to suit students' linguistic proficiency and interests. This approach is consistent with Abu Aman & Baharudin (2019), who underscored that mastery of Arabic among non-native speakers depends on targeted instruction in these four fundamental skills. The alignment between differentiated instruction and skill-based pedagogy is noteworthy: both prioritize individualized support, scaffolded learning, and adaptive task design. In this regard, differentiation ensures that each learner progresses according to their linguistic readiness and potential. Consequently, this study reinforces the argument that Differentiated Pedagogy enhances language acquisition and engagement by bridging curriculum expectations with learners' diverse capabilities.

Integration of 21st-Century Learning Elements in Differentiated Pedagogy
The integration of 21st-Century Learning elements within Differentiated Pedagogy was identified as a key indicator of teacher readiness. This finding aligns with the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013–2025), which emphasizes student-centered learning and the teacher's role as a facilitator. Teachers in this study reported embedding ICT literacy,

cooperative and collaborative learning, critical thinking, active learning, and problem-solving into their differentiated instruction. These practices are supported by Ariffin and Yunus (2017), who noted that effective 21st-century pedagogy requires integration of interactive, technology-driven strategies that promote engagement and autonomy.

The results also corroborate Yunos (2015), who advocated for a combination of teacher-centered, student-centered, and material-centered approaches to sustain learner focus and optimize classroom dynamics. Differentiated Pedagogy complements this by allowing teachers to adjust learning experiences to student readiness and interest, thereby cultivating critical and creative thinkers prepared for the challenges of Industrial Revolution 4.0. Hence, the successful adoption of Differentiated Pedagogy enriched by 21st-Century Learning principles demonstrates teachers' ability to merge traditional linguistic pedagogy with modern educational innovation, promoting both academic excellence and holistic student development.

Conclusion

This study assessed the preparedness of Al-Lughoh Al-Arabiah Al-Mua'sirah (LAM) educators at Jawahir Al-Ulum Islamic Religious High School to use Differentiated Pedagogy in the framework of 21st-century learning. The qualitative findings indicated that teachers exhibited a notable degree of preparation and adaptability in aligning varied educational techniques with the linguistic and cognitive diversity of their students. Four principal factors of readiness were identified: educator preparation prior to instruction, strategic implementation techniques, use of differentiation in Arabic language competencies, and incorporation of 21st-century learning features. The research indicated that effective differentiation commences with educators' recognition of students' cognitive levels, interests, and diverse intelligences, enabling the creation of responsive and inclusive learning experiences. The capacity of educators to modify content, procedures, materials, and learning environments demonstrates pedagogical maturity consistent with Tomlinson's (2017) model of differentiated instruction and the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013–2025).

The incorporation of Differentiated Pedagogy in Arabic language education not only fortifies skill-based instruction in hearing, speaking, reading, and writing but also amplifies participation through active and collaborative learning, critical thinking, and digital literacy. These activities highlight the essential function of Arabic language educators as enablers of comprehensive learning experiences that connect conventional teaching methods with contemporary educational advancements. This study theoretically enhances the existing literature on the contextual adaptation of Differentiated Pedagogy in non-native language learning settings. It emphasises that educators who foster pedagogical flexibility and sensitivity for learner diversity can enhance equitable and significant learning results in diverse educational environments.

Nonetheless, the results are constrained to a narrow cohort of educators within a singular institutional framework. Future research should utilise mixed-method or longitudinal approaches to investigate varied practices across numerous schools, regions, or educational levels. Comparative analyses between Arabic and other linguistic disciplines could elucidate how principles of difference are conveyed across various languages and cultural contexts. In conclusion, the study affirms that Differentiated Pedagogy, when adeptly integrated into

Arabic language instruction and bolstered by 21st-century learning components, becomes a transformative method for language education. It enables educators to address student diversity with purpose and innovation, cultivating an inclusive, engaging, and future-oriented learning environment that corresponds with Malaysia's vision for 21st-century education.

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