THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION AND LEARNING INDEPENDENCE IN AL-ISLAM AT SMA MUHAMMADIYAH 1 SURABAYA

ARTIKEL

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PROGRAM STUDI PENDIDIKAN AGAMA ISLAM

FAKULTAS STUDI ISLAM DAN PERADABAN

UNIVERSITAS MUHAMMADIYAH SURABAYA

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Diajukan Kepada Universitas Muhammadiyah Surabaya Dalam Memperoleh Gelar Sarjana Pendidikan Agama Islam (S.Pd) Program Studi Pendidikan Agama Islam

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ABSTRAK

Meskipun penekanan pada pembelajaran yang responsif terhadap peserta didik dalam Kurikulum Merdeka di Indonesia semakin meningkat, bukti empiris mengenai hubungan antara persepsi siswa terhadap pembelajaran berdiferensiasi dan kemandirian belajar masih terbatas, khususnya dalam pendidikan Al-Islam. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguji arah, kekuatan, dan signifikansi statistik hubungan tersebut pada siswa kelas X SMA Muhammadiyah 1 Surabaya. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain korelasional *cross-sectional* yang melibatkan 47 siswa dari empat kelas yang dipilih melalui *purposive sampling*. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan kuesioner *self-report* berskala Likert empat poin yang mengukur persepsi siswa terhadap pembelajaran berdiferensiasi dan kemandirian belajar. Korelasi *product-moment* Pearson dilakukan setelah penilaian normalitas dan linearitas. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya hubungan positif yang signifikan secara statistik dengan kekuatan sedang antara persepsi terhadap pembelajaran berdiferensiasi dan kemandirian belajar ($r(45) = 0{,}476$; $p = 0{,}001$; 95% CI [0,22; 0,67]), yang mengindikasikan bahwa siswa yang mempersepsikan pembelajaran lebih responsif cenderung melaporkan tingkat kemandirian belajar yang lebih tinggi. Temuan ini memperluas pemahaman empiris tentang hubungan antara responsivitas pembelajaran dan kemandirian belajar dalam konteks pendidikan Al-Islam. Temuan ini juga menegaskan pentingnya mempertimbangkan pengalaman belajar yang dipersepsikan siswa dalam merancang praktik pembelajaran yang mengakomodasi keragaman peserta didik serta mendorong otonomi dan tanggung jawab. Meskipun demikian, desain korelasional dan ketergantungan pada data laporan diri tidak memungkinkan interpretasi kausal, sehingga diperlukan penelitian lanjutan dengan pendekatan yang lebih ketat dan beragam.

Kata kunci: Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi; Kemandirian Belajar; Persepsi Siswa; Pendidikan Al-Islam; Studi Korelasional.

ABSTRACT

Despite the growing emphasis on learner-responsive instruction within Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum, empirical evidence concerning the relationship between students' perceptions of differentiated instruction and learning independence remains limited, particularly in Al-Islam education. This study aimed to examine the direction, strength, and statistical significance of this relationship among tenth-grade students at SMA Muhammadiyah 1 Surabaya. A quantitative, cross-sectional correlational design was employed, involving 47 students from four classes selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using four-point Likert-scale self-report questionnaires measuring students' perceptions of differentiated instruction and learning independence. Pearson's product-moment correlation was performed following normality and linearity assessments. The findings revealed a statistically significant, moderate positive association between perceived differentiated instruction and learning independence ($r(45) = 0.476$, $p = 0.001$, 95% CI [0.22, 0.67]), indicating that students who perceived greater instructional responsiveness tended to report higher levels of learning independence. These findings extend empirical understanding of the relationship between instructional responsiveness and learning independence within the context of Al-Islam education. They also highlight the importance of considering students' perceived learning experiences when designing instructional practices that accommodate learner diversity and encourage autonomy and responsibility. Nevertheless, the correlational design and reliance on self-reported data preclude causal interpretations, emphasizing the need for further investigation using more rigorous and diverse research approaches.

Keywords: Differentiated Instruction; Learning Independence; Students' Perceptions; Al-Islam Education; Correlational Study.

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The Relationship Between Students' Perceptions of Differentiated Instruction and Learning Independence in Al-Islam at SMA Muhammadiyah 1 Surabaya

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ABSTRACT

Despite the growing emphasis on learner-responsive instruction within Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum, empirical evidence concerning the relationship between students' perceptions of differentiated instruction and learning independence remains limited, particularly in Al-Islam education. This study aimed to examine the direction, strength, and statistical significance of this relationship among tenth-grade students at SMA Muhammadiyah 1 Surabaya. A quantitative, cross-sectional correlational design was employed, involving 47 students from four classes selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using four-point Likert-scale self-report questionnaires measuring students' perceptions of differentiated instruction and learning independence. Pearson's product-moment correlation was performed following normality and linearity assessments. The findings revealed a statistically significant, moderate positive association between perceived differentiated instruction and learning independence ($r(45) = 0.476$, $p = 0.001$, 95% CI [0.22, 0.67]), indicating that students who perceived greater instructional responsiveness tended to report higher levels of learning independence. These findings extend empirical understanding of the relationship between instructional responsiveness and learning independence within the context of Al-Islam education. They also highlight the importance of considering students' perceived learning experiences when designing instructional practices that accommodate learner diversity and encourage autonomy and responsibility. Nevertheless, the correlational design and reliance on self-reported data preclude causal interpretations, emphasizing the need for further investigation using more rigorous and diverse research approaches.

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INTRODUCTION

Developing students' learning independence remains an important challenge in secondary education, particularly as students are increasingly expected to take responsibility for planning, managing, and evaluating their learning [1]. In Indonesia, this objective aligns with the national education system's emphasis on developing independent and responsible individuals [2]. However, evidence suggests that students' capacity to manage their learning is not yet fully established. According to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022, only 58% of students across OECD countries reported confidence in motivating themselves to complete schoolwork, while 69% expressed confidence in independently planning their study schedules [3], [4]. In Indonesia, approximately 70% of students reported confidence in motivating themselves to complete schoolwork if schools were required to close again, indicating that a substantial proportion remained uncertain about their capacity for independent learning. Although these indicators reflect students' perceived readiness for independent learning rather than directly measuring their actual learning independence, they highlight the continuing importance of strengthening students' motivation and self-management capabilities [5].

This concern is also relevant to the learning context at SMA Muhammadiyah 1 Surabaya. Preliminary observations conducted during the researcher's school-based teaching practicum (PLP) indicated that some students required repeated reminders to complete assignments, demonstrated limited initiative in learning activities, and experienced difficulties managing their study time. Classroom instruction was also observed to rely considerably on teacher-centered explanations, which offered relatively limited opportunities for students to make independent learning decisions. These observations constitute preliminary contextual evidence rather than quantitative findings representative of the entire student population [6]. Nevertheless, they suggest a potential mismatch between the expectation that students develop

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learning independence and the learning opportunities provided in classroom practice. This issue becomes particularly relevant within the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes instructional responsiveness to differences in students' readiness, interests, and learning needs [7], [8]. One pedagogical approach aligned with this orientation is differentiated instruction, which provides flexible learning experiences according to students' diverse characteristics.

Differentiated instruction refers to a systematic approach in which teachers adapt learning experiences to accommodate differences among students. This approach encompasses four interconnected dimensions: content, process, product, and learning environment. These dimensions allow teachers to adjust what students learn, how they engage with learning materials, how they demonstrate their understanding, and the conditions in which learning takes place [9]. From a theoretical perspective, differentiated instruction may provide opportunities for students to exercise greater initiative and responsibility in their learning. This assumption is consistent with self-determination theory, which emphasizes the importance of autonomy-supportive learning environments in fostering students' motivation and psychological functioning. Learning independence, meanwhile, encompasses students' ability to initiate learning activities, establish goals, manage learning strategies, fulfill academic responsibilities, and evaluate their progress [10]. Although closely related to self-regulated learning, learning independence is maintained as the principal construct in this study, while self-regulated learning provides a complementary theoretical perspective. Accordingly, differentiated instruction may be associated with learning independence by creating opportunities for students to make decisions and take responsibility for their learning processes.

Existing empirical research provides important, although not entirely consistent, evidence concerning the potential contribution of differentiated instruction to student learning. A systematic review involving 12 empirical studies in secondary education reported that differentiated instruction generally produced small to moderate positive effects on students' academic achievement [9]. However, substantial variation in its conceptualization, implementation, and measurement indicates that its educational benefits may depend on contextual and instructional factors. In the Indonesian context, a quantitative study involving 30 elementary school students reported a positive relationship between differentiated instruction and learning independence, suggesting that instructional responsiveness may be associated with students' capacity to manage their learning [11]. In contrast, research conducted in junior high school science education found no statistically significant relationship between differentiated instruction and self-regulated learning [12]. Additional studies have emphasized the importance of teacher autonomy support, instructional assistance, and supportive learning environments in developing students' self-regulated learning capabilities. Collectively, these findings suggest that differentiated instruction and autonomy-supportive teaching practices may be relevant to students' independent learning, although the direction, strength, and statistical significance of these relationships may vary across educational levels, subject areas, and learning outcome measures.

Despite these contributions, several gaps remain in the existing literature. First, previous studies have predominantly focused on academic achievement or self-regulated learning rather than specifically examining learning independence as a distinct construct. Although these concepts are related, they are not necessarily interchangeable because learning independence places particular emphasis on students' initiative, responsibility, and ability to manage learning activities with reduced dependence on direct teacher guidance. Second, existing findings regarding the relationship between differentiated instruction and independent learning capabilities remain inconsistent. Positive associations identified among elementary school students have not been consistently replicated in junior high school contexts, suggesting the need for further investigation at different educational levels. Third, research on differentiated instruction in Islamic religious education has largely concentrated on instructional implementation and the development of meaningful learning experiences, while quantitative investigations examining its relationship with learning independence remain limited within the literature considered. This limitation is particularly relevant to Al-Islam education in Muhammadiyah schools, where learning is directed not only toward acquiring religious knowledge but also toward internalizing Islamic values and developing personal responsibility. Furthermore, relatively limited attention has been given to students' perceptions of differentiated instruction, even though students' perceived learning experiences may differ from the instructional strategies intended or reported by teachers. These limitations indicate the need for context-specific empirical research examining how perceived differentiated instruction relates to learning independence in senior high school Al-Islam education.

Against this background, the central problem addressed in this study is the insufficient empirical understanding of the relationship between students' perceptions of differentiated instruction and their learning independence in senior high school Al-Islam education. Specifically, the direction, strength, and statistical significance of this relationship have not been established in the context of SMA Muhammadiyah 1 Surabaya. Therefore, this study aims to examine the relationship between students' perceptions of differentiated instruction and learning independence in Al-Islam using a quantitative correlational design with a cross-sectional approach. Students' perceptions of differentiated instruction are assessed through the dimensions of content, process, product, and learning environment, while the relationship between the two constructs is analyzed using their respective total scores. The study hypothesizes a positive and statistically significant relationship between students' perceptions of differentiated instruction and their learning independence.

The urgency of this study lies in its theoretical, empirical, and practical contributions. Theoretically, it extends the discussion of differentiated instruction beyond academic achievement by examining its relationship with learning independence in a value-oriented educational context. Empirically, it provides quantitative evidence from senior high school students, addressing differences in educational level, subject characteristics, and measurement perspectives found in previous studies. Practically, the findings may provide Al-Islam teachers and school administrators with a better understanding of how students' perceptions of instructional responsiveness are associated with their capacity to manage learning responsibilities independently. Such evidence may support the development of instructional practices that accommodate student diversity while promoting initiative, responsibility, and active participation in learning. Given its correlational and cross-sectional design, this study does not seek to establish causal effects but rather to provide context-specific empirical evidence that can inform further research and the improvement of Al-Islam instructional practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Differentiated instruction is a student-centered pedagogical approach that recognizes differences in learners' readiness, interests, and learning profiles as the basis for designing responsive learning experiences [13]. Rather than providing entirely separate instruction for each student, this approach involves systematically adjusting four interconnected dimensions: content, process, product, and learning environment, while maintaining common learning objectives. These adjustments enable students to access appropriate learning materials, engage in activities suited to their needs, demonstrate understanding through varied formats, and learn within a supportive classroom environment. Theoretically, differentiated instruction is consistent with the principle that learning develops through appropriately challenging tasks accompanied by sufficient instructional support [14]. In this study, differentiated instruction is examined through students' perceptions of these four dimensions, reflecting their subjective experiences rather than objectively verified teacher practices. Meanwhile, learning independence refers to students' capacity to initiate, organize, regulate, and evaluate their learning activities while assuming responsibility for academic tasks. This construct is operationalized through five indicators: learning initiative, self-management, discipline, learning responsibility, and self-evaluation [15]. Although conceptually related to self-directed and self-regulated learning, learning independence specifically emphasizes students' initiative and responsibility in managing their learning [16]. The relationship between these constructs can be explained through self-determination theory, which identifies autonomy, competence, and relatedness as fundamental psychological needs supporting motivation and effective learning. Differentiated instruction may support these needs by providing meaningful choices, appropriate challenges, and responsive learning environments, thereby creating opportunities for students to develop greater independence. However, such theoretical connections do not necessarily establish an empirical relationship [17].

Existing research provides mixed evidence regarding the relationship between differentiated instruction and students' learning capabilities. Systematic reviews in primary and secondary education generally indicate positive effects of differentiated instruction on academic achievement, although the magnitude of these effects varies across instructional contexts and implementation strategies [18]. More specifically, a quantitative study involving 30 elementary school students reported a positive relationship between differentiated instruction and learning independence, whereas research in junior high school science education found no statistically significant relationship with self-regulated learning [19]. Other investigations have identified relatively small or context-dependent associations between differentiated instruction, academic achievement, and student well-being, while studies of autonomy-supportive teaching have demonstrated relationships with self-regulated learning strategies. These findings suggest that instructional responsiveness may be associated with students' capacity to manage their learning, but the evidence remains

inconclusive because the studies differ in educational level, subject characteristics, research design, and measured constructs [20]. Within Islamic religious education, existing studies have primarily examined the implementation of differentiated instruction in creating meaningful learning experiences or explored self-regulation in Qur'an learning at the university level. Although these studies emphasize the importance of supportive learning environments and student responsibility, they provide limited direct quantitative evidence concerning the relationship between students' perceptions of differentiated instruction and learning independence in senior high school Al-Islam education. Consequently, the proposed relationship remains theoretically plausible but requires empirical examination within this specific educational context.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study proposes that students' perceptions of differentiated instruction are positively associated with their learning independence. Differentiated instruction recognizes students' diverse readiness, interests, and learning profiles by adapting four instructional dimensions: content, process, product, and learning environment [21]. Each dimension provides opportunities for students to exercise greater autonomy and responsibility in learning. Content differentiation facilitates access to materials appropriate to students' readiness, potentially encouraging learning initiative; process differentiation offers flexible learning activities that support self-management and discipline; product differentiation provides choices in demonstrating understanding, fostering responsibility and self-evaluation; and a supportive learning environment encourages confidence, active participation, and independent decision-making [22], [23]. These relationships are conceptually supported by self-determination theory, which emphasizes autonomy, competence, and relatedness as essential psychological needs for effective learning. When instructional flexibility is accompanied by clear learning objectives and appropriate guidance, students may experience greater opportunities to regulate their learning. Accordingly, differentiated instruction is conceptualized as the instructional variable, measured through students' perceptions of its four dimensions, while learning independence is the student-related variable, represented by five indicators: learning initiative, self-management, discipline, learning responsibility, and self-evaluation [24].

The proposed relationship is grounded in the assumption that responsive learning experiences and meaningful choices provide opportunities for students to practice independent learning behaviors. However, this relationship may also operate in the opposite direction, as students with greater learning independence may perceive and utilize differentiated learning opportunities more positively [25]. Therefore, the framework does not assume a unidirectional causal mechanism but instead proposes a positive association between the two constructs. In this study, students' perceptions of differentiated instruction constitute the independent variable (X), while learning independence constitutes the dependent variable (Y) for analytical purposes, without implying causality. Both variables are represented by their respective total scores, and their relationship is examined using Pearson's product-moment correlation. The study does not directly test psychological mechanisms, mediating factors, reciprocal effects, or relationships between individual dimensions and indicators. Consequently, the conceptual framework provides a theoretical basis for hypothesizing a positive and statistically significant relationship between students' perceptions of differentiated instruction and learning independence in Al-Islam education at SMA Muhammadiyah 1 Surabaya, rather than establishing a causal explanation.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach using a cross-sectional correlational design to examine the relationship between students' perceptions of differentiated instruction and learning independence in the Al-Islam subject at SMA Muhammadiyah 1 Surabaya, Indonesia. This design was selected to determine the direction, strength, and statistical significance of the association between the two variables without manipulating instructional conditions or introducing experimental interventions. Students' perceptions of differentiated instruction were designated as the independent variable (X), while learning independence was designated as the dependent variable (Y) for analytical purposes. Both constructs were measured simultaneously through self-report questionnaires and analyzed using their respective composite scores. Given the observational and cross-sectional nature of the study, the findings were interpreted as statistical associations rather than evidence of causal relationships.

Participant

The target population comprised tenth-grade students enrolled in the Al-Islam subject at SMA Muhammadiyah 1 Surabaya across four classes (X1–X4). A total of 47 students participated in the study, consisting of 13 students from X1, 13 from X2, 12 from X3, and 9 from X4. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique based on predetermined eligibility criteria: enrollment in the tenth grade, participation in the Al-Islam subject, willingness to participate, and submission of a complete questionnaire. Although the questionnaire was distributed across all four classes, participation was voluntary, and only complete responses were included in the final analysis. Demographic information regarding participants' age and sex, as well as the verified total population at the time of data collection, was unavailable in the research documentation. With a sample size of 47 and a two-tailed significance level of 0.05, the study had approximately 80% statistical power to detect correlations of $|r| \approx 0.40$ or greater. Consequently, smaller associations may have remained undetected, and the non-probability sampling procedure limits the statistical generalizability of the findings.

Instruments

Data were collected using two theory-based self-report questionnaires measuring students' perceptions of differentiated instruction and learning independence. The differentiated instruction questionnaire assessed four dimensions: content, process, product, and learning environment, whereas the learning independence questionnaire measured five indicators: learning initiative, self-management, discipline, learning responsibility, and self-evaluation. Both instruments initially comprised 15 items and employed a four-point Likert scale, with negatively worded items reverse-scored to ensure consistent interpretation. Instrument development was guided by established conceptual frameworks, followed by pilot testing involving 24 eleventh-grade students excluded from the main sample. Item-total correlation analysis resulted in the retention of 12 items for differentiated instruction and 13 items for learning independence, yielding possible total scores of 12–48 and 13–52, respectively. Higher scores indicated more positive perceptions of differentiated instruction and greater learning independence. Internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha for each overall scale. However, formal expert-based content validation was not conducted, and evidence supporting construct validity remained limited to the available pilot item analyses. Accordingly, the differentiated instruction instrument measured students' perceived instructional experiences rather than independently verified teaching practices.

Data Collection Process

Data collection was conducted on May 29, 2026, using an online questionnaire administered through Google Forms following permission from the school. The questionnaire was distributed to students in the four participating tenth-grade classes, and respondents completed it independently on a voluntary basis. Homeroom teachers assisted only by reminding students to complete the questionnaire and did not provide guidance regarding their responses. Submitted questionnaires were screened for completeness, and only eligible, complete responses were included in the dataset. Because the researcher had previously participated in a school-based teaching practicum (PLP) at the institution, potential response bias associated with prior researcher–student familiarity was acknowledged. Independent questionnaire completion was intended to reduce direct researcher influence, although socially desirable responding could not be entirely excluded. The available documentation confirmed school permission and voluntary participation but did not provide verifiable records of individual or parental consent procedures, confidentiality arrangements, or institutional ethical approval. Preliminary PLP observations were used solely to contextualize the research problem and were not incorporated into the quantitative analysis.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical procedures. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the composite scores of students' perceptions of differentiated instruction and learning independence, while internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha at the overall scale level. Before hypothesis testing, the distributions of the composite scores were examined for approximate normality, and linearity and potentially influential observations were evaluated through visual inspection of a scatterplot. Because each construct was represented by a multi-item composite score with an approximately normal distribution, Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient (r) was employed to assess the direction and strength of the relationship between the two variables. Statistical

significance was evaluated using a two-tailed test at the 0.05 significance level. The analysis used the total scores of the 12-item differentiated instruction instrument and the 13-item learning independence instrument, without conducting separate correlations for individual dimensions or indicators. Although the principal assumptions were examined, bivariate normality was not formally established; therefore, the results were interpreted with appropriate methodological caution. The findings were used to evaluate the hypothesized positive association between the variables without drawing causal inferences.

RESULTS

The validity test of the differentiated instruction variable (X) on the 15 statements tested yielded 12 valid items and 3 invalid items (X2, X7, X14), because their calculated *r* values were below the critical *r* (0.404); these three items were therefore eliminated from subsequent analysis. The validity test of the learning independence variable (Y) on the 15 statements yielded 13 valid items and 2 invalid items (Y6 and Y10), which were likewise eliminated from subsequent analysis. Of the 15 (X) items tested, 12 were valid and three were dropped, namely (X2) (r = 0.288), (X7) (r = 0.333), and (X14) (r = 0.397). All three were negatively worded items that had been reverse scored, but their correlation coefficients remained below the critical *r* (0.404), so they were not used in subsequent analysis. Item X4 (r = 0.503) was valid and retained; the twelve valid items (X1, X3, X4, X5, X6, X8, X9, X10, X11, X12, X13, X15) form the total X score.

Overall, the validity test results show that most items of the differentiated instruction instrument meet the validity criterion, namely 12 of the 15 statements. The three items that did not meet the criterion, X2, X7, and X14, were eliminated because their item-total correlation values were below the critical *r* of 0.404. Accordingly, the total differentiated instruction score in the main analysis was formed from only the 12 items found valid. These results show that the instrument has adequate item-level validity support for use in the analysis, although the findings cannot yet be regarded as evidence of full construct validity.

Table 1. Results of the Validity Test for Differentiated Instruction (X)

No.	Item	Calculated *r*	Critical *r*	Decision
1	X1	0.554	0.404	*Valid*
2	X2 (R)	0.288	0.404	*Dropped*
3	X3	0.635	0.404	*Valid*
4	X4	0.503	0.404	*Valid*
5	X5	0.746	0.404	*Valid*
6	X6	0.648	0.404	*Valid*
7	X7 (R)	0.333	0.404	*Dropped*
8	X8	0.637	0.404	*Valid*
9	X9	0.603	0.404	*Valid*
10	X10	0.767	0.404	*Valid*
11	X11	0.608	0.404	*Valid*
12	X12	0.561	0.404	*Valid*
13	X13	0.655	0.404	*Valid*
14	X14 (R)	0.397	0.404	*Dropped*
15	X15	0.732	0.404	*Valid*

These validity results show that most items on the differentiated instruction variable met the established item-total correlation criterion and can therefore be used to form the composite score for variable X. The elimination of the three negatively worded items indicates that not all statements functioned consistently in measuring the construct at the pilot stage. Subsequent analysis therefore used only the 12 items found valid, so that the total differentiated instruction score would be formed from items that are adequately related to the construct as a whole. Even so, these results should still be understood as evidence of item validity in the pilot sample, not as complete evidence of the construct validity of the instrument as a whole.

Table 2. Results of the Validity Test for Learning Independence (Y)

No.	Item	Calculated *r*	Critical *r*	Decision
1	Y1	0.617	0.404	*Valid*
2	Y2 (R)	0.519	0.404	*Valid*
3	Y3	0.686	0.404	*Valid*
4	Y4 (R)	0.522	0.404	*Valid*
5	Y5	0.426	0.404	*Valid*
6	Y6	0.380	0.404	*Dropped*
7	Y7	0.631	0.404	*Valid*
8	Y8	0.608	0.404	*Valid*
9	Y9 (R)	0.738	0.404	*Valid*
10	Y10	0.357	0.404	*Dropped*
11	Y11 (R)	0.516	0.404	*Valid*
12	Y12	0.588	0.404	*Valid*
13	Y13	0.725	0.404	*Valid*
14	Y14	0.556	0.404	*Valid*
15	Y15 (R)	0.661	0.404	*Valid*

Of the 15 Y items tested, 13 were valid and two were dropped, namely Y6 (r = 0.380) and Y10 (r = 0.357), both of which were below the critical r (0.404) and were not used in subsequent analysis. The five negatively worded items (Y2, Y4, Y9, Y11, Y15) were valid and retained with reversed scoring.

Table 3. Results of the Reliability Test for Differentiated Instruction and Learning Independence

Variable	Initial items	Valid items	Pilot *N*	Cronbach's α
Differentiated instruction *(X)*	15	12	24	0.878
Learning independence *(Y)*	15	13	24	0.849

The pilot test showed that three items on the differentiated instruction variable and two items on the learning independence variable did not meet the validity criterion. The valid items were then used to form the total score of each variable. The reliability values indicate adequate internal consistency for use in this study.

Table 4. Results of the Normality Test for Total Scores

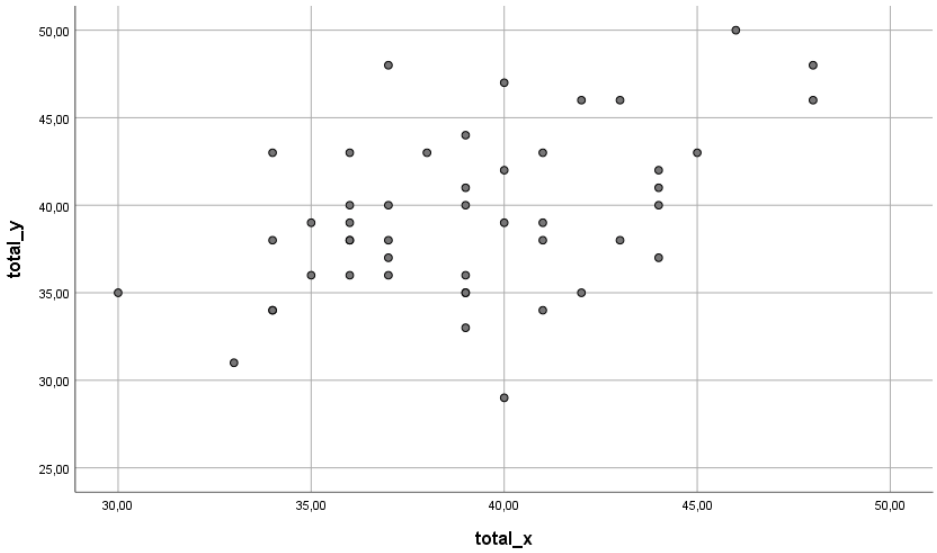
Variable	Items	*M*	*SD*	Min–Max	*W*	*p*
Differentiated instruction *(X)*	12	39.11	4.01	30–48	0.979	0.551
Learning independence *(Y)*	13	39.43	4.68	29–50	0.982	0.663

In the main sample (N = 47), the total differentiated instruction score (X; 12 items) had a mean of 39.11 (SD = 4.01; observed range 30–48) and the total learning independence score (Y; 13 items) had a mean of 39.43 (SD = 4.68; observed range 29–50). Scores were not grouped into categories because no category criteria were established. The Shapiro–Wilk test showed no deviation from normality for either total score: X, $W(47) = 0.979$, $p = 0.551$; Y, $W(47) = 0.982$, $p = 0.663$ (both > 0.05). The distributions of both scores were approximately symmetrical: skewness was 0.254 for X and 0.236 for Y, and kurtosis was −0.229 for X and −0.279 for Y.

Table 5. Results of the Linearity Test

Component	*F*	*p*
Combined	*1.424*	*0.197*
Linearity	*11.882*	*0.002*
Deviation from linearity	*0.677*	*0.779*

The linearity test showed a significant linear component, $F(1, 31) = 11.882$, $p = 0.002$, whereas the deviation from linearity was not significant, $F(14, 31) = 0.677$, $p = 0.779$. These results support the assumption of a linear relationship between total_X and total_Y.



Source: Researcher's SPSS Statistics 26 output.

Figure 1. Scatterplot

Visual inspection through a scatterplot was used to examine the pattern of the relationship between the total scores of the two variables. The scatterplot shows a tendency for higher total_Y scores at higher total_X scores, with a fairly wide spread of points around that tendency. This pattern appears reasonably linear, with no clear curvature, consistent with the linearity test results. A few points lie somewhat apart from the rest, for example one student with a high total_Y at a total_X of about 37 and one student with a low total_Y at a total_X of about 40. This visual inspection cannot serve as statistical evidence of the presence or absence of outliers, and a scatterplot does not prove the existence of a correlation or of a causal relationship.

Table 6. Results of the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Test

Relationship	Correlation coefficient (*r*)	Sig (2-tailed)	*N*	Interpretation
Differentiated Instruction and Learning Independence	*0.476*	*0.001*	*47*	*Positive, Significant (Moderate)*

The Pearson correlation results indicate a significant positive relationship between differentiated instruction and learning independence, $r(45) = 0.476$, $p = 0.001$, $N = 47$, 95% CI [0.22; 0.67]. H_0 is therefore rejected and H_a is accepted. Students with higher differentiated instruction scores tended to have higher learning independence scores; this finding does not indicate the direction or cause of the relationship. The squared correlation, $r^2 = 0.2266$ (22.66%), is the *shared variance*, that is, the proportion of variation linearly associated between total_X and total_Y in this bivariate relationship; this figure is not a percentage of influence and not a measure of causal contribution. The remaining 77.34% is variance that is not shared, or does not overlap, between the two scores in this correlation. The analysis was conducted on total scores; relationships for individual dimensions were not tested.

DISCUSSION

The present study identified a statistically significant, moderate positive association between students' perceptions of differentiated instruction and learning independence in Al-Islam education at SMA Muhammadiyah 1 Surabaya, $r(45) = 0.476$, $p = 0.001$, 95% CI [0.22, 0.67]. This finding supports the proposed hypothesis and suggests that students who perceive greater instructional responsiveness to their learning needs also tend to report stronger learning independence. Nevertheless, the magnitude and implications of this association require careful interpretation. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.227$) indicates that approximately 22.7% of the variance is shared between the two observed composite scores, rather than representing the proportion of learning independence caused by differentiated

instruction. Moreover, the confidence interval encompasses associations ranging from relatively weak to strong, underscoring the uncertainty surrounding the estimated magnitude. Thus, although the observed relationship is statistically distinguishable from zero under the assumptions of the analysis, its practical significance cannot be established from statistical significance alone. More fundamentally, the findings challenge the assumption that instructional responsiveness and learning independence operate independently of one another, while providing no basis for concluding that differentiated instruction directly produces greater student autonomy [26].

Theoretically, this association is consistent with the proposition that differentiated instruction may create conditions conducive to independent learning by responding to students' readiness, interests, and learning needs. Adaptations in content can make learning challenges more accessible, while differentiated processes and products can offer opportunities for students to select strategies, manage tasks, and evaluate their understanding [27]. A supportive learning environment may further encourage students to exercise initiative and assume responsibility without excessive dependence on teacher direction. These possibilities align with self-determination theory, particularly its emphasis on autonomy, competence, and relatedness as psychological conditions associated with effective learning. However, instructional flexibility should not be equated automatically with autonomy support. Providing choices without adequate structure, clear expectations, or appropriate scaffolding may increase cognitive demands rather than strengthen independent learning [28]. The theoretically relevant distinction is therefore not between differentiated and uniform instruction alone, but between instructional arrangements that provide meaningful, manageable opportunities for autonomy and those that merely introduce superficial variation. Importantly, the present study did not measure psychological need satisfaction, engagement, or decision-making processes; consequently, these mechanisms remain theoretically plausible explanations rather than empirically demonstrated pathways [29].

Comparison with previous research reveals a more complex empirical pattern than a uniformly positive relationship between differentiated instruction and independent learning. An earlier investigation involving 30 elementary school students reported a substantially stronger positive correlation (r = 0.796), whereas research conducted in junior high school science education identified no statistically significant relationship between differentiated instruction and self-regulated learning. The present moderate association adds evidence from senior high school Al-Islam education but does not establish a developmental progression or demonstrate that differentiated instruction operates differently across subjects. Such interpretations would be premature because the studies differ simultaneously in sample characteristics, research design, measurement procedures, and operational definitions [30]. In particular, self-regulated learning and learning independence share conceptual features but cannot be treated as interchangeable outcomes without evidence of measurement equivalence [31], [32]. Furthermore, systematic reviews reporting favorable academic effects of differentiated instruction cannot be taken as direct confirmation of its relationship with learning independence, since academic performance and independent learning represent distinct educational outcomes. Rather than resolving these inconsistencies, the present findings reinforce the need to distinguish theoretically related constructs and investigate contextual variation through comparable instruments and more rigorous research designs [33].

The Al-Islam context offers a potentially meaningful, although empirically unverified, explanation for the observed association. Unlike instructional objectives limited primarily to disciplinary knowledge acquisition, Al-Islam education also emphasizes moral reflection, personal responsibility, and the internalization of religious values. These objectives may provide opportunities for students to connect learning materials with personal experiences, evaluate their understanding, and assume greater responsibility for learning decisions [34], [35]. Nevertheless, attributing the observed relationship to these subject-specific characteristics would exceed the available evidence, as neither religious value internalization nor comparisons with other subjects were included in the analysis. Equally important, differentiated instruction was measured through students' perceptions rather than independent observations of instructional implementation [36]. Consequently, the correlation may partly reflect how students interpret and evaluate their learning environment rather than differences in objectively implemented instructional practices. Reverse or reciprocal relationships are also plausible: students who are already more independent may engage more effectively with flexible learning opportunities and consequently perceive instruction more positively [37]. Unmeasured factors, including academic motivation, prior achievement, and perceived teacher support, may additionally contribute to both scores [38]. Because these alternative explanations were not examined, the association should be understood as consistent with, but not confirmatory of, the proposed theoretical relationship.

The strength of this interpretation is further conditioned by the study's measurement characteristics. Although the retained instruments demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency in the pilot sample (Cronbach's α = 0.878 for differentiated instruction and 0.849 for learning independence), reliability does not establish construct validity or confirm that the instruments adequately distinguish the intended psychological dimensions. Instrument evaluation relied on item-total correlations from 24 students without formal expert-based content validation or broader construct validation. Notably, all three excluded differentiated instruction items were negatively worded, raising the possibility that the retained scale became more susceptible to agreement-oriented response patterns. Because both constructs were assessed through self-report questionnaires administered simultaneously, common-method variance, social desirability, and individual response tendencies may also have contributed to the observed association [39]. The absence of independently verified instructional observations and alternative measures of learning independence further limits the extent to which perceptual associations can be interpreted as reflecting educational practices or behavioral capabilities [40]. Moreover, the analysis relied exclusively on composite scores, preventing identification of whether particular differentiation dimensions were more strongly associated with initiative, self-management, discipline, responsibility, or self-evaluation. These limitations indicate that the observed correlation is informative at the aggregate construct level, but its underlying dimensional structure remains unresolved.

Additional methodological constraints restrict the precision and transferability of the findings. The relatively small sample (N = 47), recruited through non-probability sampling from four classes within a single school, limits population-level generalization and contributes to the wide confidence interval. Although the normality and linearity assessments supported the use of Pearson correlation, nonsignificant univariate normality tests do not establish bivariate normality, and visual inspection alone cannot reliably exclude influential observations. Furthermore, the potential clustering of students within classrooms was not accounted for, leaving open the possibility that shared instructional experiences or classroom-level characteristics contributed to the observed relationship. The absence of documented demographic characteristics also prevented examination of potential differences across student subgroups. Most importantly, the cross-sectional design precludes establishing temporal precedence and cannot distinguish instructional contributions from selection effects, reciprocal relationships, or unmeasured confounding. These constraints are particularly relevant because a moderate correlation obtained from a single measurement occasion may not remain unchanged under alternative measurement methods, sampling procedures, or instructional conditions. Accordingly, the findings are best regarded as preliminary, context-specific correlational evidence rather than a robust estimate of the effectiveness of differentiated instruction.

Despite these limitations, the study contributes to the literature by extending empirical examination of perceived differentiated instruction and learning independence to senior high school Al-Islam education, a context less directly represented in the studies considered. Its principal contribution is not demonstrating the effectiveness of differentiated instruction, but identifying an association that merits further theoretical refinement and empirical testing. For educational practice, the findings justify closer attention to how students experience instructional flexibility, particularly whether differentiated learning opportunities are accompanied by meaningful choices, appropriate scaffolding, clear expectations, and opportunities for self-evaluation. However, these practices should be regarded as theoretically informed considerations rather than interventions validated by the present findings. Future research should employ larger, multisite samples, independently validated instruments, and multiple data sources, including classroom observations and behavioral indicators of learning independence. Longitudinal studies could clarify temporal relationships, while appropriately designed experimental or quasi-experimental investigations could more directly evaluate causal effects. Further investigation of individual differentiation dimensions, autonomy support, motivation, and classroom-level influences would also help identify the conditions under which instructional responsiveness is associated with stronger learning independence. Ultimately, the present findings support the relevance of examining students' perceived instructional experiences alongside their capacity for independent learning, while emphasizing that stronger causal, measurement, and contextual evidence is required before broader pedagogical conclusions can be established.

CONCLUSION

Students' perceptions of differentiated instruction are positively associated with their learning independence in Al-Islam education, suggesting that instructional experiences perceived as responsive to individual learning needs are

meaningfully related to students' capacity to manage and take responsibility for their learning. This relationship reinforces the theoretical relevance of instructional responsiveness, autonomy support, and meaningful learning opportunities in understanding how learning independence develops within educational settings. However, differentiated instruction should not be regarded as an automatic determinant of learning independence, as students' existing dispositions, perceptions, and broader learning environments may also shape this relationship. The findings therefore contribute to a more context-sensitive understanding of differentiated instruction, emphasizing the importance of distinguishing perceived instructional experiences from actual teaching practices and statistical associations from causal mechanisms.

The educational implications extend beyond accommodating learner diversity to considering how instructional flexibility can be balanced with clear guidance, meaningful choices, and opportunities for reflection and responsibility. In Al-Islam education, this perspective is particularly relevant because learning involves not only acquiring religious knowledge but also developing personal accountability and reflective engagement with Islamic values. Nevertheless, the relationship between instructional responsiveness and learning independence requires further examination across educational contexts and through more rigorous approaches that distinguish students' perceptions from observed instructional practices. A deeper understanding of the underlying psychological and instructional mechanisms would provide a stronger foundation for developing learning environments that support students' independence while remaining responsive to their diverse needs.

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Author Contribution

Laila Maghfira contributed to the research planning, field data collection, data analysis, and drafting of the initial manuscript. Shokhibul Arifin and Asrori contributed by providing supervision, writing guidance, review of the manuscript, and refinement of the final draft of this article. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript as published.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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Name	:	Laila Maghfira
Student ID Number	:	20221550064
Department	:	Islamic Education, One-year program, Faculty of Islamic Studies and Civilization, Muhammadiyah University of Surabaya, Indonesia

has been endorsed by Language Center of Muhammadiyah University of Surabaya for further approval by the examining committee of the faculty.

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