

The Innovation of Islamic Education Learning Methods to Increase Student Engagement in Class VIII at SMP Muhammadiyah 07 Medan

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<p>Abstract: This research aims to develop innovative learning methods that can increase student involvement in Islamic Religious Education classes. The approach used is qualitative descriptive with interview, observation, and documentation methods to identify students' challenges and needs in learning. Based on the results of the analysis, it was found that the use of interactive learning methods, such as group discussions, the use of educational technology, and contextual approaches that are relevant to students' daily lives, can significantly increase students' active participation. This innovation also encourages more collaborative and reflective learning, so that students can understand religious values more deeply and applicatively. Thus, innovative learning methods are expected to be able to create a more dynamic and participatory learning environment, as well as strengthen students' religious understanding.</p>	<p>Keywords: Innovation of Learning Methods; Student Engagement; Active Participation.</p>
<p>Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengembangkan inovasi metode pembelajaran yang dapat meningkatkan keterlibatan siswa di dalam kelas Pendidikan Agama Islam. Pendekatan yang digunakan adalah deskriptif kualitatif dengan metode wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi untuk mengidentifikasi tantangan dan kebutuhan siswa dalam pembelajaran. Berdasarkan hasil analisis, ditemukan bahwa penggunaan metode pembelajaran interaktif, seperti diskusi kelompok, pemanfaatan teknologi pendidikan, serta pendekatan kontekstual yang relevan dengan kehidupan sehari-hari siswa, dapat secara signifikan meningkatkan partisipasi aktif siswa. Inovasi ini juga mendorong pembelajaran yang lebih kolaboratif dan reflektif, sehingga siswa dapat memahami nilai-nilai agama dengan lebih mendalam dan aplikatif. Dengan demikian, metode pembelajaran yang inovatif diharapkan mampu menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang lebih dinamis dan partisipatif, serta memperkuat pemahaman keagamaan siswa.</p>	<p>Kata Kunci: Inovasi Metode Pembelajaran; Keterlibatan Siswa; Partisipasi Aktif.</p>

A. Introduction

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays an important role in shaping students' character, morals, and spirituality in schools. In the context of formal education, Islamic Religious Education not only serves as a means of transferring religious knowledge, but also as a way to instill fundamental

Islamic values such as honesty, simplicity, justice, and a sense of responsibility. Thus, the role of teachers in delivering Islamic Religious Education material is not limited to the cognitive aspect, but also includes the affective and psychomotor aspects (HM, Manizar, 2017). However, in the current era of globalization and digitalization, there are significant challenges for Islamic Education teachers to deliver lessons that can attract students' interest and actively engage them in the learning process.

One of the main challenges in Islamic Education learning is the low level of student engagement in the classroom. Many students feel that the material presented is monotonous and less relevant to their daily lives (Eman Nataliano Busa, 2023). This has resulted in a decline in their motivation to learn, leading to unsatisfactory academic outcomes. Low student engagement is often evident from the lack of active participation in discussions, limited enthusiasm for completing assignments, and a tendency to neglect Islamic Religious Education as an important subject. In fact, Islamic Religious Education plays a central role in shaping a generation with strong moral and spiritual integrity.

Student engagement in the learning process is a crucial element for achieving optimal learning outcomes. This engagement encompasses three main aspects: cognitive engagement, emotional engagement, and behavioral engagement. Cognitive engagement involves deep thinking and understanding of the subject matter, while emotional engagement includes enthusiasm, interest, and care toward the lesson (Manoppo, 2020). Behavioral engagement is reflected in students' active participation in discussions, asking questions, and completing assignments with full responsibility. These three aspects are interconnected and play a crucial role in creating a dynamic and productive learning environment.

Various studies have shown that innovation in teaching methods can significantly enhance student engagement. For example, research by Sari and Munir (2019) indicates that the use of multimedia-based teaching methods in

Islamic Education improves student engagement and motivation in secondary schools (Wahyudi et al., 2023).

To address this challenge, innovation in teaching methods is needed to meet students' needs in a more relevant and engaging context. Innovation in teaching methods is not merely about updating teaching techniques but also about devising more effective strategies for delivering content in a way that enhances overall student participation and engagement (Hapsari & Fatimah, 2021). Traditional methods, such as one-way lectures, are no longer sufficient to meet the demands of modern education. Instead, more interactive and contextual teaching methods need to be implemented to improve the quality of Islamic Religious Education.

Several innovative teaching methods that can be applied in Islamic Religious Education include Project-Based Learning, Problem-Based Learning, and the integration of technology in teaching. These methods position students as active participants in the learning process, encouraging them to discover, analyze, and solve problems both independently and in groups (Amelia & Aisya, 2021). Project-based learning, for example, allows students to connect Islamic Education material with real-life situations. This makes the material being taught feel more meaningful and relevant to the students.

Moreover, the use of technology in education also has great potential to increase student engagement. Technology makes the learning process more interactive and engaging. The use of digital learning media, such as videos, animations, and web-based learning applications, can help explain concepts that are difficult for students to understand in a more accessible way (Melati et al., 2023). Teachers can utilize online learning platforms to provide interactive assignments, quizzes, and discussion forums that students can access at any time. As a result, students are not limited to classroom time and space but can also learn independently outside of class hours.

Moreover, it is important for Islamic Religious Education teachers to adopt a more personalized and adaptive approach to meet the individual needs of

students (Munawir et al., 2020). Not all students have the same level of understanding of the material being taught. Some students may need more attention to grasp abstract religious concepts, while others might require additional challenges to develop their critical thinking skills. In this context, applying a differentiated approach in Islamic Religious Education can be a solution to enhance student engagement. By considering individual differences, teachers can design teaching methods that align with each student's learning style and ability level.

However, innovative teaching methods will not be effective without support from the school environment and stakeholders. Schools must provide adequate facilities and infrastructure to support interactive and technology-based learning (Hariyadi & Hariyati, 2020). Additionally, there is a need for training for teachers so that they have the competence to implement these innovative teaching methods. Islamic Education teachers must continuously develop their skills in classroom management, understanding student psychology, and mastering educational technology. Collaboration among teachers, students, and parents is also essential to create a conducive learning environment, both at school and at home.

Ultimately, innovations in Islamic Education teaching methods aim not only to enhance student engagement in the classroom but also to equip them with strong Islamic values as a moral foundation for everyday life (Nurhidaya et al., 2024). With high engagement in learning, it is expected that students will be able to apply Islamic teachings in their attitudes and behavior, both at school and in the community. The innovation in teaching methods also aligns with efforts to create a generation of intelligent, character-driven, and morally upright youth, in accordance with the goals of national education. The aim of this research is to investigate and analyze various innovative teaching methods in Islamic Religious Education that can effectively enhance student engagement in the classroom, with a focus on identifying, evaluating, and implementing

methods that can facilitate active student participation, increase their intrinsic motivation, and support better learning outcomes.

B. Method

This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach, chosen to explore and understand the phenomenon of student engagement in Islamic Religious Education learning through the implementation of innovative teaching methods. The study was conducted at SMP Muhammadiyah 07 Medan in July and August over a 25-day period. The subjects of this research are the Islamic Religious Education teacher and eighth-grade students who are directly involved in the Islamic Religious Education learning process.

The data collection techniques used in this study include interviews, observations, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with the Islamic Religious Education teacher and selected students. Observations were carried out during the Islamic Religious Education learning sessions in the classroom. Documentation involved reviewing students' learning outcomes, such as assignments or evaluations provided by the teacher. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis, which included data collection and transcription, coding, and grouping of themes related to student engagement and teaching methods, followed by data interpretation to draw conclusions. Data validation was conducted using the triangulation technique.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Level of Student Engagement in Islamic Religious Education Learning

Based on observations and interviews conducted at SMP Muhammadiyah 07 Medan, it was found that the implementation of innovative teaching methods in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has had a positive impact on student engagement. Student engagement can be observed from three aspects: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement :

a. Cognitive Engagement

Students demonstrate an increased understanding of the learning material when teachers apply Project-Based Learning (PBL) and Problem-Based Learning (PBL) methods. Students become more interested in the material because they are encouraged to actively seek solutions to the problems presented (Kasi, 2022). For example, when given a project assignment to analyze contemporary religious issues, students independently seek references and engage in discussions with their peers to solve the problem. As a result, students not only understand religious concepts theoretically but are also able to apply them in a broader and more relevant context to everyday life.

b. Emotional Engagement

Observations indicate that students are more enthusiastic and show greater interest when teachers use interactive learning media such as videos, animations, and group discussions. The use of technology in teaching makes the classroom environment more dynamic and engaging for students. They become more excited about the lessons, as evidenced by their active participation in Q&A sessions and group discussions. During interviews, students expressed that they found the learning process more enjoyable and less boring. This demonstrates that innovative teaching methods not only enhance students' understanding but also positively impact their interest and motivation to learn.

c. Behavioral Engagement

An increase in students' behavioral engagement is evident from their active participation in the learning process. Students who were previously passive now ask questions more frequently, share opinions, and take part in classroom activities. In group assignments, they show responsibility and collaborate effectively in completing projects or tasks. Teachers have also noted that students have

become more disciplined and focused during the learning process. This shows that more interactive and contextual teaching methods can transform previously disengaged students into active participants.

2. The Effectiveness of Innovative Teaching Methods in Islamic Religious Education

The results of interviews with Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers indicate that the implementation of project-based and problem-based learning methods, along with the use of technology, has successfully enhanced classroom learning effectiveness. Teachers feel that these methods make it easier for them to explain complex concepts, as students are more actively engaged in exploring the material. For example, when applying problem-based learning, teachers present real-life scenarios related to Islamic teachings, such as ethical issues in technology use or social issues relevant to students' lives. Students are then encouraged to analyze these situations and provide solutions based on Islamic principles. Through this process, students not only learn to understand the theory but also think critically and apply religious teachings to real-world situations.

Teachers also acknowledge that these more interactive teaching methods help them address the issue of student engagement, which had previously been low. Students who were typically quiet and passive in class have now become more confident in expressing their opinions and asking questions about things they do not understand. Teachers believe that these methods have successfully fostered students' self-confidence and responsibility for their own learning.

3. Challenges in Implementing Innovative Learning Methods

Although the application of these innovative methods has shown positive results, the research also identified several challenges faced by both teachers and students. Some of the challenges include:

a. Limited Facilities and Infrastructure

Several teachers mentioned that the use of technology in learning is still limited due to a lack of supporting facilities, such as projectors, laptops, or adequate internet access. As a result, not all classrooms can fully utilize digital media. Students also complained that they don't always have access to technological devices at home, making it difficult to complete tech-based assignments given by their teachers.

b. Limited Instructional Time

Teachers feel that project-based and problem-based learning methods require more time to implement. The limited duration of class hours often poses a challenge in completing the assigned projects or tasks. This causes some projects to be less thoroughly explored, leading to suboptimal results.

c. Varied Student Abilities

Teachers also found that not all students can adapt to more independent learning methods. Some students with lower cognitive abilities struggle with project-based or problem-based learning, as these methods require more critical thinking and independent problem-solving. Teachers need to provide extra attention to these students to ensure they don't fall behind.

4. Strategies to Overcome Obstacles

To address these challenges, Islamic Education teachers have employed several strategies, including:

a. Optimization of Available Resources

Despite limited access to technology being one of the challenges, teachers strive to maximize the use of available media, such as printed materials or simple visual aids, to support the learning process. Additionally, teachers make use of the technology resources available in the school library or borrow devices from the computer lab when necessary.

b. Differentiated Learning

To address the varying abilities of students, teachers implement a differentiated learning approach. Students with lower abilities receive additional guidance, while students with higher abilities are given more challenging tasks to sharpen their skills. This approach ensures that all students can participate and engage in learning according to their abilities.

c. Utilization of Extra Time

In some cases, teachers provide additional time outside of regular class hours to complete projects or tasks that require extended periods. This is done to ensure that students can finish their projects well without feeling rushed.

5. The Role of Teachers as Facilitators in Implementing Innovative Teaching Methods

In the implementation of innovative teaching methods for Islamic Education (PAI), the role of teachers as facilitators is crucial to ensure that students actively engage in the learning process. This research found that teachers who successfully apply innovative teaching methods not only serve as instructors but also as mentors who encourage students to be more independent and creative in their learning.

Teachers provide clear directions regarding tasks or projects to be completed, while at the same time giving students the freedom to explore various approaches to completing their assignments. For instance, in project-based learning, teachers give general guidelines on the topic to be studied, but students are free to choose how they present their project outcomes, whether through presentations, videos, or written works. This flexibility encourages students to develop their creativity while also enhancing their sense of responsibility for their learning.

Additionally, the teacher's role as a motivator is a key factor in maintaining students' enthusiasm and motivation. During interviews, several students expressed that they felt more motivated to learn when teachers

provided emotional support and appreciation for their efforts, even when the results were not perfect. This indicates that teachers who can offer positive feedback and create a supportive classroom environment can foster a conducive learning atmosphere where students feel safe to try and learn from their mistakes.

6. The Importance of Contextual Learning in Enhancing Student Engagement

One of the key findings of this study is that contextual learning, which connects PAI material with real-life situations, significantly enhances student engagement. When teaching materials are related to events or issues relevant to students' daily lives, they find it easier to understand and appreciate the importance of religious teachings in the social and cultural contexts they encounter.

For example, in lessons on Islamic values such as justice and harmony, teachers use current social issues from the students' surroundings, such as religious tolerance or the ethics of social media use. Students are invited to discuss and find solutions based on Islamic teachings, making them feel that the material is not only theoretical but also relevant to their daily lives. This contextual learning not only makes students more interested in the lessons but also helps them internalize Islamic values in a deeper and more meaningful way.

7. Utilizing Technology as a Tool for Innovation in Islamic Education

The results of this research also show that the use of technology in PAI learning has a significant impact on student engagement. The use of digital media such as educational videos, interactive simulations, and online quizzes makes learning more engaging and interactive. Students who are accustomed to using technology in their daily lives feel more comfortable and enthusiastic when it is incorporated into the learning process.

Teachers involved in this study reported that technology helps them present teaching materials in a more visual and interesting way. For instance, in lessons on Islamic history, teachers use animated videos to depict important events in Islamic history, such as the struggles of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). These videos not only make the material easier for students to understand but also increase their interest and curiosity. Students who were previously less interested in Islamic history became more motivated to learn after being introduced to more dynamic learning media.

However, as mentioned earlier, limited access to technology in some schools poses a challenge to the optimal application of this method. Therefore, there is a need to improve technological infrastructure in schools, especially in areas with limited resources.

This research has demonstrated that innovations in Islamic Education (PAI) teaching methods can significantly enhance student engagement in the classroom. Through the implementation of project-based learning, problem-based learning, group collaboration, and the use of technology, students at SMP Muhammadiyah 07 Medan have shown increased cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement. Students not only gain a better understanding of the subject matter but also exhibit higher motivation to actively participate in learning.

These innovations are expected to serve as an effective teaching model for improving the quality of religious education in Indonesia and shaping students who are more independent, critical, and possess a strong and relevant understanding of Islam.

D. Conclusion

This study shows that the implementation of innovative methods in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SMP Muhammadiyah 07 Medan, such as project-based learning, problem-based learning, and the use of technology, has successfully increased student engagement in various aspects—cognitive,

emotional, and behavioral. Students have become more active, motivated, and enthusiastic about learning, especially when the instructional material is connected to relevant contextual situations in their daily lives. The role of teachers as facilitators and motivators has also proven to be crucial in encouraging student participation and maintaining an interactive classroom dynamic.

However, the study also identified several obstacles in implementing these innovations, such as limitations in technological infrastructure, variations in student abilities, and limited instructional time. These challenges can be addressed through the optimization of existing resources, the application of differentiated instruction, and ongoing teacher training.

By strengthening technological infrastructure, enhancing teacher competencies, and promoting collaboration among teachers as well as parental involvement, it is hoped that innovations in Islamic Religious Education can continue to develop and be more effective in fostering a deep and relevant understanding of religion for students.

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