

## Teacher Strategies in Improving Student Active Learning in Islamic Religious Education Subject at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah

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**Abstract:** This study aims to analyze teacher strategies in enhancing student active learning in the Islamic Religious Education (IRE) subject at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah. This research employs a qualitative approach using descriptive methods. Data collection techniques included classroom observations, in-depth interviews with IRE teachers and students, and documentation. The findings indicate that the strategies applied by teachers encompass the use of participatory learning methods (such as group discussions, role-playing, and interactive Q&A sessions), the integration of technology-based media, and the provision of positive reinforcement (rewards and praise). The primary obstacles encountered were varying initial student interest and time limitations, which were addressed through personalized approaches and diversified learning activities. Overall, the implementation of varied and communicative strategies proves effective in boosting students' active engagement during IRE instruction.

**Keywords:** Teacher Strategies; Active Learning; Islamic Religious Education; SMP Rahmat Islamiyah

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi guru dalam meningkatkan keaktifan belajar siswa pada mata pelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) di SMP Rahmat Islamiyah. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode deskriptif. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi kelas, wawancara mendalam dengan guru PAI dan siswa, serta studi dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa strategi yang diterapkan guru meliputi pemanfaatan metode pembelajaran partisipatif (seperti diskusi kelompok, *role playing*, dan tanya jawab interaktif), penggunaan media berbasis teknologi, serta pemberian penguatan positif (*reward* dan pujian). Hambatan utama yang dihadapi adalah bervariasinya minat awal siswa dan keterbatasan waktu, yang diatasi melalui pendekatan personal serta variasi kegiatan belajar. Secara keseluruhan, penerapan strategi yang variatif dan komunikatif terbukti efektif meningkatkan keterlibatan

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**Kata Kunci:** Strategi Guru; Keaktifan Belajar; Pendidikan Agama Islam; SMP Rahmat Islamiyah

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### **A. Introduction**

Education serves as the main pillar in developing quality, character-driven, and highly competitive human resources. According to Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, education aims to develop the potential of learners to become individuals who believe in and are devoted to God Almighty, possess noble character, and are healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, as well as democratic and responsible citizens. This noble objective can only be achieved through systematic, effective, and meaningful learning processes at every educational level.

Within the structure of Indonesia's national curriculum, Islamic Religious Education (IRE) plays a strategic role in forming students' moral and spiritual foundations. Learning in IRE is not merely a cognitive transfer of religious knowledge; it also guides the formation of affective attitudes and psychomotor behaviors that reflect Islamic values (Muhaimin, 2012). Consequently, the success of IRE instruction in schools serves as a critical benchmark for overall student character development.

Advances in modern pedagogical theory have shifted the focus of instruction from a teacher-centered learning approach to a student-centered learning approach. According to Sanjaya (2016), current educational paradigms demand active student engagement in constructing their own knowledge. Teachers no longer serve as the sole source of information, but instead act as facilitators, motivators, and mediators who foster a learning environment conducive to the development of students' critical thinking and active participation.

Student learning engagement is a key indicator in evaluating the effectiveness of classroom instruction. Sardiman (2018) states that learning is inherently a process of doing and engaging in activities; thus, learning cannot occur without active participation. This engagement encompasses both physical and mental activities, such as

listening attentively, asking questions, engaging in discussions, solving problems, and applying material through practical assignments.

However, the practical reality of IRE instruction is often confronted by perceptions that the subject is theoretical, normative, and monotonous. Ramayulis (2012) reveals that many IRE classrooms remain dominated by one-way lecture methods, causing students to become passive, easily bored, and unmotivated to participate actively. This condition can diminish retention of the material and hinder the optimal achievement of learning objectives.

Facing these challenges, the position and role of the IRE teacher in the classroom become highly crucial. Teachers are required to possess professional and pedagogical competencies to design and implement appropriate learning strategies (Hamalik, 2015). Mastering adaptive instructional strategies enables teachers to stimulate interest, evoke curiosity, and encourage active participation among all students in every IRE learning session.

Utilizing varied learning strategies serves as the primary means to create a dynamic and enjoyable learning atmosphere. Djamarah and Zain (2013) emphasize that learning strategies encompass selecting methods, media, and assessment techniques tailored to the characteristics of the subject matter and the students' conditions. Interactive and innovative strategies bridge abstract religious concepts, making them easier to comprehend and more relevant to students' daily lives.

Student learning engagement is influenced by two main factors: internal and external factors (Slameto, 2015). Internal factors include interest, motivation, aptitude, and students' physical and psychological conditions. Meanwhile, external factors include classroom atmosphere, infrastructure, and the pedagogical approach implemented by the teacher. In this context, teacher-designed strategies serve as the primary external stimulus that triggers an increase in students' internal motivation and active engagement.

From a developmental psychology perspective, junior high school students are in the early adolescence phase, characterized by identity exploration and high emotional dynamics (Desmita, 2016). Students in this age group tend to favor interactive learning

activities that involve group collaboration and provide space to express their opinions. Rigid IRE teaching concepts will struggle to sustain their attention effectively.

SMP Rahmat Islamiyah is a private educational institution committed to integrating religious values into its school culture. As an Islamic-oriented institution, the quality of IRE implementation at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah reflects the school's vision and mission. Efforts to foster intellectually and spiritually capable generations begin with effective instructional interactions in the IRE classroom.

Empirical conditions based on initial observations at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah highlight specific challenges in the execution of IRE instruction. Variations in prior religious knowledge and motivation levels among students impact their classroom engagement differently. Some students remain passive listeners, while participation in discussions and Q&A sessions continues to be dominated by only a select few.

Efforts by IRE educators at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah to address this disparity in participation are evident in their application of diverse teaching techniques. Teachers have begun integrating cooperative learning methods, digital presentation media, and positive reinforcement such as praise and extra points. However, the implementation of these strategies still requires in-depth evaluation to measure their consistency and overall effectiveness in triggering student active learning.

The necessity of exploring IRE instructional strategy choices at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah stems from the need to identify teaching models best aligned with the school's unique environment. Rusman (2018) argues that no single learning strategy is universally applicable or perfect for all conditions; the effectiveness of any strategy depends heavily on how well the teacher adapts it to student characteristics and local school contexts.

Research on teacher strategies in enhancing student active learning at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah holds significant value as an empirical investigation into religious-based learning practices. Through an in-depth study, the various methods used, student responses to these strategies, and the practical challenges faced by teachers in the field during the instructional process can be thoroughly revealed.

The significance of this study extends beyond providing an internal evaluation for the school, offering theoretical and practical contributions to the field of Islamic education. The findings are expected to serve as a pedagogical reference for IRE educators in other schools to design learning strategies capable of transforming passive, transmission-style classrooms into active, participatory environments.

Therefore, the context of these challenges highlights the need for a comprehensive qualitative study to document, analyze, and critically evaluate the range of strategies employed by IRE teachers at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah. This analysis will offer a holistic picture of instructional interactions and the dynamics of student engagement developed within the IRE classroom.

Specifically, this study aims to: 1) Analyze the instructional strategies implemented by IRE teachers to enhance student active learning at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah; 2) Identify the forms of active learning demonstrated by students during IRE instruction at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah; 3) Analyze the supporting and inhibiting factors faced by IRE teachers in implementing strategies to increase student active learning at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah.

## **B. Research Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. The qualitative approach was chosen because the researcher seeks to deeply understand the scientific phenomenon regarding the implementation of teacher strategies in enhancing student active learning in the Islamic Religious Education (IRE) subject without introducing treatments or manipulating variables (Sugiyono, 2019). Descriptive qualitative research allows the researcher to holistically and comprehensively describe real classroom interactions, the dynamics of student responses, and the instructional patterns established by IRE teachers at the research site.

This research was conducted at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah. The location was selected based on a purposive setting consideration, namely the presence of a phenomenon where this Islamic-based school actively develops varied learning strategies to address the challenges of differing student active learning levels. The

research was carried out over a period of three months, encompassing instrument preparation, intensive field data collection, data analysis, and the final report drafting stage.

Data sources in this study are divided into two main categories: primary data sources and secondary data sources (Moleong, 2017). Primary data sources were directly obtained from key informants through verbal interactions and observations, involving IRE subject teachers, the school principal, and several student representatives from SMP Rahmat Islamiyah selected using a purposive sampling technique. Meanwhile, secondary data sources include supporting documents such as Teaching Modules/Lesson Plans (RPP), syllabi, student participation recapitulation records, and the school's official profile.

The primary data collection techniques used were non-participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Through non-participant observation, the researcher directly observed the flow of the IRE learning process in the classroom to record the teaching strategies applied by teachers and the physical and verbal responses of students without engaging in learning activities. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were conducted with IRE teachers and students to delve into in-depth information regarding strategy selection considerations, instructional obstacles encountered, and the psychological impacts perceived by students regarding their learning engagement.

In addition to observations and interviews, data collection techniques were reinforced through documentation studies. Documentation aimed to gather substantive evidence such as teacher-prepared learning materials, photographs of classroom interactions, the availability of supporting infrastructure for IRE, and student work or assignments reflecting their engagement levels. Integrating this documentation technique serves to complement verbal and visual data obtained from the field, ensuring that the contextual analysis of IRE instruction becomes more integrated and grounded in empirical facts.

To ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the obtained data, the researcher applied triangulation techniques and prolonged observation. The triangulation methods utilized included source triangulation and data collection technique triangulation

(Sugiyono, 2019). Source triangulation was carried out by comparing and cross-checking the credibility of information obtained from IRE teachers with information provided by students and the principal. Meanwhile, technique triangulation was performed by verifying the alignment between interview findings, classroom observation notes, and factual documentary evidence.

Data analysis in this study references the interactive model developed by Miles et al. (2014), which consists of three main stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the data condensation stage, the researcher selects, focuses, and transforms raw data obtained from interviews and observations. The condensed data is then presented in narrative text and structured tables to facilitate understanding, prior to drawing substantive conclusions regarding the IRE teachers' strategies in boosting student active learning at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah.

### **C. Results and Discussion**

Empirical findings gathered from classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah reveal that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers employ a multifaceted array of instructional strategies to elevate student active learning. Rather than relying on traditional, lecture-heavy pedagogies, teachers systematically structure lessons to engage students both cognitively and socio-emotionally. These strategies are intentionally designed to transform abstract theological concepts into interactive classroom experiences.

The primary instructional strategy identified across observed classrooms is the implementation of cooperative learning models, notably the Jigsaw and Think-Pair-Share techniques. According to Slavin (2015), cooperative learning structures force individual accountability while promoting peer-mediated discussion. At SMP Rahmat Islamiyah, IRE teachers utilize Think-Pair-Share during complex doctrinal discussions, allowing students time to independently process concepts before sharing insights with a partner and subsequently presenting them to the entire class.

Group discussions are tailored specifically to match the operational scope of various PAI sub-domains, such as Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) and Akhlaq (morality).

During Fiqh sessions, teachers present real-world moral dilemmas or contemporary jurisprudence cases, tasking student groups with formulating Islamic solutions based on Quranic verses and Hadith. Observations indicated that this problem-based group work shifts the learner's role from passive recipient to active analyzer of religious law.

A second pivotal strategy observed is the integration of digital learning media and interactive presentation tools. Teachers regularly incorporate slide decks containing short animation clips, infographics, and interactive quiz platforms like Kahoot to introduce new topics. As Arends (2012) notes, multimedia integration captures attention and caters to diverse learning styles, preventing cognitive fatigue during abstract theoretical topics.

In topics requiring spatial or procedural comprehension, such as the rituals of Hajj or the historical narratives of Islamic civilization, teachers leverage video documentaries and interactive 3D simulations. Interviews with students revealed that visual representation helps demystify complex historical timelines and ritualistic procedures. This approach aligns with Mayer's (2014) cognitive theory of multimedia learning, which asserts that dual-channel processing (auditory and visual) enhances working memory retention.

Strategic questioning techniques—specifically Socratic questioning and open-ended prompting—form the third pillar of teacher interventions. Rather than posing simple recall questions, teachers initiate lessons with thought-provoking prompts such as "Why is honesty essential in social interactions according to Islamic ethics?" This technique prompts students to synthesize personal experiences with religious doctrine, stimulating higher-order thinking skills (Bloom, 1956; Sanjaya, 2016).

The continuous application of positive reinforcement and reward systems constitutes the fourth key strategy. IRE teachers at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah systematically issue verbal praise, public recognition, and structural reward points for active class contributions. Skinner's (1953) operant conditioning theory supports this practice, demonstrating that desirable behaviors, such as volunteering answers or asking clarifying questions, increase in frequency when immediately followed by positive reinforcement.

Field notes highlight that reinforcement techniques are especially customized for reserved or academically struggling students. When passive students attempt to participate, teachers offer encouraging responses regardless of answer completeness. This empathetic pedagogy lowers affective filters and builds psychological safety, enabling introverted learners to overcome fear of public failure (Krashen, 1982; Djamarah & Zain, 2013).

The fifth identified strategy is character modeling (*Uswatun Hasanah*), where teachers deliberately embody the moral principles taught in the PAI curriculum. During instruction, teachers exhibit active listening, emotional regulation, and humility. Bandura's (1977) social learning theory emphasizes that observational learning occurs when mentors model target behaviors; at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah, teachers' lived ethics motivate students to actively embody Islamic values during peer interactions.

These five core strategies do not function in isolation; rather, teachers combine them into cohesive, sequential lesson flows. A typical 80-minute lesson opens with a multimedia hook and Socratic question, transitions into a cooperative group activity, and concludes with student presentations reinforced by teacher feedback and points. This integrated sequence keeps learning momentum high throughout the instructional period.

Regarding the manifestations of student active learning, empirical data reveals observable shifts across cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. Sardiman (2018) categorizes learning activity into visual, oral, listening, writing, motor, and mental activities. At SMP Rahmat Islamiyah, student active learning is demonstrated most prominently through spontaneous oral participation, collaborative problem-solving, and peer interaction.

Intellectual and visual engagement is evident during the introductory phases of instruction. Observations revealed that students maintain sustained eye contact with teachers, take organized notes without explicit prompting, and raise their hands to clarify complex points. This visual and mental alertness indicates that students are actively processing instructional content rather than passively absorbing lectures (Slameto, 2015).

Oral engagement represents the most prominent indicator of active learning in observed classrooms. Students frequently initiate dialogue, defend their interpretations during group presentations, and offer constructive peer feedback. Interview data from students indicated that structured group settings reduce peer judgment anxiety, empowering them to voice thoughts openly during discussions.

Socio-emotional engagement manifests in peer tutoring and collaborative problem-solving. Stronger students naturally assist peers who struggle with Quranic recitation or theological analysis. Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) explains how peer collaboration allows learners to achieve higher levels of understanding than they could independently, fostering an inclusive classroom culture.

Psychomotor and experiential engagement is particularly evident during practical Fiqh lessons, such as performing *Wudu* (ablution) or practicing *Janazah* (funeral) prayers. Students actively execute physical rituals, peer-assess form correctness, and correct posture errors based on teacher guidance. This kinesthetic engagement anchors theoretical knowledge into practical muscle memory (Hamalik, 2015).

Over the course of the observational period, a clear developmental shift was observed in overall student posture toward PAI lessons. Initially hesitant cohorts gradually exhibited proactive initiative, such as independently researching Islamic history topics prior to class. This behavioral change signals a transition from extrinsic compliance to intrinsic learning motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Differences in active engagement were also noted across grade levels. Grade 7 students exhibited higher enthusiasm for gamified activities and physical demonstrations, whereas Grade 9 students demonstrated deeper analytical engagement during debates on contemporary ethical issues. Understanding these developmental nuances enables teachers to adjust strategy complexity according to student maturity levels (Desmita, 2016).

The quality and timing of teacher feedback were found to be critical determinants in sustaining student engagement. Immediate, constructive feedback provided during presentations reinforced correct conceptual understanding while maintaining student

enthusiasm. Conversely, delayed or overly critical feedback was observed to suppress subsequent voluntary participation.

The successful implementation of these teaching strategies is enabled by key supporting factors within the school environment. The institutional culture of SMP Rahmat Islamiyah emphasizes religious values across all administrative and academic operations. School leadership actively supports pedagogical innovation by providing dedicated professional freedom to PAI teachers (Muhaimin, 2012).

Adequate educational technology infrastructure serves as a major external facilitator. Classrooms equipped with LCD projectors, stable internet connectivity, and flexible seating arrangements allow teachers to seamlessly transition between individual work, digital media viewings, and cooperative group setups. As Rusman (2018) asserts, spatial and technological adaptability directly enhances instructional versatility.

Teacher participation in internal Subject Teacher Forums (*Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran* or MGMP) acts as a powerful professional catalyst. Regular collaborative planning sessions enable PAI teachers to share effective strategies, troubleshoot classroom management difficulties, and co-design engaging learning materials. This reflective professional community fosters continuous pedagogical refinement (Naim, 2011).

Conversely, several inhibiting factors impede the seamless execution of active learning strategies. The most significant internal challenge is the disparity in students' baseline Islamic knowledge and Arabic/Quranic literacy. Students from non-Islamic primary school backgrounds often experience difficulty keeping pace with complex textual analyses, initially limiting their active participation.

Time constraints present a prominent structural hurdle. The broad scope of the national PAI curriculum combined with limited allocated weekly class hours forces teachers to balance depth of active engagement with curriculum coverage. Teachers reported that deep cooperative learning sessions sometimes exceed the allocated timetable, necessitating shortened reflection phases.

Environmental and temporal factors also affect student attention spans. PAI classes scheduled during late afternoon hours coincided with noticeable student physical

and mental fatigue. Furthermore, occasional digital distractions and varying student focus levels required teachers to repeatedly apply classroom management techniques to regain active focus.

To mitigate these obstacles, PAI teachers implement adaptive instructional strategies. To address knowledge disparities, teachers utilize peer-tutoring pairs, matching proficient students with peers needing support. To overcome time constraints, teachers blend in-class active learning with flipped-classroom assignments, assigning reading materials prior to interactive class sessions.

A critical synthesis of these findings confirms that teacher strategy choice directly governs the quality of student engagement in Islamic Religious Education. As Sanjaya (2016) and Sardiman (2018) argue, active learning is not an inherent student trait but a cultivated response to structured pedagogical stimuli. The dynamic strategies employed at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah successfully bridge abstract religious tenets with meaningful, student-centered learning experiences.

Ultimately, the empirical evidence demonstrates that when PAI teachers combine cooperative methods, digital media, positive reinforcement, and adaptive classroom management, student engagement shifts from passive compliance to vibrant, self-directed learning. This holistic instructional framework not only elevates academic understanding but also fulfills the broader goal of Islamic education by nurturing active, reflective, and morally grounded learners.

#### **D. Conclusion**

Based on the research findings and discussion regarding teacher strategies in enhancing student active learning in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah, it can be concluded that teachers systematically implement five main integrated strategies. These strategies include the use of cooperative learning models (such as Think-Pair-Share and Jigsaw), the utilization of technology-based learning media (such as documentary videos and interactive quiz platforms), the application of participatory questioning techniques (Socratic questioning), the provision of positive reinforcement (rewards and praise), and character modeling (*Uswatun Hasanah*). The

consistent integration of these strategies successfully transforms classroom dynamics from a passive, transmission-style environment into an interactive, student-centered one.

The forms of active learning demonstrated by SMP Rahmat Islamiyah students manifest holistically across three dimensions: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. Within the cognitive and verbal dimension, active engagement is evident in students' willingness to pose critical questions, express arguments during group discussions, and respond to discussion prompts provided by teachers. In the affective and social dimension, students display empathy, cooperation, and mutual assistance through peer-tutoring activities. Meanwhile, in the psychomotor dimension, students actively participate physically in worship practice and the direct application of Fiqh materials.

The implementation of strategies to increase active learning is strongly supported by both internal and external school factors. Primary supporting factors include school leadership's commitment to creating a conducive religious culture, the availability of adequate classroom infrastructure and technology facilities, and the active participation of IRE teachers in Subject Teacher Forums (MGMP). The synergy between adequate facilities and platforms for teacher professional development forms the fundamental basis for designing and executing varied, innovative IRE instruction.

On the other hand, this study also identifies several inhibiting factors faced by teachers during the learning process. The main obstacles comprise variations in students' baseline Quranic literacy and foundational religious knowledge, limited instructional time to cover extensive curricular topics, and declining student concentration during late afternoon class hours. These technical challenges require teachers to continuously adapt so that all students remain actively engaged without anyone being left behind.

To overcome these obstacles, IRE teachers at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah implement adaptive and responsive mitigation measures. Teachers utilize heterogeneous grouping techniques to facilitate peer-tutoring, integrate flipped classroom methods to save time during initial reading phases, and diversify learning activities by incorporating group dynamics and icebreakers during low-energy hours. These adaptive steps prove

effective in maintaining consistent student interest and active engagement throughout teaching and learning activities.

Overall, this study emphasizes that student active learning is not a static variable, but rather the result of thoughtfully designed pedagogical stimuli created by teachers. The success of IRE teachers at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah in raising student active learning demonstrates that a contextual, communicative, and technology-based approach to religious education can render IRE relevant, engaging, and meaningful in shaping student character.

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