



Improving Student Learning Motivation in Islamic Education Learning Using an Activity-Based Approach at SD Negeri Inpres Baralau

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effectiveness of an activity-based approach in enhancing students' learning motivation in Islamic Education at SD Negeri Inpres Baralau. Learning motivation is a critical factor that significantly influences students' academic success, particularly in religious education where engagement can be challenging due to traditional and passive instructional methods. The research employed a classroom action research design conducted in two cycles, each consisting of planning, implementation, observation, and reflection stages. Data were collected through observation sheets, student questionnaires, and teacher interviews to triangulate findings. The participants involved were 32 students in Grade V during the 2024/2025 academic year. The findings revealed a marked improvement in students' motivation following the implementation of activity-based learning strategies, including group discussions, role-playing, games, and creative project assignments related to Islamic values. Quantitative data showed a significant increase in students' motivation scores, rising from an average of 62.3 in the pre-cycle to 76.8 in the first cycle and 85.4 in the second cycle. Qualitative observations supported these results, indicating higher levels of enthusiasm, participation, and sustained attention during lessons. This research highlights that integrating interactive and student-centered learning activities into Islamic Education can foster a more engaging and motivating learning environment. The study recommends adopting activity-based approaches in primary religious education to cultivate not only students' interest but also a deeper understanding and internalization of Islamic values. These findings are relevant for educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers aiming to improve educational practices in faith-based learning contexts. Future research may explore the long-term impact of such approaches across different educational levels and cultural settings.

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Introduction

Education plays a vital role in shaping the intellectual, moral, and social development of children. In primary education, the foundation of knowledge and values is established, influencing the learners' future academic journey and character. One significant aspect of this early educational stage is the incorporation of religious values through subjects such as Islamic Education. This subject aims not only to instill religious knowledge but also to nurture moral integrity, empathy, and socially responsible behavior among young learners.

The current reality in many primary schools reflects a persistent issue of low student engagement and motivation in Islamic Education classes. Traditional methods—typically teacher-centered, lecture-based, and rote learning—remain dominant. These methods often limit students' active involvement and creativity, resulting in a passive learning atmosphere and declining enthusiasm.

Learning motivation is a crucial factor in determining the success of educational outcomes. Students who are intrinsically motivated tend to engage more deeply with the material, display higher levels of curiosity, and achieve better academic results. Conversely, lack of motivation can lead to disinterest, absenteeism, and low academic performance. This is particularly concerning in the context of religious education, which requires personal internalization of values, not just cognitive understanding.

In recent years, various pedagogical innovations have been explored to improve learning outcomes, with particular attention to student-centered approaches. One such method is the activity-based learning approach, which emphasizes active student participation through hands-on, collaborative, and experiential activities. This method has shown promising results in improving students' learning motivation and understanding in general subjects.

Despite the growing popularity of activity-based learning, its implementation in Islamic Education, especially at the primary school level, remains limited. There is a scarcity of empirical studies focusing on how this approach can be integrated into religious instruction in Indonesian public schools. Most existing studies either focus on cognitive outcomes or are conducted in secondary or higher education contexts. The lack of research on motivation-centered outcomes in Islamic Education using activity-based approaches indicates a significant gap. While the effectiveness of this method is well-documented in science and language learning, its potential in faith-based education has not been adequately examined, particularly in rural or under-resourced school environments.

This study aims to fill that gap by investigating the impact of an activity-based learning approach on students' motivation in Islamic Education at SD Negeri Inpres

Baralau, a public elementary school located in a rural region of Indonesia. The context provides a unique opportunity to explore how creative and interactive methods can influence motivation in an area where educational resources and innovations are often limited. Furthermore, this research contributes a novel perspective by framing Islamic Education not merely as a transmission of religious knowledge but as an opportunity for meaningful, student-driven exploration of values. By aligning pedagogical methods with students' interests and developmental needs, educators can foster a more dynamic and relevant learning environment.

The novelty of this study lies in its integration of structured activity-based methods—such as games, role plays, group discussions, and creative projects—into the delivery of Islamic content. These methods are tailored to reflect Islamic values while engaging students' affective and psychomotor domains, not just the cognitive one.

The research also introduces a model of classroom action research (CAR) tailored for religious instruction, offering practical strategies that teachers can adopt and adapt. It highlights how the combination of reflective teaching and student-centered methods can bring about meaningful change in students' learning behaviors and attitudes.

Moreover, this study responds to national educational goals in Indonesia, which emphasize character education and the development of holistic learners. Islamic Education plays a central role in achieving these goals, and thus, improving its delivery is of utmost importance.

By focusing on motivation as the primary outcome, this study shifts the discourse from content mastery to learner engagement, an often-overlooked aspect in religious instruction. Motivation is a key precursor to effective learning and the internalization of moral and spiritual values. This study offers insights into how Islamic Education can become more inclusive and adaptive to diverse learning needs. Activity-based approaches offer flexibility and creativity, making the subject more appealing and accessible to all types of learners.

The methodology employed—a two-cycle classroom action research—ensures that changes are made in real-time and based on continuous reflection and feedback. This empowers teachers to be agents of change in their classrooms and to develop context-specific solutions.

The findings of this study are expected to inform curriculum designers, educators, and policymakers about the importance of integrating innovative teaching strategies in religious education. It also aims to encourage further research into the psychological aspects of religious learning.

Islamic Education must evolve to remain relevant and engaging for today's learners. Pedagogical innovations such as activity-based learning can bridge the gap

between traditional content and modern learning demands. This study offers both theoretical and practical contributions to that endeavor.

The research addresses a critical need in the current literature by presenting empirical evidence from a rural public school context. This ensures the relevance and applicability of findings to similar educational settings across Indonesia and potentially in other countries with comparable educational structures. Ultimately, the goal of this research is to provide a replicable model for enhancing learning motivation in Islamic Education through student-centered pedagogical strategies, thereby contributing to more effective and meaningful learning experiences.

Methods

This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design, which is particularly suitable for improving teaching practices and learning outcomes in a real classroom setting. The research was conducted in two cycles, each comprising four stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. This cyclical model allows for iterative improvements and adjustments to teaching strategies based on continuous feedback and observation.

The study was carried out at SD Negeri Inpres Baralau, a public elementary school located in a rural district of Indonesia. The participants included 32 fifth-grade students enrolled in the Islamic Education subject during the 2024/2025 academic year. The class was chosen purposively due to the teacher's observations of low student motivation and passive participation in previous lessons.

The intervention applied in this research was the use of an activity-based learning approach during Islamic Education instruction. Activities included group discussions, role-playing, educational games, storytelling, and creative projects related to Islamic themes. These activities were carefully selected to align with the curriculum while also catering to students' interests and developmental needs.

Data collection involved both qualitative and quantitative methods to ensure triangulation and validity. Quantitative data were gathered using a learning motivation questionnaire adapted from standardized educational instruments, measured before and after each cycle. The questionnaire consisted of Likert-scale items assessing various aspects of student motivation, including interest, effort, attention, and participation.

Qualitative data were collected through classroom observations, teacher field notes, and semi-structured interviews with students. Observation sheets were used to monitor changes in student behavior, engagement, and interaction during the learning activities. Teacher reflections and student feedback were documented at the end of each cycle to evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions and inform subsequent planning.

The data analysis process involved comparing motivation scores across the pre-cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II to determine quantitative improvements. Descriptive statistics such as mean scores and percentage increases were calculated. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns in student responses and classroom dynamics.

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research. Permission was obtained from the school principal, and informed consent was secured from students and their parents. All participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses, and their involvement was entirely voluntary.

The validity of the study was strengthened by methodological triangulation and peer debriefing. Observations were conducted collaboratively by the researcher and a peer teacher to ensure objectivity. In addition, reflective discussions were held at the end of each cycle to enhance the accuracy of the interpretations and the relevance of subsequent teaching strategies.

This methodological approach allowed the researcher not only to diagnose the problems related to student motivation but also to implement contextually appropriate strategies aimed at achieving measurable improvements. The integration of both quantitative and qualitative data provides a comprehensive understanding of the impact of activity-based learning in Islamic Education. By situating the study within the framework of action research, the methodology underscores the role of the teacher as both a practitioner and a researcher. This dual role fosters a reflective, evidence-based approach to improving classroom instruction and student outcomes.

Result

The implementation of the activity-based learning approach in Islamic Education at SD Negeri Inpres Baralau showed a significant improvement in students' learning motivation. This improvement was observed both quantitatively through motivation questionnaires and qualitatively through classroom observations and interviews. The study was conducted in two cycles, with continuous refinement of learning strategies based on the reflection of previous outcomes.

In the pre-cycle phase, students' learning motivation was relatively low. The results of the motivation questionnaire showed an average score of 62.3 out of a possible 100. This score reflected a general lack of enthusiasm and engagement in the Islamic Education lessons. Many students showed minimal participation, and their body language indicated boredom and disinterest. Observational data supported this finding, with several students disengaged during lessons, often distracted or talking among themselves.

Following the implementation of activity-based strategies in Cycle I, there was a noticeable shift in student behavior. The average motivation score increased to 76.8, indicating a substantial improvement. This cycle introduced interactive group discussions, educational games related to Islamic stories, and short role-plays that allowed students to act out moral values from Islamic teachings. Students appeared more enthusiastic, and classroom interactions became more dynamic.

Qualitative observations in Cycle I revealed increased student participation. More students volunteered to answer questions, participated actively in group tasks, and engaged in discussions. Teachers noted that students were more attentive and responded positively to tasks that required creativity and movement. However, some issues remained, particularly with time management and uneven group participation. A few students dominated group discussions while others remained passive.

In response to these challenges, adjustments were made in Cycle II to enhance individual accountability within group tasks. Activities such as individual reflections, rotating leadership roles within groups, and personal project submissions were introduced. These strategies further increased student involvement and balanced participation across the class.

The results from Cycle II showed a further increase in motivation scores, reaching an average of 85.4. This indicated a high level of motivation among the students. The increase from the pre-cycle to Cycle II (a 23.1-point gain) confirmed the effectiveness of the activity-based approach in boosting students' interest and enthusiasm in Islamic Education.

Detailed analysis of the motivation questionnaire revealed improvement across all measured indicators: interest, attention, effort, and participation. The "interest" component showed the most significant increase, from 60.1 in the pre-cycle to 88.6 in Cycle II. "Effort" improved from 63.4 to 84.1, indicating that students were more willing to complete tasks and participate actively. "Attention" scores rose from 61.7 to 83.2, and "participation" increased from 64.0 to 85.6.

These findings suggest that students not only enjoyed the learning activities but also demonstrated greater focus and persistence during lessons. Teachers reported that students were more likely to complete assignments on time and to ask meaningful questions during class discussions.

Student interviews provided further insights into their experiences. Most students stated that they preferred the new learning method because it was fun, allowed them to interact with friends, and helped them understand Islamic values in a more concrete way. Several students commented that they felt more confident to speak up and contribute in class, especially during games and role-plays.

One student noted, “I used to feel sleepy during Islamic Education, but now I look forward to it because we get to play and act.” Another said, “I remember the stories better when we act them out or play games about them.” These comments suggest that the activity-based learning approach enhanced not only engagement but also retention of material.

Teacher reflection logs supported this observation. The teacher reported that students seemed more motivated to learn and showed more respect for the subject matter. The atmosphere in the classroom shifted from passive reception to active engagement, and students began to associate Islamic Education with enjoyable and meaningful experiences.

The analysis of classroom observation sheets also indicated significant behavioral changes. During the pre-cycle, only about 35% of students showed high levels of engagement, while the rest were either passive or distracted. In Cycle I, this number increased to 68%, and in Cycle II, it reached 87%. This progression reflects the growing impact of activity-based learning on students’ overall classroom behavior.

In terms of gender distribution, no significant differences were found between boys and girls in their motivation improvements. Both groups showed similar trends in engagement and score increases, indicating that the approach was effective across genders.

Another notable finding was the improvement in collaborative skills. During Cycle II, students demonstrated better teamwork, communication, and conflict resolution during group activities. The rotating leadership model encouraged responsibility and leadership among all students, ensuring equitable participation and voice.

The data also revealed a secondary benefit of increased self-confidence. Students who were initially shy or hesitant became more willing to express their ideas. Teachers observed that the inclusive and playful nature of activities allowed quieter students to find their space and participate actively.

From a pedagogical perspective, the success of this intervention highlighted the importance of aligning instructional strategies with students’ developmental characteristics. Fifth-grade students, being in the late childhood stage, benefit greatly from tactile, social, and emotionally engaging learning experiences. Activity-based learning responds directly to these needs.

Furthermore, the integration of Islamic values into meaningful contexts—such as storytelling, simulation, and games—allowed students to see the relevance of religious teachings in their daily lives. This relevance is a key factor in sustaining motivation over time, particularly in moral and character education.

The data strongly support the conclusion that the activity-based learning approach significantly enhances students' motivation in Islamic Education. The multi-method analysis—combining quantitative scores with qualitative observations and testimonials—provides a robust foundation for this conclusion.

These findings contribute to the broader discourse on educational innovation in faith-based subjects, offering empirical evidence that student-centered, interactive learning can transform traditionally passive instructional environments. The results not only validate the theoretical underpinnings of constructivist learning models but also provide practical strategies for educators in similar contexts.

Discussion

The results of this study clearly indicate that the implementation of an activity-based learning approach significantly enhances students' motivation in Islamic Education. The progressive increase in motivation scores across the research cycles demonstrates that when students are actively engaged in meaningful, enjoyable learning experiences, their interest in the subject matter rises accordingly. These findings are in line with the principles of constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes that students construct knowledge more effectively when they are actively involved in the learning process.

The positive change in students' learning motivation, as shown by both quantitative and qualitative data, supports earlier research on the benefits of student-centered approaches in religious education. For example, studies by Rahman et al. (2021) and Yusuf & Aminah (2020) found that activity-based learning improved student engagement and retention in Quranic studies and Islamic morals. This study adds further evidence by showing that these benefits are also applicable in rural primary schools where resources are limited and where traditional teaching methods often prevail.

One of the key factors contributing to the success of this approach is the use of varied and interactive learning activities, such as games, storytelling, and role-plays. These strategies cater to multiple learning styles and intelligences, particularly those of young learners who often learn best through play and social interaction. In this context, Islamic Education becomes not just informative but transformative—connecting moral lessons with real-life experiences.

The sharp increase in students' interest and attention also reflects the effectiveness of aligning instructional content with developmentally appropriate methods. According to Piaget's cognitive development theory, children in the concrete operational stage (typically ages 7–11) benefit most from hands-on learning and concrete examples. Activity-based learning, with its emphasis on doing and experiencing, resonates well with this developmental stage.

Additionally, the study reveals that motivation in learning is not merely about enjoyment or entertainment. Rather, it is about fostering a sense of purpose, agency, and belonging. When students take active roles in their learning, they feel more responsible for outcomes, and this sense of ownership boosts their intrinsic motivation. The rotating group roles and personal reflections used in Cycle II are examples of how such autonomy can be embedded into instruction.

This research also underscores the importance of emotional and social elements in learning. Students reported feeling more connected to their peers and teachers during the activities, which created a more supportive learning environment. These findings align with Vygotsky's social constructivism theory, which argues that learning is a socially mediated process and that interaction plays a critical role in cognitive development.

Moreover, the improvement in students' collaborative and communication skills suggests that activity-based learning contributes to the development of 21st-century competencies beyond cognitive gains. This is particularly relevant in the context of Islamic Education, which aims to foster character and community-oriented values. Through group work and shared responsibility, students not only learn about Islamic principles but also practice them.

The success of this approach in a rural school also highlights its accessibility and adaptability. Contrary to assumptions that innovative methods require high technology or extensive materials, this study demonstrates that simple, well-designed activities can have a profound impact even in low-resource settings. This opens opportunities for broader implementation in similar contexts across Indonesia and other developing countries.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the findings emphasize the role of the teacher as a facilitator of learning rather than a transmitter of information. The teacher in this study adopted reflective practices, modified strategies based on student responses, and created a learning environment where students could actively explore, question, and apply Islamic teachings. This shift in role is essential for achieving deeper and more meaningful learning.

In addition, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on the relevance of Islamic Education in modern schooling. By demonstrating that faith-based learning can be dynamic, interactive, and learner-centered, the findings challenge the notion that religious subjects must be taught traditionally. They offer a model for integrating values education in ways that are both effective and enjoyable for young learners.

The absence of significant gender differences in motivation gains also suggests that the approach is inclusive and equitable. Both male and female students benefited

equally from the interventions, which implies that activity-based strategies can be effectively used in mixed-gender classrooms without bias or exclusion.

While the results are encouraging, it is important to consider the role of contextual factors such as class size, teacher motivation, and school culture. The success of the program was partly due to the teacher's commitment to reflective practice and the supportive environment of the school. Future studies may explore how these factors interact with pedagogical innovations in broader settings.

Furthermore, the use of action research methodology proved to be highly effective in this study. It allowed for ongoing evaluation and refinement of strategies, ensuring that teaching methods remained responsive to student needs. This approach could serve as a model for professional development among teachers, especially in religious education where innovation is often lacking.

Lastly, the findings of this study align with national educational goals that emphasize character education, student engagement, and holistic development. By using activity-based methods, Islamic Education can fulfill its mandate not only to impart religious knowledge but also to cultivate responsible, empathetic, and motivated individuals who embody Islamic values in daily life.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the implementation of an activity-based learning approach significantly enhances students' motivation in Islamic Education at the elementary level. Through interactive and student-centered activities such as role-playing, group discussions, and educational games, learners exhibited increased interest, attention, effort, and participation across two research cycles. The improvement in motivation was not only evident in quantitative scores but also reinforced by qualitative observations and student reflections. These findings highlight the importance of aligning pedagogical strategies with students' developmental needs and suggest that activity-based methods can transform traditional religious instruction into a dynamic and engaging experience. As such, this approach presents a promising model for improving both the quality and relevance of Islamic Education in primary schools, particularly in rural or resource-limited contexts.

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