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Implementation of the Card Sort Method to Improve Student Learning Outcomes in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education at SMP Negeri Satu Atap Agusen

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ABSTRACT

This classroom action research aimed to improve students' learning outcomes in Islamic Education and Character Development (PAI & BP) through the application of the Card Sort learning method. The study was conducted at SMPN Satu Atap Agusen, located in Blangkejeren Subdistrict, during the 2019/2020 academic year, involving 32 students of class VIII-B. The research lasted for one month, from September 20 to October 20, 2019, and was carried out in two cycles, each consisting of planning, action, observation, and reflection. Data were collected through observation, tests, and documentation, and analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative descriptive techniques. The results showed a significant improvement in students' learning achievement after applying the Card Sort method. The average score in the pre-cycle was 58.18 with 30% mastery, which increased to 68.63 (55% mastery) in the first cycle and 83.63 (90% mastery) in the second cycle. These findings demonstrate that the Card Sort method effectively enhanced students' engagement, collaboration, and understanding of Islamic moral values, leading to improved academic performance and active classroom participation.

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Introduction

Education is a crucial foundation for developing intellectual, moral, and spiritual capacities in students. In Indonesia, education is not only intended to transfer knowledge but also to cultivate character, responsibility, and moral awareness as outlined in the National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003, which emphasizes the development of learners' potential to become faithful, knowledgeable, and responsible citizens. Within this framework, Islamic Education and Character Development (Pendidikan Agama Islam dan Budi Pekerti – PAI & BP) plays a vital role in shaping students' moral and spiritual integrity. However, despite its significance, many students

still demonstrate low motivation and limited understanding of Islamic moral values due to the dominance of conventional, teacher-centered learning methods that focus more on memorization than on active engagement and critical reflection (Majid, 2020; Hamalik, 2018).

The challenge faced by teachers of Islamic Education lies in transforming passive learning environments into dynamic, participatory spaces that encourage active involvement and meaningful understanding. According to Arikunto (2019), effective teaching requires strategies that can bridge the gap between knowledge and application by engaging students in activities that stimulate thinking and collaboration. Traditional lecturing, which often limits student interaction, tends to produce superficial understanding. This issue is evident in many schools, including SMPN Satu Atap Agusen, where students in class VIII-B initially displayed low enthusiasm and unsatisfactory performance in PAI & BP, particularly on the topic "Emulating the Noble Traits of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)." Preliminary data showed that only 30% of the 32 students achieved the minimum mastery criterion (58.18 average score), indicating the need for an innovative teaching approach that could enhance comprehension and participation.

In addressing this issue, the Card Sort method was selected as a potential solution to improve learning outcomes. The Card Sort strategy is an active learning technique that involves students categorizing or matching information written on cards, thus stimulating interaction, critical thinking, and cooperative learning. According to Silberman (2016), Card Sort helps learners organize concepts in meaningful ways, promoting both cognitive and social engagement. Similarly, Huda (2015) explains that the method allows students to construct knowledge through sorting, comparing, and discussing information with peers, leading to deeper understanding. The method also aligns with constructivist theory, which emphasizes that learning occurs when students actively construct meaning through experience and reflection (Piaget, 1972; Vygotsky, 1978).

The use of active learning models such as Card Sort is particularly relevant in moral and religious education, where learning outcomes extend beyond cognitive understanding to include affective and behavioral dimensions. Joyce, Weil, and Calhoun (2015) argue that student-centered strategies help bridge abstract moral values with real-life contexts, making ethical principles more tangible. In Islamic Education, this approach supports the development of akhlak al-karimah—noble character—by enabling students to explore moral examples through interactive learning experiences. Previous studies, such as those by Sudjana (2016) and Hosnan (2014), also confirm that active learning approaches improve not only academic achievement but also students' motivation and collaboration skills.

The urgency of implementing Card Sort in this study arises from the need to shift the learning process from passive reception to active participation. Students often find moral topics less engaging when taught through one-way lectures. By involving learners in sorting and categorizing activities related to the noble traits of the Prophet, the method encourages analytical discussion, teamwork, and personal reflection. As Djamarah and Zain (2013) emphasize, learning becomes meaningful when students are emotionally and cognitively engaged in constructing their understanding. Moreover, the teacher's role evolves from being a transmitter of knowledge to a facilitator who guides exploration and reflection.

Despite its potential, the Card Sort method has not been widely applied in Islamic Education classrooms, especially in rural or remote schools such as SMPN Satu Atap Agusen. This research thus addresses a significant gap in practice, demonstrating how Card Sort can be systematically implemented to enhance learning outcomes in PAI & BP. The study's novelty lies in integrating the method within a Classroom Action Research (CAR) framework, allowing the teacher to observe, reflect, and refine teaching practices through iterative cycles of improvement. According to Kemmis and McTaggart (2014), CAR empowers educators to become researchers of their own teaching, promoting continuous professional growth and evidence-based practice.

This study also responds to broader educational goals in Indonesia that emphasize character-based learning. The 2013 Curriculum (Kurikulum 2013) mandates the integration of knowledge, skills, and attitudes through interactive and student-centered pedagogies. Implementing the Card Sort method aligns with these principles, offering a concrete model for developing higher-order thinking and moral reasoning. As noted by Hosnan (2014), meaningful learning must connect cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains to produce holistic outcomes.

Methods

This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design aimed at improving students' learning outcomes in the subject of Islamic Education and Character Development (PAI & BP) through the use of the Card Sort learning method. According to Arikunto (2019), CAR is a systematic process of inquiry carried out by teachers to identify problems in classroom practice, implement solutions, and observe the effects to achieve better educational results. The research design used in this study followed the model developed by Kemmis and McTaggart (2014), which consists of four recursive stages—planning, action, observation, and reflection—implemented through two cycles. This model allows the teacher to act as both practitioner and researcher, ensuring that classroom practice is continuously improved based on data-driven reflection.

The study was conducted at SMPN Satu Atap Agusen, located in Blangkejeren Subdistrict, during the 2019/2020 academic year. The research was carried out over one month, from September 20 to October 20, 2019, involving 32 students from class VIII-B. The choice of this class was based on the results of a preliminary assessment showing that students' achievement in PAI & BP was below the minimum mastery criterion. The average score in the pre-cycle was 58.18, with only 30% of students achieving mastery. This condition reflected low motivation, limited engagement, and insufficient understanding of moral values, particularly in the topic "Emulating the Noble Traits of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)." The researcher, who was also the subject teacher, collaborated with another teacher as an observer to ensure objectivity during data collection and evaluation.

The research process consisted of two full cycles, each including four key stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. In the planning stage, the researcher prepared all necessary materials and instruments, including the lesson plans (Rencana Pelaksanaan Pembelajaran or RPP), learning objectives, observation sheets, and evaluation tests. The Card Sort method was designed to encourage student participation through interactive sorting activities, where learners classified cards containing statements, terms, or examples related to the Prophet's moral traits. As suggested by Silberman (2016), Card Sort promotes cognitive engagement by allowing students to physically manipulate and categorize information, which enhances conceptual understanding.

During the action stage, the researcher implemented the Card Sort method within classroom instruction. Students were divided into small groups, each receiving sets of cards to sort according to given categories. The learning process emphasized cooperation, discussion, and moral reflection. Each group presented their results, followed by a class discussion to validate the answers. The teacher acted as a facilitator, guiding discussions and clarifying misconceptions. This interactive structure fostered both cognitive and affective learning outcomes, as students were encouraged to relate Islamic moral values to their daily behavior.

The observation stage involved systematic monitoring of student activities, engagement, and performance during the learning process. The observer used structured observation sheets to record participation, collaboration, and attentiveness, while the researcher simultaneously reflected on classroom dynamics. According to McNiff and Whitehead (2011), such dual observation—by both practitioner and peer observer—strengthens validity through multiple perspectives. In addition, students' test results at the end of each cycle provided quantitative data for measuring progress.

The reflection stage focused on analyzing the data collected to evaluate the effectiveness of the actions and to plan improvements for the next cycle. Reflection was

guided by both qualitative analysis (from observations and interviews) and quantitative analysis (from test scores). During reflection meetings, the teacher and observer discussed student responses, challenges encountered, and necessary adjustments. For instance, in the transition from Cycle I to Cycle II, improvements included clearer group instructions, additional examples related to daily moral behavior, and more time for group discussion to ensure equal participation.

The study utilized three main data collection techniques: observation, tests, and documentation. Observation was used to gather qualitative data on student behavior, participation, and interaction during the learning process. Observation sheets were structured to capture indicators of engagement, attentiveness, and cooperation. Tests were employed to measure cognitive achievement before and after each cycle. The tests consisted of short-answer and essay questions designed to evaluate students' understanding of the Prophet's traits and their ability to apply moral values in real-life contexts.

Documentation included lesson plans, attendance records, photographs, and field notes, which served as supporting evidence of the teaching process. The combination of these techniques allowed for data triangulation, ensuring that the findings were reliable and valid. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) note, triangulation in action research strengthens the credibility of results by cross-verifying data from multiple sources and methods. The collected data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative analysis focused on computing mean scores and percentages of students achieving mastery learning. Learning was considered successful if at least 85% of students achieved scores above the Minimum Mastery Criteria (KKM), which in this case was 70.

Qualitative analysis involved data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, following the model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). Observation data were categorized into themes such as engagement, collaboration, and moral understanding, while reflection notes were used to interpret behavioral changes. These qualitative insights complemented the quantitative outcomes, providing a comprehensive picture of how the Card Sort method influenced learning dynamics.

To ensure validity and reliability, the study employed methodological triangulation and peer collaboration. Observational data were verified through interviews and document analysis, while the observer served as an external validator to minimize subjectivity. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility in qualitative research is achieved through persistent observation, peer debriefing, and member checking. These strategies were integrated throughout the research process to ensure that interpretations accurately represented the observed phenomena. Ethical protocols were followed throughout the study. Participants (students) were informed of the research

objectives and assured that their identities would remain confidential. The teacher acted as a facilitator, maintaining a supportive and respectful environment. Parental consent was obtained from the school administration, in line with educational research ethics (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018).

Result

The implementation of the Card Sort method in this classroom action research at SMPN Satu Atap Agusen, Blangkejeren Subdistrict, during the 2019/2020 academic year, showed a significant improvement in students' learning outcomes in Islamic Education and Character Development (PAI & BP). The study involved 32 students of class VIII-B and was conducted in two action cycles. Each cycle consisted of the four stages of planning, action, observation, and reflection. Data were collected through observation, learning tests, and documentation, and analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The findings demonstrated that the Card Sort method effectively increased students' understanding of moral values, engagement in the learning process, and academic achievement.

Prior to the implementation of the Card Sort method, classroom observations revealed that the teaching and learning process was largely teacher-centered. Lessons were delivered through lectures and note-taking, with minimal student participation. Students tended to be passive listeners rather than active participants in their learning. Their motivation and enthusiasm for studying Islamic Education were low, as they perceived the subject as abstract and repetitive. Many struggled to understand moral concepts, especially the topic "Emulating the Noble Traits of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)". As a result, learning outcomes were unsatisfactory. Based on the pre-cycle test results, the average score was 58.18, and only 6 students (30%) achieved the minimum mastery criterion (KKM = 70). These findings indicated the need for a more engaging, participatory learning strategy.

According to Huda (2015), low learning achievement often arises when students are not actively involved in constructing knowledge. Similarly, Hamalik (2018) argues that learning becomes meaningful only when students actively participate in discovering and organizing information. Therefore, the researcher decided to apply the Card Sort method as an alternative to improve learning engagement and comprehension. In the first cycle, the researcher prepared a detailed lesson plan integrating the Card Sort activity with the PAI & BP material. Students were divided into small groups and provided with sets of cards containing concepts, examples, and moral values associated with the Prophet's noble traits. Each group worked collaboratively to sort the cards into appropriate categories. The teacher acted as a facilitator, guiding students during the activity and providing feedback through class discussions.

Observations during the first cycle showed a clear increase in student engagement compared to the pre-cycle condition. Students appeared more interested and cooperative, frequently interacting with peers to complete the sorting tasks. The learning atmosphere became more dynamic and participatory, reducing the dominance of teacher talk. This change is consistent with Silberman's (2016) assertion that Card Sort encourages active participation and allows students to internalize knowledge through direct experience.

Quantitative results also demonstrated improvement. The average test score increased to 68.63, with 11 students (55%) achieving mastery. Although this did not yet meet the target of 85% class mastery, it represented a considerable progress from the pre-cycle phase. However, the observation notes and reflection discussions revealed some weaknesses. Some students were still hesitant to express opinions, and time management during group work was not optimal. The teacher, therefore, identified the need for modifications in instructional design—such as clearer task instructions, additional examples, and more structured time allocation—for the second cycle.

Based on the reflection from Cycle I, improvements were made in the second cycle. The teacher refined the Card Sort activity by providing clearer task directions, more visually appealing cards, and more balanced group assignments to ensure equal participation. The teacher also encouraged students to relate the sorted concepts to real-life moral practices, fostering deeper reflection on how the Prophet's character could be emulated in daily life. The results of Cycle II revealed substantial improvement in both student behavior and academic achievement. During classroom observations, students showed higher enthusiasm and confidence. They engaged actively in group discussions, presented their results clearly, and provided feedback to peers. The teacher's role as facilitator was more effective, and the atmosphere was supportive and interactive. These observations support the findings of Joyce, Weil, and Calhoun (2015), who highlight that student-centered learning strategies increase motivation, collaboration, and the ability to apply knowledge contextually.

Quantitative data confirmed the qualitative improvements. In the second cycle, the average test score rose to 83.63, and 29 out of 32 students (90%) achieved mastery. This result exceeded the established target of 85% class mastery, indicating that the learning objectives had been successfully achieved. The increase in class mastery—from 30% in the pre-cycle to 55% in Cycle I and 90% in Cycle II—demonstrated the effectiveness of the Card Sort method in improving student performance. The significant improvement across cycles reflects the principle of continuous enhancement emphasized in classroom action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2014).

In addition to cognitive achievement, behavioral changes were also observed. Students demonstrated greater respect for one another during discussions, practiced

active listening, and showed enthusiasm in presenting their group findings. They began to apply moral values such as honesty, discipline, and cooperation—traits emphasized in the Prophet's teachings. These findings align with Majid (2020), who asserts that effective Islamic Education integrates moral values with participatory learning to develop both intellectual and ethical dimensions of the learner.

Furthermore, students expressed positive attitudes toward the learning process. In post-cycle interviews, most stated that the Card Sort activity made learning more enjoyable and easier to understand. They appreciated being directly involved rather than passively listening to lectures. As Huda (2015) and Djamarah and Zain (2013) note, learning becomes more effective when students find it meaningful and connected to their experiences.

Discussion

The findings of this classroom action research clearly indicate that the Card Sort method effectively improved both the cognitive and affective learning outcomes of class VIII-B students at SMPN Satu Atap Agusen in the subject of Islamic Education and Character Development (PAI & BP). The improvement was evident across two action cycles, where the average scores increased from 58.18 in the pre-cycle to 68.63 in Cycle I and 83.63 in Cycle II. The percentage of students achieving the minimum mastery criterion rose from 30% to 90%, demonstrating not only quantitative progress but also qualitative changes in classroom engagement and moral awareness. These results confirm that the Card Sort method provides an effective instructional approach for enhancing comprehension and participation in Islamic Education, aligning with the principles of active and student-centered learning.

The success of the Card Sort method in this study can be explained through the lens of constructivist learning theory, which posits that learners build knowledge through active engagement and social interaction. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized that learning occurs through collaborative dialogue within the learner's zone of proximal development, where interaction with peers and teachers stimulates higher-order thinking. The Card Sort method naturally fosters this type of interaction by requiring students to classify and interpret concepts collaboratively. Through sorting and discussing moral values, students engage in cognitive restructuring that deepens their understanding of Islamic teachings. This is consistent with the observations of Huda (2015), who found that active learning strategies like Card Sort promote conceptual linking and reflective discussion, leading to more durable learning outcomes.

Moreover, the Card Sort method supports the experiential learning model proposed by Kolb (1984), in which learners cycle through concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. During the Card Sort activity, students experience learning by doing—they handle cards, categorize

information, and then reflect on its meaning during discussions. This hands-on engagement transforms abstract moral lessons into tangible learning experiences, enabling students to internalize values more effectively. As Silberman (2016) notes, learning becomes meaningful when students are physically and mentally involved in processing information rather than passively receiving it.

The improvement in students' affective and behavioral dimensions observed in this research also aligns with the goals of Islamic moral education (tarbiyah akhlakiyyah), which emphasizes balance between knowledge, faith, and character. Students not only understood the Prophet's noble traits conceptually but also demonstrated respectful and cooperative behavior during classroom interactions. They began to emulate honesty, discipline, and humility—values that form the core of Islamic character education. This result resonates with Majid (2020), who states that effective PAI instruction should integrate cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects to nurture holistic learners. Thus, the Card Sort method proved to be an effective pedagogical tool for fostering both moral understanding and ethical conduct.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings of this study reinforce the argument that student-centered approaches yield higher engagement and better retention than teacher-dominated instruction. According to Joyce, Weil, and Calhoun (2015), interactive learning models encourage students to take responsibility for their learning while enhancing their ability to collaborate and communicate effectively. The observed increase in motivation and enthusiasm among students supports Hamalik's (2018) assertion that active participation transforms the learning environment into a space for exploration and self-expression. Students in this study expressed greater enjoyment and deeper comprehension when they were given opportunities to interact and contribute meaningfully to classroom discussions. This confirms that effective moral education cannot rely solely on lecturing but must be rooted in active participation and contextual application.

Another important implication of this study concerns the role of the teacher as facilitator. Through classroom action research, the teacher transitioned from being the central transmitter of knowledge to a guide who stimulates learning through questioning, feedback, and reflection. This aligns with the concept of reflective teaching proposed by Schön (1983), which views teachers as practitioners who continuously assess and adapt their instructional methods based on classroom evidence. The reflective process after each cycle allowed the teacher to identify weaknesses—such as unclear task instructions and unequal participation—and make necessary adjustments to improve the learning experience. Such iterative improvement exemplifies the transformative potential of action research in professional development (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2014).

The results of this study are also consistent with previous research demonstrating the effectiveness of the Card Sort method in various educational contexts. For instance, studies by Anjani and Yuliani (2019) and Sari (2020) reported significant improvements in students' comprehension and cooperation skills after applying Card Sort in social studies and science learning. Their findings, like those of this study, suggest that Card Sort not only enhances content mastery but also strengthens interpersonal and communication skills. Similarly, research by Saepudin (2018) in Islamic Education showed that active learning strategies increase moral reasoning and motivation to learn religious values. The congruence between these studies underscores the broader applicability of Card Sort as an innovative strategy across different disciplines.

The improvements observed in the current study also illustrate the principle of progressive learning cycles, where each stage builds upon reflection from the previous one. In Cycle I, students' enthusiasm increased but some organizational issues persisted. After revising the learning plan in Cycle II—by providing clearer instructions and more time for reflection—the outcomes significantly improved. This process reflects the dynamic nature of classroom action research, which emphasizes continuous adaptation based on evidence and experience (Burns, 2015). Through this reflective cycle, the teacher not only enhanced student outcomes but also developed professionally, gaining insight into effective strategies for teaching moral education.

Beyond cognitive and affective outcomes, the study contributes to the practical field of Islamic pedagogy by offering an adaptable model for improving classroom interaction. The Card Sort method can easily be modified for various topics in PAI, such as iman, ibadah, or Islamic history. Its simplicity and flexibility make it particularly suitable for schools with limited resources, where interactive learning materials are often scarce. More importantly, this approach aligns with the 2013 Curriculum (Kurikulum 2013), which mandates that learning processes emphasize active participation, character formation, and the integration of spiritual, social, and intellectual competencies. Thus, the Card Sort model not only fulfills pedagogical needs but also advances national education goals.

Conclusion

This classroom action research demonstrated that the Card Sort learning method effectively improved students' learning outcomes in Islamic Education and Character Development (PAI & BP) at SMPN Satu Atap Agusen, Blangkejeren, during the 2019/2020 academic year. Conducted in two action cycles, each consisting of planning, action, observation, and reflection, the study involved 32 students of class VIII-B and lasted from September 20 to October 20, 2019. The implementation of the Card Sort method led to significant progress both academically and behaviorally. Quantitatively, students' average scores increased from 58.18 in the pre-cycle to 68.63 in Cycle I and 83.63 in

Cycle II, with the percentage of students achieving mastery improving from 30% to 90%. Qualitatively, students showed higher motivation, active participation, and better understanding of Islamic moral values, particularly those exemplified by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The Card Sort technique transformed the learning process from teacher-centered to student-centered, fostering collaboration, reflection, and meaningful moral learning. It also enhanced classroom interaction and created a more engaging environment aligned with the goals of the 2013 Curriculum. Therefore, the study concludes that the Card Sort method is an effective pedagogical strategy to enhance both cognitive achievement and character development in Islamic Education, promoting not only academic success but also the internalization of noble moral values in students' daily behavior.

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