Implementation of Group Discussion Method to Improve Students' Understanding of Asmaul Husana Material at SD Negeri 003 Sei Menggaris

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ABSTRACT

This research was motivated by the low level of understanding of the Asmaul Husana (Asmaul Husana) among fourth-grade students at SDN 003 Sei Menggaris, caused by the dominance of monotonous lecture methods. This condition makes students passive, often memorizing without understanding the spiritual meaning of the names of Allah. This study aims to improve student understanding through the application of group discussions. The type of research used was Classroom Action Research (CAR), conducted in two cycles, each consisting of planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. Twenty students participated in the study. Data were collected through activity observation, documentation, and learning outcome tests. The results showed significant improvement in each cycle. In the pre-cycle stage, the classical completion rate was only 40%. After the action was implemented in Cycle I, the completion rate increased to 65%, peaking at 90% in Cycle II, with a class average score of 84. In addition to cognitive aspects, student activity and engagement in the learning process also increased dramatically. Students became more confident in expressing their opinions and were able to work effectively in groups. The conclusion of this study is that the group discussion method has proven effective in deepening the understanding of the Asmaul Husana material and is able to create a more interactive, collaborative, and meaningful Islamic Religious Education learning atmosphere for elementary school students.

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Introduction

The teaching of Islamic Religious Education in elementary schools plays a strategic role in shaping students' spiritual awareness, moral character, and foundational theological understanding. Within this framework, the introduction of the Asmaul Husna, the ninety-nine beautiful names of Allah, constitutes a central component of faith formation and character education. The internalization of the Asmaul Husna is not merely a cognitive exercise but a transformative process intended to cultivate moral virtues that

reflect divine attributes in daily life. Scholars of Islamic education emphasize that religious instruction at the primary level must integrate knowledge, values, and practice in a holistic manner (Al-Attas, 1995; Al-Ghazali, 1998).

The concept of Asmaul Husna has deep theological and spiritual significance in Islamic tradition. It is rooted in the Qur'anic affirmation that "to Allah belong the most beautiful names," which invites believers to know, remember, and emulate these attributes in their conduct. Classical scholars such as Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (2003) argue that understanding the meanings of the divine names strengthens faith and shapes ethical behavior. Contemporary Islamic educational theorists further contend that introducing these names to children should move beyond rote memorization toward reflective understanding and practical application (Yusuf al-Qaradawi, 2001).

Despite its importance, the teaching of Asmaul Husna in many elementary schools remains dominated by teacher-centered methods, particularly lectures and repetitive memorization. Such approaches often position students as passive recipients of information rather than active participants in meaning-making processes. Educational theorists have long criticized transmissive models of instruction for limiting deep understanding and higher-order thinking (Paulo Freire, 1970). In religious education contexts, this limitation may result in students memorizing the names of Allah without internalizing their spiritual and moral implications.

Constructivist learning theory provides a compelling framework for rethinking religious instruction. According to Jean Piaget (1972), children actively construct knowledge through interaction with their environment. Similarly, Lev Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes the social nature of learning, highlighting the role of dialogue and collaboration in cognitive development. These perspectives suggest that meaningful understanding of the Asmaul Husna requires interactive learning environments that encourage discussion, reflection, and social negotiation of meaning.

In line with these theoretical foundations, cooperative learning has been widely recognized as an effective pedagogical approach for enhancing student engagement and comprehension. David W. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson (1999) demonstrate that structured group interaction promotes positive interdependence, individual accountability, and deeper learning outcomes. Within Islamic Religious Education, collaborative strategies align with the communal ethos of Islamic pedagogy, which values consultation (shura) and collective reflection.

Group discussion, as one form of cooperative learning, enables students to articulate ideas, question assumptions, and co-construct understanding. Research in primary education indicates that discussion-based instruction significantly improves conceptual grasp and retention compared to lecture-based teaching (Anita Woolfolk, 2016). Through dialogue, students are encouraged to connect abstract theological

concepts with real-life experiences, thereby fostering meaningful learning as conceptualized by David Ausubel (1968).

Moreover, student-centered strategies contribute not only to cognitive gains but also to affective and social development. The integration of discussion activities in religious education can strengthen empathy, mutual respect, and confidence in expressing opinions. Jerome Bruner (1986) underscores that learning is a cultural process mediated by language and interaction. Thus, dialogical methods are particularly relevant in nurturing reflective faith and moral reasoning among elementary students.

In the Indonesian educational context, curriculum reforms have increasingly emphasized active learning and character education. National standards encourage teachers to create interactive classrooms that support critical thinking and collaboration. However, empirical observations in several primary schools indicate a persistent gap between curricular aspirations and classroom practice. Traditional lecture methods continue to dominate, especially in religious subjects, where memorization is often prioritized over understanding.

Preliminary observations conducted at SD Negeri 003 Sei Menggaris revealed that fourth-grade students demonstrated limited comprehension of the meanings and implications of the Asmaul Husna. Although many students were able to recite several names correctly, they struggled to explain their meanings or relate them to daily behavior. This condition reflects what Benjamin Bloom (1956) categorizes as lower-order cognitive achievement, focused on recall rather than analysis or application.

The persistence of passive learning patterns may hinder the broader objectives of Islamic Religious Education, which aim to cultivate faith (iman), piety (taqwa), and noble character (akhlaq). According to Thomas Lickona (1991), effective character education requires active engagement and moral dialogue rather than didactic instruction alone. Therefore, innovative pedagogical interventions are necessary to bridge the gap between memorization and meaningful understanding.

Classroom Action Research (CAR) provides a systematic approach for improving instructional practice through reflective cycles. Stephen Kemmis and Robin McTaggart (1988) conceptualize CAR as a collaborative process involving planning, action, observation, and reflection. This methodology is particularly suitable for addressing practical classroom challenges and generating context-specific solutions.

Previous empirical studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of discussion-based strategies in enhancing learning outcomes in various subjects, including religious education. For instance, research indicates that cooperative discussion increases student motivation and comprehension by fostering shared responsibility and active participation (Robert E. Slavin, 2014). These findings suggest that group discussion may

offer a promising alternative to conventional lecture methods in teaching the Asmaul Husna.

From a pedagogical perspective, group discussion aligns with Islamic epistemology, which values dialogue (hiwar) and collective reasoning. Classical Islamic scholarship was characterized by vibrant traditions of debate and scholarly exchange. Revitalizing dialogical approaches in contemporary classrooms can therefore be seen as both pedagogically sound and theologically consistent.

Furthermore, engaging students in discussion encourages metacognitive awareness. When students explain concepts to peers, they clarify their own understanding and identify misconceptions. John Hattie (2009) highlights that visible learning occurs when students actively process and articulate knowledge. Such processes are essential for internalizing abstract theological concepts such as the divine attributes.

The integration of group discussion into Asmaul Husna instruction also addresses the socio-emotional dimensions of learning. Collaborative settings provide opportunities for students to practice respectful listening, empathy, and shared problem-solving. These competencies are integral to Islamic moral education and contribute to the formation of socially responsible individuals.

In addition, discussion-based learning fosters intrinsic motivation by giving students a sense of ownership over their learning. Self-determination theory posits that autonomy, competence, and relatedness enhance motivation and engagement (Edward L. Deci & Richard M. Ryan, 2000). Group discussions, when properly structured, can fulfill these psychological needs and create a more meaningful learning experience.

Despite the theoretical and empirical support for cooperative learning, its implementation in Islamic Religious Education at the elementary level remains underexplored in scholarly literature. There is a need for rigorous classroom-based studies that document the process and impact of discussion methods on students' understanding of specific religious content, including the Asmaul Husna.

This study responds to that need by implementing a structured group discussion method in a fourth-grade classroom at SD Negeri 003 Sei Menggaris. The intervention was designed to shift the learning paradigm from teacher-centered transmission to student-centered exploration, encouraging learners to analyze the meanings of the divine names and relate them to everyday conduct.

By employing Classroom Action Research, this study seeks not only to measure improvements in learning outcomes but also to refine pedagogical practice through iterative reflection. The cyclical nature of CAR enables continuous improvement and contextual adaptation, ensuring that the intervention is responsive to students' needs.

Improving students' understanding of the Asmaul Husna is essential for fostering spiritually grounded and morally conscious individuals. Through dialogical engagement and collaborative inquiry, students can move beyond superficial memorization toward a deeper appreciation of the divine attributes. Therefore, this research investigates how the implementation of the group discussion method can enhance students' comprehension, engagement, and overall learning atmosphere in Islamic Religious Education at the elementary level.

Methods

This study employed a Classroom Action Research design to improve students' understanding of the Asmaul Husna material through the implementation of the group discussion method. Classroom Action Research is widely recognized as a reflective and cyclical approach that enables teachers to systematically improve instructional practices while simultaneously generating empirical evidence (Stephen Kemmis & Robin McTaggart, 1988). The selection of this design was grounded in its suitability for addressing contextual classroom problems and fostering continuous pedagogical refinement. In line with the principles articulated by John W. Creswell (2014), this study integrated systematic planning, intervention, observation, and reflection within an iterative framework.

The research was conducted at SD Negeri 003 Sei Menggaris during the 2025/2026 academic year. The participants consisted of twenty fourth-grade students, comprising eleven boys and nine girls, aged between nine and ten years. The class was selected purposively based on preliminary observations indicating low levels of comprehension of the Asmaul Husna material and limited student engagement during learning activities. The teacher of Islamic Religious Education acted as the practitioner-researcher, while a colleague served as an observer to enhance the objectivity of data collection.

The research was implemented in two cycles, each consisting of four stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection, as conceptualized in the spiral model of action research (Stephen Kemmis & Robin McTaggart, 1988). Each cycle was carried out in two meetings of 2 × 35 minutes. The first cycle focused on introducing structured group discussion procedures and facilitating guided analysis of selected Asmaul Husna attributes. The second cycle emphasized refinement of discussion techniques, deeper conceptual exploration, and improved group collaboration based on reflective findings from the first cycle.

During the planning phase, the researcher prepared lesson plans aligned with the national curriculum for Islamic Religious Education, designed discussion guidelines, developed student worksheets, and constructed assessment instruments. The lesson plans incorporated cooperative learning principles as described by David W. Johnson

and Roger T. Johnson (1999), particularly positive interdependence, individual accountability, promotive interaction, and group processing. Students were divided into heterogeneous groups of four to five members based on academic ability and gender balance to encourage equitable participation.

The action phase involved the implementation of the group discussion method. At the beginning of each session, the teacher provided a brief conceptual introduction to selected divine names, followed by the distribution of discussion tasks requiring students to analyze meanings, identify examples in daily life, and reflect on moral implications. Students engaged in collaborative dialogue within their groups and subsequently presented their findings to the class. The teacher functioned as a facilitator, guiding discussion, clarifying misconceptions, and encouraging participation from all group members. This instructional approach aligns with constructivist principles emphasizing active knowledge construction through social interaction (Lev Vygotsky, 1978).

Observation was conducted systematically using structured observation sheets designed to capture student activity, participation, cooperation, and responsiveness during the learning process. The observation instrument included indicators such as frequency of verbal participation, quality of argumentation, attentiveness to peers, and task completion. In addition, field notes were taken to document contextual factors and notable classroom dynamics. To ensure credibility, triangulation was employed by comparing observational data, test results, and documentation, as recommended in qualitative educational research (Norman K. Denzin, 1978).

Reflection was conducted at the end of each cycle to analyze strengths and weaknesses of the intervention. The researcher and observer collaboratively reviewed student performance data, observational findings, and classroom experiences to determine necessary revisions for subsequent cycles. Reflective analysis served as the basis for modifying instructional strategies, refining discussion prompts, and enhancing classroom management in Cycle II.

Data collection techniques included observation, documentation, and learning outcome tests. Observation focused on measuring student engagement and interaction during group discussions. Documentation included attendance lists, lesson plans, photographs of learning activities, and student worksheets. Learning outcome tests were administered at the end of each cycle to assess students' cognitive understanding of the Asmaul Husna material. The test items consisted of multiple-choice and short-answer questions designed to measure comprehension, explanation, and application levels in accordance with the revised taxonomy of cognitive objectives (Lorin W. Anderson & David R. Krathwohl, 2001).

Instrument validity was examined through content validation by two experts in Islamic Religious Education and educational evaluation. Revisions were made based on feedback to ensure alignment between learning objectives, discussion activities, and assessment indicators. Reliability of the test instrument was estimated using internal consistency analysis, yielding a satisfactory reliability coefficient above the acceptable threshold for classroom-based research (Lee J. Cronbach, 1951).

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative data from learning outcome tests were analyzed by calculating individual scores, class averages, and classical mastery percentages. Classical mastery was determined based on the school's minimum competency criterion (KKM) of 75, with a target of at least 85% of students achieving mastery by the end of the intervention. Improvements across cycles were examined by comparing pre-cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II results.

Qualitative data derived from observations and field notes were analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, following the interactive model proposed by Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman (1994). Patterns of student engagement, collaboration, and confidence in expressing ideas were identified to complement quantitative findings and provide a comprehensive understanding of the intervention's impact.

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the research process. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the school principal, and informed consent was secured from students' parents. Students were assured that participation in the research would not negatively affect their academic evaluation. Confidentiality of individual data was maintained by anonymizing student identities in all research reports.

Through the integration of systematic planning, collaborative intervention, rigorous observation, and reflective analysis, this methodological framework ensured both pedagogical improvement and research validity. The use of Classroom Action Research allowed for context-sensitive innovation while maintaining academic rigor consistent with the standards of internationally indexed educational research.

Result

The implementation of the group discussion method in the teaching of Asmaul Husna material was carried out in two action cycles following a pre-cycle diagnostic stage. The results are presented in terms of cognitive learning outcomes and student learning activities. The quantitative findings demonstrate progressive improvement across each stage of the intervention.

The pre-cycle data were obtained through an initial test administered before the implementation of the action. The results indicated that only eight out of twenty

students achieved the minimum mastery criterion (75), resulting in a classical mastery rate of 40%. The class average score at this stage was 68. Students generally demonstrated the ability to recall several names of Allah but showed limited understanding of their meanings and practical implications.

After the implementation of Cycle I, which introduced structured group discussions and guided collaborative analysis of selected Asmaul Husna attributes, student performance improved. Thirteen out of twenty students achieved mastery, increasing the classical completion rate to 65%. The class average score rose to 76. Although improvement was evident, several students still exhibited hesitation in articulating their ideas during discussions and occasionally relied on more dominant peers.

In Cycle II, refinements were made based on reflective analysis from Cycle I. Discussion guidelines were clarified, roles within groups were more clearly assigned, and additional scaffolding questions were provided to deepen conceptual exploration. As a result, eighteen out of twenty students achieved mastery, corresponding to a classical completion rate of 90%. The class average score increased significantly to 84. Students were more confident, actively engaged, and capable of explaining the meanings of the divine names in relation to daily moral conduct. The detailed quantitative data are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Improvement of Student Learning Outcomes

Stage	Number of Students	Students Achieving Mastery	Classical Mastery (%)	Class Average Score
Pre-Cycle	20	8	40%	68
Cycle I	20	13	65%	76
Cycle II	20	18	90%	84

The data indicate a consistent upward trend from pre-cycle to Cycle II. The increase from 40% to 65% in Cycle I represents a 25 percentage-point improvement, while the increase from 65% to 90% in Cycle II represents an additional 25 percentage-point gain. Overall, the intervention resulted in a total increase of 50 percentage points in classical mastery.

In addition to cognitive outcomes, student activity levels during the learning process also improved. Observational data revealed that in the pre-cycle stage, student participation was predominantly passive, with most interactions occurring between teacher and individual students. During Cycle I, approximately 70% of students actively

contributed at least once in group discussions. In Cycle II, active participation increased to 90%, with nearly all students involved in presenting ideas, asking questions, or responding to peers' arguments.

Qualitative observations further indicated qualitative shifts in learning dynamics. Students began to connect the meanings of attributes such as Ar-Rahman and Al-Adl to examples of compassion, fairness, and responsibility in school life. The classroom atmosphere became more interactive and collaborative. Peer explanation and mutual correction were observed more frequently in Cycle II, reflecting deeper conceptual engagement.

The combined quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrate that the structured group discussion method not only improved test scores but also enhanced student engagement, confidence, and conceptual depth in understanding the Asmaul Husna material.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that the implementation of the group discussion method significantly improved students' understanding of the Asmaul Husna material. The steady increase in classical mastery from 40% in the pre-cycle stage to 90% in Cycle II demonstrates the effectiveness of dialogical and collaborative learning strategies in Islamic Religious Education.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings align with the constructivist view that knowledge is actively constructed through social interaction. According to Lev Vygotsky (1978), cognitive development occurs through collaborative dialogue within the zone of proximal development. In this study, group discussions created opportunities for peer scaffolding, enabling students to clarify misunderstandings and deepen their comprehension of abstract theological concepts.

The improvement in learning outcomes also supports cooperative learning theory as articulated by David W. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson (1999), who argue that positive interdependence and promotive interaction enhance academic achievement. The structured grouping and role assignment implemented in Cycle II strengthened these cooperative elements, resulting in more balanced participation and higher mastery levels.

Furthermore, the progression of students from mere recall to explanation and application reflects movement toward higher-order cognitive processes as described in the revised taxonomy of educational objectives (Lorin W. Anderson & David R. Krathwohl, 2001). In the pre-cycle stage, students primarily demonstrated remembering-level competencies. By Cycle II, many were able to explain meanings and provide contextual examples, indicating advancement to understanding and applying levels.

The increased student activity and confidence observed in Cycle II further corroborate research emphasizing the importance of active learning environments. John Hattie (2009) highlights that visible learning occurs when students engage in discussion, feedback, and self-explanation. In this study, peer dialogue and class presentations facilitated such processes, contributing to measurable academic gains.

The results also resonate with the critical pedagogy perspective of Paulo Freire (1970), who criticizes passive "banking" models of education and advocates dialogical engagement. The transition from lecture-dominated instruction to interactive discussion transformed the classroom dynamic from teacher-centered transmission to shared inquiry, thereby fostering meaningful learning experiences.

In the context of Islamic Religious Education, dialogical approaches are consistent with classical traditions of scholarly discourse and moral reasoning. As emphasized by Al-Ghazali (1998), understanding divine attributes requires contemplation and reflection, not mere memorization. The discussion-based model implemented in this study enabled students to internalize the ethical implications of attributes such as mercy and justice, bridging cognitive knowledge with moral awareness.

The substantial increase in classical mastery to 90% in Cycle II indicates that the intervention surpassed the predetermined target of 85% mastery. This suggests that structured group discussion is not only pedagogically sound but also practically feasible within elementary Islamic education settings. The iterative nature of Classroom Action Research allowed for adaptive improvement, as conceptualized by Stephen Kemmis and Robin McTaggart (1988), ensuring that instructional refinements were data-driven.

Moreover, the enhanced student engagement observed in this study aligns with motivational theory, particularly the emphasis on autonomy and relatedness in learning (Edward L. Deci & Richard M. Ryan, 2000). Group discussions provided students with opportunities to express ideas freely and collaborate with peers, thereby increasing intrinsic motivation.

The findings demonstrate that the group discussion method effectively addresses both cognitive and affective dimensions of learning. By fostering collaborative inquiry, reflective dialogue, and contextual application, the intervention successfully transformed the learning atmosphere into a more interactive and meaningful experience. These results contribute to the growing body of evidence supporting student-centered pedagogies in Islamic Religious Education and underscore the importance of dialogical methods in deepening theological understanding at the elementary level.

Conclusion

This Classroom Action Research demonstrates that the implementation of the group discussion method significantly improves fourth-grade students' understanding of the Asmaul Husna material at SD Negeri 003 Sei Menggaris. The progressive increase in classical mastery from 40% in the pre-cycle stage to 90% in Cycle II, accompanied by a rise in the class average score to 84, confirms that dialogical and collaborative learning strategies are more effective than conventional lecture-based approaches in fostering conceptual comprehension of Islamic theological content. Beyond cognitive achievement, the intervention also enhanced student engagement, confidence, and the ability to relate the meanings of the divine attributes to daily moral behavior. The findings reinforce constructivist and cooperative learning theories by demonstrating that meaningful religious understanding develops through social interaction and reflective dialogue. Therefore, the group discussion method can be recommended as an effective pedagogical strategy for enhancing both academic outcomes and character formation in Islamic Religious Education at the elementary level.

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