Developing Inquiry-Based Pai Learning Strategies as an Effort to Improve Students' Spiritual Intelligence

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze and design the development of an inquiry-based instructional strategy for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) as an alternative to enhance students' spiritual intelligence. The main issue identified in this research is the lack of deep internalization of spiritual values in PAI learning, which has tended to be textual and limited in experiential engagement. The inquiry approach is considered effective in encouraging students to actively participate in the learning process through critical, logical, and systematic thinking to gain a deeper understanding of religious values. This research employs a qualitative approach using the library research method, which involves a comprehensive analysis of relevant literature and previous studies. The findings indicate that the implementation of an inquiry-based strategy can enhance students' spiritual awareness, strengthen reflective abilities, and foster independent, open-minded, and morally responsible character traits. In this process, the teacher acts as a facilitator, guiding students in exploring religious values through contextual and meaningful learning experiences. Thus, the inquiry strategy has proven to be an effective approach to improving the overall quality of PAI instruction while supporting the development of a spiritually intelligent and morally upright generation.

Keywords: Islamic Religious Education (PAI), Instructional Strategy, Inquiry, Spiritual Intelligence.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a very dominant element in efforts to advance a nation. In other words, education can be considered as the main benchmark for the progress of a nation. Therefore, education is expected to direct this nation to achieve national goals, namely the achievement of progress in all aspects of life. Given the significance of education in national life, all components of society really hope that the quality of existing education will continue to improve, supported by various innovations in

learning methods at every level and path of education. Learning innovation can be carried out by utilizing various approaches, strategies, and learning models. One approach applied in learning innovation is a student-centered approach (student-centered learning), where students are placed as the main subjects in the learning process. In this approach, students act as learners who must obtain adequate services or facilities, including the provision of learning materials, teaching methods, and the tools and media needed to support the learning process.(Solichin, 2017).

Islamic Religious Education plays a strategic role within the framework of the Merdeka Belajar education system, which is an initiative of the Indonesian government to provide flexibility for students and educational units in designing and managing the learning process. In this context, Islamic Religious Education is one of the subjects whose implementation can be adjusted to the individual needs of students and the characteristics of the school environment. The existence of Islamic Religious Education in the Merdeka Belajar system is based on the sociological reality that the majority of the Indonesian population is Muslim. In addition, the recognition of Islam as one of the official religions in the Indonesian constitution strengthens the urgency of this education. Thus, Islamic Religious Education has an important role in instilling an understanding of Islamic teachings, values, and principles in the younger generation as part of building the nation's character.(Homepage, 2023).

Spiritual intelligence in the context of education is instilled through compliance with regulations that reflect the values of Islamic teachings. In the school environment, spiritual intelligence develops through the internalization of Islamic Religious Education values. Students' compliance with regulations shows the implementation of spiritual values that can be an example for other students. However, there are still cases of non-compliance such as truancy, not wearing attributes according to provisions, or playing with cellphones during learning. This requires a special strategy from teachers to foster spiritual intelligence, such as educational sanctions in the form of memorizing the Qur'an. Thus, the application

of Islamic Religious Education values has an important role in shaping students' character through simple things, such as obedience to school rules.(Ajeng Linda Liswandari, 2022).

Islamic Religious Education plays an important role in the formation of the character and morality of Muslim individuals. In the digital era, learning methods need to be continuously adjusted to remain relevant and effective, considering changes in people's mindsets and the influence of technology. The methods used must be able to increase learning motivation and encourage creativity and innovation in students. Educators as agents of change are required to understand the characteristics of the current generation who tend to prefer the flexibility of learning through technology. The main goal of Islamic Religious Education is to improve the spiritual abilities of students so that they become individuals who are faithful, pious, and have noble character. This spiritual improvement is achieved through understanding, experiencing, and practicing religious values in everyday life. This ultimately reflects the identity of humans as servants of God who are moral and dignified(Muhammad Ali, 2016).

Education has a strategic role in forming a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent, but also has a strong character. In the Indonesian national education system, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) functions as a means of fostering religious and moral character of students. However, PAI learning still faces serious challenges, such as a moral crisis among students and the use of conventional methods that are less effective. Teachers as facilitators have a key role in improving the quality of learning through innovative strategies that are relevant to the characteristics of today's students. Strategies such as Project-Based Learning, cooperative learning, and blended learning have been proven to increase motivation and 21st century skills. Therefore, PAI teachers need to innovate in choosing methods, media, and evaluation of learning to make it more interesting and meaningful. This study aims to explore PAI learning strategies at RA Fathurrahman, especially in overcoming learning challenges and increasing student engagement and learning outcomes. The results are expected to provide theoretical and practical

contributions in strengthening character through religious education, in line with national education goals.(Astuti & Furi, 2025).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a literature study method or library research, which is carried out by reading and reviewing relevant sources to obtain data. Literature study is a scientific method that involves collecting, integrating, and presenting data from references related to research objectives. This study is qualitative with secondary data obtained from scientific articles, especially those discussing the development of inquiry-based PAI learning models as an effort to improve students' spiritual intelligence. The analysis technique used is descriptive-analytical, with the stages of collecting, identifying, compiling, and analyzing the data obtained.(Khoirunisa Az Zahra et al., 2024)

This research is a qualitative study with a library research approach, where data is collected from written sources such as books, journals, articles, and relevant documents. Data is presented in the form of words and sentences, then analyzed through a critical review of primary and secondary literature. The data processing process includes organizing, verifying, and analyzing thoroughly to obtain in-depth conclusions.(Mokodompit et al., 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Islamic education, as an integral part of the national education system, bears a great responsibility in forming students who are not only intellectually superior, but also spiritually strong, have noble morals, and have high social awareness. Therefore, the learning approach in Islamic education must be able to respond to the challenges of the times without ignoring the fundamental values of Islamic teachings. In this context, adaptive learning strategies are a necessity. This strategy requires teachers to adjust the learning process to the increasingly heterogeneous character of students, constantly changing learning conditions, and rapid technological advances.

Teachers are expected to have high sensitivity to students' learning needs, and be able to manage learning flexibly, creatively, and innovatively. The application of various methods, integration of digital technology, contextual approaches based on Islamic values, and the principle of differentiation are important elements of adaptive learning strategies in Islamic education. Moreover, teachers need to act as facilitators who build educational interactions in a humanistic and empowering manner, in line with the goals of Islamic education which emphasize the development of reason, heart, and behavior in harmony.(Junatama & Ramadhan, 2025)

Implementation Of Inquiry Learning Strategies In Islamic Religious Education

The inquiry method was first introduced by John Dewey, an American philosopher, as a learning approach that encourages students to think critically and not rush to draw conclusions. Students are invited to actively explore, ask questions, collect evidence, and compare findings in order to solve problems independently. Jerome Bruner and Suchman then developed this method to train scientific thinking skills, such as observing, formulating hypotheses, and analyzing data. Inquiry not only trains cognition, but also fosters curiosity and awareness of the scientific process as part of spiritual intelligence. In the context of Islam, the inquiry method has similarities with the istinbat approach used in exploring law.

An example of the application of inquiry in the Qur'an can be found in the story of the Prophet Ibrahim in QS. Al-An'am verses 75–80, when he gradually examined the signs of nature to find the essence of divinity. This method emphasizes the active role of students and educators as facilitators. Inquiry is divided into four levels: confirmation, structured, guided, and open, adjusted to the cognitive level of students. Initially used for science, this approach is also relevant for social and religious studies. In addition to encouraging deep understanding, inquiry fosters social skills through discussion and reflection, making it a holistic and valuable learning model in Islamic education.(Syafruddin et al., 2023).

Inquiry learning strategy is a learning approach that emphasizes students' critical and analytical thinking skills in seeking and finding answers to a problem. This strategy is based on the view that knowledge should be discovered by students themselves through the exploration process, as their natural curiosity drives the environment.

The main characteristics of this strategy are:

1. Prioritize active student involvement in the process of search and discovery.

2. Encourage students to find their own answers to build self-confidence.

3. Aims to develop systematic, logical and critical thinking skills, not just mastering the material.

Inquiry strategies focus more on the learning process than the end result. Learning success is measured by how active students are in seeking and finding knowledge, not by how much material they have mastered.

This strategy is also a form of student-centered learning, which combines question and answer methods, drills, and reasoning. In its implementation, teachers need to pay attention to several important aspects:

1. The issues raised in the form of questions can come from teachers or students.

2. The teacher acts as a facilitator and motivator.

3. Students must have an initial understanding of the problem at hand.

4. Given the opportunity to learn independently and evaluate the results.

5. Given sufficient time to study both individually and in groups.

6. Teachers need to monitor the process and provide assistance if necessary(Parnawi & Alfisyahrin, 2023).

Inquiry learning comes from the word inquiry which means question or investigation, and refers to the process of actively seeking information or

understanding. This model emphasizes the use of logical, critical, and analytical thinking skills to solve problems through independent discovery.

In this strategy, students are encouraged to be maximally involved in a directed and systematic learning process, and to build confidence in their own findings. The main objectives of inquiry learning are:

1. Increase active participation of students in the learning process,

2. Directing the learning process in a logical and planned manner,

3. Cultivate self-confidence in conveying findings.

Inquiry learning is a development of discovery learning, namely an active learning approach that emphasizes the importance of students' personal involvement in understanding scientific concepts and structures in depth through the process of discovery.(Adolph, 2016).

Elementary school is an important stage in the formation of students' character and initial knowledge. At this level, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning has a central role in instilling moral and ethical values. However, the PAI learning process often faces obstacles, especially related to student motivation and understanding. The inquiry method is one effective approach because it encourages students to actively seek, investigate, and understand the material independently. According to Joyce, Weil, and Calhoun (in Asyhar, 2023), this method is student-centered and develops critical and creative thinking skills. In the context of PAI, this method helps students understand Islamic teachings more deeply and relevantly to everyday life.

that the application of inquiry in elementary schools can improve the effectiveness of learning, curiosity, and critical and responsible character of students. Observations in the classroom show that teachers start learning with provocative questions, then give students the opportunity to investigate through reading and discussion. Their findings are analyzed and presented, while the teacher acts as a facilitator. However, there are students who still have difficulty because

they are not used to independent learning. Overall, inquiry has been shown to increase students' engagement, understanding, and critical thinking skills, and make Islamic Religious Education learning more meaningful(Herdawati & Ridwan, 2022).

The inquiry learning model emphasizes the process of asking and finding, which encourages students to think critically and systematically through stages such as formulating problems, testing hypotheses, and drawing conclusions. In the context of Islamic Religious Education, this approach helps students understand Islamic teachings in depth and in an applicable way. The teacher acts as a guide by directing students' critical thinking process through reflective questions and data analysis. This process is effective in instilling moral values, such as maintaining human dignity, while also training students to construct evidence-based arguments.(Journal, 2024).

Obstacles and Challenges in Implementing Inquiry Strategies

Although the inquiry approach offers many advantages, its implementation at the elementary school level still faces various obstacles. Teachers often have difficulty managing heterogeneous classes in terms of student abilities, coupled with limited resources and learning facilities. Support from the school and training for teachers are needed to optimize this approach. Other obstacles include low student motivation and interest in learning, limitations in critical thinking skills, and minimal variation in learning methods used by teachers. Learning that is too teacher-centered inhibits active student participation. An unconducive learning environment and time constraints in the curriculum are also challenges in implementing effective inquiry learning.(Sunaryati et al., 2024).

The application of the inquiry learning model offers various advantages, including increasing learning independence and strengthening students' critical thinking skills. However, there are a number of obstacles and challenges that can affect the effectiveness of its implementation. These challenges include:

1. Educator Readiness

- Limited understanding of the inquiry model: Many educators still do not have a comprehensive understanding of the stages and basic principles of the inquiry approach.

- Reliance on conventional methods: Educators who are accustomed to using the lecture method often have difficulty shifting to a more participatory and investigative approach.

2. Student Readiness

- Critical thinking skills that have not developed optimally: Students are often not yet accustomed to the analytical and reflective thinking processes that are at the heart of inquiry learning.

- Low motivation and independence in learning: The inquiry model demands active participation and learning initiative from students, which does not always emerge spontaneously.

3. Time Limitation

- Inquiry-based learning requires a longer duration than direct teaching methods, while the time available in the academic calendar is often limited.

4. Limited Facilities and Infrastructure

- Lack of access to learning resources such as laboratories, internet facilities, or supporting reading materials is a barrier in itself.

- The large number of students in one class can also hinder the effectiveness of implementing the inquiry model.

5. Learning Evaluation

- Difficulty in assessing students' thinking processes: Evaluation in inquiry learning is not only oriented towards the final result, but also towards the process, which tends to be more complex and difficult to measure objectively.

6. School Culture

- Excessive focus on academic achievement and memorization: A school environment that is still oriented towards achieving exam scores and memorizing material is a challenge in itself in implementing learning that emphasizes exploration and problem solving.

There are a number of challenges in its implementation. These challenges include limited understanding of the inquiry model by educators, limited time in learning, minimal supporting resources, and lack of evaluation and module updates. To overcome this, it is recommended that there be educator training, use of technology, development of flexible modules, and an evaluation system that assesses the exploration process and student involvement.(Efendy et al., 2025).

Principles Of Inquiry Strategy

1. Principle   think   criticalThis strategy emphasizes the development of intellectual abilities, questioning skills, and open thinking. Students are invited to actively think to find answers or ask questions.

2. Principle   Interaction   and   Collaboration Learning encourages cooperation and communication between students and teachers through group and class discussions. Teachers act as facilitators who build a spirit of cooperation.

3. Principle   Ask

    Students are trained to think critically through questions they ask or receive from teachers, creating a dynamic and interactive classroom atmosphere.

4. Principle   Development Cognitive

    The initial stimulus from the teacher arouses students' curiosity. They are directed to think independently in finding answers and relevant facts.

5. Principle   Openness

    Teachers give students the freedom to explore various sources of information.

Learning does not only depend on teachers, but is open to various approaches and methods that students choose independently.(Rika Widianita, 2023).

Learning inquiry focus on development aspect intellectual participant educate. Slamet mention that process Study teach influenced by four factor main: (1) *maturation*, that is change physiological And anatomical covers growth body, brain, And system nerve; (2) *activity physique*, namely action real to object around Which can enrich experience And strengthen ability think; (3) *experience social*, Which direct participant educate For value opinion person other And realize existence norm social in outside self they; And (4) *balance*, that is process adjustment between knowledge long And knowledge new Which obtained through experience Study.

According to Chomaidi and Salamah, there are several important principles in inquiry learning, namely:
(1) The principle of intellectual development orientation, where success is measured by the student's ability to discover knowledge through the process of thinking, not just understanding material.
(2) The principle of interaction, which emphasizes the importance of communication between educators and students. participant educate in to formpattern think.
(3) The principle of asking questions, which encourages student activity through discussion and questions and answers. as stimulation think.
(4) The principle of learning to think, namely the learning process is seen as a means cognitive development, not only memorization.
(5) The principle of openness, namely providing as much space as possible for students to explore various possibilities and prove their truth independently.(Feriyanti & Arsyad, 2025).

CONCLUSION

The inquiry-based Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning strategy is the right approach to develop students' spiritual intelligence. This approach not only

focuses on mastering religious material theoretically, but also encourages students to experience, explore, and reflect on spiritual values in depth through critical, logical, and structured thinking processes. Through the inquiry method, students are given an active role in the learning process, such as through asking questions, discussing, and observing religious phenomena that occur in everyday life. This process allows for the growth of authentic spiritual awareness, including an understanding of divine values, ethical responsibility, and steadfastness of faith obtained through personal experience.

In addition, inquiry learning contributes to shaping the character of students who are independent, open-minded, and reflective of religious values. In this case, teachers act as guides and facilitators, not as the only source of information, but as supporters in the process of searching for the meaning of life and truth by students. Thus, this strategy is an innovative approach that supports the implementation of PAI learning holistically and is oriented towards the formation of people who are moral and spiritually intelligent.

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