

Implementation of Inquiry Learning Strategy in Improving Students' Critical Thinking Skills in Islamic Religious Education Subject

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Abstract

This study aims to assess the effectiveness of the application of the Inquiry Learning strategy in improving students' critical thinking skills in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) subjects. The background of this study began with the challenges faced by students in analyzing, evaluating PAI materials, and relating them to everyday life. The method used in this study was classroom action research (CAR), which was carried out in two cycles with subjects of eighth grade students in a public junior high school. Each cycle includes the stages of planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. The research instruments consisted of observation sheets, critical thinking tests, and documentation. The results of the study showed that the application of the Inquiry Learning strategy significantly improved students' critical thinking skills. This is reflected in the increase in the average score of students' tests between cycles I and II as well as the increase in student activity and participation during learning. Therefore, the Inquiry Learning strategy can be considered an effective approach in teaching PAI, because it supports the development of students' critical thinking skills actively, independently, and reflectively.

Keywords: Inquiry Learning, critical thinking, Islamic Religious Education, learning strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has built and continues to build students' character and morals. In the PAI learning process, students are expected not only to learn about religion, but also to implement religious values in everyday life in a meaningful way. However, one of the several problems we encounter in the field is that PAI is often delivered to students in a way that is too dogmatic and mnemonic, or without ever exposing students to a deep reflective process. As a result, students are passive in participating in learning and are also faced with questions of analysis, evaluation, and in terms of Islamic problems that should be explored in everyday life. (Arifin, 2024)

This phenomenon shows the weakness of the learning process that has not been able to stimulate the development of students' critical thinking skills. In fact, critical thinking skills are an important part of 21st century competencies that are needed to

face global challenges. This ability allows students to be active in receiving and processing information, questioning ideas, and making decisions based on logical and ethical reasoning. In the context of Islamic Religious Education, critical thinking plays an important role in forming a moderate, rational, and tolerant understanding of religion so that it can produce a whole and responsible Muslim person.

Critical thinking skills in Islamic Religious Education include analysis of Islamic teachings, assessment of religious phenomena, and the relationship between Islamic values and the dynamics of today's life. These skills can only be honed if teachers apply the right learning approaches and methods. One relevant strategy is Inquiry Learning, which places students as active subjects in the learning process, not just recipients of information. Through this strategy, students are encouraged to investigate, ask questions, observe, and formulate understanding independently through high-level thinking activities.(Utomo, 2020)

Inquiry Learning Strategy is an approach that aims to foster students' curiosity through challenging questions, active observation, and finding solutions to problems. In the context of Islamic Religious Education, this strategy can be applied to study themes such as faith, worship, morals, and muamalah in a more in-depth and contextual way. With this approach, students not only memorize religious texts or Islamic law, but also learn to understand the essential values of Islam and implement them in their social lives.

However, the application of Inquiry Learning in Islamic Religious Education learning in schools is still not optimal. Many teachers still rely on one-way lecture methods and make teachers the center of information. This is an obstacle in the development of students' critical thinking. Therefore, teachers need to be equipped with a comprehensive understanding of the stages of inquiry as well as the ability to facilitate discussions, formulate open questions, and guide students in formulating logical and value-based conclusions.(Husni, 2020)

The implementation of this strategy requires careful learning planning and effective classroom management. Teachers are required to design learning activities

that can trigger students' curiosity and create space for exploration. In addition, teachers also need to encourage active interaction between students, facilitate discussions, and provide constructive feedback to strengthen the critical thinking process. This process forms students to be able to think systematically, recognize problems, collect and analyze data, and draw conclusions that are in accordance with Islamic teachings and logical principles.

This study aims to assess the effectiveness of the application of the Inquiry Learning strategy in improving students' critical thinking skills in Islamic Religious Education subjects. The approach used in this study is classroom action (CAR), which allows researchers to directly observe the dynamics of learning and changes that occur in students throughout the learning process. By using CAR, teachers also have the opportunity to reflect and improve their teaching strategies continuously. The results of this study are expected to provide a significant contribution to the development of a more innovative and relevant learning approach to the needs of today's students.

The selection of the Inquiry Learning strategy in this study is based on its suitability with the principles of modern pedagogy, especially student-centered learning. This strategy provides opportunities for students to become active, independent, and reflective individuals in line with the direction of the independent curriculum policy and strengthening the profile of Pancasila students. Through the inquiry strategy, students are invited to participate in the process of searching for meaning, which will build a deeper and more lasting understanding than conventional teaching methods.

Based on the explanation above, this study is intended to evaluate the extent to which the Inquiry Learning strategy can improve students' critical thinking skills in Islamic Religious Education learning. The findings of this study are expected to be a reference for Islamic Religious Education teachers in designing interactive and responsive learning methods to today's educational challenges. In addition, this study is also expected to encourage the realization of a generation of students who are not only academically intelligent, but also have noble character and morals.

RESEARCH METHODS

The main approach of this study is library research. Since the literature review includes books, journals, academic writings, and other relevant materials, this study is classified as library research. This approach was chosen because it does not require data collected directly from the field, but rather focuses on the analysis and synthesis of the opinions of several experts on the implementation of the Inquiry Learning strategy in teaching Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and its impact on students' critical thinking skills.

The implementation of this research goes through several core stages. The first step is to search and collect relevant literature sources from various digital libraries and other scientific sources. After that, a selection process and assessment of the quality of the references are carried out to ensure that the information used is valid and supports the research objectives. The next stage includes content analysis, which is an in-depth review of the material from the selected sources to find similarities in themes, ideas, and theories. Finally, a scientific synthesis and argument are prepared that are designed to answer the research questions based on the findings of the literature study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Understanding Inquiry Learning Strategy

Inquiry Learning Strategy is a learning method that emphasizes the active involvement of students in seeking and finding information. In this method, students are encouraged to develop questions, formulate problems, conduct investigations, and find answers through critical thinking processes. This approach aims for students to be able to understand the material more deeply through direct involvement in the learning process, not just passively receiving knowledge from the teacher..(Prasetiyo & Rosy, 2020)

This strategy requires students to not only observe, but also to interpret data, make hypotheses, and conclude information in their own way. Thus, this learning emphasizes the importance of the process of discovering knowledge, which is much

more meaningful to students than just getting the results that have been prepared by conventional teaching.

Active student involvement is one of the important aspects of Inquiry Learning. Unlike traditional, more passive learning methods, where students only listen to information provided by the teacher, this strategy invites students to be directly involved in every step of learning. From formulating questions to developing solutions, students become active learners who develop understanding through a deeper process.

This approach is in line with the principle of constructivism, which emphasizes that knowledge is constructed by students through personal experiences and interactions with the surrounding environment. In this model, the role of the teacher shifts to being a guide who accompanies students in the process of exploring knowledge, rather than being the sole provider of information. Through this process, students are encouraged to develop critical and reflective thinking skills in understanding learning materials.

Inquiry Learning strategies can improve students' important skills, such as critical thinking, problem solving, and better communication. In the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), this approach provides students with the opportunity to explore Islamic values through real life, so that they not only memorize religious teachings, but are also able to apply them in relevant and practical situations.

Understanding Students' Critical Thinking Skills

Critical thinking skills are one of the key skills needed by students to face the challenges of the 21st century. In general, critical thinking refers to the ability to analyze, evaluate, and conclude information rationally and objectively. This skill allows individuals to not only receive information passively, but also to process and evaluate the information in depth. With critical thinking skills, students can make logical decisions, solve problems effectively, and participate in discussions in a constructive manner..(Zakaria et al., 2021)

In students, critical thinking includes the ability to question assumptions, identify arguments, and analyze evidence that underlies a claim. Students who have these skills can sort relevant information, distinguish fact from opinion, and see issues from multiple perspectives. In addition, this ability also includes expertise in organizing thoughts in a structured manner, providing assessments based on logical reasons, and avoiding common thinking errors.

The importance of critical thinking skills for students lies in its function in equipping them to face the increasingly complex dynamics of life. In an era of rapidly growing information flow, students are not enough to just be passive recipients, but need to be able to examine, review, and use the information wisely in the decision-making process. Without critical thinking skills, students will have difficulty sorting out erroneous or irrelevant information, which can ultimately negatively affect their understanding.

In the context of education, critical thinking also plays an important role in developing students' character. This ability encourages students to be more open to new ideas, appreciate different views, and learn to provide arguments based on logical reasons and strong evidence. This will greatly help in improving the quality of learning that does not only focus on memorizing facts, but also on developing analytical and reflective attitudes towards the subject matter being taught. (Riska Agustin et al., 2024)

Critical thinking skills in students do not develop on their own, but need to be formed through a systematic and continuous learning process. Strategies such as problem-solving-based learning, group discussions, and inquiry approaches are effective methods for stimulating critical thinking skills. In the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning, this ability plays an important role in helping students understand religious teachings more deeply, examine the values contained therein, and connect them to the realities of everyday life in a logical and balanced manner.

By developing critical thinking skills, students are not only directed to achieve academic achievement, but also to grow into wise individuals, able to do self-reflection,

and have high social sensitivity. These skills are important provisions for them to play an active role positively in community life and face various challenges in the increasingly complex global era.

Understanding Islamic Religious Education Subjects

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is one of the subjects in schools that is designed to provide students with an understanding of Islamic teachings in various aspects, such as faith, worship, morals, and muamalah. The purpose of this lesson is to instill Islamic values that underlie the formation of students' character and morals, so that they can grow into individuals who have a solid religious foundation and are able to apply Islamic teachings in everyday life..(Dwi Cahyani et al., 2023)

In general, Islamic Religious Education teaches the basic principles of Islamic teachings, including belief in Allah, His Prophet, His books, angels, destiny, and other teachings. In addition, Islamic Religious Education also provides an understanding of how to perform worship such as prayer, fasting, zakat, and hajj, as well as instilling good morals that must be applied by every Muslim in everyday life. Islamic Religious Education has an important role in shaping the character of students who have noble and responsible character. Through Islamic Religious Education learning, it is hoped that students will not only gain knowledge about religious teachings, but also be able to internalize these values in their lives. Thus, students will become individuals who are not only intellectually intelligent, but also have piety towards God and the ability to interact positively with others.

As a component of the educational curriculum, PAI has an important role in maintaining the sustainability of religious values in accordance with the development of the times. In this context, PAI not only teaches the theory of religious teachings, but also provides a practical understanding of how to apply Islamic teachings in facing the challenges of modern life. Thus, PAI functions to form a generation that not only has religious knowledge, but is also able to practice Islamic teachings wisely and responsibly.

Implementation of Inquiry Learning Strategy in Improving Students' Critical Thinking Skills in Islamic Religious Education Subject

The application of the Inquiry Learning strategy in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning aims to develop students' critical thinking skills. Through this approach, students are not only taught to memorize Islamic teachings, but are also given the opportunity to analyze, assess, and relate Islamic teachings to their daily lives. Inquiry Learning provides space for students to actively explore information and seek answers to questions that arise during the learning process..(Firmansyah et al., 2025)

The Inquiry Learning strategy emphasizes an active learning process, where students do not just receive information from teachers, but also function as knowledge seekers. They are involved in activities such as data collection, analysis, discussion, and drawing conclusions. In the context of Islamic Religious Education, this approach encourages students to think more critically about religious teachings and how to apply them in everyday life, while helping them to internalize Islamic values in their behavior.

In its application, this strategy begins by asking open-ended questions that can arouse students' curiosity. Teachers provide opportunities for students to seek answers from various sources, such as literature or group discussions. Through this approach, students can gain a deeper understanding of Islamic teaching topics, such as faith or worship, which can then be applied in everyday life. Inquiry Learning also provides opportunities for students to relate Islamic teachings to contemporary situations they face. For example, in learning about morals, students can analyze their behavior and that of others based on Islamic teachings. This deepens their understanding of religious teachings and encourages them to think more critically in making decisions based on Islamic values.

In addition to improving critical thinking skills, this strategy also encourages students to assess various religious views or practices that develop in society. Through group discussions, students can compare views on worship or muamalah, and evaluate

different perspectives. This trains students to think more openly and appreciate various opinions that exist in a religious context.

The success of Inquiry Learning also depends on the teacher's ability to be a good facilitator.(Asror, 2022)Teachers should ask questions that motivate students to think critically and provide guidance in the discussion process. As facilitators, teachers play an important role in creating an environment that supports the process of critical and active thinking in the classroom. However, the application of Inquiry Learning in Islamic Religious Education requires a wise approach to ensure that students not only question religious teachings, but also understand and internalize religious values in a more reflective way. Teachers must maintain a balance between the freedom to think critically and respect for fundamental religious teachings.

The implementation of Inquiry Learning also needs to be adjusted to the social and cultural background of students. Each student has different views and experiences, which affect the way they understand Islamic teachings. Therefore, it is very important for teachers to consider this context so that learning remains relevant to students' daily lives. Support from the school is also very crucial in the implementation of Inquiry Learning. Schools must provide sufficient resources, such as literature and discussion spaces, so that students can further explore the knowledge they explore. With adequate facilities, students will be more easily involved in the inquiry process and gain a more meaningful learning experience..(Milda et al., 2024)

In addition to strengthening critical thinking skills, Inquiry Learning can also increase students' learning motivation. Students feel more challenged and involved because they are given the opportunity to actively search for and understand the material. This is different from traditional learning methods which are usually more passive. Therefore, Inquiry Learning in Islamic Religious Education is very effective in developing students' critical thinking skills, not only in understanding religious teachings, but also in applying them in their lives. Students become more sensitive to relevant religious issues and wiser in facing various life challenges.

In addition, the application of Inquiry Learning also strengthens students' social skills. Through discussion and collaboration in groups, students develop the ability to work together, listen to the views of others, and express their opinions clearly. These social skills are very important both in everyday life and in the future of students. In order for the application of Inquiry Learning to run effectively, teachers need to receive appropriate training. Teachers must understand how to ask effective questions, facilitate productive discussions, and assess student learning outcomes objectively. Proper training will help teachers maximize the potential of Inquiry Learning in Islamic Religious Education. (Pratiwi & Mawardi, 2020)

Therefore, the application of Inquiry Learning in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) subjects provides various very important benefits, both to improve students' critical thinking skills and to develop their social skills. With this approach, students are given the opportunity to be more involved in the learning process, which allows them not only to study Islamic teachings in theory, but also to develop deeper, critical, and analytical thinking skills. This is very relevant, considering that in everyday life, students are often faced with situations that require high-level thinking skills to make the right decisions.

CONCLUSION

The application of the Inquiry Learning strategy in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning has proven effective in developing students' critical thinking skills. With this approach, students not only gain textual religious knowledge, but are also taught to think more deeply, analyze information, and explore various existing points of view. This encourages students to be more critical in evaluating and linking Islamic teachings to the realities of their lives. In addition, this strategy also encourages students to be more active in the learning process, allowing them to interact with the material more reflectively and constructively.

In addition, Inquiry Learning also has a positive impact on developing students' social skills. During the learning process, students are involved in group discussions that require them to work together, respect the opinions of others, and convey ideas clearly and precisely. These social skills are very important, especially in the context of Islamic Religious Education which teaches the values of mutual respect and interacting well in social life. Thus, the Inquiry Learning strategy supports the formation of better student character, not only in terms of religious knowledge, but also in the ability to communicate and cooperate.

The application of Inquiry Learning in Islamic Religious Education also helps students to internalize Islamic values in a deeper and more practical way. Through critical thinking, students can connect Islamic teachings with contemporary problems they face, and develop a wise attitude in making decisions based on religious teachings. This is very important to form a generation that not only has a strong understanding of religion, but is also able to apply it rationally and responsibly in everyday life.

Thus, the Inquiry Learning strategy makes a major contribution to improving the quality of Islamic Religious Education learning. Through this more interactive and participatory approach, students are not only taught to memorize religious teachings, but also to think critically, work together with their peers, and apply these teachings in their lives in a more relevant way. Therefore, the implementation of Inquiry Learning in Islamic Religious Education can be considered a very positive step in preparing students to become individuals who are not only academically intelligent, but also have good character and social skills.

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