

Elevating Student Engagement through Active Learning Strategy: An Exploratory Study of Instructional Management in State Islamic Junior High School

Muhammad Jikri ¹, Najminnur Hasanatun Nida ², Agustian Ramadana Putera ^{3*}

^{1,2} Universitas Islam Negeri Antasari Banjarmasin, Indonesia

³ Univeresitas Islam Internasional Indonesia, Indonesia

* agustian.putera@uiii.ac.id

Abstract

Many people assume that Islamic subjects are boring because the stereotype of Islamic education always emphasizes memorisation. This research aims to find out the stages of learning management in Islamic subjects using Active Learning Strategy (ALS) to stimulate student involvement in the classroom. The data collection methods used are observation of teachers to observe how the ALS process is implemented in the classroom, interviews with teachers regarding learning management, and documentation by looking at lesson plans that have been made by teachers. The study of MTsN 4 Barito Kuala in South Kalimantan province where this school has successfully integrated Islamic subjects, student involvement, and ALS. The results of this study are: 1) We can track all the teachers' planning through the lesson plan they made and the document stated clearly they stimulate students to be active. 2) Teachers have implemented various ALS methods such as Everyone Is A Teacher Here, Index Card Match, and Team Quiz so that the atmosphere created is fun, warm, and enthusiastic. 3) To appreciate as well as encourage students to be engaged, teachers do not only assess the cognitive aspects of students but extend the range of evaluation to the affective and psychomotor domains using Behaviour-based Evaluation so that all processes are taken into account.

Keywords: *Active Learning Strategy, Instructional Management, Islamic School*

Introduction

Building the Indonesian nation is essentially all about developing the whole person, the achievement of which requires education as a tool to foster personal values. Education is a process that is part of every life and throughout human existence. The same definition can be used and described in Article 1 of Law No. 20/2003 on the National Education System as a developer of character and functions to educate the nation's life. In addition, this article also states that faith and devotion to God Almighty, noble character, independence, capability, knowledge, creative, noble character, and being a democratic and responsible citizen are the main focus in the world of education in Indonesia (Azis, 2016).

Based on the National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003, National Education is education based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia which is rooted in religious values, Indonesian national culture, and responsive to the demands of changing times. National Education as mentioned earlier is expected to serve the function of

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cultivating abilities and shaping the character and civilization of a dignified nation to educate the nation's life, aiming to develop the potential of students to become human beings who are faithful and devoted to God Almighty, noble, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, and become democratic and responsible citizens (Sukarjo et al., 2010). However, achieving these educational objectives is not as straightforward as turning the other side of the ledger. In Islam, basically, education is also tainted with the awareness that every Muslim must seek knowledge and not to neglect it. Islam as a universal religion provides guidelines for human life towards happiness. Human happiness is the ultimate end of human life, and its attainment is highly reliant on the matter of education. Allah SWT created human beings without knowledge of anything through His grace, Allah bestowed all the perfect instruments to acquire knowledge and the facilities for learning. The means referred to are the sense of hearing, the sense of sight, and the mind.

From these verses, those are evident that the command to learn, develop, and render oneself beneficial to others is extremely robust. The tools that Allah has given us to understand are very comprehensive, and the purpose of learning is clearly defined. Therefore, learning is the main pillar of human progress and the Qur'an describes it very intensively. Three main pillars must be followed to carry out learning activities. *First*, hearing, humans capture words with this hearing. *Second*, sight is applied to understand items that can be observed, demonstrated, and tested. *Third*, the heart and mind in matters that require the use of observation and formulation of concepts to conclude.

In this case, the teacher has very strategic duties, roles, and positions to impart Islamic practices (transmission of Islamic values) through various methods that are applicable, effective, and appropriate in the usage and application of these concepts. Plenty of people assume that the learning methods found in madrasas or Islamic schools are outdated. This opinion is derived from traditional methods that mostly rely on memorization so it somehow loses its appeal (Ashaari et al., 2012). If we explore the innermost definition of 'pedagogy' then we realize that it is the student who should be dominant during learning. It can also be traced that there is a similar interpretation of the meaning of education and *tarbiyah* which refers to facilitating students (Sahin, 2013).

Factors that can affect student success in participating in the teaching and learning process vary. Those include physical, psychological, environmental, social, economic, curriculum, facilities and infrastructure, teachers, and learning methods and strategies. Learning shall be delivered in a fun and effective way. The purpose is not only about faith and morals or one's behavior, but to adopt it and set it as a guide to life in daily life and provision for the next life to be safe in this world and the hereafter. To ensure these are all possible, student engagement must be ensured. Fredricks et al., (2016) theorized that by engaging students in learning, teachers are already investing in potential steps and edging closer to developmental endeavors.

The application of Active Learning strategy (ALS) assumes that every human being if they can use their intellectual and emotional abilities well, can make leaps in performance that were

previously unpredictable. This can be done by using appropriate strategies or methods for the success and achievement of learning objectives (Dawam & Ta'arifin, 2005). ALS is a learning model that uses an individual approach, thus ensuring that each student can recognize and understand their potential in the learning process. The application of ALS should be carried out by experienced teachers because the core of this method is deeper learning approaches so that students are stimulated to understand the material not only memorizing (Munna et al., 2021).

Discussions on ALS are not uncommon among experts. Active Learning where teachers can incorporate real-world issues into the classroom is one of the most effective ways to train and provide opportunities for students to practice (Maxim et al., 2019). Metzger et al., (2020) said that the benefits of teachers' implementation of ALS are that it stimulates students to be actively involved in the classroom so that it can improve students' memory, attitude, and learning outcomes. By being actively involved in the class, students can be enabled to fully absorb the learning topic (Stone, 2012), and student engagement in the classroom is deemed to be highly interconnected with the quality of education itself (Wanner, 2015).

Teaching practice is a process of transferring knowledge as well as interaction between students and teachers (Pane et al., 2017). To accomplish teaching objectives, teachers need to be able to create a pleasant learning atmosphere and encourage all students to be active throughout the learning process. In the initial exploration, the researcher stated that Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri 4 Barito Kuala has implemented the ALS model, which is a continuation of the application of active learning principles. The strategies used by teachers in learning are Everyone Is A Teacher Here, Index Card Match, and Team Quiz, not only strategies that support active learning, but the physical environment in the classroom is also very supportive so that learning can run effectively.

Student engagement is an effective method of learning that is of increasing interest to experts in science, technology, engineering, and STEM fields (Sinatra et al., 2015). However, there is a dearth of inquiry into student engagement in Islamic subjects. This makes no sense bearing in mind that one of the aims of education stated in Indonesia's national education system law is to mould students to be god-fearing and have noble morals. This suggests that religious education subjects should be more entitled to enforce student engagement in every lesson. The fact that religious schools are generally not as expensive as secular schools does not necessarily negate the quality of religious schools. Aziz et al., (2023) stipulated that Islamic educational institutions play their role in constructing knowledge and character about the Islamic faith that is useful for forming a dignified society.

Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri 4 Barito Kuala is one of the schools that has been implementing ALS in all subjects for a long time, especially Islamic religion subjects. This subject is often considered different from other subjects and even a difficult subject to use ALS because the material in this subject is faith issues and personality issues that require special explanations from teachers that are more absorbable by students (Basinun et al., 2020). This is the reason why the utilization of ALS which supports students' activeness and

understanding is very crucial in the learning process and enables students to be active in the learning process in the classroom. The advantages of ALS that can stimulate students to participate in class will be challenged whether it continuously functions in religious education subjects or not (Ginting, 2021). This is the reason why the utilization of ALS which supports students' activeness and understanding is very crucial in the learning process and enables students to be active in the learning process in the classroom. The advantages of ALS that can stimulate students to participate in class will be challenged whether it will continue to work in religious education subjects or not. To fill this gap, the researcher noticed that what MTsS 4 Barito Kuala did in combining religious subjects with ALS succeeded in making students happy, enthusiastic, and actively engaged in the classroom. Hence, this research has the novelty of encouraging more Islamic schools to actively engage their students to do so.

Method

This study is descriptive qualitative research with the aim of analyzing instructional management using Active Learning Strategy (ALS) to improve student engagement in Islamic schools. This research employed interview, observation, and documentation methods to collect data. This research can also be categorized as a case study research where the investigation is taken from one specific phenomenon which is Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri (MTsN) 4 Barito Kuala in South Kalimantan Province which can be used as an example of integrating religious courses with ALS and student engagement.

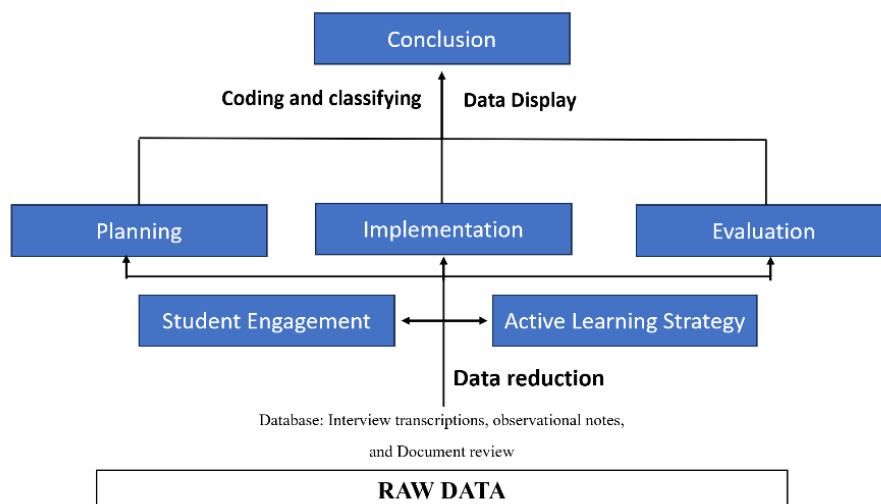


Figure 1: Reseach Flow

The Miles & Huberman method consisting of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing was used to analyse the data (Sugiyono, 2019). The number of informants is 5 people with details of 3 teachers who serve as primary data sources, 1 deputy principal, and 1 principal from whom secondary data is obtained. Subsequently, the data will proceed through a triangulation procedure in which the interview results from all informants will be compared with direct classroom observations and lesson plans that explicitly portray how teachers organize their classrooms and whether they engage students or not. Sources for

analyzing the research data are obtained from journal articles or books on related topics to ensure a comprehensive and up-to-date understanding. Data on ALS will be disaggregated based on the learning management process of planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Before the data collection process as can be seen in figure 1, some early preparation as ethical issue and related tools were conducted. *Firstly*, the researchers went to the school to receive the permission from the authority as well as carrying out pre-research interview with several teachers. The interview in this process is not aimed to obtain data but rather to find the research gap. Once the permission was granted, the necessary instruments such as interview questions and observation notes tool were then formulated. On the other hand, the data collection process was implemented as explained in figure 1. As illustrated by the flow, this research was conducted in 3 steps. The obtained raw data is reduced into units of analysis of the research: student engagement and active learning strategy. Moreover, under these two specific topics, the data was then classified into three parts of instructional management: planning, implementation and evaluation. The data were coded to fit into smaller classification. Conclusion is retrieved from this analyzed data.

Results and Discussion

Learning will flow effectively in line with the desired goals if it is manageable (Supriyanto et al., 2022). Good learning certainly only comes from a systematic and directed arrangement where all possibilities that occur either thought of or unforeseen have been minimized. Therefore, management usually divides a process into several stages so that teachers can easily control the stages. Astuti (2018) noted that learning management entails at least three distinct stages so that it can be categorized as well-prepared. These stages are planning, implementation, and evaluation. All of these stages are integrated and we cannot claim that one of these is more important than the other.

Based on the results of preliminary observations, in teaching, most teachers have applied various ALS methods. One of the teachers that the researchers interviewed admitted that he often adopted three ALS approaches, namely Everyone is a Teacher Here, Index Card Match, and Team Quiz. The use of these strategies is customized to the needs and abilities of students, which are used by teachers to achieve the desired goals in learning and the appropriateness of the material with the strategy. Learning activities require the role of a teacher in order to strive for the creation of a harmonious communication relationship between teaching and learning. Husnani et al., (2020) theorized that by providing sufficient learning experiences, teachers are capable of shaping students' morals and skills through various activities that suit their abilities.

The practice of ALS is relatively uncomplicated, with the teacher providing the subject matter, involving the students in the steps that have been stipulated in the theory to be implemented, and the classroom atmosphere being set up in such a way that the students can interact in the atmosphere so that all students can actively and enjoyably take part in the lesson, in accordance with the objectives to be achieved in the learning process. Stanberry

(2018) mentioned that ALS also offers teachers the flexibility to be deployed anywhere with or without any media so that they have many options for where to teach, both in the classroom and out in public. In addition, the purpose of learning has changed to enhance the student experience and this cannot be achieved without student engagement; rather, one of the go-to ways to attain this is student engagement (Wanner, 2015).

Effective learning is strongly influenced by existing conditional factors. These factors encompass that learning must be conducted in an enjoyable environment for students. Based on the data, it can be seen that the implementation of ALS using Everyone Is A Teacher Here, Index Card Match, and Team Quiz strategies have been carried out, although there are discrepancies between the application and the actual theory, learning is still well implemented. The principal told the researcher that Islamic subjects are always encouraged to creatively organize their learning in a fun way whereas it sounds impossible to incorporate Islamic learning with ALS. Although many people believe that they are opposites, the ALS method is also supported by many experts as an effective way to motivate students to learn (Shroff et al., 2021). For more details, the author will analyze the data based on the problems presented.

Planning

Planning is one of the most important processes in learning management. With proper planning, it is expected that learning can proceed successfully so that it can be directed and the desired goals can be reached. Planning is likewise important as a control for the teacher to improve further learning. In the general principle of using goal-orientated learning strategies, purpose is the main component. All teacher and student activities are attempted to achieve the predetermined goals. Based on the data, it is known that subject teachers have made plans. We can track whether they have already done it well or not by examining the syllabus and lesson plans they prepared. The researcher found that the teachers were very careful about the correct rules in making their lesson plans. Planning provides certainty about where learning will be directed and the structure of learning will be clear for both teachers and students (Syafaruddin & Nasution, 2005). From teacher interview data, they have formulated learning objectives before they enter the classroom and the learning process is outlined clearly on lesson plans. They said that in making lesson plans, they consider what is written in the curriculum issued by the government and what is agreed upon in the MGMP (teacher forum) in each lesson.

The first milestone in learning management is planning. At this stage, all elements involved in learning are diagnosed such as students, materials, media, environment, and even the teacher himself. Utomo (2018) theorized that learning planning contains: 1) identifying objectives, 2) developing methods and strategies, 3) selecting content, 4) designing evaluation techniques. Astuti (2018) further suggested that factors that need to be considered in lesson planning are concrete learning and the difficulty of the content being taught. Whatever the teachers occupy in the lesson plan should be suited to the needs and achievable. Frequently, teachers force themselves to design perfect lessons but they forget that learning is limited by

time. Therefore, good learning is not only learning that is attractive in appearance and direction but also has a high level of completion (Rayuni, 2010).

By making lesson plans, learning objectives will be more focused and strengthen the desired goals. Teachers will find it easier to diagnose whether the learning is on the right track or not after the course ends (Farihin et al., 2022; Husnani et al., 2020; Yamin, 2023). As we know that all learning activities are aimed at achieving a particular goal. Therefore, these objectives must be formulated with clarity and correctness. This purpose will be the basis for undertaking learning activities (Gulo, 2008) because all components of learning are aligned with the learning objective (Gunawan, 2017b). Furthermore, schools determine learning strategies and methods also based on the objectives formulated at the beginning. This means that the teacher's preparation in determining the strategy has been prepared in advance and recorded in the lesson plan. Subject material, according to Suharsimi Arikunto, is the centerpiece of teaching and learning activities, because it is the content that students are attempting to master (Djamarah & Zain, 2014).

Media, including available educational facilities, greatly affect teaching and learning strategies. Researchers interviewed teachers and found that in determining learning media, they must first adjust the objectives, learning materials to be presented, and learning time. Limited time will hamper the motion space in the learning process so they feel it is a waste to spend a lot of time making attractive learning media. Furthermore, they mentioned that there are certain materials that make it difficult for them to create learning media. Materials such as history (tarikh), tafsir quran, and hadith seem difficult to formulate into certain media. Therefore, they only maximize simple media that are already available in the classroom such as whiteboards, markers and posters. In addition, considering that this school is a junior high school which is the next level of primary school, the concept of concrete psychology for children still prevails. Piaget's theory shows that children around 12 years old (grade 7 junior high school) are still in concrete operational cognition so teachers must understand the condition of their thinking ability by adjusting the use of media for learning. (Astuti, 2018).

Implementing

The next step is implementation. This is the point where all the approved plans, usually agreed upon by the teacher and the principal, are actualized in the classroom. We may have been disappointed to witness low learning outcomes or students who have never achieved anything. But we had never questioned what the cause is, which may be due to the poor way of delivery by the teacher (Utomo, 2018). Learning is carried out as an interaction between teachers and students whose upstream is that students are able and willing to learn (Faradilla et al., 2018) According to Erwinsyah (2017), there are three aspects that teachers pay attention to, namely the creation, control, and maintenance of optimal learning situations. These three aspects are determined through the accumulation of media, strategies, and learning objectives previously formulated at the planning stage.

Based on observation, all Islamic religious subjects, including fiqh, aqidah akhlak, history of Islamic culture, and quran hadith, have attempted to involve students in their learning. The implementation of learning strategies also indicated that teachers have applied active learning strategies, namely, Everyone Is A Teacher Here, Index Card Match, and Team Quiz in learning in classes VII and VIII in this school. Moreover, the results of the application of active learning showed that almost all students were enthusiastic about participating in the lesson. The teacher explained the material in great detail using examples. Islamic religious subjects that initially seem traditional can be made exciting with a pinch of creativity from the teacher who delivers the lesson. Based on observations, students are very animated and enjoy participating in learning when there are teachers who utilize ALS in the classroom. The strategies mentioned above make students the core of learning and merely position the teacher as a facilitator. It is clear that the classroom atmosphere becomes very enthusiastic and fun when ALS is implemented. The researcher discovered that when the researcher was attending the class to witness their learning, many students raised questions, students arranged the cards given by the teacher, and worked together with their groups to answer the quiz questions given to them. And finally, religious education classes are very divergent compared to what many people assume. This is in line with the notion of Hartikainen et al., in Munna et al., (2021) that ALS will bring the classroom atmosphere into student-based learning so that they can explore more deeply the creation of new concepts. ALS also enables teacher and student interactions more intense where teachers and students are not focused on just one point and become increasingly open to opportunities for one-on-one interaction (Stone, 2012).

When researchers observed the class, the topic taught was about faith in the angels of Allah SWT. The teacher adopted the methods taught in the 2013 curriculum, i.e. observing, questioning, exploring, associating, and communicating. In addition, to enliven the class, the teacher collaborated with the 'Everyone is a Teacher Here' strategy. The learning flow is as follows: 1) The class begins with reading the verses of the Holy Quran led by students as an opening, 2) The teacher gives a brief explanation and students pay attention to the available books (Observing), 3) The teacher initiates a discussion forum (Questioning), 4) Implementation of the 'Everyone is a Teacher Here' strategy in which there are activities to explore, associate and communicate. Based on these data, it indicates that Islamic religious lessons can be directed by using ALS, and students are stimulated to be active in class because it is possible to foster students' character and personality through Islamic religious teaching (Arif et al., 2023; Sharma et al., 2017).

Evaluating

The last stage is evaluation. Widoyoko (2019) stipulated that the results of the evaluation will determine whether the policy is continued, revised, or terminated. Evaluation contains an assessment system that teachers utilise to detect the extent of students' understanding of the content taught (Wahy, 2012). Quantitatively, learning is assumed to be successful when all students get high scores. In this case, the teacher can choose in what way he conducts his learning assessment. There are options that teachers can choose between test and non-test

which makes them flexible in the use of instruments that match what they want to evaluate. It is pointed out that there are so many aspects of students that should be assessed, not only the result of the learning process but the whole process where there are affection, psychomotor, character, motivation, and others that are also important to be assessed.

In the learning process, evaluation is one way to determine the success of students and to identify the extent to which students can comprehend the material that has been conveyed by the teacher. We will not be able to capture the correct data on how effective the learning process is without evaluation because planning, process, and evaluation are integrated with one another. (Gunawan, 2017a; Putera et al., 2021). This opinion is also amplified by Widoyoko (2019) that the position of evaluation in learning management cannot be substituted because its function is very crucial in revealing to what extent students are immersed in their learning.. Furthermore, Supriyanto et al., (2022) additionally pointed out that this evaluation can be very beneficial at the curriculum diversification phase where it can serve as a guideline in determining further learning related to students' intelligence and learning speed.

Evaluation in this school is carried out after studying several subjects, this can be seen when the teacher conducts the pre-test and post-test (formative evaluation). This test is conducted by the teacher at each meeting to measure the learning achievement of each basic competency (KD). When researchers interviewed the teacher, he revealed that there were 2 types of tests used to evaluate ALS, namely pre and post-tests to assess students' cognitive abilities and behavior-based tests to assess students' activeness in class. This assessment indicates that the learning is process-based. Learning outcomes are certainly paramount, however, the process for each child to achieve maximum results is highly varied, which is why it is essential to emphasize this in the evaluation. In constructivism theory, every experience that humans undergo will generate valuable meaning and knowledge that cannot be obtained by traditional learning methods (Adom et al., 2016; Bada et al., 2016; Golder, 2018).

Conclusion

Based on the extensive explanation mentioned above about the learning management implemented at MTsS 4 Barito Kuala, we elected because we found that the learning conditions of Islamic subjects were very different from other schools that only used the traditional approach. The conclusions from the data and interpretations on the topic are: 1) We can track all the teachers' arrangements through the lesson plans they prepared and the documents clearly reveal that they have been stimulating the students to be active. 2) Teachers have implemented a variety of ALS techniques such as Everyone Is A Teacher Here, Index Card Match, and Team Quiz to create a pleasant, exciting, and energizing atmosphere. 3) To value as well as encourage students to be involved, teachers do not only judge the cognitive side of students, but broaden the scope of evaluation to the affective and psychomotor sphere by using Behaviour-based Assessment so that all processes are taken into consideration.

Acknowledgment

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