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Optimizing Islamic Religious Education Learning through Multi-Method Approaches to Enhance Students' Learning Interest

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Abstract

Islamic religious education in vocational schools often struggles with low student interest due to reliance on conventional lecture-based methods. This study aims to optimize Islamic religious education learning through the implementation of multi-method approaches to enhance students' learning interest. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach, with data collected through in-depth interviews and documentation. The informants included PAI teachers, teaching practicum students, and vocational students. Data were analyzed using an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The results indicate that the implementation of multi-method approaches, such as project-based learning, audio-visual learning, digital storytelling, and game-based learning, significantly improved students' learning interest. Students became more engaged, enthusiastic, and active in the learning process. The findings imply that integrating varied and innovative teaching methods can effectively optimize Islamic religious education learning in vocational schools. This approach not only increases students' interest but also supports meaningful learning experiences and the development of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains.

Keywords

Islamic Religious Education, Learning Interest, Multi-Methods Approach, Project-Based Learning.

1. Introduction

Education is a fundamental pillar in developing high-quality human resources. In the era of globalization and rapid technological advancement, the demand for effective and engaging learning processes continues to increase, including at the vocational high school (*Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan/SMK*) level. The success of learning is not only determined by curriculum design and teacher competence but is also strongly influenced by students' learning interests. Learning interest is a crucial psychological aspect, as it drives students' engagement and persistence during the learning process. Students with high learning interest tend to be more active, enthusiastic, and capable of understanding learning materials more effectively (Arasy et al., 2025). However, low student interest in Islamic Religious Education (*Pendidikan Agama Islam/PAI*) remains a significant issue, particularly in vocational schools (Sulaiman et al., 2024). PAI is often perceived as less engaging due to the dominance of conventional, teacher-centered, and monotonous instructional approaches. This condition leads to passive classroom behavior, low participation, and decreased motivation among students (Ilham & Eka, 2024). Monotonous teaching practices have also been shown to negatively affect students' motivation and overall learning interest (Tanwir et al., 2018; Kusumastuti & Kudus, 2025).

One approach that can address this issue is multi-method learning. This approach integrates various instructional methods, such as interactive lectures, discussions, question-and-answer sessions, assignments, presentations, and the use of learning media. The use of varied methods can create a more dynamic, engaging, and participatory learning environment, which significantly enhances students' learning interest (Salamah et al., 2022). Additionally, the use of diverse instructional media helps accommodate different student learning styles, making the learning process more inclusive and effective (Anggita et al., 2023).

The relationship between instructional methods and learning interest is particularly important in this context. Learning interest influences students' attention, participation, and motivation during the learning process (Rahayu, 2020). In vocational schools, students often show greater interest in practical subjects, making it challenging to foster engagement in PAI. Research indicates that low student attention in PAI is influenced by both their preference for vocational subjects and the continued use of conventional teaching methods (Limo et al., 2025). Therefore, the implementation of multi-method learning is expected to create a more varied and engaging learning environment. The integration of multiple teaching strategies has been proven effective in increasing students' learning interest and participation (Salamah et al., 2022). Furthermore, combining different approaches, including motivational strategies and cooperative learning, has been shown to enhance students' activeness and enthusiasm in PAI classes (Sulfikram et al., 2023). These improvements can be observed through indicators such as attention, participation, enthusiasm, and engagement (Muslih et al., 2024).

Despite existing studies on instructional strategies in PAI, several gaps remain. Previous research has mainly focused on single methods, such as blended learning, extracurricular-based strategies, or specific active learning models like Question Student Have (QSH) (Sulfikram et al., 2023; Halim et al., 2025). However, comprehensive studies examining the integrated implementation of multi-method approaches in vocational school contexts are still limited. Moreover, there is a lack of research that systematically explores the processes of planning, implementation, and evaluation within a unified framework. Studies analyzing teachers' roles in selecting appropriate methods based on student characteristics and identifying challenges holistically are also scarce (Muslih et al., 2024). Therefore, this study offers novelty by providing a comprehensive analysis of multi-method learning implementation in PAI at SMKN 1 Dlanggu, covering planning, implementation,

and evaluation, as well as examining changes in students' learning interest through indicators such as attention, participation, enthusiasm, and engagement. Thus, the purpose of this study is to describe the implementation of Islamic Religious Education learning through multi-method approaches at SMKN 1 Dlanggu and to examine how these approaches influence and improve students' learning interest in PAI learning.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Islamic Religious Education Learning and Learning Optimization

Islamic religious education is a conscious and planned effort to prepare students to recognize, understand, internalize, and practice Islamic teachings through guidance, instruction, and training activities. According to Agus (2019), PAI aims to develop Muslim individuals who are faithful, pious, and possess noble character in both personal and social life. In the context of vocational high schools, PAI plays a strategic role in shaping students' character, ensuring that they are not only vocationally skilled but also equipped with strong moral and spiritual foundations (Taquiudin, 2025; Asma & Setiawan, 2025).

However, PAI learning in vocational high schools often faces challenges, particularly the low level of students' learning interest. This is mainly due to students' greater focus on vocational subjects and the perception that PAI is theoretical and monotonous (Sanjaya, 2016). Therefore, instructional innovation is needed to make PAI more engaging, meaningful, and relevant to students' needs. Learning optimization can be understood as an effort to maximize both the learning process and outcomes through the effective and efficient management of instructional components. Hamalik (2003) states that learning is considered optimal when learning objectives are achieved through the active involvement of students, encompassing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains.

The optimization of PAI learning requires teachers to be capable of designing strategies, methods, and learning media that are varied and aligned with students' characteristics (Hasibuan, 2024). Teachers are not only responsible for delivering content but also act as facilitators who are able to create a learning environment that is engaging and meaningful (Mulyasa & Aryani, 2017).

2.2. Learning Interest

Learning interest refers to an individual's tendency to feel attracted to and enjoy engaging in learning activities voluntarily, without external coercion. It plays a crucial role in determining how students respond to the learning process. According to Slameto (2015), learning interest is an internal factor that significantly influences students' academic success. Students who possess a high level of learning interest tend to demonstrate greater curiosity, active participation, enthusiasm, and responsibility during learning activities (Suharti, 2021). They are more likely to focus their attention, engage in discussions, complete assignments diligently, and persist in overcoming learning difficulties.

Furthermore, students' learning interests are not formed in isolation but are influenced by various internal and external factors (Kurniawan et al., 2021). Djamarah (2008) explains that instructional methods, teacher attitudes, the learning environment, and the relevance of learning materials to students' needs are key determinants of students' interest in learning. When teaching methods are monotonous and teacher-centered, students are more likely to feel bored and disengaged. Conversely, when teachers employ varied, interactive, and student-centered approaches, students tend to be more motivated and involved. Therefore, the implementation of multi-method approaches in Islamic Religious Education learning is expected to enhance students' learning interest by creating a more

dynamic, engaging, and meaningful learning environment that accommodates diverse student characteristics.

2.3. Multi-Methods in Islamic Religious Education Learning

Multi-method learning refers to the use of multiple instructional methods within a single learning process to achieve predetermined objectives. According to Sanjaya (2016), this approach aims to prevent student boredom, accommodate diverse learning styles, and enhance students' activeness and learning interest. In Islamic religious education, multi-method learning may include lectures, discussions, question-and-answer sessions, demonstrations, role play, case studies, and project-based learning. Hadi (2021) emphasizes that the selection of methods must align with learning objectives, materials, and student characteristics to ensure effectiveness. The use of multi-method approaches can increase students' learning interest by creating variation, fostering engagement, and promoting a more dynamic classroom atmosphere.

Students' learning interest often declines when instruction is delivered in a monotonous manner, such as relying solely on lectures for extended periods. This condition tends to make students passive, less attentive, and unmotivated to participate in the learning process. Through the implementation of multi-method approaches, teachers can combine various methods such as lectures, question-and-answer sessions, group discussions, assignments, and presentations. This encourages students to become more actively involved in the learning process (Sholehatin & Wirdati, 2021).

According to Uno (2023), learning that actively involves students through various methods can increase interest and motivation. Participation in activities such as discussions, questioning, and expressing opinions fosters engagement and enjoyment in learning. Multi-method approaches also accommodate different student characteristics and learning styles, ensuring all students are involved. This leads to increased attention, participation, and responsibility in completing tasks, ultimately supporting the achievement of PAI learning objectives (Rasyidi, 2024).

3. Methods

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design aimed at exploring and understanding the process of optimizing Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning through the implementation of multi-method strategies. A qualitative approach was selected because it allows for an in-depth examination of participants' experiences, perspectives, and contextual realities. In this approach, the researcher serves as the primary instrument, actively engaging in data collection, observation, analysis, and interpretation to construct meaningful insights. The design emphasizes the exploration of processes and meanings rather than generalization, enabling a comprehensive understanding of how multi-method strategies influence students' learning interests.

The population of this study consisted of students participating in Islamic religious education learning at SMKN 1 Dlanggu, located in Dlanggu District, Mojokerto Regency, as well as PAI teachers involved in the instructional process. This study adopted a purposive sampling technique, selecting participants based on their direct involvement and relevance to the research focus. The selection of participants was intended to ensure the richness and depth of data, as qualitative research prioritizes detailed understanding over broad generalization. Students and teachers who actively engaged in multi-method learning activities were considered key informants due to their direct experiences with the implementation of the instructional strategies.

Data collection techniques primarily involved in-depth interviews as the main method. The interviews were conducted by student teachers participating in the

Teaching Practicum (*Praktik Pengalaman Lapangan/PPL*) and PAI teachers at SMKN 1 Dlanggu, involving students and other relevant participants. In qualitative research, interviews are widely used to explore participants' perceptions, experiences, and interpretations through direct interaction between the researcher and respondents. In addition to interviews, secondary data were obtained through documentation, including lesson plans, syllabi, attendance records, and relevant academic literature to support and enrich the primary data findings.

Data analysis in this study followed the interactive model, which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. This process is cyclical and continuous, allowing researchers to systematically organize, interpret, and verify qualitative data to identify patterns and themes. Data reduction involves selecting and simplifying relevant information, while data display facilitates the organization of findings in a coherent form. The final stage involves drawing and verifying conclusions to ensure the validity and credibility of the findings. This analytical approach ensures that the results are systematic, comprehensive, and accountable.

4. Results

4.1. Implementation of Multi-method Islamic Religious Education Learning

The results of the interview with the Islamic Religious Education teacher at SMKN 1 Dlanggu, namely Mr. F, indicate that time discipline is a fundamental principle in the implementation of learning. The informant emphasized that starting the lesson on time is not merely a matter of maintaining order in the teaching and learning process, but also carries deeper value, particularly within the context of Islamic teachings. Respecting time is regarded as a fundamental value that must be instilled in students through the teacher's role modeling. Furthermore, the informant stated that consistency in starting lessons according to the schedule is maintained, despite challenges such as the absence of breaks between classes. In such conditions, students are sometimes not fully prepared or may still feel fatigued. Nevertheless, the informant continues to uphold time discipline as a form of habituation to help students develop disciplined learning behaviors. This indicates that the practice of discipline is not merely technical in nature, but also serves as a strategy for character development among students (Asma & Setiawan, 2025).

The interview findings also reveal that students' responses to the teacher's habit of consistently starting lessons on time tend to vary. Some students appear less enthusiastic at the beginning of the lesson, particularly due to physical fatigue or the need to readjust after the previous class. However, the teacher does not consider this a major obstacle, but rather a natural condition within the dynamics of the learning process. This attitude reflects the teacher's understanding of students' needs and readiness. To address these conditions, the teacher implements various adaptive instructional strategies. One of the efforts undertaken is the use of diverse learning methods, both inside and outside the classroom. Learning activities conducted outside the classroom, such as in the school mosque, are considered capable of creating a more conducive atmosphere, allowing students to feel calmer and more prepared to participate in the lesson. This approach demonstrates that flexibility in instructional methods can serve as a solution for maintaining student engagement and comfort, without neglecting the principle of time discipline (Bileuto et al., 2025).

Based on the interview with the PAI teacher at SMKN 1 Dlanggu, namely Mr. F, it can be concluded that time discipline is a primary principle in the implementation of PAI learning. Starting the lesson on time is viewed not only as a form of teacher professionalism but also as an effort to instill Islamic values, particularly the value of respecting time, through role modeling. Although students are sometimes not fully prepared due to the absence of breaks between classes, Mr.

F consistently begins the lesson according to the schedule while still considering students' comfort (Indramayanti et al., 2024).

The interview results indicate that in the implementation of Islamic religious education learning, the teacher tends to use the lecture method as the primary approach in delivering basic material. However, this method is not used in isolation but is combined with question-and-answer techniques to enhance students' active participation. This approach enables students not only to act as recipients of information but also to be actively involved in the learning interaction process. Furthermore, the teacher applies other varied methods as a form of adaptation to students' needs. In addition to classroom-based learning, instructional activities are also conducted outside the classroom, such as in the school mosque, which is considered capable of creating a calmer atmosphere and supporting students' mental readiness for learning. This reflects an effort to create a more flexible and conducive learning environment (Salamah et al., 2022).

In addition to the use of varied instructional methods, the teacher consistently implements religious habituation within the learning process. These practices include reciting the Qur'an before the lesson begins, conducting *tahlil*, *istighosah*, and performing *dhuha* prayer in congregation. These activities aim not only to develop students' religious character but also to create a more orderly, calm, and supportive learning atmosphere that enhances students' readiness to learn. The interview findings also reveal that the combination of various instructional methods applied by the Islamic religious education teacher is considered quite effective in increasing students' learning interest. The informant stated that although the lecture method is often perceived as monotonous, it remains relevant when combined with question-and-answer sessions, religious habituation, and outdoor learning activities. The implementation of multi-method approaches has a positive impact on students' learning attitudes, as they become calmer, more focused, and demonstrate greater enthusiasm during the learning process. In addition, the variation in instructional approaches helps reduce boredom, making the learning material easier for students to understand. This indicates that the integration of diverse instructional methods, accompanied by religious habituation, plays a significant role in creating a more effective and meaningful learning experience (Mulyasa & Aryani, 2017).

The interview results indicate that the implementation of multi-method approaches in PAI learning has a positive impact on students' learning interest and attitudes. Students become more focused, more enthusiastic, and less prone to boredom, even though the lecture method is still used as the primary means of delivering material. This is particularly important considering that many PAI teachers at SMKN 1 Dlanggu still tend to rely predominantly on the lecture method. Therefore, the implementation of a multi-method learning approach is highly necessary to enhance students' interest in PAI learning at SMKN 1 Dlanggu. Innovative methods such as Project-Based Learning (PjBL), audio-visual learning, digital storytelling, and game-based learning can serve as relevant and effective alternatives, especially when aligned with the characteristics of vocational school students, who tend to be active, practical, and prefer contextual learning. Through the application of these multi-method approaches, PAI learning is expected to become more engaging, meaningful, and capable of optimally improving students' learning interest and overall learning quality (Rasyidi, 2024).

4.2. Multi-Method Approaches to Enhance Students' Learning Interest

Based on the interview results, students from the Visual Communication Design (*Desain Komunikasi Visual/DKV*) and Animation majors tend to prefer varied learning approaches. AR (DKV) stated that learning becomes more enjoyable when material explanations are combined with games or interactive activities, as continuous explanations often lead to boredom, especially when the material is lengthy. Similarly, FN (Animation) emphasized the importance of variation in

learning, although not necessarily in the form of games. According to FN, combining explanations with activities such as discussions or watching videos helps students better visualize and understand the material (Anggita et al., 2023).

These preferences are closely related to students' individual learning characteristics. AR identified as a visual learner, showing greater interest in learning that involves images or interactive elements. They prefer teachers who explain clearly and firmly but are less inclined toward overly dominant lecture methods that require excessive note-taking. Meanwhile, FN expressed a preference for PAI learning that incorporates real-life examples, as this makes the material more relevant and easier to understand. However, both students indicated that learning that is too serious and lacks variation makes it difficult to maintain focus, particularly during afternoon lessons. Regarding learning experiences during the Teaching Practice (*Praktik Pengalaman Lapangan/PPL*), both students reported that PAI learning became more engaging. AR found the learning process more enjoyable due to the inclusion of games and project-based activities, which allowed the material to be applied in practical ways rather than remaining purely theoretical. Similarly, FN noted that activities such as watching films and creating simple animations helped improve understanding and made the learning experience more interesting (Indramayanti et al., 2024).

When comparing the PPL teacher with the regular PAI teacher, AR expressed greater comfort learning with the PPL teacher due to a more relaxed and less tense classroom atmosphere, which encouraged students to ask questions more freely. FN also felt comfortable with both teachers. However, learning with the PPL teacher was perceived as more engaging due to the use of creative methods aligned with the characteristics of the Animation major. In terms of preferred learning methods, AR favored project-based activities and visual storytelling, as these align with the DKV major and allow students to develop design skills while understanding PAI material. Meanwhile, FN preferred animation-based tasks, as they provide opportunities to express learning through visual media, making the process more meaningful (Rasyidi, 2024).

On the other hand, several factors were identified as contributing to students' boredom in PAI learning. Both students highlighted that excessively long explanations without supporting activities lead to a loss of focus. AR noted that prolonged explanations reduce concentration, while FN stated that learning relying solely on verbal delivery without visual support feels less engaging. Additionally, extensive note-taking was perceived as tiring and detrimental to focus, and overly long instructional videos without follow-up discussion were reported to cause drowsiness and decreased learning interest (Salamah et al., 2022).

A comparison of learning experiences before and after the presence of PPL teachers indicates a noticeable improvement in students' enthusiasm and interest in PAI learning. AR stated that learning became more engaging because it was delivered creatively and aligned with personal interests. Likewise, FN reported increased interest as the learning materials were connected to animation and digital media relevant to their field of expertise. These findings suggest that the use of varied and creative instructional methods plays a significant role in enhancing students' engagement and learning interest in PAI (Limo et al., 2025).

5. Discussion

Based on the results of interviews with the PAI teacher and students at SMKN 1 Dlanggu, it can be concluded that optimizing PAI learning through multi-method approaches significantly enhances students' learning interest. Previously, PAI learning was dominated by lecture-based methods, which tended to make students feel bored, especially vocational students who are generally active, creative, and prefer visual and practical learning. This finding is consistent with studies indicating

that monotonous instructional approaches reduce students' engagement and learning interest (Ilham & Eka, 2024; Arasy et al., 2025). Therefore, the use of a single method is insufficient to accommodate diverse student characteristics and learning preferences.

The implementation of multi-method approaches by teaching practicum students such as project-based learning, audio-visual media, digital storytelling, and game-based learning serves as an effective strategy to address this issue. Through PjBL, students actively engage in projects aligned with their majors, making learning more contextual and meaningful. This supports Rasyidi (2024), who found that project-based strategies improve student engagement and practical skills. In addition, the integration of technology-based media enhances students' understanding and interest, as emphasized by Zain et al. (2025), who highlight the role of digital and AI-based media in improving the effectiveness of PAI learning. These approaches not only increase interaction but also help bridge abstract religious concepts with real-life applications. This aligns with Kurniawan et al. (2021), who state that learning interest develops gradually through continuous exposure to engaging learning experiences. The teacher's role as a facilitator in creating an interactive and supportive learning environment was also evident, reinforcing findings by Bileuto et al. (2025) that emphasize the importance of teacher adaptability.

Furthermore, students from DKV and Animation majors reported that PAI learning became more relevant when connected to their fields, such as through animation projects, visual storytelling, and design-based tasks. This supports findings that contextual and student-centered learning enhances participation and interest (Indramayanti et al., 2024; Kusumastuti & Kudus, 2025). Conversely, conventional methods such as prolonged lectures, excessive note-taking, and lack of visual media were identified as key factors contributing to boredom and reduced concentration, supporting previous studies (Salamah et al., 2022; Muslih et al., 2024).

In a broader context, these findings reflect the growing need for innovation in PAI learning. Edy and Sumarta (2024) emphasize that curriculum and instructional innovation are essential to ensure learning remains relevant to students' needs and current developments. The multi-method approach implemented in this study represents such innovation by integrating traditional religious instruction with modern, technology-supported, and student-centered strategies. This integration not only enhances learning interest but also supports the development of critical thinking, creativity, and practical competencies among students.

These findings are further supported by learning interest theory, which states that students' interest increases when learning is engaging, varied, and actively involves learners (Slameto, 2015; Basiroh, 2023). Multi-method approaches provide opportunities for students to learn through different modalities, thereby improving not only cognitive understanding but also affective and psychomotor aspects. In the context of PAI, this is particularly important for fostering religious values and character development (Basiroh, 2023).

6. Conclusion

Based on the results at SMKN 1 Dlanggu through two cycles, it can be concluded that optimizing Islamic religious education learning through multi-method approaches positively enhances students' learning interest. The integration of various instructional methods, such as lectures combined with question-and-answer sessions, religious habituation, the use of learning media, and outdoor learning, creates a more engaging and conducive learning environment. These findings indicate that multi-method approaches not only facilitate students' understanding but also foster more meaningful learning experiences.

The implications of this study highlight the importance of instructional innovation in PAI learning. Teachers are encouraged to apply varied and creative

methods aligned with vocational students' characteristics, while schools should support these efforts through adequate facilities, learning media, and professional development programs. Students are also expected to actively participate, as engagement is essential for achieving optimal learning outcomes.

However, this study has several limitations. It was conducted in a single school with a limited number of participants and only two research cycles, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study focused solely on learning interest without examining other variables such as learning outcomes or long-term impacts. Future research is recommended to involve broader contexts, larger samples, and additional variables. Further studies may also explore integrating multi-method approaches with other innovative learning models to gain more comprehensive insights into improving the quality of PAI learning.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval and Originality Statement

Ethical approval was obtained for this study. The manuscript represents original work and has not been previously published, nor is it under consideration by another journal.

Data Disclosure Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.



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